

Prologue

Joan Dallas imagined the calm turquoise water splashing up against her bare feet as she slipped out of her too tight, but too cute to leave at the store, peep toe pumps. By this time Sunday, instead of being stuck in her office, she would be spending her time staring at the Pacific Ocean while draped over a lounge chair so soft it could be mistaken for a bed. A red bikini will be covering her well-proportioned frame, a Mai Tai will be in her right hand, and if she has it her way, Chris Kahu will be in the left-hand.

Joan clicked the print key on her computer, completing the lengthy accounting report two weeks before the deadline. She pushed away from her desk and swiveled around in her chair in order to view the street through the over-sized windows that covered the back wall of her office. She wasn't going to miss this scene. For an entire week she would not have to deal with extra long red-lights, ignorant traffic cops, or out of control drivers.

The famous Kulani hotel would normally be out of her price range. However, Chris Kahu, a native Hawaiian and photographer she dated while he was visiting relatives in Houston, promised the beachfront view from her hotel suite would be so breathtakingly beautiful, that it would bring her to tears. Therefore, Joan decided to ignore her budget this one time. She planned on vacationing like a celebrity; exchanging the daily grind for picturesque views, two-hour long massages, and elegant dinners.

Chris had insisted that he and Joan go Latin dancing on each one of their six dates. Now Joan loved to dance to hip hop and R&B music, but she was completely unfamiliar with Latin dancing. The first time she walked onto the dance floor she could feel sweat pouring down her back from nervousness. Joan estimated the club had around

three hundred people in it and she felt like each one of them was staring at her. This became true when she tripped over Chris' feet and landed on the floor, taking two other people down with her.

She was so embarrassed she started crying. Chris picked her up, put his well defined arms around her waist, placed her head on his chest and rocked her to the music until she was ready to try again. Under his careful instruction, by their third date she was comfortable enough to twirl around, wearing a short dress and extra high heels like the other women.

Joan stared at Chris' business card. She hated herself for waiting until the day before her flight to call him. It had been seven months since their last date. After she dropped him off at the airport he told her to give him a call if she were ever in Honolulu. *But did he mean it? People say stuff like that all the time.*

"Wait a minute," Joan said to herself, remembering the book she had just read by bestselling author and talk show host, Dr. Kashia Snow. She said all women had the ability to be a PATCH, which stood for Perfectly Able to Create Happiness. But before becoming a PATCH, you had to start acting like one. PATCHES did not whine and wait for stuff to happen. PATCHES acted as if they were fearless, sexy, successful, and gorgeous, whether it was true or not. Because if you kept pretending, one day you would wake up and realize that you were no longer pretending to be a PATCH, but that you had the official seal.

With that, Joan picked up the phone and dialed Chris' phone number.

"Hello, Ms. Dallas," Chris answered.

Joan wanted to scream with joy; Chris had answered the phone using her name which meant he had taken the time to program her number into his cell phone.

"Hello, Mr. Kahu," Joan copied his professional tone. "I'll be in Honolulu all next week. I would like to get together to—"

Chris interrupted. "Salsa, Samba, Mumbo, and the Rumba are my specialties. It would be my pleasure to assist you."

"Yes, Mr. Kahu. Can you fit that into your schedule?" Joan cooed.

"Gladly. Where will you be staying?" he asked eagerly.

Joan held her breath. "Kulani."

"Did you get the ocean front suite?"

"Didn't you tell me to?"

"Here I thought I was going to be spending the next week alone. Now I get to be captivated by my beautiful black butterfly. When do you arrive?"

"I'm taking the overnight flight at 10pm tomorrow. I should arrive in Honolulu at 9:30 am Sunday morning."

"I'll be there to pick you up," Chris said.

Just then Joan's assistant, Miriam, walked into her office. "Excuse Ms. Dallas,"

"Uh, look, Mr. Kahu, I have to go, so I'll talk to you later." Joan hung up the phone and looked directly into her assistant's eyes. All PATCHES know the best way to convey confidence is with eye contact.

“Sorry, Ms. Dallas. I didn’t mean to interrupt your call.”

Joan liked the way “Ms. Dallas” rolled off her assistant’s tongue. Miriam, originally from Brazil, had a thick accent.

“Can I leave a little early?” Miriam asked. “My husband just called and told me he can’t pick up the twins, so I need to make it to the sitter’s house by five.”

“Sure, Miriam I’m about to leave myself. I still need to stop by the dry cleaners and pick up my son.”

“You are very lucky. I would love to go to Hawaii by myself. Shoot, I would settle for being able to go to the restroom by myself.”

Joan placed Chris Kahu’s business card back into her purse. “You know I was a little hesitant to go alone after Tisha and Lila cancelled out on me, but now I’m looking forward to it. I can do whatever I want and go wherever I want, without anybody else’s input.”

Miriam shook her hips as if she were slow dancing. “With whoever you want,” she winked.

“Exactly,” said Joan.

“Well I have three bits of advice,” Miriam said before closing the office door. “One, use a condom; two, don’t bring him back with you; and three, take lots of pictures for the horny and hopeless.” Miriam laughed and then turned to exit the office. “Oh yeah, before I forget, Dr. Wright left this for you.” Miriam extended her hand that held a piece of paper in it.

Dr. Wright was Joan’s first and only boss since graduating from college.

Joan had gone on dozens of interviews before answering an ad that stated, “Passionate Doctor needs Passionate Manager.” Dr. Wright and Joan hit it off immediately.

In the eight years they worked together, Dr. Wright and Joan expanded the one office into three, housing seven other allergists along with their staffs. When asked to describe Joan’s job description, Dr. Wright responded, “I take care of the patients and my Joan takes care of everything else.”

Dr. Wright believed if given the opportunity she could find the right combination of medication and environmental changes to control almost any allergy. Her big break came when local Houston newswoman, Samantha Redden, mentioned on air that Dr. Wright was the only doctor in town who could help her with a severe pollen reaction.

Within a few months, Dr. Wright had throngs of doctors that wanted to be associated with her, a six-month waiting list for appointments, and patients from all over the country.

Joan took the piece of paper from Miriam’s hand and began to read it. *You have been with me since the beginning. I could not have done any of this without you. You are the best! That’s why I’ve decided to give you a raise. We will discuss the details when you get back. Have fun!*

Joan had worked through her lunch that day so she decided to go to the break room and pop a bag of popcorn to munch on during the ride home. She put her shoes back on stepped out of her office door and walked dead-smack into the delivery guy’s muscular chest. She stepped back slowly as he walked forward into her office, closing the door behind him.

“I’m sorry; your secretary is not at her desk. I was getting ready to knock when you walked out. I was told you had something that needed to leave today,” the medium height, medium build man said.

Joan had not minded stumbling into him at all. She had wanted to meet him since he started handling their deliveries when Dr. Wright and the other doctors decided it was more cost effective to switch from a large national delivery service to a small local one three weeks ago. He not only worked for the service, but he was also part owner.

Joan turned around to retrieve the accounting report she has just finished from her printer. She placed it in an envelope and then bent over her desk to address it. She could feel his eyes covering every inch of her body. Joan was glad she wore her crème suit. The long pleated skirt fit her every curve.

Then Joan remembered she had forgotten to tell Miriam to call the delivery service. She turned toward him and held the envelope in her hands with a smile on her face. “Who told you I had something outgoing today?” she inquired.

He moved in closer and looked around the office. “Are we alone?” he said quietly.

“Yes, why? Do we need to be?”

“No, not really, but when I ask you what I ask you, I would prefer that there not be an audience, especially if you shoot me down. I’ve actually wanted to talk to you for a while now. I was here on other business and saw that your secretary was out so I decided to go for it.”

Joan looked him up and down. “You don’t seem like a man that has to worry about women shooting him down.”

“Well, I guess I’m out of practice. I only move when I see something worth moving to.”

“And you see that?” Joan flirted.

“Do I ever. You seem like a woman that is about business.” He looked at the name plate on her desk and added, “Ms. Dallas.”

Joan batted her eyes and handed him the envelope. “You know my name but I don’t know yours.”

“I’m sorry. I’m tripping. I’m Curtis, Curtis Rodgers and I’m in desperate need of having your phone number.”

Joan acted as if she wasn’t so happy that she could do cartwheels. “I’m out of town next week, but you can call me the following week.” Joan gave him her business card from the stack off her desk. He then placed it in his wallet.

Since he did not make a point to leave, she asked him what she had wanted to ask him since the first day she saw him. “My friends and I are giving a pool party.” Joan looked directly into Curtis’ eyes. “It’s not until the end of the summer, but I can’t help but ask you now that it appears to me you would look good next to a pool.”

He stepped back and smiled. Joan could tell he was turned on by her assertiveness. “See I knew there was something different about you.” He licked his lips. “I would love to join you next to a pool or anywhere else you happen to be.”

“I look forward to speaking with you soon,” Joan replied seductively.

“Likewise,” Curtis winked and then walked out the door.

As if things couldn’t get better than a week in paradise and a raise, Curtis was as attracted to Joan as she was to him. She couldn’t help but laugh out loud as she thought

about how fine he was, and more importantly, how jealous her girlfriends would be when they saw the Morris Chestnut look-alike on her arm at their annual book club pool party.

Last year she had made the mistake of inviting a sweet, but skinny, guy named Walter. When Walter arrived shirtless next to the hunks they had picked out just for the occasion, Joan was so embarrassed. *But that won't happen this year*, Joan thought as she prepared to leave her office.

Joan closed the blinds then retrieved her purse from the closet. Her hunger pains would have to wait. Now, it was four-thirty, too late to pop a bag of popcorn. If she could get to the parking garage in the next five minutes, she could still beat the rush hour traffic. Realizing she had forgotten to log off her computer, she reached across her desk and grabbed the mouse.

Suddenly, she was no longer in her office, but instead surrounded in darkness.

“What in the world is going on? Where am I?” Joan screamed. She could hear voices; some appeared to be right next to her while others appeared to be miles away.

One minute, each of the women who were now surrounded by darkness, were living their lives as if it were a normal day, and the next, they were in a pitch black auditorium which appeared to go on endlessly. Some of the women were screaming and others were shaking vigorously, but most were scared into silence.

Joan could hear the rapid beating of her heart as she forced herself to wake up from what she hoped was only a nightmare. All of a sudden, a faint speck of light highlighted a small portion of a stage. The screaming women became silent and the shaking women became still.

This is too real to be a dream, Joan decided. *I must have died and went to Hell.*

Joan watched anxiously as a petite, elderly black woman dressed in a long, flowing white robe walked slowly into the only light, now radiating in the building.

“Good evening, ladies,” the woman spoke. “I know you are wondering who I am and why you are here.”

The intensity in her voice made Joan grow even more fearful. She tried again to look around the room, but all she could perceive was blackness.

“My name and position are of no importance to you,” the woman continued. “Be calm. I mean no harm.” She paused, as if giving the women a chance to internalize her last statement. “My beautiful sisters, you have lost your way. The world you have created for yourselves is simply out of control. You are lost. We have proposed an experiment so that you may be found.”

Who in the world is ‘we’? Joan wondered. Sweat was pouring down her face and sliding down her stomach. She could hear someone close to her gagging as if they were vomiting. No longer able to keep her composure, Joan leaped out of her seat and yelled, her voice echoing loudly throughout the building.

“Lady, I don’t know who you are and I don’t care,” Joan said. “However, I do know one thing, and that is, whatever help you are trying to provide, I don’t need. So, can I please just be zapped back to where I was?”

Just then, another voice sounded out. “Joan, is that you? It’s me, Tisha.”

Joan not only heard her best friend, Tisha’s, voice, but Tisha’s cousin, Lila, also a friend of Joan’s, called out to her also.

Abruptly, the darkness lifted and the women could now see each other. Hundreds of thousands of women were neatly seated stadium style underneath bright signs that

listed their places of residence. Each of them was clothed in a white linen robe, same as the woman on stage.

At first, the woman appeared to be relaxed, but now, the women could hear the displeasure in her voice and see it on her face. “No one is leaving until I am finished saying what I have been sent here to say,” the woman informed them. “Therefore, I suggest you *all* sit down and listen.”

Joan immediately took her seat.

“As you know, there is a problem with you and the men in your lives. On numerous occasions, we have heard your cries,” the woman continued.

Shockingly, each woman heard a quiet voice in her ear sounding as if it were her own. Joan heard, “*All men are dirty dogs. All they want to do is make babies their broke butts can’t take care of. I’m tired of giving up my goodies to these no-good trifling players who act as if they would rather be tortured by a hive of honey bees than make a commitment to one woman.*”

Finally, Joan heard herself from a recent experience one night when she was pleading out to God as her tears fell. “*Father, can you help me? I’m tired of being lonely. What am I doing wrong?*”

As the voices died out, the woman on the stage continued speaking. “All of you want to marry kings, but are you conducting yourselves as queens?”

An enormous movie screen slowly lowered behind the woman. Joan tightly grabbed the arms of her seat, embarrassed by what she had heard, and afraid of what she might see.

Joan's eyes gravitated toward the first picture to appear. It was Jamal, Joan's first sexual experience when she was only fourteen. She sat numb, unable to move or react. The men were pictured in the order in which she had slept with them. The final picture was of Scott, an accountant she had met three months prior.

She had no idea her rule of "no more than two to three new experiences a year" had resulted in a total she was too humiliated to finish counting. She shook her head back and forth in disgust when she realized she could not recall all of their names. Without warning, the pictures of the men disappeared and images emerged.

Soon Joan witnessed herself engaged in a fistfight with Raquel, a woman she had a lengthy feud with, over James, the man who had fathered each of their sons. The following imageries covered Joan's two-week trip to Jamaica, which landed her in hotel suite after hotel suite with men she had met days, or sometimes hours, before. Her eyes started to water as she observed herself aggressively seducing a man she knew was married.

Simultaneously, each woman viewed her own personal video, their eyes serving as the projectors for the flashbacks they witnessed. Many of them were smiling as they watched fond memories, while others, like Joan, had shame covering their faces as they viewed a dose of reality that was anything but pleasant.

"Sisters, you don't begin to know your power!" the woman said with authority. "There was once a man walking in the desert, weak and near death because of thirst. One day, the man saw a rock with one glass of water on top of it. The man jumped for joy. The gift to him was priceless. He savored each drop as if it were his last. While he was very thirsty, he managed to have the discipline to save half the glass of water. The

second day, when the man woke up and walked to the rock, there were two glasses of water. He could not believe his luck. On the third day, there were six. By the seventh day, the man grew to expect the water.”

The women nervously shifted from side to side in their seats, knowing exactly where the woman was going with her story.

“The man started to bathe with the water,” the woman stated. “He even washed his camel with the water. He would have given it away if there would have been anyone to give it to. Sometimes he would just pour it out if it had gotten a little old. After all, he knew more was coming tomorrow, and better still, he didn’t have to do anything to get it.” She paused and then abruptly stated, “Refuse to bed a man who has not made a commitment to you and God.”

Joan sucked her teeth. “You expect us to just give it up cold turkey?” Joan immediately regretted that remark once she saw the expression on the woman’s face.

“Give up what?” the woman responded, coarsely. “I guess you all are satisfied passing from one man to the next. I suppose you would rather share your men than to have one for yourself. Do you not want a husband and father for your children, or are you content with just having a baby’s daddy? These men will never know your value unless you start acting like you are valuable. This is why we have brought you here today. This is operation SSE, The Single Sister Experiment.

“We want to know how your men would react if each of you stops giving yourselves away and demand to be treated like the priceless gifts you really are. Many of you believe when you lie down with a man you’re offering your body, but I believe

you're giving up much more. Don't you want to know what would happen in your lives if you stopped giving up your precious water?

“Of course, all of you could go on doing what you have been doing and continue to hurt like you have been hurting. Is this drastic? Yes, it needs to be. Is it going to be difficult? Yes, more difficult than you can imagine. You will figure out who lied to you. Beloved, some of you will endure a painful self-analysis as you discover the lies, the liars, and your true self.”

The woman folded her hands, paced a couple of times and then said, “I went shopping one day and purchased a bookcase from one of those warehouse supply stores. I opened the box and immediately disregarded the manufacture's instructions. They were just too long and too extensive. I thought, ‘hey, I'm smart enough to do this by myself.’ I pulled all the parts out and put the pieces together that seemed right. One of my friends stopped by so I implemented his ideas as well. I could see we had done something wrong half way through the process, so I called one of my relatives who had a bookcase similar to mine. I took his advice and moved on. Then I looked on the Internet to see what other people had to say. At the end of the day, I called it quits. The bookcase was leaning on one side. The panels were weak and could not support the weight of even my smaller books. The one who created the bookcase gave me the instructions, but I chose not to follow them.

“Surely a great philosopher knows exactly what you should be pursuing in your life. Perhaps a famous television personality knows how to lead you from earth to heaven. Maybe you should start following a novelist, celebrity, or a scientist from one of

the elite universities who is known for his extensive scholarly works. When will you grow tired of listening to that nonsense?"

Joan remembered how she and her friends had followed Dr. Kashia Snow.

"Ladies," the woman pointed out, God is not some egomaniac who is trying to stop you from having fun. He is a loving Father who deeply desires to protect His children. Tell me, is this God's best for you?"

Joan thought back to what she had heard and seen and replied, "No."

"You are not alone, my sister," the woman said to Joan. "We want all of you to have everything God has waiting for you. We want you to find husbands. We want the family unit together and strong. However, you can't attract a godly man until you become a godly woman. I think it's that time, don't you?" The women nodded their heads in agreement. "I think it's time these brothers got real thirsty. Are we in the midst of a drought, ladies?"

"Yes! Yes!" the women enthusiastically shouted.

"In order for this experiment to work, we need the complete cooperation from every last one of you," the woman told them.

The women looked around at each other, and then they started to stand up one at a time. Within seconds, the entire auditorium was standing hand in hand and quietly weeping.

Joan's eyes were closed tightly, fighting to hold back the tears that were pooling in her lids. When she opened them, she found the woman had stepped off the stage and was now standing in the center aisle.

“You have been created by God for His purposes,” the woman said, pointing to Joan and the rest of the women. “He is the manufacturer. Ladies, from this day forward you will follow the manufacturer’s instructions. You will study and meditate on the instructions. You will journal concerning the instructions. You will be changed by the instructions. I’m speaking of the Bible, the Word of God, or as I like to call it...” She paused and held up her Bible, “Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.”

After asking the women to get on their knees, she told them to repeat after her. “God, I know that you love me as no one will ever love me,” she stated as the women repeated her words in unison. “Today I surrender my life to your complete control. I pray for guidance as I seek to grow into the woman you created me to be.”

Joan walked over to Tisha and Lila and they all linked hands firmly. She knew she was going to need the support of her sister network like never before.

“This is the first phase of the experiment,” the woman said. “I or one of my colleagues will visit each of you as we believe it is warranted. I know you may have more questions, but I am not at liberty to answer them at this time. In a few moments, you will be returned to your lives as you left them. Until next time, my sisters, be blessed,” the woman concluded.

In less than a second, Joan was back at her desk. Clearly shaken up, she walked outside her office in search of a sign indicating something out of the ordinary had taken place and that the whole auditorium scene was not just a figment of her imagination. To her disappointment, everything and everyone looked the same. But little did she know, her life as she once knew it wasn’t the same.