

Summer arrived with a blazing heat. The temperature broke records with days of 100 degree weather. Jackie whizzed along the highway in her cherry red Honda Accord, with the air conditioner blasting icy cold air, during the early Friday morning rush hour traffic to the airport, listening to KFVN news radio. She absorbed every headline and storyline.

This weekend's excursion with the girls would allow her time to relax and a chance to focus on fun. The trip would also allow her time away from Kevin. Lately his attitude had shifted into neutral from lover-man to spaceman. He needed his space, he needed time to think, and he needed *things* that did not include her.

Driving through DFW international airport was like navigating a labyrinth; always going in circles and never really going anywhere. She finally landed in the North Shuttle parking lot. She grabbed her luggage, hopped on the shuttle bus, and arrived at Terminal A. The tension of the relationship, the drive for perfection, and the haunting nightmares that kept Jackie wound up tightly, all receded like flood waters flowing into a drain. While feeling through her emotions, Jackie suddenly noticed her girlfriends at the gate to check-in. The ladies were light with laughter and ready to kickoff a weekend of celebration. Jackie's friend, Alicia Hartman, was on her way to marital bliss. The weekend-long party signified her last rite of passage as a single woman.

The six ladies prepared to board the plane, ready for an excursion that was destined to create fireworks and not the kind that burst in midair. The soiree would erupt like a volcano and add hotter temperatures, than anticipated, to the fun, festive weekend.

Jackie knew all of the ladies except one and she did not seem to connect with the usual clique. She questioned why Alicia invited her to the weekend bachelorette party. After all, Alicia had only casually mentioned that she worked in the same department and that they had lunch a couple of times.

Jackie observed the woman, noticing that she was not as polished and professional like the rest of them. But, she dismissed her prejudices and packed away her biases. She did not want anything or anyone to disrupt her temporary moment of joy.

As customary, the group exchanged animated hellos and sisterly hugs. Alicia introduced her coworker to the rest of the gang.

"Ladies, I want to introduce my assistant, Theresa," Alicia stated with an attitude worthy of a diva. A chorus of '*hellos and how are you*' and rattling of names filled the air to welcome Theresa into the clique. "She has to deal with me every day and we know that isn't an easy task. So, I wanted Theresa to join us and see that I'm not all about work. And, I also wanted her to meet my wonderful friends." The ladies encircled Theresa welcoming her into the group.

The six ladies arrived at the New Orleans airport, fired up and feeling feisty. The humidity rose up and steamed their faces for an instant, free facial. Moistness sank into their perfectly coiffed hairdos to undo any shape or form of curl. Jackie thought *I should have opted*

for the sister girl ponytail. She noticed that Tiffany's hair fell right into a naturally curly pattern. After all, Tiffany was a bayou girl.

The shuttle ride to the heart of the French Quarters was like riding in a space car from the Jetson's. The shuttle driver bobbed and weaved speeding along Interstate 10 like they were the only car left on the planet. Jackie prayed a quick prayer, *Lord let us make it to our hotel safely and not die in the hands of this mad-driving maniac.* God answered her prayer and the group arrived at the hotel with all body parts intact and their hearts recovered to their rightful places.

The ladies sashayed to the front desk to check-in, at the refurbished hotel in the Warehouse District, each toting overstuffed suitcases crammed with enough clothes for a week's stay. The lobby was adorned with colorful, contemporary artwork mingled with relics of history. The upholstered chairs and lounging sofa added softness with warm shades of daisy yellow, olive green, and tea-colored brown. The hardwood floors added old world charm along with the French doors and the intricate iron railing that outlined the stairs. The charm of the hotel embraced the visiting group with a relaxing atmosphere. It was just the ambience needed to kickoff the celebration.

After settling into their rooms, the girls walked to the French Quarters for lunch. Each one voiced her preference. The only thing that each one had in common was the desire to indulge in some spicy Creole cooking. Tiffany, the expert on the area and the cuisine, guided the group in the right direction. She knew all the hot spots in the area where they could feast on fresh seafood, zesty jambalaya, and spicy etouff  . But it was Alicia's weekend, so her choice won out. The ladies strolled over to Poirier's on Decatur Street. The sassy jazz greeted them at the door. The warm mahogany wood structure embraced them with old world charm.

"This weekend is going to be the bomb!" Alicia exclaimed throwing her stout arms up in the air.

"Say that girlfriend!" Jackie stated.

"I can't believe that I'm finally getting married." Alicia had always feared that since she was petite and plump that finding a mate would be next to difficult. It seemed that the men she encountered favored skinny women. She learned to allow her inner beauty to shine bright and dynamic personality to lead the way.

"You are lucky. Greg is a great guy," Theresa remarked with a quiet shyness. Her soft gray eyes darted off to avoid direct eye contact with anyone. She felt somewhat anxious. She did not have a college degree or the fancy job title like the rest in the group. She only wanted to fit in and hoped the other ladies were as friendly as Alicia.

"I know. He is wonderful. His proposal was right on time. I've always wanted to be a June bride. I know that sounds corny, but I like tradition and stability. I guess that's why I work as an accountant. Everything has to be exact."

“I hear you girl. I have finally admitted to myself that I’m a perfectionist. But I can do without the numbers.” Jackie knew her perfectionism resulted from not wanting anything to be noticeably out of place. She did not like to draw attention to herself, especially any negative unwanted attention.

“Girl you are borderline obsessive-compulsive,” Alicia teased Jackie.

“Alicia, what colors have you chosen for the wedding?” Tina chimed in. Tina was bordering on six feet tall and slim like a cover-girl model. She was bold and beautiful. Her dark chocolate complexion was smooth like whipped butter. Her demeanor was always poised and self-assured. Her towering presence commanded attention like a drill sergeant every time she walked into a room.

“I’m thinking about chocolate and champagne.”

“Oh, sweetie. I love it! Those colors are très chic,” Stacy stated with her usual perky personality. She was the happy go lucky one of the bunch. She talked to everyone like she always talked to the kids in her first grade class. Stacy owned a classic style, clean cut cropped hair, and simply sweet and petite.

“Isn’t chocolate sort of dark for the summertime?” Jackie asked with a hint of cynicism.

“Where are you going on your honeymoon?” Tiffany asked trying to keep the focus on Alicia and away from Jackie’s jealous comment. She knew that her friend always liked the attention for herself even if she did not want to admit it. She knew, with Jackie, that it was all about *me...me...me*.

“Well, I think he is planning on St. Thomas. But, he won’t say. He wants to surprise me! Isn’t that sweet? As long as there is clear blue water and sandy beaches, so I can sport the new bikinis in the day. And of course, the sexy lingerie for the night time.” Alicia had visited the gym everyday since the engagement. She did not want too much extra skin bouncing in unwanted areas.

“Ok, everyone is done eating their lunch? If so, let’s go shopping. I’m ready to move around,” Jackie remarked trying not to sound annoyed at all of the attention that Alicia was receiving. She desperately wanted the attention for herself. She could not wait for the day when Kevin dropped to one to knee, recited those magical words, and crowned her with a three-carat princess cut diamond ring. She knew precisely what she wanted and how she wanted it.