

# Chapter One

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Noriana Morgan stormed out of the closing attorney's office carrying a bulky dossier with her copies of the multi-million dollar deal she'd just signed. After seven hours of extensive document reviews and signatures, she was finally done. As she came out of the two-story gray stucco office building, her shoulders slumped. Her white and black business suit felt too snug after sitting in that giant burgundy chair for hours. She was five feet three inches tall, though she looked taller with her high heels. Her light brown, long hair hung in disarray down her back. Noriana carried herself well, considering she'd put on quite a few pounds over the past few years. She didn't care, not at all. Her mental and physical exhaustion was agonizing. It was September 13, two days after her first grandbaby was born in one of Atlanta's hospitals. Noriana was there, at forty-years-old, witnessing her granddaughter, Noelle, come into the world. She was delighted to be a young grandmother. Noelle was a 9/11 baby. That little bundle of joy was perfect in her grandma's eyes. "Perfection," Noriana stated as she got to hold Noelle. Her voice was steady despite the blustery emotions raging inside. A river of tears flowed from her large, glossy brown eyes. She held the miracle in her arms lovingly. Noelle was Noriana's new generation and her hope for a new legacy.

Two days after Noelle's birth, she signed the sale of her multi-million dollar company. After months of grueling due diligence, she was glad to complete the sale. That part of her life was over now, she believed. "I'm a multi-millionaire," she meditated as she got in her white Ford Expedition.

The reality left her feeling somewhat blank, bereft of any real excitement. She lit her Marlboro Red cigarette, cranked the engine and headed to the closest Starbucks. She craved her usual caramel espresso. These days, she lived off two and a half packs of cigarettes a day and two to three Starbucks coffees. Sometimes she pondered why she put on weight, when in fact she rarely ate any real food. Overall, Noriana's concentration wasn't on her looks, much less her health. She was a robot, functioning like a programmed machine to accomplish things, to resolve everyone's issues, to please people. The price she was to pay was still unidentified to her back then. Her mind was set: "All is good. I just have to keep on going, and all will be just fine."

Running at a fast pace for years, not dealing with the reality concerning her life, she raced through her existence at a hundred miles an hour while living in denial, lying and destroying her life and the lives of her three daughters. Her husband of many years, John Morgan, was there physically, but he had been absent from the marriage emotionally. Yet, she refused to stop and analyze the very core of her life.

What was she trying to prove and to whom? Was it worth the consequences? Her marriage was shattered from the beginning, but she negated it to herself and her daughters. Noriana fell in love with John back in 1989, almost at first sight and thus, she was blind to see who he truly was or the person she became due to this relationship, just as she declined to grasp the major bearing her abusive father, Paul, had in her life. Illogically, she developed into a beggar for love.

Noriana assumed she could buy love, that somehow she could prove herself to be worthy of affection through material accomplishments. Quite frequently, she smothered people with money, gifts, or other favors that her wealth allowed. Sadly, all these beneficiaries thought her to be a fool, but that didn't stop them from taking full advantage, knowing that they could.

On that fateful day, Wednesday, September 13, Noriana drove back to her office. It was early evening by the time she got there.

Parking her SUV in the designated spot in front of the large, one story, red brick building, she wept. She'd sold her company that she loved and worked so hard to build from zero up, to a man she now despised, Kevin. He was a mean and ruthless man. She recognized the signs through the selling process, but she knew there was no choice anymore, she had to sell or else, all would be lost.

Anguished by the need to inform her eighty-four employees, she sobbed harder. Her oval face with high cheekbones was smeared from the leftover makeup. Looking up in the rearview mirror, Noriana felt brokenhearted, knowing that all these employees trusted her and needed her compassionate management. She always helped them; each of them relied on her and yet, she let them all down. They were family to her.

During one of the recent meetings with Kevin, she conveyed her deep concern for her employees and asked him to continue treating them well. Full of haughtiness, he replied to her request, in a cynical tone, "People don't mean anything to me. Numbers do." Her heart suffered a painful blow as she absorbed the significance of his words.

Now, she had to break the bad news to her people and then stay with the company an additional one hundred twenty days to train the new owner – and see her staff suffer under the new management. Her final day as per their contract would be January 15, a period of time that felt like years to her. Shaken by her sentiments, Noriana opened the front door of the showrooms that led to her large office located on the right of the entrance. "At least, he's not here now," she reminded herself, as a false smile spread on her full lips. She'd just spotted Latisha, her office manager.

"I was about to close the showrooms for today," Latisha said. Her voice was different, not the usual merry tone. "Do you need my help, Lady Boss?" she continued, sounding restrained.

"No honey," Noriana replied, making an effort to sound typical. "I'll just be here for a tad, but I'll see you in the morning. Thank you for doing such a great job. You are awesome, Latisha."

“Anything for you, Noriana,” Latisha replied with a nod. “You are the best boss in the world. We all love you. You know that.” Then she went back to her office to get the front door keys.

Latisha was an African-American woman, who was the sole provider for her son and her unemployed husband.