

Ana looked around Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, she had two hours and fifteen minutes before her flight for Miami was scheduled to leave. On her way to California, the layover was only forty minutes, just enough time for her to exit one plane and go straight to the gate for the next one.

Atlanta was one of the major American cities Ana had never been to. She had heard a lot of good things about the place from other people. She always heard it was a good place for black professionals. She walked around the busy airport looking for somewhere to eat. As she watched the busy crowds of people Ana thought the airport looked like a city in itself. It had a train system and everything.

She walked around until she got to Paschal's Restaurant. Ana had never eaten soul food before she moved from Miami to New York, and really wasn't that crazy about it. The one thing she did like was collard greens, so she got fried chicken and collard greens.

She sat down and looked at the people around her. To her left were two women who appeared to be in their mid-twenties laughing and talking. At the table in front of her, was a couple who didn't look too happy with each other. Some people were with children, some on the phone. Ana was lonely. She was by herself with no one to call. She didn't have a boyfriend, her immediate family was in another country and her best friend was in another state. She sat alone

wishing she could just run away. She felt like walking outside the airport and staying there where no one knew her. She walked to the gate, pulled out her sketchbook and sketched a few things before she got on the next flight.

After a bumpy flight, Ana was back in Miami. She stood next to the conveyor belt and watched everyone that was on her flight get their bags. The belt stopped and all baggage seemed to have already been unloaded, but Ana was still missing one bag. She walked over to a customer service desk to speak to someone.

"Excuse me, do you know if all the bags from flight five-three-three came out already?" Ana asked the clerk.

"I don't know, let me check," the clerk replied.

The clerk made a phone call before telling Ana that all the bags from her flight had already come out. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Could this be any worse? She already didn't know where she was going to sleep that night. She was tired, hungry, and the suitcase that she bought in L.A. with her new things in it was missing. Ana took a deep breath before speaking again, "Is there anywhere else my suitcase could be?" The customer service representative took her to where some bags were stored, but none of them were hers. They looked around until he finally took her information and told her what steps to take to file a missing item report.

Ana left the airport in tears. Everything she bought in L.A. was gone. The only thing she still had was a Gucci purse that she wore on the plane. Once she got to her car she sat down and counted how much money she had left. Exactly \$2,000, including the \$1,500 Paul gave her. With nowhere else to go, Ana, went to a hotel near the airport. She

paid for two weeks at the hotel on her credit card, which was almost to its limit. Once inside her room she ran a warm bath and laid in it trying to get her thoughts together.

She wished there were a way she could get to her father. She wanted to talk to him now more than ever. She decided she would call her mother and get his lawyer's number to get her father's information from him. Her next thought was school. First thing in the morning she would go see Keri in the financial aid office. Ana was sure she got accepted, especially since IFAC didn't require you to submit a portfolio to be accepted. She would spend the rest of the night working on scholarship and grant packages.

The next morning she went to IFAC and spoke to both Keri and Ms. Rios, and like she thought, she was accepted. They gave her all the information she needed. Orientation for new students was in one week. They still were going to wait until the scholarships and grant information came back before they would know how much if any money she would have to pay out of her pocket. Ana got back to the hotel feeling a lot better, she was going back to school to pursue her dream. She called her mother to at least get the name of her father's lawyer, but her mother wouldn't give it to her. Ana couldn't understand why her mother wanted to keep her own father from her. She decided she would find her father on her own by getting to a computer and looking up his information up online.

Ana was eating when her phone rang.

"Hello," Ana answered.

"Hey, how you doin'?"

Ana immediately recognized the voice as Tavares.

"I'm okay."

"You back in town?"

"Yeah, I'm back in Miami."

"I could come see you?"

Ana's first instinct was to say no, but she was lonely.

"Yeah, you can come over I'm at a hotel."

Ana gave Tavares directions and half an hour later he was there. They spent the night watching Pay-Per-View movies until they fell asleep. They spent the next day together and it wasn't long before Tavares started asking questions.

"Why are you staying in a hotel?" Tavares asked.

"Oh, I'm moving into my apartment in a few weeks, I'm staying here until its ready," Ana lied.

"Where's your parents?" Tavares asked.

"They're not around!" Ana snapped letting Tavares know that he was annoying her. Tavares changed the subject and never asked her about her parents again. Over the next week, Tavares became her fuck buddy. He only left the hotel room twice to go home for clothes. Tavares really liked Ana, but she only liked having him around because no one else was.

Ana's two weeks were almost up and her credit card was almost to its limit. Between gas and food, she had \$1,610 left. At the rate she was going, it would be only two to three weeks before she was flat broke. She couldn't afford to keep paying for a hotel. Even though she didn't want to, she put her pride aside and called Ms. Joyce, the woman that her cousin Karen told her about that rented rooms in her house.