



K-RHO:

The *Sweet* Taste
of Sisterhood

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CHAPTER ONE

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Kiara

ANY OTHER MONDAY night, Kiara Michaels' mind would be on the ethics of corporate mergers. Tonight, a different kind of union occupied her thoughts.

Two weeks ago, the heavy purple linen envelope her mother trained her to expect almost from birth landed in the Copper Road University sophomore's campus mailbox. The letter bore an invitation. The women of the Lambda Mu Chapter of Kappa Alpha Rho Sorority, Incorporated had requested her attendance for an interview. She was being considered for membership. Acceptance of the offer required Kiara to deliver three copies of the enclosed application and a money order for \$24.95 to the Sanford Student Center at 6:45 p.m. tonight.

Kiara walked briskly out the back entrance of her dorm. The Blueburg, North Carolina cold air slapped her mocha colored cheeks with an icy hand. Shivering she thought, 'why am I doing this? Doesn't being the daughter of a lifetime sorority member count for something? They should just tell me where to show up in my white dress so I can get my sorority handbook, pin and a bounty of crossing gifts. Hell, I have probably been to more national conventions than all the girls put together.'

"Excuse me, are you here for the Kappa sorority meet-

ing?” a voice said behind Kiara.

Kiara turned to face a girl who resembled a gazelle. Slender shape, beaming brown eyes and a direct gaze. She wore a royal blue beret leaned to the side of a neat black braided bob. Smiling, the girl waited for a response.

“Are you here for an interview?” Kiara asked walking inside followed by the newcomer.

“Yes, good to know I’m not the only one they are meeting with tonight. Usually, this time on a Monday, I would be in my Comparative Latin American Politics class. But, since the lovely women of the Lambda Mu Chapter of Kappa Alpha Rho Sorority, Incorporated requested my presence, I decided to forgo my educational advancement for a night. I’m Gloria Allen by the way, what’s your name?”

Kiara introduced herself. Walking up the carpeted steps to the second floor, Kiara noted Gloria also wore glasses and seemed about the same height. Then again, it could have been the three-inch heels Kiara wore making her eye level to her companion.

Lowering herself onto one of the brown leather sofas in the center of the second floor lobby, Kiara noticed fifteen other girls milling around. Removing her jacket, she unconsciously rubbed the back of her neck. She had recently cut her hair and still felt sensitive about exposing her neck. Her hairstyle choice did not come from a desire to jump on the recent Toni Braxton hair cut craze sweeping campus. It was to camouflage the damage of a dorm-applied perm. The scholarship checks only stretched so far and trying to cut costs, Kiara had gone the budget route instead of the beauty salon. Feeling clumps of the hair, damaged by harsh lye, separate from her scalp when she washed her hair a week ago, she realized some things were worth the price you paid.

“Does one of y’all have a light?” the buxom girl with skin dark as a starless December night asked. She sat with an unlit cigarette in her mouth. To Kiara, she resembled an African queen regarding her subjects who’d failed to amuse her. She wore her raven colored hair in a neat bun and had a serious look on her face.

“Sorry. I don’t smoke,” Kiara said. Gloria shook her head.

“No matter, I don’t think I’m supposed to smoke in here anyway. I just wanted to stir up some trouble while I wait for the sisters to call me in for my inquisition,” the girl drawled, checking her brown teddy bear faced watch. “They need to hurry up. My show comes on at nine and I am not trying to miss it because Thelma and ‘nem are running behind.”

“I totally know where you are coming from with that. I was just saying to Kiara, I am usually in one of my night classes at this time. Dr. Brevard usually lets us out right at the stroke of nine so by the time I get back to my dorm shows have been on for about fifteen minutes. I hate trying to get into a show once it’s started. I feel like I’m playing catch up the entire time so I usually don’t try to watch,” Gloria said nodding her head.

“Listen to me just talking up a storm without introducing myself. My name is Gloria and this is Kiara. What’s your name?”

“Donna Edwards, pleased to meet you,” she said.

“Nice to meet you Donna. Seems like I have seen you around campus before. What’s your major?”

“Social work.”

“Cool, mine is Political Science and Spanish. Kiara what is your major?”

“Business with a minor in Psychology,” she answered.

‘Man, this girl asks a lot of questions,’ Kiara thought looking around the room.

Gloria continued her fact-finding mission. “Neat. So what dorm do you stay in?”

Frustration creeping in her tone, Donna answered, “Brunswick, and you?”

“Pitt.”

“Aw shit, the honors dorm. My girl May-Lynn stays there and I know there aren’t that many of *us* up in there. Props to you,” Donna said with an approving look.

Blushing, Gloria replied, “Please, it’s just a brick building with some people who happen to test well. I think it’s neat your dorm is right beside mine. No wonder you look familiar. I have probably seen

you coming and going in the morning.”

“How about you?” Donna asked Kiara. “Don’t tell me you stay in one of the other Coal Campus dorms? You know I think it is sort of silly for Copper Road to divide up the dorms on campus using mining terms. I mean damn, everyone knows where the money came from to build the campus.”

“No, I stay in one of the Diamond Divide campus dorms, Greene,” Kiara said.

“Oh, the girl jock dorm. What sport you play? My cousin Regina who plays softball stays there, on the third floor. Country as hell,” Donna said, shaking her head. “She got written up last semester for trying to cook some collards in a crock pot in her room. You know the rooms aren’t wired that well and it caused a small fire. My people, my people.”

Relaxing a little, Kiara replied, “I run track. Gina your cousin? I heard about that last year. At least, from what I heard, the greens were off the chain so the situation wasn’t too bad.”

The three of them shared a laugh. The laughter seemed to help calm the trio’s nervousness about the interviews. They each came to this interview with different motivations but hoped for the same outcome. Kiara’s purpose was, in a sense, to join the family business. Her mother, two aunts and a cousin were Kappa Alpha Rho members. Kiara’s exposure to the organization began almost from the crib, when her mother dressed her in *Future K-Rho* shirts and took her to every sorority function possible. Kiara had been a Rho Angel in elementary school, a Rho-ette in middle school, and a Rho Rose in high school.

Along with her actual love for the organization’s mission, Kiara’s reason for joining involved the love of her mother. Staring at Donna and Gloria, she reflected. She and her mom never seemed to have anything in common. Her mother never left the house without her shoes and purse matching. Kiara lived in t-shirts and tennis shoes. Dorothy Michaels seemed to own the biggest church hat collection east of Cape Fear River. Kiara kept her hair pulled back in a ponytail, or due to recent circumstances, simply styled. Kiara thought, ‘maybe if we shared the same organization we could bridge a gap, which seemed

to start when I decided I'd rather climb trees than play with tea sets.'

"So y'all sophomores or juniors?" Donna asked. When Kiara looked at her with a why-you-want-to-know expression, she added, "In a few minutes, those K-Rho sisters are going to be all up in your Kool-Aid so you might as well get used to people being nosy."

"I'm a sophomore," Kiara said looking at Gloria.

"So am I."

"Good, there's nothing worse than being around a bunch of young-acting freshmen or some stuck-up upperclassmen," Donna said offering mints to Gloria and Kiara. After they declined, she placed one in her mouth.

"So I guess you're a sophomore," Gloria said.

"How did you guess?" Donna replied with smiling sarcasm.

Kiara considered the motivation of the two sophomores she just met. Neither had shared what brought them to the interview. She knew K-Rho was selective so she assumed the two had something going for them. Otherwise, they would be in class or somewhere else. At this point, she thought to herself, 'I should focus on me and not them.' Soon she heard her name. Looking at her watch, Kiara realized close to twenty minutes had passed since she sat down. Grabbing her purse, Kiara walked to the door where a girl in purple and platinum stood, and prepared herself for what awaited on the other side.

"Good evening, Ms. Michaels, my name is Ruth Wilson. I am currently the president of the Lambda Mu Chapter of Kappa Alpha Rho Sorority, Incorporated," she said. "I, along with chapter secretary Veronica Whitman, will be conducting your interview. We anticipate the interview to last up to thirty minutes, but out of respect for yours and our schedules, hopefully we will complete the process without extending that timeframe."

Kiara and Ruth often cracked jokes in Abnormal Psychology, however tonight Ruth was all business. Kiara knew she had to respond accordingly if she was to make a good impression.

Setting the digital clock facing her, Ruth started the interview. "Kiara, why do you want to be a member of Kappa Alpha Rho Sorority, Incorporated?"

“My interest in Kappa Alpha Rho Sorority, Incorporated comes from my admiration of the sorority’s goals of standing strong, reaching high, and giving back,” Kiara said. She struggled not to shift in her seat. Be it nerves, the new wool long sleeve navy dress, or a very good heating system, she was starting to sweat. She knew being a legacy or daughter of a sorority member all but guaranteed her acceptance. Still, anytime she faced an interview she felt a little unsettled.

“Not to speak ill of the other sororities on the yard, but the Lambda Mu Chapter members are the ones registering voters, collecting food and clothing for the homeless and tutoring students at the high schools. I remember when the student union didn’t want to bring Angela Davis here to speak, y’all donated all the money from your dances to help pay for her fee. Plus, y’all’s step team is all that.”

Veronica and Ruth smiled slightly and scribbled Kiara’s answers. She hoped praising the chapter’s philanthropic and party side would confirm her appreciation and awareness of the group’s impact on the Copper Road Campus. Known for being selective, Kappa Alpha Rho’s interest process differed from other organizations. Instead of interest meetings, they garnered their interviewees based on attendance at each of their events. Consideration for membership required each of the women to have attended at least three Kappa Alpha Rho events during the previous twelve months. Kiara had attended five.

The Lambda Mu Chapter was also unique on campus for never having any allegations of hazing leveled against it. CRU hosted eleven fraternities and sororities. All of them except Kappa Alpha Rho had been removed at one time or another. Kiara felt based on her experience and stories she had heard from others, if selected for membership, she wouldn’t have to worry about being mentally or physically harassed.

“Thank you for your response to the question. What do you think you can bring to Kappa Alpha Rho Sorority?” Veronica asked.

“I can bring a dedication to keeping the name of Kappa Alpha Rho respected on the yard. I also bring a knowledge and appreciation of all that Kappa Alpha Rho has done and a desire to make it all that it can be.”

“If I didn’t know any better, I would think you had practiced that little speech,” Veronica said, lifting her naturally arched eyebrow and looking sideways at Ruth.

Not knowing what to say, she responded, “No, that came from my heart.”

When she told her mother about receiving her packet, her mother kindly sent her what she had just said in case the question came up in her interview. Dorothy had given the same response during her interview thirty years ago. Waiting for Ruth and Veronica’s response, Kiara’s stomach churned. Did it work?

“Kiara, are you seeing anybody special?” Ruth asked in a way suggesting she may already know the answer.

The hair on the back of Kiara’s neck stood up. Did they know about Chris? Since becoming a couple last year, the two worked hard at keeping their relationship under wraps. She wasn’t ashamed, just cautious. Copper Road University was a Southern school and certain types of relationships were frowned upon. She kept her love life under wraps out of a love of privacy. She also didn’t want it to interfere with becoming a Kappa. While on the national level the organization prided itself on its diverse membership, on the local level everyone may not be so accepting.

Crossing her fingers under the table Kiara answered, “Not really.”

“Good to know. The process of becoming a member of Kappa Alpha Rho Sorority, Incorporated is very time intensive and often results in less time on social activities. If you are selected for membership, the learning process requires your full attention. Oftentimes those not connected with the organization have a difficult time understanding,” Ruth said smoothly.

“I understand,” Kiara said.

Veronica and Ruth asked additional questions. Kiara shared what social issues she felt the organization should address through their community service projects and her career plans after college. The two also confirmed they had researched her. Veronica complimented her for winning the conference 800 meter title last year and

expressed appreciation for volunteering at the hug-in to raise money for Blueburg's chapter of the American Heart Association. The runner, who lost her father three years ago to a heart attack, smiled at the members' praise. After giving Kiara a chance to ask questions, they dismissed her and advised if there were any additional information needed they would be in touch.

Kiara's nervousness about the interview prevented her from eating her usual four small meals. Instead, only a cup of coffee and a pack of crackers had touched her lips during the previous twelve hours. Now, her stomach signaled it was chow time. Pondering her dining options, Kiara saw the smoking sophomore from the lobby coming out the small study room to her left.

"Hey Donna, how did it go?" Kiara asked.

Rolling her eyes, Donna pulled a Dalmatian patterned scarf out of her black pea coat pocket. "I have had better Pap smear exams. I had three Rho's doing my interview. Cassandra, my freshman RA who wrote me up for breaking curfew. Cynthia, the Rho who wears what looks like every piece of makeup she owns every day to class, and some haint whose face was so twisted up I figured her drawers were cutting her in two. But like the Bible says, if someone doesn't make you feel welcome or pay attention to the words you are saying, you need to shake the dust off your feet and keep it moving."

Kiara was no Biblical scholar, but her recollection of that Bible passage differed from Donna's delivery. The two walked down the steps in silence and Kiara prepared to let this frustrated girl go her separate way. Something, however, in the back of her mind prompted her to reach out.

"Listen, you want to walk with me downtown to get a sub? I didn't get a chance to get dinner and I don't want to walk by myself. I would drive but I let my roommate borrow my car to go to work."

"Sure. Better yet, I will call my boyfriend so he can pick us up and give us a ride," Donna said, looking pleasantly surprised at Kiara's suggestion.

"Where does he live? I don't want him to make a trip just because I'm hungry."

“Peter doesn’t mind coming from Martin. He will do anything for me. I mean, since the season is over coach doesn’t have them under a curfew,” Donna said walking toward the bank of six campus phones located in the student center lobby.

“He stays in the football dorm? Your boyfriend isn’t Peter Darden, the center that people are talking about going pro?”

“The one and the same. We have been together since last year. I tutored him in English and we have been kicking it ever since,” Donna said, picking up the phone and dialing his number. Kiara watched Donna’s face change from expectation to resignation when the phone rang without an answer.

“I guess Peter must have run to get him something to eat or his roommate is on the phone. He never clicks over,” Donna said hurriedly. “I will be glad to walk with you downtown.”

“Kiara, Donna, wait up please,” Gloria said, racing down the steps at such a pace that Donna and Kiara rushed to break her fall.

“So I guess your interview went well?” Kiara asked, smiling back at Gloria who looked joyous.

“Truly. Gwen Brantley, the chapter vice president, Keisha, who is in my Spanish class and Cassie Addams, a member of Tau Omicron Kappa, their local graduate chapter, did my interview. You know, it really wasn’t that much of an interview. They asked some questions, I gave some answers and then we chatted.”

“Lucky you having Gwen do your interview. She stayed on my hall last year. She is one of the few K-Rhos on the yard I think is alright. We were going to walk down to Famous Subs, do you want to go?” Donna asked.

“I’m all for exercise but I can drive us. My car is a little junky, but if you don’t mind I don’t,” Gloria said.

Donna and Kiara surveyed the overflow of books, jackets and something resembling a plant occupying the passenger and back seats of the blue Toyota. They exchanged glances confirming their opinion about Gloria’s definition of a little junky. Still, a free ride was a free ride.

“Damn girl, are you trying to blow out my ear drums?” Donna

said responding to the syncopated rhythm of drums and cowbells of go-go blasting from the speaker behind her head. She shared the back seat with Gloria's leather knapsack.

Backing out of the parking spot Gloria said, "Apologies, I like to crank my music up and I was in a Chuck Brown frame of mind today."

"What is this we are listening to?" Kiara asked. Her shoulder and neck swayed to the rhythm of song. While she really couldn't make out the lyrics, the groove had her going.

"That my friend is the soundtrack of my youth, go-go. I spent most of my youth in D.C., and go-go is the district's unofficial theme music. Not too many people down here are into it," Gloria responded. "You remember the song "Da Butt" that was popular three years ago? Well the group who did that was E.U. and they are one of the biggest go-go bands there are."

The drive to the sub shop only took a few minutes but Kiara and Donna learned much more about Gloria than they requested.

"I was born in Baltimore, Charm City as we call it. My mom got a job during the last half of my junior year as one of the state's assistant attorney generals so she moved to Raleigh. I decided to go to school down here so I wouldn't have to drive so far when I need to go home to do my laundry or borrow money," Gloria said with rapid-fire delivery.

"I wanted to go to Howard or FAMU but I figured CRU would do, especially after I was awarded the P.A. Neal Scholarship. It covers my tuition and room and board until I graduate. Well, that's not the only reason I'm at CRU. I'm a big fan of Dr. Joffey who teaches in the Poli Sci Department. Did you know he used to work for the UN? I had a class with him last year and he is sooo brilliant."

Waiting for their sandwiches, the three discussed more about their backgrounds. Donna and Kiara grew up less than ninety minutes apart; Kiara in Wilmington, NC and Donna in Kenansville, NC.

"So Kiara, what do you want to do when you grow up?" Gloria asked, motioning the sub worker to add more black olives to her sub.

"Be employed," Kiara chuckled. "No, I'm trying to decide if I

want to go to graduate school and become a therapist or work in some corporate human resources department.”

“My goal is to get a job with the State Department after graduation. I had considered working stateside, but I would love to see the world and I figured if I can get the United States government to pay for it, even better,” Gloria said. “Last summer, I spent three weeks in Haiti doing relief work with my church, Saint Joseph, and I grew so much. Did you know Haiti is the world’s oldest black republic and it was the first independent nation in Latin America? You really should read *Tell My Horse* by Zora Neale Hurston. She went to Haiti and investigated the whole voodoo and political culture back in the 1930s. It is remarkable that what she wrote about in terms of their political process still applies today. I wrote a paper last semester and used her book as one of my sources and just blew my professor away by how a book written by an anthropologist/folklorist/fiction writer over sixty years ago is still relevant.”

“Are you always such a know it all? If that is the case, I may need you to become my roommate and help me with some of my courses,” Donna said, monitoring her sandwich’s construction. “I have this girl whose major seemed to be fucking fraternity members. Last semester, she screwed three Sigma Chi members. Now she is spending her days and nights at the Tau Kappa Epsilon house on East Tenth. Like my cousin Cheryl would say, girl is just giving out the goodness out of both draw legs.”

“So Ms. Psych Major, what do you make of that kind of behavior?” Gloria asked, sitting on a yellow plastic chair waiting for the other girls to get their sandwiches.

“Well, I could say she has some daddy issues she is trying to resolve by seeking out inappropriate male attention. Or she could have low self esteem and is seeking to bolster it by engaging in a behavior that traditionally indicates a woman’s worth, which is the ability to attract a mate,” Kiara said, paying the worker for her turkey and Swiss. “Or girl just likes screwing.”

Donna nodded her head and said, “I will take door number three for the win. I mean my roommate is good people. Don’t get

me wrong, I like having the room to myself most nights since she is out gallivanting, but I just hope she doesn't get hurt or get caught out there."

Getting into Gloria's car, Kiara replied, "Sounds nothing like my roommate. Ms. Freshman seems surgically attached to our room. She may venture down the hall to visit one of her high school friends, but other than that, she is either sitting in her bed eating cereal, in class or at work at Round-Up Ranch."

"She works at Round-Up Ranch? Man I love their fried chicken. It's not as good as my momma's, but it will do in a pinch," Donna said, licking her lips.

"It was cute the first two weeks she got the job when she would bring food home, but now both of us are so over their food she doesn't even bother to bring leftovers."

"Wow, I guess I'm lucky to have a room to myself. I got a private as part of my scholarship package," Gloria said. "It's great because I had a chance to put up a book case for all my books and my aquarium."

"You have fish in your room? The only fish that graces my room is usually fried with some tarter sauce and fries on the side," Donna said.

"Well just know, when you come to my dorm room, my tank is a no fry zone."

"Thank you for the ride, Gloria. It was good meeting you and Donna tonight," Kiara said when Gloria pulled in front of her dorm. The ten-story building sat on the east section of the sprawling campus set on the outskirts of North Carolina's tenth largest city. Donna and Gloria's dorm occupied the middle section of the university.

"Don't mention it. I had fun getting to know Donna and you tonight. I haven't had a chance to hang out with many black girls since I enrolled here. Tonight was cool," Gloria said. Donna looked at her with a somewhat bemused look on her face.

"Glad we could provide you with a cultural excursion. Now if you wouldn't mind, I would like to get to my room to catch the rest of *MacGyver*," Donna said.

“Oh, you’re into *MacGyver*? I’m more of a *Murphy Brown* fan. Did you see the episode last week?” Gloria asked.

“Can’t say I did,” Donna said dryly.

“Oh well, I guess I will tell you about it on the drive,” Gloria said.

Watching Gloria drive away, Kiara reflected on the connection she made with the Donna and Gloria. First impressions were often lasting impressions. Those two had certainly made an impression on her. The question was, she thought, ‘did they make a lasting impression with the Kappa Alpha Rho sisters?’