



# GET IT Together

## CHAPTER ONE

**THE ONLY THING STANDING BETWEEN** Alexis Jefferson and her dream designer handbag were time and opportunity.

Even before her alarm blared at 6:30 A.M., excitement had her wide awake. It was her second favorite day of the year—her birthday was the first—and she didn't want to miss a second of it.

As she showered, all she could think about was the trip she had planned to the mall to get the new Gabriel Humphrey bag. For the first time ever, the popular purse designer was breaking with tradition and releasing his summer collection a month early on a Tuesday rather than a Friday, and Alexis was determined to be the first at her school, Tate Academy, to have one by any means necessary.

After getting dressed, she studied herself in the mirror, nodding in approval at her reflection. In preparation for the day, she had gotten her shoulder-length weave redone, gotten a pedicure and finally perfected the makeup technique she had been practicing for a week. It sucked that she had to wear her school uniform, but she would make it work.

She looked good, even if she did say so herself.

She readjusted her white shirt, hiked up her khaki skirt so it showed her thighs, then grabbed her backpack and glanced around the disaster she'd left in her bedroom and bathroom, knowing her housekeeper, Marguerite Rivera, would have it all cleaned by the time she returned home.

*You've got this, Alexis*, she thought, casting one last glance at the mirror.

It was showtime.

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**"I KNOW YOU DON'T THINK** you're going out of the house like that."

Alexis stared at her plate, silently groaned and rolled her eyes before she turned around to face her daddy, Alex Jefferson.

"Daddy," she whined, "all the girls dress this way."

Alexis shifted in her seat, which caused her skirt to rise a little higher, and her daddy frowned as he took in its short length then her high-heeled sandals, which showcased her French pedicure.

"Alexis, I'm not playing with you," Mr. Jefferson said, frowning. "Get upstairs—now. You're fifteen. That's much too young to have on those heels and that much makeup."

Alexis looked at the floor, blinked a couple of times and fixed her face so it was filled with sadness as fake tears filled her eyes. "But Daddy, don't you think I look pretty?" she asked as her bottom lip quivered and she stared at him with her big brown eyes.

She smiled inwardly when she saw his gaze soften.

"Of course you look nice, Princess. Is that outfit even in dress code?"

She nodded, causing her hair to hit her in the face.

"Yes, sir. Like I said, this is the way all the girls dress at school. You want me to fit in, don't you? Dressing like this helps me fit in." He opened his mouth to speak, and she rushed on. "Since Momma died—"

Mr. Jefferson sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

Alexis knew he hated it when he mentioned her mother who had died from breast cancer ten years ago. Since her momma had been gone, her daddy had tried to make up for her absence by giving Alexis whatever she wanted.

“I’ll tell you what,” he said, throwing a glance at Mrs. Marguerite who shook her head and frowned. “Why don’t we compromise? Pull your skirt down and take off some of that makeup.”

Alexis grinned and kissed him on the cheek. “Thanks, Daddy. You’re the best. I love you,” she said as she headed toward the door. “I’ll do it as soon as I get to school. I don’t want to be late.” She grabbed an apple and picked up her backpack, taking a few steps toward the door before turning around. “Oh, I almost forgot. Can you sign my permission slip? We have that class trip today.” Alexis pretended to rummage in her backpack for the folded sheet of paper she’d placed on top, which she held out to him, making sure he only saw the bottom of the page where he was supposed to sign. When he tried to take the paper from her, she snatched it back.

“Alexis, I need to read this over before I sign it,” he said.

Alexis gave him a pretty pout. “I know, I know. An attorney never signs anything without looking it over. Daddy, it says the same thing all my other permission slips say. Can you just sign it so I won’t be late for school?” She glanced out the window just as the school bus pulled up and honked. “Daddy, hurry.”

Mr. Jefferson shook his head, grabbed his favorite gold pen from his shirt pocket and signed the paper.

“Have a good day, Princess,” he said, standing and placing a kiss on her forehead.

Alexis gave him her brightest smile, the one she knew could get her anything she wanted. “Daddy, can you give me some money for the trip?”

Mr. Jefferson chuckled as he reached for his wallet and handed her a fifty-dollar bill.

“Thanks,” she threw over her shoulder as she ran out the door to the waiting bus. Just before the doors closed, she turned and waved good-bye, knowing her daddy or Mrs. Marguerite would be watching. Finally, free of their watchful gazes, she plopped down in her seat, looked over the bogus permission slip that would let her out of school early and grinned wickedly.

*I’ve still got it*, she thought, laughing aloud.

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“DID YOU GET YOUR DAD to sign your permission slip?” Alexis’s best friend, Lauren Lewis whom everyone called Lucky, asked when they met in the lunchroom at Tate Academy before classes started.

“Of course I did,” Alexis said. “You know I can get my daddy to do anything I want. What about you? Did your momma sign yours?”

Lucky shook her head as she took a sip of juice. “After busting me last time, she called the school to check and found out there wasn’t a field trip.”

“Ah, man,” Alexis said. “You know I need you to go to the mall with me. It won’t be the same without you.”

“I know,” Lucky said, shrugging. “Can you wait until Saturday to go?” She looked at Alexis, her black eyes wide with hope.

Alexis wrinkled her nose.

“Uh, no. You know the new Gabriel Humphrey line comes out today. I want to be there when they start selling them at one so I can be the first to get that purse we saw online.”

“You’ll probably be the first anyway,” Lucky said. “I’m sure no one else is keeping up with that stuff.”

“You know that’s not true,” Alexis said.

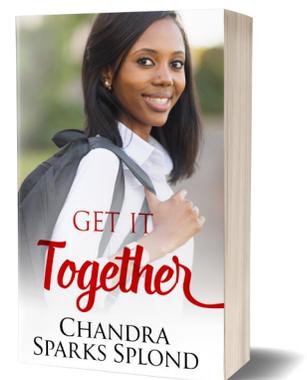
It was no secret that Tate Academy was a private school, and the kids who attended had parents who were some of the richest people in Birmingham, Alabama. All anyone had to do was look at the parking lot, which was filled with expensive cars, and in the lunchroom, where the students were dressed in designer uniforms and very expensive shoes and jewelry.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” Lucky said, looking around the lunchroom as she shoveled in a spoonful of oatmeal. “It wouldn’t be the same if everyone is walking around with it. Well, have fun.”

They sat in silence for a few minutes as Lucky finished eating.

“She looks a mess,” Lucky said, stopping mid-bite and frowning as she stared.

“Who?” Alexis asked, looking up from the homework she’d just remembered she needed to turn in for French class first period.



Lucky tilted her head two tables over to where Trinity Evans was seated alone reading a book. Alexis squinted, trying to get a better look at the girl's outfit, but all she could see was her white uniform shirt.

"What's wrong with it?"

"First of all, what's up with her hair?" Lucky asked, turning up her lip.

Trinity had her hair in a twist out, which complemented her mocha face. Although it wasn't a style Alexis would wear, Alexis thought it looked good on Trinity, but clearly Lucky saw things differently.

"She looks cute," she said, smiling when Trinity looked their way, then focusing on the sentence she was trying to conjugate.

"Cute?" Lucky said, curling her lip and smoothing back her ponytail. "Are we looking at the same person? Why would she come out of the house looking like that?"

Lucky's voice rose a couple of octaves in disgust, and Alexis gave a quick glance at Trinity, wondering if the girl had overheard her. Based on the way Trinity slouched a little in her seat, she had.

Alexis sighed. She and Lucky had been girls since they had met in gymnastics classes when they were three. They had stopped gymnastics a long time ago, but they had kept in touch over the years, and Alexis had been excited at orientation when she found out both she and Lucky were attending Tate. Some days it felt like old times, but more and more often lately, Lucky said and did things that made her uncomfortable.

Alexis threw an apologetic smile at Trinity, then turned to Lucky. "Hey," she said, her mind racing as she tried to change the subject, "we have to get started on the guest list for my birthday party. We've only got six months left to plan it."

Lucky nodded, talk of Trinity forgotten as Alexis pulled out the party planning binder she'd created from her backpack and scribbled *Guest List* across the top of a blank page. "How many people are you going to invite?" Lucky asked, taking a sip of her orange juice.

Alexis thought about it for a second. "Probably about a couple hundred. I want it to be exclusive, you know?"

"Okay, okay." Lucky nodded, liking the idea. "Yeah, we don't want to allow just anybody in." She threw a glance at Trinity and rolled her eyes. "We know who won't be invited."

Alexis kept staring at her paper, pretending she hadn't heard Lucky as she jotted down guests' names. By the time the bell rang, signaling the start of the school day, they had about fifty names on the list.

"You want to come over to my house later?" Alexis asked, tucking her homework into her French notebook and tucking it in her backpack. She grabbed her purse, searching for gum. "We can hang out by the pool and work on the plans some more."

"Sounds good," Lucky said.

"I'm glad it's almost summer. It will give us more time to work on the party."

"Before I forget, I got you a gift," Lucky said, reaching into her backpack and placing a package that held a round container on the table.

"Is that the new shade of Fenty?" Alexis squealed, picking up the lipstick.

Lucky nodded. "I saw it, and I had to get it for you. I know how much you liked it when you saw it the other day."

"Thanks, girl," Alexis said, wrapping an arm around her friend's shoulders and pulling her in for a squeeze. She grabbed a tissue and compact from her purse and removed her old lipstick before sliding on the new shade, admiring the way it made her skin glow.

"It looks pretty good on you," Lucky said, smiling her approval.

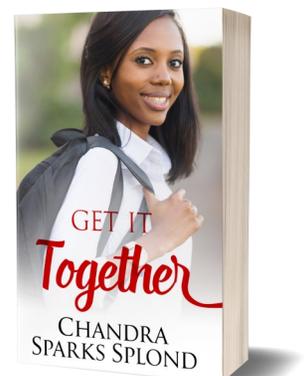
Alexis fingercombed a few strands of hair into place, then nodded before tucking the mirror back in her purse and leaving the tissue and empty lipstick box on the table.

"Hey, have you decided what you want your dad to get you for your birthday present?" Lucky asked as she collected her breakfast tray.

"Do you really need to ask?" Alexis said, popping a stick of gum in her mouth. "The only car for Alexis Jefferson is a Lexus, baby."

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CHANDRA SPARKS SPLOND



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## ABOUT THE BOOK

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Alexis Jefferson doesn't want much for her sixteenth birthday—just an amazing party and a luxury car. With an unlimited budget and the help of her best friend, Lucky Lewis, Alexis is ready to make her wildest dreams come true. After making a series of bad choices, Alexis finds her party plans in jeopardy—unless she volunteers at a place she never imagined. It might not be so bad since it means seeing cutie Carter Summerville... To her surprise, the more time she spends helping others, the more Alexis starts to question the person she's become and the people around her. With her birthday approaching fast, Alexis starts to wonder if maybe the best gift she can give herself is to get her life together.

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Chandra Sparks Splond is an editor, speaker and award-winning author and blogger. She is the owner of West End Publishing, LLC., and was the consulting editor for Arabesque romance at Kensington Publishing. She has also edited for Random House, Moody Publishers, Kimani Press, and Hyperion, as well as several *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *Essence* bestselling authors. She was a copy editor for *Good Housekeeping*, *Newsday* and *The Morning Call*, and has written for *Black and Married with Kids*, *Brides Noir*, *Weddingpages*, and *Romantic Times*.

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