

# Prologue

*It was the last game of the series, the last game of the season, and likely the last game of his illustrious, professional career,* thought Gregory Clayton Alexander. The press and news media, when they learned from his bio his family actually descended from Alexandria, Egypt, founded by the Alexander III of Macedon, they tagged him with the name Alexander the Great during his first year in college. When his name and number were called loudly with verve by the announcer in the SRO Madison Square Garden arena, using that tag line, he winced, but he stood and trotted to center court through the Soul-Train path lined by his teammates.

The boisterous crowd erupted; the roar so loud it was deafening.

He played his entire seven years of professional basketball here with the same team; people he both liked and respected. Not just friends and fans, but people he regarded as family. He set impressive record-breaking stats, never failing to score in the triple double digits, earned two Olympic Gold Medals, and two NBA Championship rings to show for his time in uniform and potentially a third if they could clinch the title tonight. It was a brutally, hard fought series tied three all. The adrenalin rush was flowing and their team was pumped to make this last game historic. Mentally and emotionally, he was immersed in his zone outside of time and space.

The adulation he received didn't die down and even the opposing team and coaches stood and applauded. However, he couldn't deny the way it made him feel to see his parents, siblings, nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, cousins; an entire tier of family and close friends from home and elsewhere stacked in the stands; his personal rooting section standing up

for him with banners proclaiming him as theirs. For just a moment his heart was so full, it brought tears to his eyes. He tapped his heart three times with a closed fist and then pointed to his family, but he had to keep his head in the game. He knew there would be a ceremony to retire his number 42 jersey following the game regardless of who won the season title. He had been through the retirement of his jersey before in high school in Goodwill, Summer County, South Carolina, and then again in college, at the University of Virginia, but this would be the very last one for the rest of his life.

Gregory Clayton Alexander would not be a man afraid to face his future once the cheering stopped.

Though he resented the tagline “Alexander the Great” used liberally during interviews, he agreed to speak on camera with ESPN, ABC, CBS and NBC and to be interviewed after the game by a few other regional sports’ programming networks. His agent was approached to have him say, when asked by a reporter what he would be doing next, he was to say he was going to Disney World. He easily rejected the contract. Actually, all he wanted was to escape the hype and spend some quality time with his family, particularly his younger sister, Aretha Grace, at the private party his family planned for later. Since the very beginning of his early childhood experience playing basketball in his hometown, Aretha was his taliswoman. She helped him workout, exercise, practice, and study on a daily basis. A lot of his success he owed to her unfailing support.

He also had some big shoes to fill. His father, Dr. Bernard Alexander, played basketball at Howard University on an athletic scholarship. His two older brothers, Kenneth and Benjamin, both played in college and turned down opportunities to play professionally. Twin cousins, Donald and James Dixon, both had stellar athletic collegiate careers, and even his older sister, Vivian Lynn, now a US Appellate Court Judge, also played on a winning US Olympic team while a student at Spelman College. Out of thirty or so first cousins, only a few didn’t play the game in high school and college.

Basketball was in his family’s DNA, the majority of whom, both male and female, were tall and athletic. Better still, Gregory and his

cousins could have attended any number of colleges or universities on academic or athletic scholarships. Though others had the opportunity, he was the only one in his family's history to accept an NBA contract; to take the road less traveled seven years ago. It was gratifying to learn yesterday from his agent that he would be inducted into the basketball Hall of Fame this year. He had enjoyed the game, but now, after playing more than eighty professional games a season for seven years, it was time to end this chapter of his life. He was trading in his NBA career to put his MBA to work as a founding partner in a new, stock-and-bond, brokerage firm. Alexander, Chandler, Jackson, Lightfoot, McAlister and Montgomery, PA, constituted Compliant Trading and Investment, Inc., (CTI), a newly seated Wall Street brokerage house, banking institution, business insurance underwriters, and member of the New York Stock Exchange.

The partners were loosely connected as friends and some as relatives. Margo Chandler was his agent's, Bill Chandler's, sister; Troy Jackson was Vivian's brother-in-law of her first husband; Jeremy Lightfoot was the brother of another one of Vivian's law partners, Alan Lightfoot, Attorney General for the recently created United Native American Nation; China McAlister was one of Vivian's former client's comptroller and business associates; and Joyce Montgomery was Vivian's current husband's sister. Joyce and Troy were also related through their siblings. Joyce's older brother, Bob, and Troy's sister, Sheila were husband and wife.

They had solid academic backgrounds and gained valuable experience working in various aspects of the financial industry. The collaboration of their combined talents gave them a promising start and a leg up over their competitors. They were the young titans looking to quickly expand their talent base with the addition of a few more partners. They offered partnerships to Jackson Chase, a well-known, commodities trader taking the industry by storm and Adam Atterly, a west-coast trader showing incredible savvy in the insurance market who happened to be Gregory's cousin's, James Dixon's, brother-in-law.

When Gregory announced his retirement from professional sports at the end of his current contract to embark fulltime upon this new career,

no one, outside of his family and close friends, understood or wanted him to quit. After all, he was not even thirty yet. His agent, Attorney William Chandler, was inundated with offers of ridiculously outrageous sums of money for him to continue to play for other teams in the league; some offering a percentage of the team as an inducement. What they didn't know or understand was he already owned a percentage of his current team. So, it wasn't about the money. He had more than enough to sustain his lifestyle and the means of generating more wealth if he chose to. For him, it was about completing a goal set in his childhood and starting on another challenging one.

He remembered one Labor Day holiday when he was still just a kid. It was when he decided what he wanted to do with his life in the short term. He, his siblings, and about thirty of his first cousins were camped out in tents on the beach in front of their great-grandaunt Hannah Ivy Benson's house. It was the crack of dawn and they were laughing about and recounting one of his brother's, Benny's, sexual escapades when his cousin James asked him,

*"You are practicing safe sex, right, Greg?"*

*"I wouldn't call it practice, exactly,"* he answered and grinned smugly, *"but, yeah, I remember what y'all taught me."*

*"Oh, so you think you've got pro status now, huh?"* Benny asked.

*"World class."*

*"It's your responsibility, Benny. You handle it,"* Kenneth directed.

Benjamin's long-suffering sigh was audible before he sat up, took off his sunglasses, and looked him in the eyes. *"Look, G, I think you missed the moral of my story."*

*"Oh, I got it all right,"* he recalled saying and laughing. *"I won't ask a hunnie dip to marry me until after I'm making big, stupid money. Then she'll think twice before she refuses. Everybody knows there ain't no romance without finance. Ain't no love without the glove,"* he said and, at the time, believed it as if those were two of the Ten Commandments.

*"Greg,"* Benny said, shaking his head in frustration, *"we're definitely going to have a little talk before I leave to go back to the Air Force Academy."*

*"You still thinking about playing pro ball?"* Donald asked him.

*"Only for a little while. After I get in and make some money, I want to go into business for myself just like James wants to do."*

*"Doing what?" James asked.*

*"Stocks and bonds. Investments, financial planning. Something like that," he answered at the time. "Uncle Calvin works on Wall Street and when I went to visit him he said there is a lot he could teach me about working in the financial markets."*

*"He's a good teacher, too," Kenneth added.*

His parents and grandparents taught him and his four siblings to set goals and adhere to the family principles: essentially, each one teach one. Every year for a week surrounding the Fourth of July holiday hundreds of his family members converge on Goodwill, Summer County, South Carolina, in reunion of mind, body, and spirit. They came together to rededicate their lives to the wisdom their ancestors passed down through the ages of their family and to ensure the success of future generations.

In addition, each Labor Day holiday at summer's end, the young cousins still in schools follow the family tradition and continue gathering at great-grandaunt Hanna Ivy's house at Atlantic Beach on the South Carolina Grand Strand to offer moral support for the academic year ahead.

He had a great childhood growing up among family and friends on their farm; a good academic career through both undergrad and the year of graduate school; and a professional career that made him wealthy and, he hoped, wise. He finished undergrad in three years and grad in one. Still he had no one special to share his life with. He had dated heavily in college and after, but found no relationship hit all of his buttons. Along the way he lost his cocky, childhood attitude toward women and sex. He wanted much more at this juncture in his life. His parents' and three of his siblings' successful marriages were his role models. He would not settle for anything less successful for himself; he never had. The next phase of his life was just beginning and, to his mind, just as challenging as the last.

