

ANOTHER FAMILY REUNION NOVEL  
IN THE WISDOM OF THE ANCESTORS SERIES

*Judicial*  
**INDISCRETION**

BOOK ONE IN THE CHI-TOWN GIRLS TRILOGY

ANN JEFFRIES



# Chapter 1



*“There’s a party over here! There’s a party over there! Oooo Ahhh!”*

Indeed, there was. A massive amount of people, most of whom were lawyers, were shouting catcalls, whistles, and dog barks over the din of loud, heart-throbbing, foot-stomping, finger popping, head locking, hand-clapping music. Multicolored strobe lights flickered in sync with the Old School funky sounds. Hot, steamy, hard bodies undulated to the driving rhythm of the beat. “*Go head! Go head! Go head!*” was another chant rippling through the space. “*Par-tay! Par-tay!*” It was a get down and it was on! “*To the left! To the left! To the left!*”

Tina Justice’s body was moving like her namesake on a revival of ***Proud Mary***. Cheryl Lawrence flung her impressive hips toward George Bryant. He captured her waist in his hands suggestively gyrating his torso against her rear.

“*Ooo wee, girl! Serve me somethin’, somethin’, sister woman!*” George shouted out. “*Umph! Umph!*”

“Can’t handle this, brotherman,” Tina teased as she snaked her body in a perfect wave from head to toe.

Fingers clicked in the air as George rounded to find another woman pressing him with a sensuous sway of her body. “*Get it, girl!*” he yelled.

Then the DJ torqued it up with another favorite body-challenging beat and the crowd went wild.

Sitting alone at the bar, Kristen Catherine Bryant, KC to her friends, slowly exhaled with total disinterest. The cool, white marble under her fingertips vibrated from the bass sound reverberating off the walls, floor, and high ceiling. She’d rather be anywhere other than this steamy, hot,

ballroom at her friend, Tina's Sheridan Road mansion in Chicago. She had no choice though since the festivities were in her honor. Surprise parties, even those planned by her oldest, dearest friends, and two older brothers, weren't her thing. She much preferred sitting on an island beach listening to cool jazz, smelling salt sea air, and counting millions of stars in the endless night sky.

Thinking of the stars and sky, she recalled that her pal, Tate Kennedy, was up there right now in the wild blue yonder continuing his dream of erecting the SPACEHOME project. Another pal, Air Force General Benjamin Alexander, was making history piloting the spacecraft he and his brother, Kenneth Alexander recently designed and built which didn't need a rocket booster to lift it into orbit. Oh, yeah, she thought, teamwork makes the dream work. It worked here on terra firma, too, and as a result, she was about to embark on a new dream, however not one of her own choosing.

Long-lashed, bright brown eyes rolled to the white gold Rolex on her wrist; a gift from "*The Judge*" when she, herself, was robed and became a Federal court judge three years ago. Her father presented the watch to her hours after he held the Bible for her—her mother's Bible—and she'd taken her oath of office. The senior Judge was jubilant—in his staid, somber manner—that his youngest and only female offspring had been appointed to a federal district court in Illinois. Was that only three years ago? she distractedly mused. It seemed like a lifetime had passed.

Kristen glanced at George Bryant, her older brother, whose better than six-and-a-half-foot frame towered over others. He now had three women engrossed in his very suggestive dance moves. Their mother, Lydia Martine Booth Bryant, had been a world-renowned prima ballerina and had trained them in all forms of dance. They were young when she died, but her teaching lived on to a certain extent in each of her three offspring. Kristen shook her head in amusement and put palm to chin resting her elbow on the bar. Her eyes rounded the crowded, hardwood dance floor in the ballroom, momentarily stopping on some of the more provocative dancers' moves. If only she could be that carefree and uninhibited for

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just one day, she'd take it. Yet, her life had to be lived with the decorum befitting a tenured professor of law who lectured at Chicago University's School of Law, the position she had just resigned and a federal appellate court judgeship—the new position she would assume in a month and the reason for the all-out bash.

Kristen sighed again. Strickland Briggs hadn't even come to the party. *WTH*. She really hadn't expected he would or that her friends even invited him. When she turned down his marriage proposal two months ago, he had wordlessly turned on his expensive, Italian, hand-crafted shoes and walked out on her. That scene wasn't even a fleeting footnote in history before the *Chicago Times* society pages captured Strickland escorting Shannon, a high-fashion model, into one of the hottest and most exclusive night spots in town. Gossip columnists opined the affair between Strickland and Shannon never really ended. Rather, it simply went under cover, literally and figuratively speaking.

Over her two-year relationship with Strickland, he never took her anywhere except stuffy professional receptions, bar association meetings, political dinners, and office events filled with lobbyists and captains of industry. However, some enterprising members of the Fifth Estate—yellow journalists to be precise—captured rather racy pictures they claimed were Strickland and Shannon in very compromising situations.

Strickland claimed the photos were forgeries, but never took steps to clear his name. However, being seen in all the politically correct places with Judge Kristen Catherine Bryant was Strickland's saving grace, his shield against gossip and innuendo. She fit his personae—Black, upwardly mobile, young and wealthy. In short, a BUPPY.

Well, so much for licking his wounds, she thought as the music turned to the sultry voice of Toni Braxton's *Let It Flow*. The band and singers were definitely kicking it Old School tonight.

"How about a slow drag, Judge Bryant?" a man's lowered, deep-timbered voice whispered over her ear.

A leisurely grin crept into Kristen's dower expression.

"Since when do you address me as 'judge', Pete?"

“Should I call you Madam Justice?” He grinned coming around to face her.

“I’m still KC Bryant to you, pal,” she smoothly answered.

“Not anymore, lady. You be ‘de judge!” He teasingly laughed.

“Stop,” she said, raising her hand in a traffic-sign motion. “I’ve had about all of *‘de judge’* jokes I can take for one night.”

Pete took her outstretched hand and deftly pulled her up from the barstool into his arms. “You just got it like that, my sistah,” he teased while guiding her into a dance on the crowded floor.

Peter Brock, a few years her senior, had been her friend and confidant since childhood; literally since they were babes in arms. The exclusive, private school they attended together had not done its job on him the way it had settled on her like an anvil. He was still buck wild when he wanted to be, but his family’s lucrative business and political connections kept him out of one jam or the other most of his life.

He was a very good lawyer now in spite of himself. He simply didn’t take the legal profession or himself very seriously. Yet, he teamed up with her father, brothers, and best female friends, Tina Justice and Cheryl Lawrence, and her good friend, Federal Appellate Court Judge Vivian Alexander Montgomery, to successfully lobby for her appointment to the federal appellate court in Washington, DC, to take Vivian’s place on the court. Her tightly-knit group of lawyers and supporters spent many months, almost six months, together preparing for the US Senate hearings at her father’s strong suggestion, and Pete had even acted as her legal counsel whenever the need arose.

However, not many people said no to her father. Certainly, she never could. Judge Clarence Edward Bryant, Senior, intimidated everyone, except her mother and her older brothers, Clarence Junior and George. Her brothers pandered to the senior Judge Bryant’s only loves—the law and sports. Her brothers, both lawyers now, George played professional football in the NFL, and Clarence Junior, professional basketball in the NBA. She, as her father’s only daughter, was held to a higher standard than her brothers and had about as much athletic ability as Beyoncé.

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Secretly, outside of the omnipresent eye of the austere senior Judge Bryant, she could make Beyoncé sit down and take notes. However, were she ever to exhibit any of her deftly exotic moves in public, she knew the wrath of the senior Judge Bryant would descend on her as solidly as the gavel he wielded like an ax. *Guilty!* Guilty of dreaming about something she couldn't have—a life lived in complete, sensual abandon or, at least, on her own terms.

“Why the sad face, KC? The Judge isn't here. In fact, we didn't even mention to your father we were throwing this surprise party for you.”

Kristen didn't realize Pete watched her so closely while they danced. She laid her forehead against the hard-muscled plane of his broad chest for a moment exhaling before lifting her head to look up into his eyes.

“Sorry, Pete, I guess I'm still tired from all the work we did to get me appointed and confirmed to the appellate court. It seems like a lifetime ago since I've had any time to myself.”

“Is that it? You just need a rest? Please tell me you're not still hung up on that weasel in a Saville Row suit?”

Kristen leaned her head back and narrowed her eyebrows as she continued to look up into Peter's handsome face searching his eyes. She didn't have to ask him who he was talking about. She knew it was Strickland Briggs.

“You never liked him, did you?”

“About as much as I like jock itch,” he snorted.

“Why, Pete? What did Strickland ever do to you?” she asked, confused.

Pete looked down into her concerned expression. Then a slow, lopsided grin grew across his handsome face. “Took you away from us,” he said, smiling.

“Really?” she snorted, shaking her head. “Now will the *real* Peter Brock, Esquire, please stand, place your hand on the Bible, and answer the question as posed?”

Peter's smile broadened. “Well, Judge, it happened when I was a child,” he teased feigning seriousness. “I had this little girlfriend who was always tagging after me and begging me to play with her...”

Kristen pursed her lips and shook her head. "That's not how I remember it, Pete, but that's beside the point. The issue is, why didn't you like Strickland?"

"Ever the lawyer, KC."

"The question, Pete," she encouraged.

"Let's just dance, pal-of-mine."

Pete turned her on the dance floor and held her close. She waited, understanding Pete was choosing his words very carefully in how to answer her question. He was always so protective of her; as protective as her brothers and her father were. Still, she was a patient woman, and would wait until he found the words to explain his thoughts. He always told her the truth no matter what and she trusted him without question.

Kristen again glanced at her watch on her arm which rested on Peter's shoulder. In ten hours she would be on a chartered Adventurers Executive Airline flight headed for a private island where she could enjoy complete and total anonymity; her first real vacation ever.

Since the day she took her first steps, her parents designed her life in a master plan leaving little or no time or room for her to exercise any control over her own desires or destiny. Now she would be free and un-chaperoned, at least for three weeks, before her father joined her in Washington, DC, in preparations for her ascension to the federal appellate bench. She couldn't wait to step on that flight to freedom.

"The man was two-timing you, Kristen. You must have seen all the news in the society pages about him and the super model Shannon. He's a social-climbing bastard. Briggs could see, just like the rest of us, you're headed for bigger and better things. He wanted in on the action and to keep Shannon as his side piece."

Kristen's body stiffened, but Pete held her that much tighter forcing her to sway with his moves.

"I'm sorry, baby," he whispered at her ear. "You didn't deserve to be told like this, especially not tonight at a party in your honor, but I kept quiet for far too long. We all did. We couldn't stand to see you hurt."

Confusion clouded Kristen's face. "He was using me? All of the time we dated, he was just using me?" she asked searching his warm,

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affectionate eyes for the truth. Clearly everyone, all of her close friends, knew it, she pondered. Pete nodded again in the affirmative. “Why didn’t you or any of my other friends tell me before?”

Pete blew a slow, frustrated breath and pulled her back into his arms. “The Judge had us all on lockdown. He thought Strickland had the political savvy you shy away from. That Strickland would do everything in his power to assure you a position on the Supreme Court without a breath of scandal. Your father warned me and everyone not to interfere, to overlook Strickland’s affair with Shannon, and to concentrate only on getting you nominated and confirmed to the federal court.”

“Even my father knew about Strickland and Shannon?” she questioned hoping it was not true.

Pete nodded in the affirmative. “Yes. He thought he was doing the right thing, KC. He wants you to be the first Black female Supreme Court Justice and a politic man, like Strickland Briggs, with the right pedigree, family background, and all the right connections would assure that would happen. You have to be very careful who you associate with, KC. Everyone has a hidden agenda, and I’m afraid, that includes Strickland Briggs.”

Kristen was numb.