



# All About The Money

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**Category:** Adult, Crime And Mafia, Action, Suspense

**Description:** For Jada West it was All About the Money. From dancing at the best club, to becoming the city s top Madame, whatever it took to make piles of paper, that s what she was about. In this tale of power and money Jada discovers that in the end, there is something more important than money.

**Total Pages (Source):** 39

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Jada West

For me, it was all about the money. It always has been. I think it's in my blood. I come from a family of hustlers. My moms and my daddy were both hustlers. That's all my mother and father ever talked about. Money, money, money, and how to get it.

They'd known each other all their lives. Moms was born six months and one day before daddy. They lived next to each other and my grandmothers were best friends. Both my mother and father used to say they don't remember a time when they weren't together. Even though they never got married and we didn't always live together, we were always a family.

My daddy was a gambler; that was his hustle. That's how he put food on our table. He played poker and blackjack, shot craps, played C-low, but his thing was pool. In his day, my daddy could shoot pool with the best of them. He used to always say that when he was truly on his game: "Ain't another man standing can touch me with a stick in my hand."

When I was a kid, he would take me with him sometimes when moms had something goin'. It used to make him madder than hell and he would rant and rave and say, "Swear 'for God, this the last time I let her do this to me. She know damn well I got shit to do, 'cuse my French; and if I ever hear you talk like that I'll beat your little ass. But she knows what I gotta do tonight. But if she was to come home and I ain't got no money, what would happen?"

“She would lose her mind.” I would always say ‘cause she would go off over the slightest little thing. It became kind of a runnin’ joke-us trippin’ on moms trippin’.

“You damn right she would. I can hear her now. ‘What you mean you ain’t got no money? Well, I’ll just go on down to the rent office and tell ‘em I ain’t got the rent ‘cause my man couldn’t find no baby sitter’,” he went on and on. But the second he got in that pool room, my daddy was a rock. Makin’ shots and takin’ money.

My moms used to boost from the mall and commit identity theft with checks and credit cards. She would do whatever it took to make money. “Honey, when you got a man’s back, I mean truly got his back, a woman gotta step up. Sometimes a woman gotta use what she got to get what she gotta get to take care of her family.” The fact that moms would give it up for money if she felt she needed to, used to piss my father off. But when he had a woman on the hook that he was getting money from, moms wouldn’t say shit. For them, it was always about the money. ‘Cause no matter who or where they were gettin’ money from, it was always for us. We were always a family.

But money turned out to be their downfall. When I was seventeen, my daddy had a woman who was givin’ him money. My father would bring the money home and was givin’ it to my moms. That’s just how they did it. But one night the woman followed him to our apartment and she waited for daddy to come out. I was watching from the window and saw her walk up on him, put the gun to his head, and kill him.

“Daddy, no!” I screamed at the top of my lungs and kept screaming, as the woman looked up at me and ran to her car. I wanted to run out there, but I couldn’t move. My moms came to see what I was screaming about, but I couldn’t talk. All I could do was point out the window at my father’s body.

“Oh God! God, no!” she yelled and ran out. It felt like all the life had been drained from my body. He and I were so close. And I loved my daddy so much that I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. It felt like part me was dying out there.

It still does.

After that, moms had to go for herself. She went out and got herself a job and worked it for two weeks, before she accidentally slipped in the ladies room. She sued them and got a little settlement, but her plan was to do what she called “washin’ the check.” That’s when they use some kind of chemicals to erase the amount on the check, and then they put in a new amount. She got a fake ID and setup an account to run the checks through, and went for it. Good plan and it worked, except for the fact that the insurance company knew who they’d sent that check number to. So, it was easy for them to match her work ID with the bank’s surveillance video. Now moms is doin’ fed time in Illinois. If daddy were alive, he would have never let her make a mistake like that.

I had just celebrated my eighteenth birthday when they took my moms away. With only a court appointed lawyer at her side, the judge gave her ten years. Now I was alone and broke. All they left me was a seventy-seven Monte Carlo. That bitch was beat down, but it ran like a champ. I had to get somethin’ goin’ and quick. Since I had barely graduated from high school, I knew college wasn’t in my future. I was determined not to turn out the way my people did, but I had absolutely no clue about how I was gonna do it. I had to learn from what they did and from their mistakes.

I remembered what my moms told me about what a woman gotta do, but all the lyin’ and fakin’ you gotta do just wasn’t for me. See, when you gettin’ money from men like that, they think they own you. That’s the mistake daddy made. That woman was givin’ him her money for that dick, and that made him hers. No, no-not a life for me.

For the first couple of months after they took moms away, I wrote to her once a week. You know, keepin’ her up on what was goin’ on with me. I remember writing her and sayin’ how I stayed in our old apartment for three months before they finally put me out. I had moved in with a friend of mine from high school named Love. She worked at a tattoo parlor. She let me sleep on her floor until I got myself together. I survived

those days on whatever money daddy's old friends gave me. I wrote her that I had to stop getting money from them, because some of them wanted something in return for their money and I wasn't prepared to do that. I never got an answer to any of my letters, until one day I got a letter from her that simply said that I should stop writing her. She said that reading my letters was too painful for her. She told me that I shouldn't even think about comin' to see her 'cause she didn't want me to see her like that. I was heartbroken 'cause now I felt like I was truly alone.

With few other options on the horizon, I took a job at a market research company. My job was to call people and ask them survey questions about their buying habits, and direct them to Web sites where they could buy stuff. It didn't pay much, but it allowed me to move off Love's floor and pay rent for my hole-in-the-wall apartment. Well, at least it paid the rent most of the time, but this month wasn't one of those months and I was late on my rent, again. For the last couple of days, I'd been dodging my landlord-a pervert named Chuck.

A few months earlier, I caught Pervert Chuck, the rent collector/building super/loan shark all rolled into one, sifting through my underwear drawer. At the time, I was three hundred dollars short on the rent. I was able to convince him to forget about the money, in exchange for a pair of my worn Victoria's Secret thongs, but he's been riding my ass, trying to take it to the next level ever since.

When the first knock sounded at the door I jumped, startled by the noise, then froze and stood completely still. It wasn't like my super could actually see through the door, but I still tried to stop breathin', and stayed as quite as humanly possible.

I looked up my reflection in the mirror, which hung above the sofa. "This is really sad," I said under my breath. I swear I could hear him leaning against my door. I knew he wouldn't hear any music or the TV, since the power was off, so I stood still and I tried to remain quiet.

“Shit! Missed that bitch again,” I heard him grumble. My heart was racing as I stood waiting for sounds of his footsteps walking away. Nothing. I was trembling, praying to God Chuck wouldn’t use his key to let himself in, and find me standing there pretending not to be home.

When I thought the coast was clear, I tiptoed b

ack into the bedroom. Things were really going downhill for me and I was at my wit’s end. I knew that I had to come up with a better plan than the one I was workin’.

Later that afternoon, I was ridin’ past the project we used to live in and stopped to pick up a two-piece snack from Fat Larry’s. I don’t know how he does it, but that was by far the best chicken I’ve ever tasted. On the way in, I stopped in my tracks to admire what had to be the prettiest drop- top Beamer I had ever seen. It was sweet-royal blue with baby blue leather and wood panel interior. I mean this car was sparkling in the sunlight and the rims were glistening. A few other people walked by admiring the ride, and I was like damn, will I ever see the day when I can afford shit like that? I sighed and walked up to the entrance. When I pulled the door open, I accidentally bumped into a woman who looked like she belonged in the car.

She was sporting a Baby Phat denim jumpsuit that hugged her curves. She accessorized it with old-school Gucci boots and a matching shoulder bag, with a pair of large designer shades that swallowed nearly half her face, and a Gucci fedora tilted to the side on her head.

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“I’m so sorry,” I offered.

“Jada, that you girl?”

I snapped my head toward her hidden face. I didn’t catch the voice, but she definitely knew me. When she snatched off the shades and pulled her hat’s brim back, my mouth dropped. “Diane?”

Diane and I worked together at the marketing company for nearly a year. She rarely showed up to work and, at that time, hadn’t been there at all for a couple of months.

“Yeah, girl! What’s up? I ain’t seen you in a minute!” she said like she was really glad to see me.

I instantly felt self-conscious. There I was dressed in some raggedy jeans and an old sweatshirt that I usually wear when I clean the apartment on weekends.

As Diane spoke, my brain kept trying to understand how one goes from barely coming to work, to being dressed in the finest gear and sporting a look that dripped money. When she pressed the alarm button and that pretty ride beeped, I was too through.

“You okay?” she asked.

I looked at the car then back at her, still dumbfounded. “Um, I ah-” I stuttered, but I was taking in everything fabulous about the new Diane. At five feet seven and one hundred and forty pounds, Diane was beautiful. Her once short hair had been

replaced by long wavy and flowing tresses. She blinged from her ears to her neck to her wrists. The chick was iced out, and she looked good. “Ah, Diane, what’s up? I mean, did you hit the number or something?” I needed to know.

She scrunched up her pretty face. “Number? Nah, girl, I ain’t hit no number.” She chuckled.

I looked at the car again and then back at her. This time her eyes followed mine.

“Oh shit!” she started. “Girl, that ain’t nothin’,” she testified, motioning toward the car. “You ain’t gonna make any real money punchin’ no damn clock. I can tell you that much for sure,” she said.

“Well, what do you mean?” I asked her.

She pulled me to the side, closer to her car. “Look, why don’t you go get you some Fat Larry’s chicken,” she suggested.

I shook my head reluctantly. It was like I didn’t want to leave her for fear that when I came back, she, that car, and my chance to make some real money, might be gone.

“Go on, I’ll wait right here for you,” she promised.

I glanced at her and the car one last time before going inside. When I walked outside and saw Diane sitting behind the wheel of her car, I gladly climbed into her luxury car and leaned back in the passenger seat like I belonged there.

“Are you ready to make some real paper?” she asked.

“Girl, you just don’t know,” I said.



Little did I know what she had in mind would change my life in ways I never imagined possible.

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I thought about the conversation Diane and I had that day, after we left Fat Larry's.

"Girl, I swear, I was you about a year ago. You remember, I was sneaking in and out of my cousin's dorm room, barely able to eat and shit," Diane shook her head at the awful memories she described. "I just got tired of tryin' to play it straight," she admitted.

"Yeah, but the ride-I mean look at you, girl. You've got to tell me what you doin' to get paid like this."

"It's simple," she said. "I dance at this little club called Ecstasy on Friday and Saturday nights," she said calmly.

I leaned in to her.

"What you mean, you dance at a club? What kind of dancin' are we talkin' 'bout here?" I wanted to know.

"I'm an exotic dancer," she said without so much as a whisper to her voice.

"What?" I screamed.

She didn't seem the least bit phased by my shock. It was as if we were discussing Larry's chicken. "Say what you want, but I never leave with any less than five hundred dollars a night," she said and eased back in her seat. I could sense she was studying my reaction. I let the figure roll around in my head. "I know what you're

thinking,” Diane said.

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“No, I don’t think you do.” Had she said five hundred dollars a night? For two nights worth of work she made one thousand dollars? That’s almost triple what I make for working eighty hours.

She pulled her hair behind her ears and leaned toward me. “Yeah, I do, Jada. Your ass thinkin’ ’bout that paper. And you wonderin’ if you can do it.”

I didn’t say anything ’cause she was right.

I just nodded my head and Diane continued, “Look, I’ve been to the club with you plenty of times, Jada. I’ve seen you out there on the floor, shakin’ that ass,” Diane said and started shakin’ in her seat. “You just be shakin’ that ass naked.”

“Naked in front of a room full of men,” I corrected.

“I don’t. I dance for one man,” Diane boasted. “Which ever one is standin’ in front of me with money in his hand.”

“I don’t know, Diane. Dancin’ at a club is one thing-but naked? — I just don’t think I could do that in front of a bunch of horny men.”

“I’m tellin’ you, you could make a grip. You got a bomb ass body too. Them titties and that ass. I’m tellin’ you, girl, you sleepin’ on your best money makers!”

“What, you been sizing me up?”

“Nah, girl, I don’t even get down like that. Well I do, but that’s only for real serious

money.” She giggled.

I was used to men commenting about my double-D cups, and I’ve heard one or two joke about my bodacious booty, but it was strange sitting there and listening to Diane do the same.

“I’m telling you, all you doin’ is dancin’,” she persisted.

“Yeah, but you talkin’ about dancin’ naked,” I said, seemingly not able to move past that point. I was just gettin’ to the point where I was comfortable havin’ sex without it being pitch-dark in the room, and that was definitely a huge jump from there. “I don’t know, Diane,” I said and hunched my shoulders.

But there I was, pulling up in front Ecstasy. It was a little building that looked like nothing more than a shack from the outside.

Once the car was in park, I immediately started having second thoughts. You don’t know these people, there could be rapists, murderers or whatever hanging out around here.

I glanced around in both directions hoping no one was paying attention to me as I sat behind the steering wheel of my piece-of-shit car, and tried to summons up enough courage to go inside. I wondered if Diane’s car was parked on the other end somewhere, or maybe even in the back. I would definitely need her there to help me make it through the night.

A couple of guys walked by my car and snapped me back to reality. “Okay, I can do this,” I whispered.

I flipped down my visor mirror and looked at the job I had done with my makeup. I had plastered my eyes with so much shadow that I felt like one of the girls in the

many porno flicks I'd watched to get myself pumped up. Diane had told me that's what she did to make herself feel sexy.

She said after filling her head with X-rated images and downing a few shots of Henny, she was usually good to go. I was hoping for the same magic when I felt for half-pint bottle of Hennessy that I had picked up on the way there. I opened the bottle and took another swallow. This is nothing more than a new adventure, the tiny voice in my head encouraged.

I thought back to earlier that day when I was cornered and felt up by Pervert Chuck 'cause I didn't have all the rent money. I felt disgusted with his hands all over me. If I really wanted to be honest about it, I let him do it. I didn't scream or fight him off. I did very little in the way of protest. I allowed him to trap me in that corner and touch my body, because that's what it took to cover the rest of the rent.

I knew I'd be meeting the same type of pervert behind those walls. So I had to ask myself what was the difference? What was the difference between me dancin' naked in front of a bunch of men for money, and being felt up by one because I was short with my rent again? Although neither choice seemed too appealing, the answer was simple: It was all a matter of choice and what I was willing to do, and money. The truth was that there was no difference. It was all about the money.

I fidgeted with my hair and applied more gloss before snapping the mirror shut. I took a deep breath and clutched the door handle. I hesitated and tried to think positive thoughts about what I was going to do, but the truth of the matter was that I was scared to death. So scared that my hands were shaking. "You can do this, Jada," I told myself as I got out of the car. "It's gonna be just like Diane said, I'll be dancin' for one guy," I said as I walked slowly toward the building. "Just one guy."

As I walked I got a taste of what it was gonna be like, as I felt the eyes of every guy in the parking lot on me. Undressing me with their eyes and doing worse things in

their thoughts. “You can do this, Jada,” I repeated. I was used to guys staring at me, but never like this. I felt like an object-a juicy steak on a platter that was about to get served up. Some of the guys were yellin’ at me, but I was too deep into what I was about do to comprehend, much less care what they were saying. Truth be told, I was an object now; an object for their entertainment.

At that moment, the club’s door swung open and I could hear booming music flooding into the parking lot. When the bouncer stopped me at the entrance, my skin started to crawl as his eyes wandered from my head down to my toes. “I’m lookin’ for Bruce,” I said to him.

“You new?” he asked in a voice so deep it startled me.

“Um, yeah,” I nodded, clutching my thin jacket at the neck.

“I know you ain’t shy. This ain’t no place for no shy ho’s,” he insisted.

I started to say something, but no words came out.

He laughed. “Let’s see what you working wit.” I jumped when I felt somebody’s hand palming my ass.

“What the hell!” I turned to face the culprit. “Don’t touch me!” I screamed at this drunk who could barely hold himself up.

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“Aw, baby, you too cute to act all like that,” he slurred. “We friendly around here. If you gon’ make some money, you gots to be nice,” he added.

“Just don’t touch me!” I said again.

He stumbled toward me and I took a few steps back.

“Here,” he said and shoved a crumbled five dollar bill toward me. “Here’s something for you, cutie,” he continued before stumbling into the club.

I turned my attention back to the bouncer.

“That’s just Eddie. He don’t mean no harm,” he said. “But you definitely got to get used to muthafuckas grabbin’ at you. We try to keep that shit down, but it’s gonna happen. If you don’t want to be touched like that, you gotta figure out how you gonna keep niggas off you without it costin’ you money.”

“I will.”

“Come on. Why don’t you go in and walk through that first door to your right. That way you can get straight to the dressing room and bypass the crowd,” he offered.

Although I was tempted to follow the bouncer’s instructions, a part of me was curious about what it was like inside the club. So I stepped past him, bypassed the door and followed the sound of the music.

The room was a pretty good size, but the mirrored walls made the place seem twice

as big. The tables and chairs were lined up in sections that surrounded the stage. There were also two dark doorways toward the back of the room. The soft lighting gave off a dark enough hue over the entire room, and the place smelled like a mixture of cigarette smoke, crisp new money, and just a hint of weed. Several men stood huddled in a group surrounding a couple of dancers. They were both naked and dancin' their asses off. There were other men posted up at the bar. A few of them had woman dancin' in front of them.

I stopped and looked around the room. A lot of the men that were sitting at the tables had women dancin' for them too. Up until that moment, I was under the mistaken dilution that I would be doin' a couple of sets onstage and that's it. But as I continued to watch, I saw the men givin' the dancers money when the song ended. The dancer would get the money, get dressed in what little outfit they were wearing, and move on to the next man.

At that point, I knew that that was how they made their money. If I was gonna clock the kind of paper Diane was talkin' about, I was really gonna have to hustle. I remembered what my moms told me about what a woman gotta do. "You're here to make money, Jada. It's all about the money."

I started to get excited as the music pumped through the massive speakers. It was loud and contagious. Just as I prepared to turn and find the dressing room, I bumped into this completely naked woman. "Hi, you must be Jada," she said, like she was fully clothed. I tried my best not to stare at her naked body, but I couldn't help it.

"Um, how-how'd you know me?"

"Actually, I came out here to find you. I'm Creme. Diane just called me and said she's running late, so she asked me to take care of you 'til she get here," Creme said. She was cute, short hair, olive skin with an hourglass shape, firm breasts and shapely hips.



I tried not to stare at her nipples, but they seemed to be pointed right at my eyes. Next to us, two other naked dancers were grindin' their hips and shakin' their breasts all in their customers' faces.

"Oh, okay," I said, turning my attention back to Creme.

I kept reminding myself that this was really no big deal. I pulled my gym bag close and followed Creme down a dark hallway.

Before we turned I looked toward the stage; a couple of women were gyrating all over each other. One was wearing a pair of spiked heels and a garter around her beefy thigh. The other dancer, who was laying on the stage, had on white platform boots and a garter filled with bills. Spiked heels dropped it like it was hot and was bouncing up and down on other dancers' face. On the other side the stage, I noticed pink flesh when another dancer spread and held her legs up and opened wide, in mid air. I couldn't hide my shock. But when I saw a group of men throwing bills onto the stage, I finally knew exactly where I was and was sure that I wanted to be there. "You can do this, Jada. It's all about the money," I repeated silently.

"You comin'?" Creme asked over the music as she walked.

"Yes." I did a slow trot to catch up to Creme.

We weren't in the dressing room for a good thirty minutes before a big, burly man burst through the door. Most of the girls scattered or quickly busied themselves. I never did know what his real name was, but all the girls called him Bruce Bruce, 'cause he was just as big as the famous comedian and he did kinda favor him.

"Delicious just quit, I need somebody fresh!" he hollered. When he stepped close to me, Creme was standing next to me, but she didn't say anything.

“Oh, Jackie,” he said, removing the cigar from his lips, where spittle had gathered at the corners of his mouth.

“Um, it’s Jada,” I corrected.

“Whatever. You’re Delicious now. You need to be ready to shake that ass when I call for you.”

Before I could protest, he spun around and headed back out the door as abruptly as he had come in.

I glanced up in the mirror to see the other dancers in different stages of closing down for the day, while others were getting ready to go make more money. My head started spinning and I felt myself get warm.

“God, where’s Diane. I can’t do this,” I said, leaning up against a nearby counter.

“What you mean you can’t do it? Much as Diane been braggin’ about your ass, you’d better get out there and do somethin’,” Creme insisted. But the more she talked, the more upset my stomach became. Soon, I felt the bile churning and threatening to erupt. I rushed to the closest trashcan and leaned over the top.

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The other girls were going about their business like nothing had happened. When I was done, Creme pulled me to the side. “Look, I got a little something for you. It’ll help you relax and get into it,” she said. She fumbled through her stuff for a second and came out with a small plastic bag. I knew what time it was. She stuck one of her long fingernails into the bag and held it in front of my face.

I had tried cocaine a few times, but I never really got anything out of it. “Nah, that ain’t my thing,” I said and took a swallow of my Henny.

“Okay,” Creme said and took the hit.

By the time it was my turn to dance, Creme had me pumped, a little drunk, and feelin’ the music. When Bruce Bruce called for me, I was as ready as I’d ever be. Once I got onstage, I sprang to life, surprising even myself. Every time I went down to the floor, I’d shake my behind and spread my thighs. The men loved it. I’d gyrate my hips to the music, stripping off pieces of clothes as I moved around the stage. When I was down to my last stitch of clothing, which was a thong with fringes, I pulled it to one side and used my fingers to stretch my lips real wide. That one really surprised me. These two men stood at the stage feedin’ me money like they had an unlimited supply.

Diane never came to the club that night and I didn’t see her at all for a few days, but by the time she came back, I was a pro. After three weeks into my new profession, the money was rolling in and I was ready to change my name. Delicious was okay, but this c

ustomer gave me an idea when he came stumbling up to the stage at the end of my

performance one night. “I want to see my kitty,” he slurred. I was trying to clear my money off the stage before the next dancer came up, but he wouldn’t let up. “Miss Kitty!” he shouted. “I want to see her. I live for the part when you stroke that cat for me,” he said.

“What?” I yelled over the music.

“Them other bitches just dance. You put on a show for a nigga. Make him want you.”

At first, I didn’t understand what he was saying. But the more I studied the other girls; I realized he was talking about. They were just dancing. They were merely moving to music. Every so often they may rub a tit, but it was like: one, two, stop and turn; three, four, shake your ass; five, six, drop and spread; seven, eight, get back up. That’s when I realized just how different I was.

When I was onstage, it was like I was in a trance, dancin’ in my very own world. I’d pick a man and stare at him, literally workin’ him over with my eyes. When I danced, I moved seductively and my hands wandered all over my body as if the customer himself was exploring me. I stroked, caressed, and massaged, tryin’ to give them an idea of what it might be like if I’d actually let them touch me.

With his simple request, my new persona was born. I became Miss Kitty. Now, I waltzed out onstage dressed in a short, tight leather miniskirt, with a garter belt and black fishnet stockings. I topped things off with a fishnet shirt, a black leather bra, and a long pair of black gloves. My final touch was a small, elegant silk mask. Within two months time, Miss Kitty had her own small-but-generous following. Their money spoke volumes-telling me without a doubt that they appreciated my well-calculated efforts to make them happy and to make me money.

I lay in bed one Saturday, thinking about how my life had changed. I'm not the same person I was when I walked through those doors. If you had told me when I was fifteen that in five years I'd be the premier dancer at a strip club, I woulda called you a liar and might have slapped your face. But every night, I am the queen at Ecstasy. The truth is, I'm enjoying this life that I've been living for the past eight months.

But I had bigger plans for my life. I was gonna be big-time. I never really knew what I was gonna be big-time at, but I planned to make a lot of money doing it. At least that part of the plan was working. I was making mad money and was a superstar in my own right. Sure, the men came to see the other dancers, but when Miss Kitty sashayed out of the dressing room, it was like the room was mine.

Nothin' could touch the high I felt while onstage. That's the part of all this that has surprised me the most: I'd never been the kind of person that was-you know-stuck on myself. I am by no means ugly, but at the same time, I am by no means the prettiest girl in the room. There are women with better bodies, and there are a bunch of women that can shake their asses off. What separates me from the rest is my presentation. I just worked harder than every other woman in there, because I wanted it more than they did.

I tried to ease up out of bed, only to lie back down. My head was pounding in the worst way. When the phone rang, I would've paid someone to make it stop. I snatched it up before it could scream again.

"Heeeey, girl, I'm on my way to pick you up now. Nine West is havin' a fierce sale. I know you down, right?" Diane was hollering in my ear.

I slapped my forehead. "Damn. Why are you callin' here all early with this shit, Dee?"

"Early?" she screeched.

“Shit yeah. I’m a wreck.” I tried to reason.

“Bitch, pull yourself together and let’s roll,” she said, sounding far too giddy to me.

I turned to face the wall and caught a glimpse of the digital clock. “Damn, is it five o’clock for real?”

“Yeah, that’s what I been tryin’ to tell you, Miss Kitty,” she threw in somewhat sarcastically. “We hit Nine West, do the rest of the mall, grab some food, then get out to the club and make some cheddar,” she said.

I rubbed my face and yawned. “Okay, how far are you?”

“I’ll be there by the time you wash your ass and brush your teeth,” she said.

Later that night at the club, I tripped off how easy it was for me to drop a grand on shoes during my shopping spree with Diane. I spent a lot more than Diane, but I used the grand to cop two pairs of Prada stilettos. Then we went to this boutique that sold Le Perla lingerie. Diane’s mouth dropped when I easily laid three grand on the counter to pay for a lace bra with a matching panty and garter set.

“Are you crazy?” she had asked.

“It’s for my show,” I said as the salesclerk picked up her pace, hoping Diane wouldn’t change my mind.

“At the club?” she asked in bewilderment. “Hmmm! I wish like hell I’d spend that kind of paper to shake my ass for those losers,” Diane sucked her teeth.

I didn’t respond right away, but in my mind, I pointed to that extra effort as to why I was so different from Diane and the rest of the dancers. Considering all I spent on the

spree, I knew I'd go to work with a vengeance-no wallet was safe with me on the prowl.

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Halfway through my act, to my surprise when I went to the edge of the stage, there was a woman calling me with her eyes. She was all but drooling as she stared at me longingly. I slid to her on my knees, steadily working my hips like we were the only ones in the room. She was loving every moment of it. Each time I wiggled she stuffed a crisp, new twenty into my thong.

“You sexy as fuck,” she said when I leaned over to shake my titties in her face. She stroked at me and I scooted beyond her reach. I loved playin’ with girls ’cause it drove the niggas insane and made them drop major paper.

I went to work another section of the stage before returning to my faithful fan. This time I turned around and spread my cheeks so she could stuff more twenties into my garter. She didn’t disappoint. When she reached up to rub my breasts, I moved out of her way and rubbed them for her, squeezing my nipples for good measure.

I had her hot and wet and I knew it.

After I finished working the room, I made my way to the dressing room to change my outfit. When I came back out, I scanned the room, but my new girl toy was gone. As I walked toward the VIP room to see what was going down in there, this dude grabbed me by the arm. “Say, Miss Kitty, what’s up? You looked real good out there,” he confirmed.

“I’m glad you enjoyed the show,” I said as I tried to move on. He tugged my arm again, pulling me back closer to his body. Liquor reeked from his pores.

“What’s up? You get down like the others?”



“Yeah, for five hundred dollars,” I said without blinking. That was my standard answer anytime somebody came at me like that. Once niggas heard that, they usually went on about their business with their heads hangin’ low. I was there for the money, not to give up any parts of this pussy.

“Whaat? Five hundred dollars? Bitch, is you crazy? Baby, I can get some ass for a hundred and a half up in this bitch,” he yelled.

I sucked my teeth. “One fifty?” I ran my hand along the length of my body. “What about this body says I’d even consider giving up any of this for a measly, hundred and fifty dollars?” I asked with all seriousness.

“Damn, baby, that’s a grip though. You want too much.”

“Nigga, please. Obviously your paper ain’t heavy enough, so you need to move on to one of these average bitches around here.” Before he could tug me again, I snatched my arm from him and stormed into the VIP room.

When the club was getting ready to close, I walked into the dressing room and everyone was giggling and acting like they’d gone in on a winning lottery ticket.

“What’s up?” I asked one of the few somber-looking dancers in the room.

She turned to look at the group that was celebrating, and then turned to me. “What’s up, Jada? They all excited and shit ’cause Bruce Bruce just came in and picked girls for Sunday night’s big private party,” she snarled. “I’m really surprised that Bruce Bruce di

dn’t pick you.”

“So am I,” I mumbled, taking her response and attitude to mean she wasn’t one of the

chosen ones. I had heard the talk around the club. The party was being held for The One. He was the hottest rappers in the city and word was, when he and his entourage came to the club, it was at least an easy grand for even the average dancer. That told me my goal should be three times that amount. Now, all I had to do was find a way to get invited to the party, but Bruce Bruce was nowhere to be found.

As I was heading out the back door, a powerful hand clutched my shoulder.

“Miss Kitty, I was lookin’ for you. I want you at One’s party tomorrow night. Think you can handle it? It’s a lot of money to be made,” Bruce Bruce warned.

“I’ll be here purrin’,” I promised.

4

The next night sheer electricity lingered in the air at the club. This so-called private party wasn’t private at all. There were fifteen other dancers besides myself and at least thirty members of The One’s entourage, and a bunch of the clubs regulars that were friendly with Bruce Bruce.

When I hit the floor, Bruce Bruce was sitting at a table in the corner with two guys, but it was the one in the black that caught my eye. I was just about to make my way over there when I was surrounded by three men. “Miss Kitty!” one of them screamed and they all started dropping money at my feet. Without taking my eyes off the man in black, I took off my outfit and went to work.

“Watch this,” another one said. “You ain’t never seen nothin’ like this before, dog.”

I was so into it that a circle formed around me and before long, they were chanting my name. “Miss Kitty! Miss Kitty! Miss Kitty!” There were so many of them that they blocked my view of the guy. When the song ended, I picked up my money and

went back to the dressing room.

When I returned to the floor, I looked around the club for the man in the black, but I didn't see him. I was startled when a deep and sexy voice said, "Miss Kitty, right?"

I spun around; it was the guy and he looked even better up close. He had the most piercing eyes. "That's me."

"I enjoyed watching you dance," he said.

"Thanks. You a friend of Bruce Bruce?" I asked.

"I guess you could say that."

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“I haven’t seen you here before,” I said and stepped closer. “So I guess you’re part of The One’s entourage.”

He flashed a smile and I got wet. “Not exactly. I own the company that manages The One.”

“Oh really,” I said, knowing that this was somebody I needed to know.

“You ready to go, Black?” the other guy he was with said.

“Yeah, in a minute, Freeze,” he said and turned to me.

“Miss Kitty, it was a pleasure meeting you. Maybe I’ll see you again.”

“Jada.”

“Excuse me.”

“Jada. My name is Jada.”

“Okay, Jada it is then. Maybe I’ll come back to see you. Bruce Bruce speaks very highly of you. I’d be interested to see why,” he said and started to walk away.

Since he’d already seen me dance I assumed that he meant something else. The way he looked; the way that sexy voice rang in my ear, I was ready to forget about this money and go anywhere he wanted. I grabbed his arm. “What’s your name?” I had to know.

“Mike Black.”

And just like that he was gone.

I kept looking toward the VIP room where the real money was. I knew it was time for Miss Kitty to take the stage. I looked around at the tired ass dancers who didn't make it into the VIP room and knew I'd have the room chanting my name again, soon enough.

When I got onstage, I went into my act. I was gyrating my hips and did a split. When I eased out of it was when I noticed him.

The One himself.

He was walking out of the men's room flanked by two men. When his eyes caught mine, I took my nipple between my teeth and bounced up and down, allowing the tassels on my crotch to touch the floor. He stopped cold in his tracks.

Bills started raining down on me. When I twirled around on my ass and brought my thighs up and did a split in midair, I heard them yelling.

“Goddamn, girl!” someone cried.

“Work that shit!” another one said.

I danced like there might not be a tomorrow and at every turn, his eyes were on me. Before it was over, he was at the edge of the stage, his bodyguard's right at his side.

When I crawled to him, he plucked five crisp one hundred dollar bills from his wad and held them out for me. He leaned over and whispered in my ear, “You come to VIP with me and my boy Bullet here.”

I allowed him to put the bills into my thong then shook my head. “Nah, baby, I’ve got work to do,” I said and shook my hips and wiggled away from him. When I finished my set he was still standing there, staring at my every move. The One went back in the VIP room while I was picking up my money. I cursed myself for not jumpin’ at his offer. I was doin’ all right controlling the floor, but I knew that The One was in there with a select group, and that’s where I belonged. With the real money!

Later that night, I walked out of the dressing room and bumped right into The One’s bodyguard. He was massive; a six feet four-inch tower who looked down at me and said, “The One wants you in the VIP.”

“And what are you, his mouthpiece?” I asked.

“He told me to bring you,” he confirmed.

Since that’s where I wanted to be anyway, I followed Bullet to the VIP room without another word passing between us. When I walked through the door, Creme and the other dancers that were in there, rolled their eyes at me and continued what they were doin’. They knew what my presence in the room meant. And when Bullet walked me over to The One and he pulled me onto his lap, you woulda thought I’d slapped their mothers.

“You a bad muthafucka, you know that?”

“Thank you,” I purred modestly.

“I was watchin’ you move on the stage.”

## Page 8

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“I know, and thank you for the tips,” I said and ran my hand across his chest. “Do you want me to dance for you?”

“I wanna fuck you,” he demanded more than asked.

I was shocked, but at the same time, not at all surprised at his directness. “It’ll cost you,” I said.

“You ain’t said shit to me, mommy,” he said, sucking his grill. “Why don’t I double what you usually charge? I always gets what I want.”

I looked at him, studying him.

The One was fine as hell, but since I wasn’t plannin’ on fuckin’ him or anybody else in there, I decided to get ridiculous. “Two grand,” I said quickly; thinking that his reaction would be the same as everybody else’s. I thought that he would say I was crazy and have Bullet drag me outta there.

“Why don’t we make it three,” he said with ease.

My eyes lit up. He can’t be serious, I thought. He just couldn’t be. When he started ripping bills from the most massive wad of cash I’d ever seen, I knew The One was no joke. At that moment, I had to make a choice. Three grand just to fuck him? I thought about all the shit I talked to the other dancers about doin’ exactly what I was thinking about doing. I’d taken pride in the fact that I wasn’t that kind of woman. They were lettin’ those drunk-ass niggas have them cheap. I wasn’t goin’ out like that. I was a dancer; an entertainer, not a ho.

“So, what’s it gonna be, mommy?”

Three grand. I nodded my head slowly and began eating my words.

“Get your shit then, we outta here,” The One said and nodded at Bullet. He stood up and escorted me to the dressing room, and waited outside like a sentry while I got dressed. I thought I could still change my mind and tell Bullet to tell The One, thanks, but no thanks, Miss Kitty don’t roll like that, but then I took a swallow of Henny and knew that wasn’t gonna happen.

As I got ready to walk out, Creme burst through the door. “Where you goin’?” But before I could answer she said, “You ain’t slick, bitch. I saw Bullet’s big ass standing outside the door.” She leaned close to me and whispered, “You gonna fuck The One?”

“For three grand,” I whispered back.

Creme didn’t say a word. She just held up her hand for a high five and I was on my way.

We took his Hummer limo to his hotel, where he took me up to a plush suite. I swear I felt just like Julia Roberts in Pretty Woman.

He ushered me into the room while he stood in the hallway talkin’ with Bullet and some of the other members of his entourage. I eased into the bedroom and prepared myself for his arrival.

Knowing how guys like to talk and brag about their conquests, I knew I’d have some time. I had never done anything like this before and I never thought that I would find myself in a situation like this. To this point, all of my sexual experiences have been with only three guys. Two of them, Edward and Thomas, were boyfriends, and this



guy named Roy. I met him a couple of years ago and we'd been fuckin' ever since. We don't have a relationship; I mean we don't go anywhere or do anything, he just comes by when I call him and he takes care of my needs. The whole idea of doing it for money was completely foreign to me, not to mention, something that I had promised myself that I would never do. But when he said he would pay me three thousand dollars just to have sex with him, I couldn't refuse.

I was determined to make sure he knew that I'd definitely be worth his cash. I selected a little black lacy number and positioned myself on the bed, but I knew that I wouldn't be there for long. The moment he walked through the bedroom door I was all over The One.

"Damn, girl, you vicious, huh?"

"You just don't even understand just how vicious I am; but you will, I promise you that." I had his clothes off in no time and was ready to rock his world.

The One lai

d out on the bed. "Come here," he demanded and I quickly complied.

He was very well endowed, and I didn't hesitate to climb on for the ride. I put my hands on his chest, grabbed hold of his dick, and slid down on him. "You like Miss Kitty?"

He was so deep inside me I swear he was poking my womb. The One was that and then some-massive, thick and long.

"Shit! Take this dick, bitch. You want it, take it," he encouraged. And I was definitely trying to take it all. I leaned forward, placing my weight on my arms and pounded him. "That's right, bitch! Throw the fat, juicy pussy, bitch!"

I wasn't real happy about him callin' me a bitch, but he was paying well for the privilege, so he could call me whatever he wanted to. I rotated my hips, grinding my pelvic area onto him until I was certain he couldn't go any deeper. "Damn, bitch!" he yelled. "Get that dick!"

I leaned forward allowing my nipples to graze his face. He tried to shove both of them in his mouth. "Yeah, you know what I want. Do that shit."

I pumped harder.

I could see "the look" come over his face. "Oh shit!" he cried out.

I pumped harder.

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“Damn, I’m about to bust.”

It had been a long time since I had any dick, and even longer since I had one this big and I wanted to make it last. But when I tried to move he grabbed my hips, pulled me closer and started pumpin’ that big dick like there was no tomorrow. I felt him expand and explode inside me. I wasn’t even close to cummin’. He had been beating up my walls, but he hadn’t quite hit my spot. But for three grand, I felt like we could go several more rounds at least.

The One, the only name I got from him, released a gut-wrenching grunt and suddenly shoved me off his body. “Watch out, I gotta piss,” he said. I wanted to protest, remind him that I hadn’t gotten my fill, but the thought of the three grand made me think better of it.

When he didn’t come back to bed right away, I thought about checking on him, and then decided against that too. Finally, he stumbled out of the bathroom, wearing a pair of boxers and a massive platinum iced-out chain.

“Yo, look, you was tight and shit, but I’mma have Bullet take you down to the lobby.”

That caught me completely off guard. “Um. .” I said, once again stunned by his directness. But I wasn’t about to say anything. “Um, sure, I can see myself out.”

“Whatever. He’s gonna take care of you. Cool?”

“That’s cool.”

The One went back in the bathroom and closed the door behind him.

Whatever. I shrugged my shoulders and got out of the bed. While I got dressed, I wondered if maybe he was a little embarrassed because I'd made him cum so quickly.

Bullet was standing by in the hall. He counted off three thousand dollars and handed it to me. I quickly shoved it in my bag and gave him a half-ass salute letting him know I could handle it.

"Later," he said, then turned and stumbled down the hall.

As I made my way to the elevator, I felt used. Probably because I had been used. I don't know what I was expecting to happen in there, but it wasn't to get humped, dumped, and asked to leave. I stepped onto the elevator smiling inside at the grip I'd made in less than five minutes, and I wondered who really used who. I began to think about how easy that actually was, as opposed to what I was doing dancing at the club. If I busted my ass and hustled all night, I mean really went cutthroat, I could make a grand, maybe more on a good night. But I made three times that amount and barely broke a sweat.

When the elevator stopped on the twenty-sixth floor, I wondered who the hell was going somewhere at six-thirty in the morning. The doors opened and a curvy white woman stepped into the elevator. Her hair looked a little rustled and her makeup was smeared a bit, but she still looked classy.

"How are you?" she asked, like she was simply being polite and didn't really care that it was two minutes before dawn.

"Oh, I'm good"-I yawned-"and you?"

"You sound a bit tired like me," she flashed a fabulous smile and yawned herself.

“Those are very contagious, you know,” she yawned again. “My name is Sasha,” she extended her hand. “Sasha Deverox.”

I shook her hand. “Jada West.”

She tossed me a knowing look then snickered. “Are you here doin’ what I think you’re doing?”

“It depends,” I said, really curious about what she meant.

She looked around as if we weren’t alone on the elevator. Then she leaned in toward me. “I mean who do you work for? Which service?” Sasha wanted to know.

I was really confused, but I needed to know just what Sasha was talking about. She was iced from her ears to her chest and her fingers. I noticed a thick diamond tennis bracelet dangling from her arm when we shook hands.

“Why? Do I look like someone you know?” I asked stalling, hoping for more information.

“Yeah, as a matter of fact, you do. But I know she got out of the business a while back. That’s a shame too, ’cause she used to make serious money. She’s the one who encouraged me to go out on my own,” Sasha confirmed.

My interest was very piqued at this point. She didn’t look like a dancer; she had this air of elegance about her that told me she was clocking some serious dough, and if she was shaking her ass to earn it, she was doing some type of private shit.

“Well, how’s it been on your own?” I asked, still fishing.

“It was rough at first, but once I built up my clientele, it’s been paradise ever since.”

She smiled again.

“Your clientele, huh?”

“Best part is I don’t have to worry about splitting my fees. Of course, I don’t tell the client I’m an independent contractor. It seems like they just feel better thinking you’re part of a service; you know, a real escort service,” Sasha said easily.

My mouth dropped but in my mind, I knew Sasha was somebody I needed to get to know better. I looked at Sasha, the way she was dressed, the way she carried herself, and I knew this was a much better hustle than stripping. I would make it my business to find out all I could about the escort business. Sasha didn’t know it, but she was about to take me to the next level, and hopefully to riches beyond my wildest dream. And my dreams were pretty wild.

5

Two weeks after we met in the elevator in those wee morning hours, I sat across from Sasha at the trendy and upscale Marea on Central Park South.

“I could tell when I first saw you that you weren’t in the business,” she said.

I let out a little giggle. “Was I that obvious?”

“Yes,” Sasha reluctantly admitted. “But I knew that you needed to be.”

“It was my first time,” I hesitantly admitted.

“What did you do?” Sasha smiled. “I mean, before your ‘first time’.”

“I dance at a club called Ecstasy.”

“Everybody got to start somewhere.” Once we ordered our meal, Sasha got down to business. “So, like I told you over the phone, what I do can be very lucrative. It’s just a matter of knowing how to you handle yourself in every situation.”

Sasha offered to let me work under her until I felt comfortable going out on my own. Sasha was very big on independence, and I liked that about her. She had convinced me it was best that way. Under Sasha’s tutelage I learned how to walk and talk, like a lady. There were days when I felt like I was Eliza Doolittle and Sasha was Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady*.

Sasha and I had spent weeks “fixing” my wardrobe. “I don’t mean to criticize, but what you wear is too-too ghetto for what we do, honey,” Sasha criticized as she went through my closet. “This stuff may be all right for the club, but the look you’re going for is elegant and classy.”

I already had compiled a stash of sexy lingerie, so that wasn’t going to be an issue. But I swear, the woman had a line of credit at all of the most exclusive boutiques. For a while after I hooked up with Sasha, I still danced at the club so I had money to reinvent myself.

Once Sasha felt that I was ready to be seen in public with her, she encouraged me to quit dancing so she could introduce me to the world. We went to executive networking events, exclusive VIP mixers, and just about every high-roller’s private party there was. It amazed me to see just how many people she knew.

Sasha had discreet and elegant business cards. I noticed when Sasha attended these events she was often friendly, but never a chatterbox. She’d carefully scrutinize all of the men who were present, especially those with dates. By the end of the night, she would have distributed a small and select number of her cards. I really liked the way she operated. If the men were loud and flashy, drunk or obnoxious, she avoided them. Sasha had a good nose for money, and oftentimes it was the quiet and laid-back ones who were her ideal targets, and they usually paid off.

We’d spotted a couple of celebrities and I remembered feeling like I wanted so desperately to be a part of Sasha’s world. We’d talked for hours about the ins and outs of the ‘biz,’ as she called it.

It would take about a month before I felt completely comfortable with the idea of sleeping with men for money. Even though I had already done it, the idea was still somewhat foreign to me. I gave some thought to how I’d been livin’ for the past year. None of this was part of my great plan. Well, almost none of it. I had always planned



on makin' this kind of paper, just not like this.

One Friday afternoon, I had just finished a mud bath at a spa Sasha recommended, when I got her call. She informed me that Douglas, no last name provided, was in a pinch and needed a date for an exclusive event.

Once I agreed, she informed me that I should check into the Peninsula Hotel on Fifth. Douglas would be picking me up at the hotel room. I chose a caramel-colored Channel skirt suit with soft, camel leather sling backs, and a matching Channel evening bag. Sasha had warned me to dress tastefully when I checked into the room.

When I walked into the grand lobby of the Peninsula Hotel, it was like stepping into Wonderland. A cascading staircase that forked into two directions took center stage in the massive lobby. I stepped to the right and went to the front desk. "Good evening, madam," the clerk greeted.

"Ms. Green," I said like Sasha instructed. "I have a reservation."

He checked his screen, then looked up at me and smiled. "Of course, here's your key card. Will you be needing help with luggage?"

"I've got it. Thanks," I said as I took the card and headed toward the bank of elevators. I stepped off the elevator and into the deluxe suite. It was a one-bedroom corner suite with a glorious view. I opened one set of French doors that led to a terrace. I looked over the rail and felt my stomach nearly give way when I looked down.

The room was luxuriously furnished in earth tones and neutral colors. There was a decorative fireplace and even walk-in closets. I marveled at the separate dressing area with its own vanity and a separate guest bathroom. The room had a stereo system with a CD player, and the master bathroom had double sinks with a television

mounted over the bathtub.

Maybe thirty minutes after I was relaxing in the California king-sized bed, there was a knock at the door.

“Shit!” I bolted upright in the bed. I looked at the clock, wondering if I could’ve misunderstood Douglas’s pick up time.

“Ah, who is it?”

“Room service,” the cheerful voice called back.

I jumped up, a bit confused. “Room service?”

“Yes, ma’am. Compliments of Ms. Deverox,” he answered.

I rushed to the door and pulled it open. When I did, the bellman wheeled in a silver cart, like they do in the movies.

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“Fresh strawberries with melted chocolate and a bottle Moet,” he announced in a grand way.

“Oh, wow,” I said as I searched the room for my purse.

I slipped him a ten-dollar bill and giggled as he closed the door behind himself.

“Shit, I could really get used to living lovely like this!” I plucked one of the juiciest looking strawberries and dipped it into the bowl of melted chocolate. I bit into it and savored the flavor.

An hour later, I stumbled over to the bed. I had indulged in too much champagne and I knew I needed to pull myself together before Douglas arrived. I was glad Sasha suggested the earlier check-in.

By the time Douglas knocked on the door, I was still hanging on to a nice little buzz. I leaned against the open door wearing a simple but elegant Donna Karen silk slip dress. The fine fabric felt so good against my skin.

Douglas was a big man, with great taste in clothes. He was wearing a tailored tuxedo that looked like it may have been made specifically for his body. “You must be Stacy,” he said.

I thought about correcting him, but I wasn’t sure what Sasha had told him, so I figured I’d be Stacy tonight. “And you must be Douglas. Please, come in,” I said and I moved to the side so he could come into the room. He looked around and I could tell he was impressed.

“Ah, this is nice,” he said as his eyes rolled over my body. “Real nice,” he added.

“So where are we going tonight?” I asked.

“Excuse me?” he asked looking a little confused.

“I was asking where we were going tonight.” I repeated. “I was under the impression that we were going out for the evening.”

“Oh, that stuffy affair,” Douglas said and took a seat in a chair by the window. “I showed my face and snuck out to see you,” he said, his pudgy cheeks broke into deep-set dimples when he smiled.

“Oh?” I wasn’t sure what to say or do.

He used thick fingers to tug at his bowtie. In my mind I had prepared myself for polite conversation over a nice meal at his stuffy affair, maybe even some dancing. I thought I’d have enough time to think through what I had to do and get myself motivated over drinks. But Douglas made it clear the only thing he had on his mind was getting me out of the dress as quickly as possible.

I looked at Douglas again. Although his clothes fit him well, Douglas was shaped like a pear. He wasn’t exactly the type of man that I found particularly attractive. But that was something I would have to get used to if I wanted to get paid in this business. I thought back to my experience with The One. Being with him was easy because he was fine as hell. This was going to be a bit harder.

I started thinking about the kind of man I wished Douglas was, and that’s when I noticed I was getting wet. Visions of being loved by my faceless man flashed through my head and I zoned Douglas completely out.

“So, what do you think about that?”

I snapped out of my wishful thinking and shook my head. “I’m sorry, what did you say?”

“I said you should come over and sit on my face so I can suck you dry,” he repeated without as much as a flinch or stutter.

I hesitated.

“Oh.” He held up one of his fat fingers. Douglas peeled his jacket off, quickly unbuttoned his shirt, and stepped out of his wing tip shoes. He then dug into his pocket and pulled out a wad of cash I hadn’t seen since my nights at the club.

He quickly peeled off several bills and held them out toward me. “I guess once we get this out of the way, we can get down to business.”

I looked at the cash then up at him.

“I know this isn’t a freebee, so let’s cut the theatrics and get to it,” he said in a cold, no-nonsense fashion.

I took the bills from his hand, careful not to snatch them, and placed them on a nearby table. I fought the urge to count as I turned and tried to lead him into the bedroom.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“I thought you wanted me in the room,” I offered.

He held out his hand. “Nah”-he shook his head and extended his arms to me-“why

don't you come over here?"

The instant I walked over to Douglas, he snatched up my dress, ripped off my panties, bent me over the edge of the couch and was about to ram himself into me when I said, "Condom."

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“Oh yeah,” he said and did what amounted to a giggle.

By the time I got the condom out of its package, Douglas’s dick was hard and his pants were down around his ankles. Once I got the condom on him there was no caressing, no gentle touching or foreplay. Douglas spun me around, bent me over the edge of the couch again, and rammed himself into me. He banged me like he had something on his mind and the work he put in with me might help make things better.

When Douglas grabbed the back of my hair and slammed himself into me deeper, I wanted to howl out in pain, but I bit my lip and dug into the sofa’s upholstery.

“Emmm, you are gorgeous!” he squealed. He grabbed my waist, holding me in place before slamming into me again. After the sofa, Douglas took me on the coffee table, a nearby sofa table with my leg hiked up on one side, and then again on the floor.

When we were done, I thought he might want to relax on the bed and catch his breath, but he didn’t. I watched as he picked up his discarded clothes and went in search of the restroom. Ten minutes later, a fully dressed Douglas was standing in front of me. “I like you. Tell Sasha we need to see each other again,” he said.

Before I could think of what else to say, he was gone. I picked up the money he had given me and counted it. My fee was fifteen hundred dollars. I counted it again and realized there was an extra three hundred dollars there. I saw that as a bonus Sasha didn’t need to know about. She and I had worked out a deal. My fee for use of her connections was twenty-five percent, until she thought I was ready to do my own thing.

Sasha had two hotels we used for our business. And it was simple really. I'd go to the Peninsula about twice a month, and that was always my favorite. In the past six months, I had seen Douglas twice since our last encounter. During that time I was starting to get the hang of things. I knew what to expect in most, if not all situations, and was very comfortable with myself and what I was doing.

I was at home one afternoon when my BlackBerry rang. I reached for it and answered without checking caller ID. It was Diane. I hadn't seen or talked to her since I stopped working at the club. She and I tried to keep in touch with one another, but we had been playing phone tag for months.

"Well, it?

??s about damn time you actually answered the fuckin' phone. A bitch been tryin' to call your ass for mo' than a minute," Diane's voice rang out in my ear.

"I swear I was just gonna call you," I quickly defended.

"Yeah, yeah, whatever, bitch. What's been up wit you?"

"Nothing much."

"Cut the bullshit, Jada. Creme told me she saw you pushin' a new big-body Benz. Bitch, I need to know what you been doin'! And let's not even talk 'bout how your ass just bounced and been MIA for months now!" she hollered.

"I know, I know," I said.

"You know my nosy ass; I gots to know what the fuck is up wit all that. I wanna know what you been up to. I mean, you hit the numbers or something?" she asked, bringing back memories of a similar conversation I had had with her.



My other cell rang and I checked to see Sasha's number flashing across the screen. "Dee, I need to grab that, but I swear we'll get together soon. I promise," I said, wanting her to hurry and hang up because Sasha was calling with information about my appointment for the evening.

"If you don't call me back, I swear-fo'-God, bitch, I'ma hunt your ass down like a runaway slave," she testified.

"Dee, I'm gonna call you back, I swear!"

My heart was racing at the thought of missing Sasha's call, but luckily, Diane let me go. "Hey, Sasha," I said.

"Randolph is meeting you at the Peninsula at nine," she said.

"Are we going out?"

"No, he wants a romantic evening in. He mentioned something about pay-per-view movies in the room and all. Oh, he wants you in a teddy and high-heeled slippers," she informed me.

"Okay, cool."

"Remember, ease up on the slang. Remember, classy and elegant, not ghetto and fabulous," she warned before hanging up. I had already learned a lot from her.

Six months after that, I felt I had a nice little list of my own clientele. Sasha and I had agreed when the time came for me to venture out on my own, we'd talk about it, so there wouldn't be any kind of hard feelings. That talk was to take place at The Pen-Top Bar and Terrace inside the Peninsula Hotel.

When Sasha arrived we ordered drinks and some food. I had marinated shrimp cocktail with Marie Rose sauce, while Sasha ordered sushi and sashimi with wasabi, pickled ginger and soy sauce. “How’d it go last night?” she asked, sipping a Blue Crystal: a drink made with Beefeater Gin, Triple Sec, and a splash of Blue Curacao. I had a Godiva Chocolate Martini made with Absolute vanilla, Godiva White Chocolate Liqueur, and cream.

“Everything went fine,” I said and discretely handed Sasha her cut of my money for the last time.

Sasha took the money and put it in her purse before taking a sip of her drink. “You know I just absolutely love the view from up here,” she said.

“I know what you mean. It makes me feel like I’m on top of the world,” I said.

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Sasha folded her hand in a very ladylike way in front of her and looked at me. “So, Jada, tell me what you wanted to talk to me about.”

“Well, . Sasha, . I, um-”

“Don’t tell, let me guess. You think you’re ready to fly solo. Is that what you think you wanna tell me?”

Her attitude caught me a little off guard. I had known Sasha for almost a year and in all that time, she had never copped the kind attitude that she was throwing off now. But I never had to tell her that the envelope I’d just handed her would be her last. I had become a good earner for her. Most weeks I’d give her no less than twenty-five hundred dollars, and all she had to do for it was pick up the phone. On top of that, my company was requested quite frequently and by some of her better clients. Some of which I planned on taking with me.

“I think I’m ready-No, I know I’m ready.”

Sasha laughed at me and I wanted to kick her ass over it, but I did business regularly at this hotel, so I kept my cool.

“Look at you, Jada, all dressed up tryin’ to be a lady.” Sasha took a sip of her drink. “Do you remember who you were when I met you?”

“Yeah, I remember.” Now it was me that had the attitude.

“You couldn’t talk, you could barely walk without falling on your face, and you

definitely had the most ghetto taste in clothes.”

This bitch was one insult away from getting this White Chocolate Martini thrown in her face.

“I made you”-Sasha leaned forward and said sternly-“It was me who taught you how to walk without falling; how to talk without having to end every sentence with a curse. And it was me who taught you how to dress like a lady. I taught you all those things. If it wasn’t for me, you’d still be shakin’ your ass at that dive. I made you, Jada,” she said again, but this time she stuck her finger in my face. “Never forget that.”

“No, Sasha,” I said to her. “I won’t forget any of that.”

I was on fire. My eyes were squinted, my teeth were grinding together and my fists were balled. I seriously wanted to punch Sasha in the mouth. Although I hated to admit it, Sasha was absolutely right about me. When I met her, I was just a ghetto shake dancer. It was just the nasty way she said it that was pissin’ me off.

Then Sasha smiled. “Stop looking like that”-her smile turned into laughter-“I was just playing with you.”

“You sure?” I asked, but I was still hot.

“Yes, silly.” Sasha laughed and ate some of her sushi. “Had you going for a second there, didn’t I?”

“I was about to start acting very unladylike,” I laughed and tried to relax.

“Listen, honey, I am so proud of you and the way you handle yourself now. Jada, you have come so far. You’ve been ready to fly solo for a long time.”

“Really?” I questioned with childlike wonder.

“Of course you have. But I figured that if you wanted to keep giving me your money, it would be rude of me not to accept.”

“And you know a lady is never rude,” we both said almost in unison.

I was glad to go with Sasha’s blessings. Working with and studying Sasha taught me one thing: She was on top, in charge, the boss, and I worked for her. I walked the way that she did, talked the way she told me to talk, and I dressed and conducted myself the way she said a lady should.

Sasha was my madam-even though I hate the word, she was my pimp. That’s where the money was, not lying on my back with my legs in the air. I was ready to leave Sasha all right, but I wasn’t going solo. I was giving Sasha two, sometimes three grand a week. If I were to get a couple of girls working for me, I could pull in five, six grand a week, and whatever I made would be gravy. In the “New World” I would be on top, ’cause that’s where the money was.

And you know I was all about the money.

6

I looked around my new spacious two-bedroom apartment and marveled at how far I had come. I had a nice new luxury car, a large apartment, the finest clothes and tons of money in the bank; maybe not tons, but more than I’ve ever had in my life. I was finally living the good life.

I strolled over to my dining room table and glanced at the pictures I had laid out. Each one was personally selected to get started. And while I figured that one other person and myself would be good, I liked each one of them and I couldn’t choose, so

I decided to keep them all. Diane was the only one I was iffy about, because she was straight ghetto. I was sure that Diane wasn't ready to work with the kind of exclusive clientele I was working with. "Come on, Jada," Diane pleaded when she arrived at my apartment. "I could be a good fuckin' ho for you," she said and laughed.

"That's just it, Diane, I'm not looking for ho's. I'm targeting a more upscale clientele," I told her.

"Come on, Jada. I'm tired of dancin' every fuckin' night. And I'm so fuckin' tired of them scandalous-ass bitches. Shit, if could make three times that layin' on my back, come on, Jada, you gots to count a bitch in."

"And that's another thing, Dee."

“What?”

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“You curse too much,” I said.

“What about it?”

“It’s not very ladylike,” I said.

Diane looked at the expression on my face. Then she looked me up and down. “Look, Jada, don’t think I ain’t been checkin’ you out. You changed.”

“I have changed, Diane. But that’s how-” I started, but Diane stopped me.

“Like I said, the way you talk and shit. You even walk different; don’t be lookin’ like you ’bout to fall all the damn time.” Diane smiled and I did too. “You know, I been seein’-you know, how you dressin’ these days and how you carry it and shit, and I’m like yeah, Jada, you doin’ it. So, if that’s what it takes, then you gotta teach me to be like you.”

“We’ll give it a shot and see how it goes,” I said quietly.

Diane gave me a hug. “You watch, Jada, I’ll be the best ho-I mean escort-you ever seen.”

The ringing phone broke up our moment. It was the doorman. “You have visitors. A

Ms. Bella and Ms. Simone,” he announced.

The minute I first laid eyes on Bella and Simone, I began thinking about all the money I could make by investing in these two beauties. “Yes, Alfred. Please send them both right up,” I quickly gathered the pictures and placed them in the folder I had nearby.

When I opened the door, Bella strolled in. She was a caramel-skinned beauty with long curly hair, wicked curves, full breasts, and a smile that lit up the room. We met one morning when I was coming in from an appointment. “Excuse me,” Bella had said that morning.

I turned to verify she was talking to me. “I think you dropped this,” she said, holding up a tube of MAC lip gloss.

“Damn!” I squealed. “Thanks, honey. I lose these things like they’re free,” I said.

When she smiled I was like, whoa! “You live around here?” I asked.

She shrugged. “I wish. I was actually trying to meet a friend, but I got lost,” she said.

We grabbed some coffee at a nearby Starbucks where she poured out her life story. Bella told me how miserable her life was. She was on the outs with her very repressive parents and had been going from one bad job to no job at all, and was desperately in need of money.

But what I saw in her was spirit. I found her to be a quiet and easygoing young woman with an almost childlike enthusiasm for life. Bella was the kind of person who sought variety in what she did. Bella also told me she had tried to be a dancer, but didn’t go back after she slipped and fell from the stage. “I figured that was a sign that I needed to find a new way to make some extra cash.” She had giggled.



My other selection was Simone. She too had a sad tale to tell about how she desperately needed money. Simone was tall and thin. She was flat-chested, but looked like she was gliding instead of walking. Simone had a short, Halle Berry-type haircut, light eyes and smooth skin. Simone was a stunner who had raw sex appeal and determination. I met her working in one of the boutiques I had frequented with Sasha. She was frustrated after a rude customer had ripped her a new one over not being able to return a gown that had been visibly worn. When the customer stormed out of the shop, I heard her sigh. "I don't know how much longer I can take this shit," she had hissed.

I walked over and looked around to make sure her manager was nowhere in sight.

"You could probably make a substantial amount of money if you just used some of your other assets," I said.

Her eyebrow crept upward, but she didn't dismiss me right away.

"You a headhunter or something?" she wanted to know.

"I'm not. I'm what you can call an entrepreneur. You're not afraid to make a little cash and have some fun while you're at it, are you?"

"I don't sell or do drugs," she said.

"I understand." I slipped her my business card; then slid the stack of crisp one-hundred-dollar bills toward her.

She looked at the money then up at me. "When can we get together?" she asked.

Once everybody had a drink and made themselves comfortable, I explained what we were going to do and how we were going to do it. "The most important thing that I'm

going to teach you is how to conduct yourselves in a ladylike manner in every situation. Elegant and classy, ladies, that is who you are at all times.” I stood up and moved to the middle of the living room. “I’m going to teach you how to walk, how to talk”-I looked at Diane and she rolled her eyes-“and how to dress, and how to conduct yourself at any occasion. Knowing what to say and what not to say, will make your company more desirable and therefore, requested on a regular basis.

“Now, I’ve been thinking a lot about this and I realized that Sasha will be working all the CEOs, CFOs, and other suits: wealthy people that are discrete with their money. They don’t have anything to prove to anybody.”

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“That’s old money,” Simone said.

“Old money is good money,” Diane added.

“True. Old money is good money, but. .,” I said and paused to emphasize my point, “those people are used to having it and know what to do with it.”

“So what you talkin’ ’bout us doin’?” Diane asked.

I wanted to make Diane repeat that sentence in proper English, but we’d have plenty of time for that. “Our plan doesn’t involve targeting her rich crowd. We’re going to leave those clients to Sasha. She has both a knack and a nose for them.” I also knew I’d be creating bad blood by going after Sasha’s established clientele, especially if I didn’t have to. “Our target group is going to be the new rich: The ones who just stumbled into money; the ones who don’t quite know how to act now that they have it.”

“Ballers,” Diane said.

“I’m talking about music industry insiders, rappers, producers, actors, and movie and television producers and of course-ballers. Now, unfortunately, people like that don’t attend the kind of mixers and events that Sasha’s crowd go to. But they do have their own functions and that’s where we’ll target them.”

“Sounds like a plan to me,” Bella chimed in quickly.

I fronted them five grand each to let them know I was serious about business. It was

like a signing bonus. The ladies and I had spent the next month or so getting to know each other. Bella, Simone, and Diane had spent many nights at my place during our late-night bonding sessions that lasted well into the early morning hours.

Sasha and I still met once every couple of weeks to catch up, but for the most part, I was either shopping, which the ladies all excelled at, or hanging out with one or all of the ladies. In my mind, these little outings were all training sessions.

After one of many shopping trips, I walked in the bedroom while Bella was on the phone. “Well, if that’s how you feel about me now, I guess I have no choice but to make it on my own,” I heard her say into the phone before sniffing. Before I could tell what was going on, Simone came rushing out of the bathroom with a wad of tissue.

That’s when I realized Bella had been crying. She turned and I noticed her bloodshot eyes.

“What’s wrong with her?” I whispered to Simone.

She walked over to me, leaned in then whispered, “She’s been fighting with her family for nearly an hour now; something about them not wanting her back home.”

“But I. .” Bella managed before breaking down and sobbing again.

I looked over at Bella who was crumbling on the phone. I walked over and slowly removed the receiver from her shaking hand. I placed it back into its cradle and took her into my arms.

“My mother called me a streetwalker,” she sobbed onto my chest. “She said she never wants to see me again,” she added.

I rubbed her back. “We’re your family now, don’t worry about it,” I told her.

“Her parents are devoted Jehovah Witnesses-you know, like they go door to door and all,” Simone said.

“I just didn’t want to follow the faith,” Bella said.

I stroked her back. “Don’t worry about it. Like I said, we’re your family now.” By the time I looked up, Diane had walked into the room. I didn’t know how much she had heard, but I could tell by the look on her face that she agreed with my statement.

“If your parents don’t want you because you don’t want to go door to door, you ain’t ever gotta worry about them again,” Diane said walking over to us.

Bella finally pulled back and looked up at me.

“I’m so sorry,” she sobbed.

I looked at her, moved hair from her face then said, “That’s what I’m trying to tell you. You have nothing to be sorry about.” I looked around the room. “I know everyone here agrees, we don’t ever have to worry about feeling left out, or like we don’t belong. By the time we’re done, we’ll rule this town.” For the first time since I walked into the room, I realized that we were at a turning point in our relationship. If things went the way I planned, our little close-knit family would be unstoppable.

“Thank you, Jada,” Bella said sniffing. She turned away from my embrace. “Thank you all,” she added. We enveloped her in a group hug and laughed at ourselves for being so emotional.

Two months into my self-employment gig and business was very slow. As a matter of fact, business was a bit too slow. We were for the most part, living on my back. I still had my regular clients. When I had an appointment or when the client would allow it, I would send Bella or Simone. Diane was still a little too ghetto for prime time, but she was working hard. I had thought about doing some work for Sasha, until she informed me that her fee had increased to 51 percent since I was now direct competition.

“It’s just business,” she said, then sipped her Mimosa.

I couldn’t fault her, but talking with her gave me an idea. Working with Sasha, business was steady because of her clientele and connections. But now that I was on my own, maybe I needed a different approach.

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“So what’s up, Jada?” Bella asked.

“Yeah, when do we get to see some real money?” Simone had asked.

“I’ve got an idea,” I said, shedding thoughts of Sasha from my mind. “I think we need to go out and see if we can drum up some business.”

Bella had a worried look across her face, but it was Simone who fired q

uestions at me. “Drum up business? Why? I thought you had that all under control. You mean we gotta go out and get the johns?” She sucked her teeth.

“Okay, first off, these are not johns. These are very important clients who are a bit lonely and are willing to pay for the company of an attractive lady,” I corrected.

“Whatever,” Simone snapped.

“I think what she means is, we thought things were a bit more organized and setup already,” Bella informed me. “I didn’t think we’d actually have to go out there and have to get our own clients.”

Simone jumped up. “I don’t know about this,” she said.

“I thought you guys were ready to make some paper. I guess I was mistaken.” I shrugged.

“Yeah, but I ain’t about to go on the stroll,” Simone said and smacked her lips.

“Nobody’s asking you to go on the stroll. All I’m saying is, right now my client list isn’t enough to sustain us all, and I don’t think it would hurt to do some networking at some exclusive events.”

“So how do we get ourselves invited to these exclusive events?” Simone asked.

“I know exactly where we’ll start.”

“Where?”

“Sensations.”

Sensations was a nightclub frequented by our target clientele. My plan was a simple one.

Advertise.

If you have a product and you wanted to get maximum product recognition with your target group, you have to advertise. Get that product out in front of your target group. Once a week we would go to Sensations.

“Are you guys gonna trust me or what?” I needed to know. “I’m telling you, we’re doing the right thing.”

Simone was a bit reluctant, but after some convincing, quite a bit actually, she agreed. Once I had Simone, Bella fell right in line. By the time Diane arrived, it was agreed we’d go to Sensations the very next Friday night.

That night I realized that my new family had found their voice. Simone was by far the strongest personality of the three. Bella was soft as butter, and Diane was just glad to be down, so she went along with whatever everybody else was doing.



But not Simone, her favorite line was, “I don’t understand this at all,” she would say, laced with attitude. Which to me always meant that she wasn’t with what I was sayin’, and before we moved on, I needed to make it clear what we were talking about and more importantly, how it would benefit everybody. I knew that once I had Simone on my side it was over.

We spent the day shopping for that evening’s attire. Simone chose a Nicole Miller stretch, satin ruched slip dress with spaghetti straps. I couldn’t really appreciate the straight neckline, but I did like the ruching at center bust and at the front and back bodice. When she first walked out of the fitting room, I wasn’t sure I liked the dress.

“Work it, girl,” Diane encouraged.

And when Simone worked it, it was like she gave the dress a life of its own.

“I think that’s the one,” I told her.

“You like it?” she asked Bella.

“It’s nice. And obviously you know how to work it,” she said excitedly.

With Simone out of the way, we turned our attention to finding just the right outfit for Bella. I was flipping through a nearby rack of dresses when my head snapped toward a squeal coming from Diane.

“Well, I’ll be damned!”

I turned to see Bella strolling out in a bodysuit. But this wasn’t just any bodysuit; it was a sleek one-piece that hugged her curves.

She strutted and ran her hands along the length of her body.

“I feel so sexy.” She giggled. She spun, then struck a pose.

“Girl, you are too fierce in that getup,” I said.

“You think I should get it, Jada? I mean, you don’t think it’s-I don’t know”-she shrugged-“too much?”

“Too much?” I stepped a bit closer to her. “Girl, you look hot!”

“For real, with that outfit on, I just pray we’ll be able to get some play up in the club standing next to you,” Diane cosigned.

“Okay, if you guys like it, then I’ll get it,” she said before turning and rushing into the fitting room.

Once we piled into the car, Diane turned to me and said, “How come you didn’t get anything?”

“Yeah,” Bella added.

“Please, all the stuff I have in that closet; some of that shit still has tags dangling from them.”

When Snoop’s new cut came on, we all started rocking to the beat. All the while I thought about the black Just Cavalli satin bustier dress, laced with a leopard-print tie. It was just the right mixture of elegance and class; the perfect outfit for the Queen B. When I thought about it, I knew for sure that the night would belong to us.

Everyone agreed to meet at my place by seven. After I went over the plan again, we got dressed and was sipping champagne while we waited for the bewitching hour. Our game plan didn’t involve going to the club to party, we were strictly there for business. I had put in a standing reservation for a limo to pick us up every Friday night at eleven o’clock sharp. We would arrive at the club and make our grand entrance at exactly midnight.

Knowing that the club would be crowded by the time we got there, I made arrangements with Sherman, the club’s manager, to have one of the circular couches close to the VIP room, reserved for us. “Money isn’t an issue,” I said when I talked to him over the phone.

“I think you and your party would be more comfortable in the VIP room,” Sherman said.

“No, Sherman, but thank you. I’m sure we’ll be just fine outside the VIP room.”

When I got off the phone, naturally, Simone questioned my logic. “Why don’t we wanna be in the VIP room?”

“Because all of our target market won’t be in VIP room. We need to position ourselves where we would get the maximum exposure. The driver will be here soon,” I said, as the clock got close to eleven. “Is everybody ready for this?”

“Shit, I been ready,” Diane said quickly. “Let’s do the damn thing. Oh, I mean, yes, Jada, I am ready to proceed to the club.” She laughed at herself, as did everybody else.

“We’re gonna take Sensations by storm, ladies. They’re not ready for this,” Bella added, standing up to do a model’s runway turn.

“The world is ours!” Simone began shouting, and Diane and Bella joined in. I was so proud of them, especially Diane; she had worked so hard and had come so far from where she was. The chant of the “world is ours” continued until the phone rang. “Quiet down, ladies,” I said and answered the phone. “Yes, Alfred.”

“Your driver is here.” Alfred the doorman called to say.

“We’ll be down in fifteen minutes.”

While the ladies talked amongst themselves, I hung up the phone and slipped into the bathroom and took one final look. Once I was done, I joined my family. I stood in front of Diane until everyone was quiet. “What?” she asked.

“Let’s do the damn thing.”

When our stretch Chrysler 300 limo pulled up at the club’s entrance, I noticed the stares from people standing in line. Some were blatantly staring, while others tried to act like the vehicle’s sleek appearance was no big deal. We sat parked for at least ten minutes before the driver stepped out to get our door.

He opened the door and extended his hand to me. I accepted his hand, stepped out of the limo and struck a pose. I could hear the buzz of small talk from those who were in line. The driver held out his hand for Diane and she stood next to me. By the time Bella was out of the limo and standing next to Diane, I knew we had everyone’s

attention. When Simone got out and stood next to Bella, the only sound to be heard was coming from the cars passing by.

I started walking toward the entrance. As planned, Diane walked next to me while Bella and Simone followed single file behind her. “Where they think they goin’?” I heard one woman say as we passed.

“I don’t know, but they need to get their wanna-be-cute asses in the back of this line like everybody

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else,” the woman in line with her said. That was exactly the response I was hoping for. I wanted to set the tone from the start. I wanted everybody to know that these ladies were special.

We walked right up to the door, where security removed the velvet rope and allowed us in without any questions. I could hear the mumbles as the door closed behind us.

“Can I help you, ladies?”

“Yes, I’m sure you can. My name is Jada West. I believe we have an area reserved for us?”

“Yes, Ms. West. We’ve been expecting you, and welcome to Sensations. A bottle of Moet is waiting at your table, compliments of the management,” the hostess informed us.

“You ladies look so good tonight. It would be my honor to escort you through the crowd to your table,” one of the clubs security staff said with his eye on Simone.

“Thank you,” I said.

“Why don’t you ladies follow me,” he said, and along with another member of security, escorted us to our table. The security escort wasn’t planned, but I was gonna work it to our advantage.

Sensations was a very big club with a huge dance floor, a big stage, and five bars. The VIP room was in the back of the club, directly across from the stage, with a small

staircase that led to the entrance. It was elevated so guests in the VIP room could watch the show without having their view obstructed by the crowd.

As I expected, the club was packed. I was glad for the security escort, because had it not been for them clearing a path with flashlights, we would've never made it to our area. Not to mention, our entrance wouldn't have had the same impact. As we made our way through the crowd, I could see that we were getting a lot of attention from the men, and quite a few women.

When we arrived at our couch, we found it had been roped off for us. I reached in my clutch and pulled out two hundred-dollar bills. "Thank you for getting us here," I said and handed a bill to each of our escorts.

"You didn't have to do that," one said, but Bella had his attention.

"But thank you," the other said and practically snatched the bill out of my hand. He quickly rushed off and grabbed a waitress. "You take good care of my friends here."

Once they were gone, she popped the cork and poured each of us a glass. I raised my glass. "Well, ladies," I said over the music, "here's to us. The world is truly ours and tonight is just the beginning."

"Damn, this is the bomb," Diane commented.

"I told you guys to have faith in me. I know what I'm doing," I said, relieved that it worked out that way.

A man walked up to the table and asked Simone if she wanted to dance. He was nicely dressed and kind of cute, but I could tell that he had enough money in his wallet to buy somebody a few drinks. Maybe he could spring for breakfast after the club closed, but that would be a stretch. He wasn't even on my radar. In the short

time we had been there, I had already scoped out a few targets.

Before she could answer, I spoke up. “No. She doesn’t want to dance with you,” I said with a smile.

He looked at me like I was crazy. “I wasn’t talkin’ to you.”

“Yes, you were.”

“What about you?” he asked, thinking he’d get a different result from Bella.

“She doesn’t want to dance with you either.”

He looked at Diane, she held up her hand. “Don’t even waste your time,” Diane told him and he went away.

“Why does it seem like all the cuties are broke,” Bella asked.

“I know what you mean. It wasn’t too long ago that I would’ve jumped up and been on the floor right now,” Simone said with a smile as she watched him walk away. “I might have even given him some.”

Diane laughed. “Jada’s right. He’s the type of guy that will try to keep you on the dance floor so he ain’t gotta buy you no drink.”

Finally, members of our prospective clientele started approaching us, and one at a time I allowed the ladies to dance. But we had a strict one-song limit. I put that rule in place for two reasons. First off, dancing was not what we were there for. Dancing makes you sweat. Sweat ruins your hair and suddenly your outfit doesn’t look perfect anymore. I wanted them to look perfect. Perfect objects for the pleasure of man. Two: you give a wolf a taste and then say, “Thank you,” and walk away leaving them with



that you-know-you-want-me look in their eyes.

We weren't in the club for a good hour before I had spoken with several men, who I knew from their conversation, would become my clients. There was Alex the accountant. He couldn't get enough of Bella. Then there was a guy who introduced himself to me as T-Love. His ballin' ass was drippin' money. I knew that with her experience in dealing with guys like him, that Diane would be the one he wanted.

While the ladies were on the floor, I was giving bedroom eyes to some eye candy sitting across the room. I didn't know what he did, but I knew he was rich. He was iced-out, from the large diamond nuggets that hung from his ears, to the large diamond studded bracelets on his wrist and the Rolex President watch. He was drippin' money too, literally wearing his riches for us all to see.

Simone and Diane had just returned to the table when the waitress came over and leaned down toward me. "Compliments of the gentlemen over there." She placed the standing ice bucket with a bottle of Cristal on ice near our table. Once the waitress had filled my glass, I glanced in his direction and raised it in acknowledgment of his gesture, but he was on his way over to me.

“So, whassup?” he asked.

“You,” I said.

He looked at Simone then back at me. “You ladies mind if I join you?”

They both shook their heads.

“I was just about to use the ladies room,” Diane said as she stood, Simone followed.

“I like your style,” he said. “You know, the way you carry it.”

“Is that right?”

“So what’s up with you? I ain’t seen you here before,” he said.

“Are you a regular or something? Keeping tabs on who comes and goes?” I inquired.

“Nah, I just recognize a dime piece when I see one,” he countered.

“I understand,” I said, but I wasn’t getting a good vibe from this one. The way he was talking just didn’t fit what he was wearing.

“Would you like to dance?”

“No. I don’t dance,” I replied coldly, as Bella came back and slid in next to me. He started to say something, but I cut him off. “I don’t mean to be rude, but, I need to

“speak with my friend. I really appreciate the Cristal, but if you’d excuse us.”

“I really did wanna talk to you.”

“Do you have a card?”

He stood up and reached in his pocket, pulled out a solid gold cardholder and handed me one. “I’ll look forward to hearing from you,” he said and walked away.

Once he was gone, Bella looked at me. “He was cute. What does he do?”

I looked at his card. “Investment banker,” I told Bella. “But there’s something about him that doesn’t quite feel right. But I’ll check him out.”

By the time we left the club, I had a collection of business cards and phone numbers that I was confident would turn into money.

8

Since we began going to the club business had picked up, and not a moment too soon as far as I was concerned. The club had become a mandatory event, unless you had an appointment, and had been every Friday night for the last three months, but it was starting to get old. Fact of the matter was, I was getting enough referral business from our clientele that we really didn’t need to go there, but the ladies loved it. It was the one night of the week they looked forward to. At first, I thought it was because it gave them a chance to be stars. “That’s not it, Jada,” Bella corrected. “It’s because it’s the only time that we all get together and hang out.”

“Yeah,” Diane added, “just hangin’ together, you know, like we used to, shoppin’ or whatever. But we were always together.”

“Like a family, Jada. Ain’t that what you used to call us? Well, that’s what we are.”

The limo picked us up at my apartment, we made our usual entrance, and we were escorted to what had become our spot at Sensations. That night the club was packed. More packed than usual. But as packed as it was that night, our usual targets didn’t seem to be in the house. So I allowed everybody to cut loose a bit, which meant doing more dancing and drinking than usual.

We had been there an hour and a half when I decided that nothing was up for the night and Simone advanced the idea that we go to another club. “You know, see what else is out there,” she suggested.

“Yeah, I’m for that,” Diane added. “Have some fun. I ain’t got drunk and wild in a minute.”

Bella laughed. “Now you know any time you start drinkin’, you start lookin’ for a woman to seduce.”

We all laughed, but it was true. When she used to dance at Ecstasy she’d get with a woman, but only if the price was right. That was her policy until she ran up on this one client that turned her out. After that, anytime I ran up on a female client, she belonged to Diane. “Keep talkin’, Bella,” Diane threatened. “And I’ll be suckin’ on one of those fat, juicy nipples you got,” she said and playfully reached for Bella.

“Back up off me. You know I’m in it strictly for the Benjamins.”

“I am too. So for you, I’ll only charge you half price to suck on these titties.”

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Just then, a commotion started not too far from us. The next thing I knew there were shots fired and everybody started running for the exit. Not wanting to get caught up in the stampede, I ushered the ladies into the VIP room.

When things quieted down, I found out from one of the security staff that a man had been shot. It seemed that his woman showed up at the club and caught him with another woman. He told me that the police were in the club, and that they wanted to ask everybody who was in or around the VIP room some q

uestions. “Questions? What kind of questions?”

“Don’t worry, Ms. West. They wanna talk to everyone who was in the VIP room at the time. Since you were sitting right where it happened, they just want to know what you saw. No big deal,” he assured me. But I wasn’t feelin’ that at all. There was no way I wanted to talk to the cops about a murder or anything else, for that matter. I looked at the ladies. Diane was borderline drunk and Bella was just a little too easy to rattle. I knew I didn’t want them talking to the cops either.

“You need to get us outta here,” I said, digging in my purse for some money to give him.

He looked around. “Okay, okay. Let me think for a minute.”

“Well, think fast,” Simone told him and touched his face. She knew that he liked her and would do anything for her.

“I’ll make like I’m takin’ y’all to the bathroom and let you out the back door. But it

would be better if you all didn't go at once." He grabbed Simone by the hand. "Come on, let's go."

"No," I said quickly. "Bella, Diane, y'all go with him. You stay with me, Simone."

"Why?"

"Not now, Simone."

"Okay, whatever. Whoever's goin', let's go," he said, and Diane and Bella followed him out.

Once they were gone, Simone looked at me with angry eyes. "Why you do that?"

"Cause you are stronger than they are, Simone. If somebody gotta talk to the cops, I'd much rather it be you."

She looked at me and then her look softened. "You're right. Diane is drunk and Bella is just Bella. The cops start sweatin' them, there's no tellin' what they might say."

"I'm glad you understand. I need you to be a rock for me, Simone."

"I am," she protested.

"I know, but you gotta have faith in me and not question everything I say. Especially at times like this."

"My bad," Simone said to me as the cops bum-rushed the VIP room.

"When are we gonna be able to leave?" a woman asked in a whiny voice.

I didn't say a word. The last thing I wanted to do was give the cops a reason to toss attention my way.

"We ain't see shit; we been posted up in here all night," this rapper I had met, but couldn't name, offered up. They asked us a few questions, took our names, told us that they would be in touch if they needed us, and let us go.

I felt relieved that that's all it was, but the next day I got a call from the cops. They wanted to ask me some more questions and wanted me to come down to the station. My first thought was to ignore their request, but I knew that wasn't the answer. They would probably think I was trying to hide something and start looking at me. Not that I was worried about the murder; I didn't see anything. But I knew how cops were. My next thought was to show up with my lawyer, but I talked to Sasha and she didn't think that would be a good idea either. "No, Jada. You walk in with a lawyer, it would be the same as saying, 'Look at me, coppers, I got something to hide'."

So, I dressed down-no makeup and definitely no ice-and went down there. I thought that it was a little strange that Simone hadn't gotten a similar call to come in, but I just figured that they would get to her in due time.

After a short wait, I was taken to what they called an interview room and was introduced to Detective Albert Gineconna. "Thank you for coming in, Ms. West. I won't take up a lot of time. I just need to ask you a few questions about what happened the night before at Sensations," he said and placed a tape recorder on the table in between us. "I'll be recording our conversation, if that's all right with you."

"Not a problem."

"So, tell me what you saw."

"I really didn't see anything. I was there with a friend of mine," I started, but the

detective stopped me.

“What’s your friend’s name?”

“Simone Frazier.”



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“And it was just the two of you?”

“Yes,” I said slowly.

“Go on.”

“We were just sitting there, when all of a sudden we saw a commotion in front of us. When we heard the shots and saw the people running, we ran in the VIP room.”

“You say you heard shots.”

“Yes.”

“Was it a single shot or more than one?”

“Well, the music was playing so it’s hard to be sure, but I think I heard more than one shot.”

“What happened after that?”

“Nothing. We were told that we couldn’t leave until the police talked to us. After that I went home.”

Then his questions got personal: Where I lived, what I did for a living, and how often I went to the club. I told him that I came to the club pretty regularly and gave him my correct address, ’cause he could check those things out if he wanted to know. I told him that I sold insurance, glad that Sasha got one of clients to get me a license

without having to take the test. After that, he thanked me for coming in and told me that I was free to go.

As I left the interview room was when I saw him. The eye candy I had the bad feeling about the first night we came to the club. He wasn't iced-out or as well dressed as he was the last time I saw him, but it was definitely him. I knew right then that he was a cop.

As quickly as I could, I put on my sunglasses and dropped my head. I walked out of there considering the possibility that he could just be there like I was, to give a statement about what happened the night before at the club. I didn't know and didn't care which one it was, I just got out of there and hoped he didn't see me. Once I got to my car and was on my way out of the parking lot and thought about it, they'd only made the people that were in the VIP room stay and he wasn't one of them. No. He was a cop; I was sure of it. And since that was the case, I had to consider the possibility that this wasn't a coincidence. Maybe they brought me in for him to ID me. I made the decision right then and there: We needed to stay out of the clubs for a while.

9

After that incident, we laid off Sensations for a couple of months. During that time business had been very good. I no longer felt the need to make elaborate public displays in order to market the ladies. I had reached the point where I wanted to be in this business. Now that I had stronger contacts, I was always one of the invited guests at social gatherings. I was running my program exactly the way Sasha ran hers. Now, it was me carefully scrutinizing all of the men, making note of those who were their with dates. And before I left, I'd have leads on new clients. With all the new business, I was thinking about adding some new talent.

I was sitting around the apartment relaxing with Diane one afternoon, and we were

talking about our increase in business. I had just offered her, her choice of the last three appointments that had come in. “What times are they?”

I ran my finger down the appointment schedule on my laptop. “Uh, seven, ten, and a late night will call.”

“Jackson?”

“Of course.”

“I’ll take them all,” Diane said.

“What?”

“You were just sayin’ that business was so strong that you had to handle some new clients.”

“And?”

“I’m trying to keep you from havin’ to go out like that.” One thing I had to say about Diane, she was true to her word. She was a good ho. “If business is so good, why don’t you recruit somebody?”

“I’ve been thinking about it, Diane; I really have. And I’ve been looking at some women, sizing them up. I just haven’t found what I’m looking for.”

“What about Creme? She’s been all over me to talk to you.”

“Oh hell no! Creme likes to powder her nose too much.”

“True that,” Diane agreed as Bella came in the apartment.

“Hey, Bella,” we both said.

“That is not the type of person we want to invite into our family,” I continued.

“What type of person?” Bella asked.

“You remember my

friend Creme?”

“The one that used to work with y’all at the club?” Bella questioned.

“That’s her,” Diane said.

“What about her?”

“Jada thinks she would be a bad influence on us because she sniffs.”

“I don’t know about her being a bad influence; we’re all grown and capable of making our own decisions, but I agree with Jada.”

“Why, Bella?” Diane asked.

“I don’t know. I just never liked being around people that do that,” Bella said.

“People that do what?” Simone asked as she came dragging out of the bedroom.

“Well, good afternoon, sleepyhead,” I said. “Glad you’re still with us.”

“Yeah, well, y’all are making so much noise out here I couldn’t sleep. So what y’all talking about?”

“Diane wants us to start hanging out with her crackhead friend from Ecstasy,” Bella said.

“She is not a crackhead,” Diane insisted. “And I only brought it up because Jada was talking about recruiting somebody new.”

“Why?” Simone asked quickly. “I think we’re doing just fine. We don’t need anybody else,” she added.

“Jada thinks we do,” Diane said like a pouting child.

“I just said that business has picked up and I was thinking about it. But let’s talk about it.”

“I say no,” Simone told us firmly. “It’s true we all have been working a lot and I am a little tired, but what I’m not, is ready to give up any of this money.”

“I agree with Simone,” Bella said.

“Well, when you put it that way”-Diane said and winked at me-“there’s just enough money for us.”

“I guess that settles it,” I said. “But from what I’m hearing, we all could use a break.”

“Maybe we could take a trip,” Bella suggested. “Go to one of those resorts in the islands and have West Indian men wait on us hand and foot.”

“That’s sound like a great idea,” I said. “But I was thinking of something a little more immediate. It’s been a while since we went to the club.” I didn’t have to say another word. The ladies were all for the idea and we quickly agreed that we were ready to go back to Sensations.

The moment the limo pulled up in front of the club, flashes of the last time we were there flooded my mind. “You thinking about the last time we were here, huh?” Bella asked reading my mind.

“Yeah, that shit was foul,” Diane added.

When our driver got out and opened the door for us, there was a small round of applause from the few members of security that were standing outside. “Welcome back, Ms. West. The place hasn’t been the same without you ladies.” He walked up to Bella. “I really missed you, cutie.”

“Thank you,” Bella said to him and kissed him on the cheek.

Just as they always had, security escorted us to our spot. It did feel good to be back. Sherman, the clubs manager, sent over a complimentary bottle of bubbly and it seemed like old times.

It didn’t take long for the ballers to pour into Sensations that night. I noticed this chick walking around like she owned the place; I wasn’t mad at her though, she was working the hell out of this bad-ass white Gucci pants suit. She gave me a knowing look as she passed, hot on the tail of this up and coming actor.

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Later in the ladies room, I noticed the chick in the white suit as I stood next to her at the sink. “This place is always such a mess,” she commented.

“I know. You would think that they would keep somebody in here to keep the place clean,” I told her.

“If these men only knew how nasty some of these women are, I don’t think they’d be in such a hurry to jump in bed with them.” Then she paused and thought about it. “What am I sayin’? They wouldn’t give a shit as long as they get what they want.”

“You ain’t told no lie there,” I said and looked around for something to dry my hands with.

She reached in her purse and handed me a few bar napkins. “I’m Chante,” she said extending her hand.

I dried my hands and then shook hers. “I’m Jada.”

Her eyebrows wrinkled. “Like the actress?” she asked.

I nodded my head.

“I’ve seen you here before,” she said as we walked out together.

“Yeah, I’ve been here a few times.”

“You and your friends always look so nice every time you’re here.”



“Thank you, Chante. I was telling my friend earlier that you’re wearin’ the hell out of that Gucci.”

“Thank you.”

As we made our way through the crowded club, a guy grabbed my arm with so much force, that I bumped onto Chante. “What the hell?” I screamed. I could tell he was drunk, but that didn’t stop him from trying to manhandle me. I struggled to pull free from him. Before I knew what was happening, Chante did a quick move and sent a blow to his neck.

“Goddamn! You see that shit?” I heard someone say as the drunk cowered over grabbing at his neck.

Chante turned to me. “Are you okay?”

I stood stunned to silence. I slowly nodded my head, but I was still in shock over the way she’d put him down.

She pulled me by the arm. “Come on; let’s get out of here before he gets up.”

“Why don’t you come back to my table and I’ll buy you a drink,” I offered.

She smiled. “I’d like that.”

Chante was cute, brown skinned, and had shoulder length hair that she wore bone straight with a part down the middle. I couldn’t pinpoint her age, but I immediately started wondering if she’d be interested in our line of work. Of course that’s not the kind of question you go asking complete strangers. When we got back to the table I introduced Chante to the ladies. After a round of drinks I asked, “So, tell me, Chante, what do you do?”

“Oh, nothing really,” she said. “What I mean is I used to be an executive assistant until my uncle died and left me a nice little stash. So I chucked the nine-to-five three years ago and just been havin’ a good time. But you know what they say about all good things-sooner or later, they come to an end. Lately my money is starting to look real funny,” she shrugged. “Guess I could’ve done some better planning; should’ve kept the job. But I’m hoping to find a generous donor.” She giggled.

“Well, when you find him, please let me know if he has a brother, uncle, or even a father. I’ve been looking for a member of that family for quite a while,” Simone said, sending us all into a laughing fit.

10

Over the next few weeks, Chante had hung out at the club with us a few times. I took her along a couple of times when I was going to private parties or CD release parties. She was cool to be around and the ladies liked her. I liked Chante because she was easy to talk to and she always kept it real. No pretense at all from Chante. She was straight up, no chaser, that’s what I liked about her. Whether she would make a good addition to our family was another matter. After my experience with the police over that shooting and seeing Mr. Investment Banker at the precinct, it had left me a little leery about new faces. But I still gotta eat, so I decided to invite Chante to meet me at my favorite restaurant. Besides, it would give me a chance to observe her in another atmosphere.

As I strolled into Jill’s for dinner, the place was packed and buzzing. I loved walking into a place and realizing heads were turning in my direction. I glanced around the bustling restaurant and still hadn’t seen Chante, so I figured I’d arrived early. I squeezed by two men who had been eyeing me up since I stepped onto the scene. “You looking for me?” one of them asked. I smirked at his tired- ass line and kept moving.

By the time I looked toward the back of the restaurant, I noticed none other than Chante, curled up with some sexy roughneck. “Ah-hem,” I cleared my throat.

Chante stuck her pretty little head around her friend’s and smiled up at me.

“Jada! I was just looking for you,” she said, looking like I had caught her with her hand in the cookie jar.

“Emp hmm, looking for me all up in his face, huh?” I teased.

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“Girl!” she winked. The guy finally turned at the sound of my voice.

“This is, ah, what’s your name again, sweetie?” she cooed.

“Jordan,” he offered in a deep voice.

“Yeah, this is my new friend Jordan,” Chante said. “See, I told you I was waiting on someone,” she said to him.

Jordan’s beady little eyes ran up every inch of my body then back down, before he pulled away and glanced back to Chante.

“Well, my girl’s here, so I’d better spend some time with her,” she told Jordan who hadn’t really taken his eyes off me. “You know how it is, gotta spread the love around.”

He looked at her then back at me. “What’s up? She don’t like to party?” he asked.

Chante and I looked at each other then started cracking up. “Come on, Jordan, my girl and I need to catch up. We’ll get together later, I promise. But right now, we’ve got some private business to discuss,” she said like she was talking to a three-year-old.

Jordan took her hand to his lips and planted a kiss there. I rolled my eyes, but waited while he worked his jelly. “I’ll be at the bar waiting on you,” he promised. You’d think the two knew each other for years.

We admired the view as he walked away, then started looking over the menu.

“It is so packed in here,” I said.

“That’s why I grabbed this table. I figured if I had waited any longer, we might be eating outside on the sidewalk,” she said.

Dinner went pretty well. We talked about clothes, music and the latest black celebrity gossip. I marveled at how easygoing Chante was, and how we interacted like old friends. By the time we had wrapped up dinner, Jordan had passed by our table at least three times. Each time he did, he and Chante exchanged “fuck me” looks. I thought it was funny. I thought about telling girlfriend she shouldn’t be giving up the goods for free, but that would have led us down a conversational path I wasn’t ready to go down, so I kept it to myself. “Well, so what’s up for tonight?” I asked as I rose from the table with my doggie bag in hand.

“I’m gonna see what Jordan is talking about, then I’m gonna hook up with you guys. Where are y’all partying tonight?” she asked.

“We’ll be at Sensations tonight. Or at least I will. Simone has an appoint-I mean a date tonight, and I’m not sure about Diane.”

“Even if it’s just you, me and Bella, I’m sure we’ll have a good time,” Chante said.

“Why don’t you meet us at my place and ride with us?”

“Sounds good.”

“You sure lover boy is gonna cut you loose?” I asked.

“Please,” she said as stood up. “After I work him over for a few hours, he’ll be begging me to get out.” I gave her a hug and turned to leave.

Hours later, when we walked up into the place the way we do, Chante fit right in. We watched from our table as other half-naked women jockeyed for attention. Some tables were stacked with drinks. To the left of our table, a few ladies were having a divorce party, with the guest of honor wobbling in and out of her seat. A couple of her friends were doing seductive lap dances in their chairs as her friends cheered on, while another one held a camcorder.

“You having a nice time?” Chante asked.

I nodded, and then took a sip from my drink. I was having a blast. The dance floor was packed and the music was thumping. I sipped my drink again and enjoyed the atmosphere. Waiters walked around like busy mice, quickly running through the maze of a club from table to table.

It was about one-thirty in the morning when Simone and Diane walked into the place. “Hey, ladies. How’d it go tonight?” I asked as we each exchanged hugs.

“Great, Jada,” Diane said quickly. “It don’t even take me long to do what I gotta do.”

“Must not have been all that. Who comes to the club after a great date?” Chante asked.

Bella quickly looked away like she didn’t know us. Simone and Diane looked at her and then to me, with that handle-your-girl look on their faces.

“What?” Chante smiled and hunched her shoulders. “Did I say something wrong?”

“No, Chante. You didn’t say anything wrong,” I said, searching for something to tell her. “A great date doesn’t mean you got to give up the goods.” Then I flipped it back on her. “I see you here after your date with Jordan.”

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“That’s ’cause I checked out his package early in the evening,” Chante came back quickly.

“What you talkin’ ’bout, Chante?” Diane asked.

“When we were leaving Jill’s, I bumped into him and felt for his dick; I couldn’t find it.” Chante grabbed her head. “I started getting a headache right then.”

The bass in the music was thumping and some blinged-out baller grabbed Diane’s hand. She looked at me. I looked him over and motioned with my eyes that it was cool. Watching Diane on the floor, feeling the music, had me feeling like I needed to go find me something to rub up against-you know, let Miss Kitty out of the bag. I quickly decided against it. I hadn’t danced with anybody since we started going there and I wasn’t about to start now. I was there for business. But a few minutes later I was rocking to the music in my seat. I wondered if Chante had noticed that I collected business cards anytime we were out, and if she did, did she wonder why.

This well dressed guy came and stood over Simone. They didn’t look like they were strangers and she didn’t bother to introduce him to us. Without a word, he extended his hand to her and she accepted. Eyebrows raised and a few smirks popped up when Simone and her mystery man walked away from our table. “I guess she was bored with our company,” Chante joked.

I shook my head and got up from the table. “I’ll be back,” I said and headed toward the ladies’ room. A waitress arrived just as I walked away, and I told her to bring me another drink. I glanced over my shoulder and considered whether it was wise to leave Bella alone with Chante. I figured it couldn’t hurt, so I was on my way.

On my way back, I couldn't hear what they were talking about, but the look on Bella's face told me she wasn't feeling the conversation.

"Hey. Everything okay?" I asked as I took my seat.

"Yeah, it's cool," Chante answered, a little too quickly for my taste.

"You guys seen Diane?" I asked.

"Not since she left the table with that baller," Bella answered.

Before I could take another sip of my drink, I looked up to see Diane walking toward us. "Jada, lemme holla at you for a sec," she said.

I got up again and walked a few feet away.

"I've got a live one here, so I'm about to bounce," Diane said and motioned toward a delicious looking thug who was waiting for her near the bar.

I usually didn't allow that type of thing, but I recognized him. He was already a client, so I made sure he saw me.

"How much longer y'all gonna be here?" Diane asked.

"Not much longer. Maybe another hour. I don't see many new prospects."

"Well, I'll catch up with y'all later then," Diane said then sashayed over to her client. Again, when I came back to the table, I felt like I was interrupting something between Chante and Bella, but I wasn't about to start trippin'. I made a mental note to get the 4-1-1 from Bella later.



Just then, Simone came back to our table. I could tell by looking at her that she'd been crying. I jumped up from my chair and rushed to her. "Simone! What's the matter?"

"That guy was my ex-boyfriend," she said, fighting back the tears. "He heard what-" she started, and then cut her eyes at Chante.

I quickly grabbed her hand, "Come on, Simone. Let's go someplace quiet. Excuse us, ladies," I said to Chante and Bella, and led her to the VIP room. Once we were inside I said, "Now, tell me what's going on?"

"That guy who I left with, he's my ex-boyfriend. He heard from some of his boys what I've been doin'," she said and began to cry again.

"How would any of his boys know about what you're doing?"

"He told me that his boy is a client."

"Oh." What else could I say?

"He came to make me stop."

"What did you say?"

"At first I said that I didn't know what he was talking about, but he just kept pushin' it. Callin' me a ho and a slut and this and that; tellin' me I was better than this, and that he was taking me away from this life of sin 'cause I was a ho and needed to find God or whatever." Suddenly the tears stopped and I saw the fire return to her eyes. "Then I just lost it, Jada, and started goin' off on him. Then he grabbed me by the arm and tried to drag me out the club. Well, you know security wasn't havin' that. They grabbed him and dragged him out the club. When they got him outside they

started kickin' his ass. I tried to stop them and tell them that it wasn't that serious, and he just needed to go and not come back. But once they let him go, this fool spit in big Kevin's face."

"Wrong move," I said, having seen how security here deals with problems.

"Kevin hit him in the face so hard that blood was everywhere, and then the police came to take him to jail, but he was trying to fight them too. He kept callin' my name, callin' me a ho and sayin' that this was my fault. I swear, Jada, I didn't want him to get hurt, and I damn sure didn't want him to go to jail."

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“It’s not your fault, Simone. He shouldn’t have tried to manhandle you like that.” I reached in my purse and gave her the card of a bail bondsman. “But if you’re feeling that badly about him going to jail, here is the number for a bail bondsman. Let me know how much his bail is.” That was the very least I could do for her.

The next afternoon I made it a point to talk to Bella about the conversation she and Chante had the night before at the club. It must have been on her mind as well, because as soon as I sat down, Bella came to me with her concerns. “Chante doesn’t know what we do?” she asked that afternoon.

“No, what’s up?”

“Just curious, ’cause last night, she just seemed to be all up in my grill. I mean she was fishing for information; I didn’t say nothin’, though

h,” Bella had reported proudly.

“What exactly was she questioning you about?”

“Well, she wanted to know how we made money, what we did for a living, how we were able to buy such nice clothes and things like that.”

“And what did you say when she asked?” I had to handle Bella gently. I didn’t want her to think she’d done anything wrong.

She shrugged. “I just told her she needed to talk to you.”

“What did she say after that?”

Bella thought for a moment, smirked, then said, “You know, I don’t think she really said anything about it. But she wasn’t like salty or nothing like that. I just remember saying it to her; then I think you walked back up on us, so she dropped it.”

“I see,” I had said.

“Did I do good, Jada?” Bella asked, waiting for my approval.

“Yeah, Bella, you did just fine. You tell Chante, or anybody else with questions about our family, to come to me and I’ll handle them from there.”

Bella actually breathed a sigh of relief. The fact that she went at Bella was a bit troubling. I mean, Chante and I had spent a lot of time together and she had plenty of chances to ask whatever she wanted to ask. In fact, I’d been waiting for her to come at me with questions. I knew for sure I needed to check Chante out a little closer.

11

Chante

I woke up early that morning and got ready to go. When I started up my car, I sat there for what seemed like an eternity, thinking about what I was doing. “It’s just another job,” I told myself. “No different from any other. Then why am I making it so complicated?” I knew the answer and I was afraid of what I’d discovered about myself.

I know what they’re doing. They’re high-priced hookers, even though they are all so discreet about it. They were breaking the law and I had violated the rules and gotten personally involved.

The truth was I liked Jada; she was mad cool. Over the last few weeks I'd really gotten to like her and "the ladies," as Jada called them. We were friends.

Jada rarely goes anywhere without calling me and inviting me to hang out with them. We have lunch and dinner together all the time in some of the finest spots in town. We've gone to clubs, release parties, and we shop. Damn, Jada West is one shopping don't-give-a-fuck-what-it-costs, I-just-know-it-fits-and-I-want-it woman.

Jada has a style about her that I liked, even envied. She always wore the finest clothes. She's chauffeured around like a celebrity just about everywhere she goes. And I loved being a part of that lifestyle.

I put the car in drive and pulled off. While I drove, I thought about how I got into this in the first place. "Come on in and have a seat, Rachael," Gineconna said to me as I came into his office.

First off, my name is not Chante. My name is Rachael Dawkins and I'm a cop. "Thank you, lieutenant," I said and took a seat in front of his desk.

"How's it feel to be back?"

"I was happy to be able to sleep in my own bed after seven months." I had been on loan to the DEA, infiltrating a drug ring that was operating heavily on the East Coast.

"You'll be glad to know that thanks to the work you did, three dozen arrests were made, as well as a substantial amount of drugs and money confiscated. Damn fine piece of work."

"Thanks, lieu."

"So, are you ready to be a cop again?" he asked, knowing that I had no say in the

matter.

“No. I was hoping for a little time off. You know-an all-expense-paid trip to the Bahamas. At the DEA’s expense of course,” I replied, since I knew it wasn’t happening anyway.

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“Wouldn’t we all, Rachael. Wouldn’t we all.”

“So what you got for me?”

“You ever hear of a club called Sensations?”

“Big club, upscale clientele; I’ve been there once or twice. Why?”

“Well, Sam’s been working there trying to get a handle on what we believe is one of the largest drug operations in the city. He reported that there’s also a prostitution ring that’s been operating out of there. It’s run by a woman named Jada West.”

“A woman?”

“Yes, a woman. What’s the matter, Rachael; I know you aren’t going to tell me that you’re discriminating against women being pimps?”

“Not at all. A crook is a crook is a crook, all day long. I’m just a little surprised.”

“So far, Sam hasn’t been able to get close to them.”

“Say it ain’t so.” Sam used to be my partner. I can’t stand him. “What’s the matter, Super Sam can’t crack a girly pimp?”

“He’s working the drug angle and doesn’t want to tip his hand. A couple of other male officers have tried to get close to her, but she won’t bite.”

“Sounds like she’s got good instincts; she can smell a cop.”

“I agree. That’s why we’re trying a different approach with you. Anyway, there was a murder there, totally unrelated to the drugs or the prostitution ring, but since then they’ve stopped coming. I want you start hanging out there-see if you can find out where they disappeared to. If they show back up, you get close to them and let’s see if we can shut them down.”

“So, you want me to be a prostitute?”

“No. But if it comes to that, we’ll work something out so you won’t have to take it there.”

That’s how it began. During the time that they were absent from the club, I went to work. The address and phone number she gave when they brought her in for questioning were dead. She had moved out of that apartment and changed her cell number. Knowing Jada like I know her now, she probably sniffed Sam out as a cop. Bringing her in for questioning on that murder was what made her go underground, not the murder. So I was at the fuckin’ club every night, because I had a feeling they’d be back. Every night I’d talk to men. It wasn’t easy, but I finally found one of her clients and bought him a drink. I told him that I was a lesbian, which kept him from being all over me, but also served another purpose as well. Once I got him drunk and talkin’, I told him that I’d seen one of her girls and, “She was a goddess. I would pay anything to get with her, but they stopped coming here.”

“I know which one you’re talking about,” my drinking buddy said and began describing Diane. “Here,” he said and reached in his pocket for a pen. “Here’s her number.”

Jackpot.



By the time they came back to the club, I knew everything about Jada West. Father dead, mother doin' fed time. I knew about her and Diane at Ecstasy. I knew all about Simone and Bella. The lieutenant was happy to hear that I had made contact with them rather easily on their first night back in the club.

Since then, I've had nothing to report and he's growing impatient. At our last meeting he reminded me that I was better than this. "I understand from talking to her that Jada West is smart. But shit! It shouldn't take this long for you to crack her. Either way, Rachael, I need to see some results soon or I'll have to pull you off this thing."

I parked my car behind the building and went inside. I saw my old partner Sam coming toward me. "How's it going, Rachael?" Sam is the most disgusting man I've ever met. Always talkin' 'bout his big dick is and what he could do to me with it. You can't turn your back on him or his hands will be all over you. Fuckin' pig.

"Great, Sam. How about you?" I replied like I was happy to see him.

"Same old same, day in and day out. We should get together-you know, to catch up."

"I'd like that," I lied. "I'll stop by when I'm done," I lied again. I'm not giving you any pussy and nothing you have to say is of any interest to me, I thought as I made my way to an appointment that I was already very late for.

"Good morning, Rachael," Gineconna's admin said to me.

"Is he in?"

"Yes, but he's on a call and wants you to wait for him.

I nodded my head and took a seat. Suddenly, Gineconna's door swung open. "Come on in and have a seat, Rachael," I heard him yell.

I went in his office and made my report, which was basically the same as the one I'd made last week. "Nothing new to report."

"So you mean to tell me nothing has happened yet?"

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“No, sir-I mean we go out clubbing a lot. Sometimes we go to these parties, mostly for up and coming rappers. We’ve been to a few celebrity birthday parties and that kind of stuff. And we shop, a lot,” I said, only half lying.

“No mention of where the money comes from?”

“Not a word. When I asked, all I got was giggles, and was told to ask Jada. These things take time. You know that.”

“And you’ve never witnessed any exchange of money for sex or sexual favors?”

“None that I’ve witnessed personally, no. As far as I know and can prove, they’re just four girlfriends that hang out together. Jada never speaks to me about what they do. And ‘the ladies,’ as she calls them, basically only speak when Jada says they can,” I said.

“Okay, so when you’re at these parties what’s goes on? What does she say she does for a living?”

“She says she sells insurance.”

“And?” Gineconna asked.

“She has a license, a Web site, and she speaks knowledgeably when she has to. When we’re at these events she collects business cards, just like everybody else. My guy says that he met her at a record company party and he gave her his card. A couple of weeks later, she calls and sets up a date for lunch. She broke it to him over salad.”

Gineconna let out a frustrated sigh and I took the opening. “What it comes down to is how bad do you want them?”

“Will your guy testify?”

“Not likely.”

“What about the girls? Can you turn one of them?”

“I’ll stay on it and see what I can do, but I’ll be honest-those ladies are loyal to Jada. She walks on water in their eyes. Turning one of them will take time and I’ll run the risk of blowing my cover.”

“Right now we don’t have enough evidence t

o make a case that will stick,” Gineconna said. “You think you can turn up another client of hers?”

“Sure, but it will take time. How bad you want her?”

“Bad. But I can’t continue to justify the use of resources and the overtime on the four little girls sellin’ pussy with no results insight. I need you back in the rotation, catching cases.”

I tried my best to look disappointed. “Damn. I just need a little more time.” But that was exactly what I wanted. “I tell you what, lieu, you do what you gotta do; I’ll continue to work it on my own time. I’ll stay close to Ms. Jada West; try to flip either one of her clients or one of the girls.”

Gineconna smiled. “That’s what I wanted to hear, Rachael. I knew I could count on you. As flamboyant as West is, and the way these girls seem to love the spotlight, I’m

sure they'll make a mistake."

I left Gineconna's office feeling great. I got exactly what I wanted. I was officially off the case, but still had an official reason to remain in contact with them. After a while, Jada would be off of Gineconna's radar. I'd already told them I was going to have to get a job, so I've got a reason to be unavailable at times. But I could go on being Chante.

I loved being Chante and I was starting to wonder if Chante was who I really was. I didn't believe it. But I do. I love being Chante.

The last time we were together, Jada asked if I could take a weekend trip with them. "All expenses paid of course," Jada explained. "It's just going to be us and the ladies hanging out in the Bahamas."

I told her I'd think about it, but I knew deep down inside I wanted to go. And since how I did my job was pretty much my business, I figured I'd be able to go with no worries.

But Gineconna was right about one thing: I know Jada could live without it, but the ladies do love the spotlight. Sooner or later, hangin' out at that club will be their downfall. My job now was to keep Jada out of the clubs, or this could all come crashing down on me. I've had nightmares about blowing my cover and fearing Jada's disappointment once she realized the truth. My challenge was to find a way to prevent that from happening, at all cost.

12

Jada West

It was a little before midnight on a Wednesday night and the ladies and I had been

sitting around talking and drinking. Everybody, myself included, had an appointment earlier that night and had come back to my place. “So, I say we polish these off and go find some real trouble to get into,” I said, looking around the room.

“One more of these and I ain’t gonna have to try too hard to find trouble,” Diane said hoisting up her glass.

“Okay, we’re all feeling real nice and nobody’s got an appointment”-I winked-“so we should just call an end to this bonding, then go kick up some dust.” I glanced at the ladies. “Who’s down?” I asked.

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“Count me in!” Diane said, hyped and drunk at the same time.

“You ain’t said nothing but a word,” Simone tossed in, as she turned up her glass.

Just then the phone rang.

“Does this mean I can give it away for free tonight?” Bella giggled.

Diane got up and removed the drink from Bella’s hands. “I think you’ve had enough,” she said. in a dramatic fashion. We all started cracking up as I picked up the phone.

“House of Beauty, this is cutie,” I sang into the receiver.

“Hey, cutie, sounds like there’s a party going on over there. How come I didn’t get an invite?” Chante said into my ear.

“Oh, hey, Chante. We’re just sitting around trying to decide what to get into,” I answered. I had planned on talking to Chante about her conversation with Bella, but it was a conversation I wanted to have in person.

“Hmmm, seems to me like that’s where I need to be,” Chante said.

“Well, come on through then,” I challenged.

As I hung up, Simone turned to me and asked, “Who was that? Chante?”

“That was her,” I confirmed.

“So, what’s up? Is Chante gonna be down or what?” Simone asked.

“I don’t think so. I mean she’s cool and all, but ours isn’t the kind of business you can just welcome someone into,” I said to Simone, even though that was exactly how I got her. I placed the phone back in its cradle and swallowed the last of my drink. I was had nice buzz going and this wasn’t really a conversation I felt like having with Simone. But I knew she wasn’t about to give up.

“So we just continue to have her hanging around? I mean, pretty soon she’ll figure it out, don’t you think? Nobody can be that fuckin’ dumb.” Simone snickered.

“Well, she hasn’t said anything to make me think she’s even curious.” I lied just to shut Simone up. She had a way of questioning everything. I hadn’t forgotten about the questions Chante had asked Bella, but a part of me was a little suspicious about why Chante never approached me. “Why don’t we think about getting our groove on,” I offered, trying to keep things light.

“Yeah, I feel you on that. So what’s up with the bachelorette party Diane mentioned?” Simone asked.

“Bachelorette party?” Bella questioned. “Diane, you are getting too gay for me.”

“Look, it’s like I told her. I don’t think we need to even start doing events like that. I mean, we make good money now. We start going out like that, I’m just afraid it could turn into something we don’t want.”

Simone didn’t look like she agreed too much with my response, but I meant what I said. “I didn’t start this business only to go right back to where I’d started. I see no real money in the stripping thing; especially since we make three or four times what a



stripper earns on a good night. This is easy money for a few hours on your back.” I knew for sure that old saying-been there and done that-applied in this case. It made no sense to start stripping at parties. And honestly, I was a bit pissed at Diane for even bringing it up in the first place. I went and sat down next to Diane. “Did you ever imagine things would turn out this way?” I asked.

“I always knew you were destined for the big-time. I watched how you came to Ecstasy and took over. Yeah, there were prettier girls working there. Better dancers too. I was a better dancer than you.” Diane laughed. “But you knew how to give those men what they wanted, and you made the money. So when you said you were gonna do this, I knew this was where the money was gonna be. Why do you think I begged you to be down?” Diane smirked.

“Smart girl.” I leaned closer to her. “So, why do you want to take a step backwards and go back to shaking your ass? I know it can’t be the money.”

“Honestly,” Diane said softly, “Creme asked me if I would do the party with her. I already told her what you said, but she wants to get with us bad and she’s trying anything.”

“I knew there had to be something else to it. I tell you what, why don’t you and me go by Ecstasy and I’ll tell Creme myself. That should get her off you.”

“Thanks, Jada. Once she hears no from you, maybe she’ll stop bugging me about it.”

Diane and I stood up and started getting ready to leave. “We’re gonna make a quick run, ladies,” I said to Bella and Simone. “Chante is on her way. Give me a call and let me know where y’all end up and we’ll meet you there.”

“Where y’all going?” Simone asked.

“Ecstasy,” Diane replied.

“The place where you guys used to dance?” Bella asked.

“That’s right,” Diane said.

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“What are y’all going there for?” Simone asked. “You’re not still thinking about asking that crackhead to join our family, are you?”

“Of course not,” I assured Simone.

“She getting on my nerves, so Jada’s going to shut her down,” Diane said.

“I wanna go,” Bella said quickly. She stood up and started shaking her ass. “I might even dance while I’m there.”

“Why, so you can fall off the damn stage again?” Simone asked and started to get ready to leave.

“Why you go

tta go there, Simone, with your no-dancing ass,” Bella came back.

“Aren’t we getting a little loose with the language, ladies?” I asked.

“Sorry, Jada,” they both said, and Diane stuck out her tongue. It was usually her that I had to chastise about her language, but lately it hasn’t been an issue.

“Where are you two going?” I asked.

“With you,” Simone said.

“No. You guys have got to wait here for Chante.”

“She has a cell phone, am I correct?” Simone said in as proper a manner as she could.

“Simone, you are absolutely correct. Chante does have a cell phone,” I said and took out my cell phone.

Bella walked up to me. “Can we talk for a second?” she asked quietly.

“Sure.”

“Jada, I don’t feel comfortable around Chante after the other night,” Bella told me.

“I understand. But that’s why I want you to wait here for her. I’m going to talk to her tonight, but I wanna know if she comes at you again.”

“What about Simone?”

“Have you told her anything?”

“No.”

“You let me worry about Simone,” I said and headed for the door. When I opened the door, there was Chante.

Chante

“Oh, hey, Chante,” Jada said, obviously startled to see me standing there.

I almost went for my gun when the door flew open. “I was just about to ring the bell.”

“Good, now we don’t have to wait for her,” I heard Bella say in the background.

“Y’all weren’t trying to leave me, were you?”

“Me and Diane were gonna make a run,” Jada said and looked at Diane. “But we can do that anytime,” she said and kept walking out of her apartment.

“Hey, Chante,” Diane said, hugged and kissed me on the cheek. After she squeezed my ass, she followed Jada to the parking lot. I can tell by the way she looks at me that she’s interested, and I’m curious.

Bella was standing in the hallway; but when I looked at her she looked away. I’d wondered if I had come on a little too strong when I tried to get Bella to talk the other night. “How you doin’, Bella?” I asked and followed Diane. Bella didn’t answer. I looked over my shoulder and saw she and Simone coming behind me. “What’s up, Chante,” Simone said.

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“Hey, Chante,” Bella finally said. She was smiling the way she always does, so I couldn’t be sure.

“Where we going?” I said as we got to Jada’s 500 Benz.

“Sensations,” Simone said.

“Again?” I said quickly.

“What, you don’t like Sensations?” Simone asked.

“I like it, but we were just there the other night,” I said and Bella looked at me. “Why don’t we go someplace else?”

“It doesn’t matter to me,” Jada said and got in the car. Diane got in the front seat; I sat in the back between Simone and Bella. Once we were all in, Jada asked, “Where you wanna go, Chante?”

“What about the Twenty-Grand Club?” I suggested, but anywhere other than Sensations was fine with me. The only reason they were even on Lieutenant Gineconna’s radar was because they were operating so high-profile in the middle of his drug investigation. I was sure that if I kept them out of Sensations and out of Sam’s reports, Gineconna would forget all about these ladies.

“Haven’t seen you in a couple of days, Chante, what’s been up?” Jada asked. I could see her piercing eyes in the rearview mirror.

“You remember I said my paper was getting a little short? Well, I’ve actually been thinking about looking for a job.” I wanted to start laying some foundation for when my job started preventing me from doing lunch. Diane and Jada exchanged glances. Diane smiled and Jada looked in the mirror. “I just been gettin’ my resume together and whatnot, but it’s a start, right?” I couldn’t tell if she was looking for a reaction from Bella. I glanced at Bella. She was staring out the window as if nothing I said amounted to a hill of beans. I was way too paranoid and it was starting to get on my nerves.

“Tough break,” Diane said, “having to get a job and all. Maybe you’ll get lucky and find a job doing something that you like.”

“Yeah, maybe I will,” I said and shank into my seat.

It was a completely different event when we went to other clubs. No limousine, no major entrance, no reserved table. We parked the car three blocks from the club and had to walk. We stood in line for twenty minutes and there was nowhere to sit once we got inside. Low profile. That’s how I intended to keep them. I think they preferred it this way, except Simone. She, more than Bella and Diane, reveled in the attention they got at Sensations. Out of the spotlight Jada, Diane and Bella don’t leave the dance floor, but not Simone. Not being much of a dancer, you’ll always find her posted up at the bar, surrounded by men and holding court. The dance floor belongs to the three former shake dancers. Men come and dance with them, but eventually they fade away; usually when they realized that each lady was trying to out dance the others and were paying them no mind.

Of the three, Diane was by far the better dancer, while Jada was more seductive. And even though she may stumble every now and then, Bella is a “saltshaker” that had men mesmerized. Me, I flow somewhere in between. I can hold my own on the dance floor, but I’m nowhere near the level the ladies are on. So I drifted to the bar where Simone was in rare form. One of her suitors asked her to dance. “I won’t dance with

you, but maybe Chante will,” she said and dismissed him with a hand. He was fine, so I danced with him.

When I came off the dance floor, Jada did to. She followed me back to the bar where Simone was. It wasn’t long before some good-looking man was handing me a drink. “Here you go, sweetie,” he said and began talking to me like I had known him all his life. Suddenly, I became aware that Jada was standing next to me.

“Chante,” Jada said and touched my arm, “do you have any plans after you leave here?”

“No. What’s up?”

“Nothing. I just wanted to ask you something.”

“What?” I asked, knowing she wanted to talk about me sweatin’ Bella.

“It’s really nothing-” Jada started. “But I was just wondering what you thought of me, Chante.”

Of all the shit that could’ve come out of her mouth, she asks me what I think of her. I wasn’t at all ready for that. “I don’t know.” I giggled and thought about an answer. “I like you, we’re friends, I guess.” And giggled again.

“I like you too, Chante. So that’s why when Bella said that you were-” Jada began.

“Hello, Ms. West,” a voice came from behind Jada.

When she turned to see who the voice belonged to, I got ready to give the speech I had ready.



“Ricky Stanton,” Jada said.

Oh shit! I thought as he stepped between us and kissed Jada on the cheek.

“How are you doing?” Ricky asked. He took a step back and looked at me. I could tell I looked familiar to him.

“I’m doing fine, Ricky.” Jada turned to me. “This is my friend-”

“Chante. We met a couple of months ago at Sensations. How’s the music business?” I asked him quickly before he remembered that he gave me Jada’s number after I got him drunk.

“Busy. Always something going on,” he said and turned to Jada. “Look, I gotta run, but I wanted to tell you we’re having a little party tomorrow night at my house. The One finished his next album, so if you’re not doing anything stop by.”

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“I’ll do that,” Jada said.

Ricky turned back to me. “Now, Chante is it?”

“It is,” I flirted.

“You say we met before. Did we get along?” Ricky asked me and Jada rolled her eyes.

I looped my arm in his and winked at Jada. “We got along very well.” I leaned toward Jada. “We’ll talk later, girl,” I said quietly to Jada. Anything to get away from that conversation, I thought, and left the club with Ricky.

After we left the club, Ricky Stanton took me to breakfast. And after breakfast, he took me to my apartment in his limo.

Damn, I loved being Chante.

She was living a life that I only dreamed of and knew would never happen for me.

13

Jada West

It was good seeing Ricky Stanton the night before. He was The One’s producer and one of my first clients. I’ve seen The One a couple of times since that night. As much as that night represented a turning point in my life, it was apparently just another

night at the tittie bar for The One. He doesn't remember it at all-not that I've gone out of my way to remind him. Each time he sees me it's like the first time we're meeting, and I always have to remind him that we've met.

I decided early in the day that I was going to the party, so some maintenance was in order. I called the spa and made an appointment. I was able to drag Bella and Diane along, but Simone rolled over and pulled the blanket over her head when we tried to recruit her.

"Go awa-a-ay," she shrieked. I had no idea when she had made her way in, because she was nowhere to be found when we left the club. Diane had come in just before sun up, but still she was down for the spa. I called Chante to see if she wanted to go, but she didn't answer. She slipped out the club with Ricky Stanton before we had a chance to talk, but I was sure I'd see Chante at The One's party.

Chante don't like to miss anything.

After the day at the spa, we prepared for the evening. Bella and Simone had early appointments for the evening; however, both planned to come to the party if it was at all possible.

As for me and Diane, we had a stop of our own to make before we headed for the party. Once we left the apartment, it wasn't too long after that, that we were seated at a table at Ecstasy.

We were definitely overdressed for the occasion. Diane dressed in her Carmen Marc Valvo satin cocktail dress, with the plunging V-neck in the front and back. And me in my new Betsey Johnson Battenburg-lace dress. "A lot of new faces in here," Diane said.

"You know how it is, they come and go," I replied as one of those new faces

approached the table. She was a caramel-skinned beauty with big pretty eyes, curvy hips, and large breasts. “Y’all wanna dance?”

“Yes,” Diane said quickly.

I looked at Diane as the dancer began peeling off what lit

tle outfit she had on. “I think Bella is right about you.”

“What?”

“I mean it’s cool-you know-if you’re into women.”

“I am definitely bisexual and leaning that way. It’s like-you know-dick is just a job for me now. I don’t know,” Diane said and turned her attention back to the dancer.

While Diane got her eyes full, I flagged down a waitress and ordered two Absolute and cranberry juice on the rocks. “If you see Creme tell her that she has guests in the house,” I said and gave her a fifty.

Before the waitress came back with our drinks, I saw what looked like Creme coming toward the table. If it was Creme, she had lost a lot of weight. I leaned close to Diane.

“When was the last time you saw Creme?”

“I don’t know; it’s been a while. Why?” Diane answered without taking her eyes off the dancer.

“Diane!” I yelled to get her attention and pointed at Creme.

“Damn!” was all that Diane could get out before Creme was at the table.

Creame was still cute, but her face was drawn and her olive skin had blotches. She had let her hair grow long and now it looked unkept. Her hourglass shape was gone, and her once firm breasts were sagging. Remembering what she looked like then, it was hard looking at her now.

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“Look at you two,” Creme said and pulled up a chair. “Diane and Miss Kitty herself.”

“Creme, what happened to you?” Diane asked.

“I had been sick. Had the flu and shit, lost a little weight. But I’m feeling better now; startin’ to get my weight back up.”

“How’s it going here? I was just saying to Jada that there are a lot of new faces.”

“It’s a’ight, but I’m ’bout burnt out on this. I need to do something different,” Creme said and then looked at me. “That’s why I been hollerin’ at Diane about gettin’ wit you.” Creme looked at Diane. Diane looked away.

I held up my hand to stop her. “Creme, don’t bullshit me. You know as well as I do that the flu didn’t make you lose all that weight. How much are you smoking?”

“You right, Jada, you right. I was on it pretty hard for a while, but I got it under control now,” Creme assured me, but I didn’t believe her. It looked like she had taken a hit before she came on the floor.

“You are in no condition to work for me.”

“Come on, Jada. I got that shit for real.” Creme looked around the room. “I just need to get outta this place.”

I looked around the room and thought back to my first days at Ecstasy. Diane was missing in action, so it was Creme who looked out for me, taught me the ropes. I

looked at her now and I saw the desperation in her eyes. “You are in no condition to work for me,” I said, but feeling like I had to do something. “But I’ll tell you what I will do for you.” I reached in my purse and handed her my card. “When you ready to get off the rock, call me and I’ll help you.” I stood up and looked at Diane. “Let’s go.”

It was after midnight when Diane and I arrived at the party. Bella and Simone were there when we got there, and so was Chante, of course. The living and dining rooms at Ricky’s house were fully packed with invited guests. They had gathered two hours after the exclusive event began to toast the host. Quite a few of our clients were there, but there were a lot of others who weren’t. The room was filled with upcoming rappers and a bunch of video vixens, one or two that I considered recruiting.

I looked around the room, nicely decorated with people mingling and having a good time. Not only was there a DJ who was spinning the hits, but there was a microphone in case any of the rappers felt like going freestyle.

“To a successful and profitable year,” Simone said, hoisting up her crystal champagne flute.

“Here, here!” I agreed.

I also noticed a couple of athletes were in attendance. Simone, the closest thing I had to a right- hand man, had already talked about luring the elusive men onto our clientele list. Simone leaned over as we watched Chante seductively dancing with a football player who was one of the targets. “Is she on board?”

“Nah, I don’t trust her like that.”

Simone brought the glass to her lips then looked at me, her eyebrow raised. “You don’t trust her? I can’t tell-I mean the way she hangs with you. I mean, it’s like she’s

already on the team,” she said.

“Well, she’s not.”

I glanced over at Chante and the ball player again. The two looked like they’d soon be headed for a room. When Simone cleared her throat, I looked to see what or who was holding her attention. She was watching Bella and the guy she was with.

“Who the hell is he?” she asked.

I looked at the roughneck who Bella was with. “Oh, that’s Bullet. He’s The One’s bodyguard.”

I motioned for Bella to join us. She excused herself from Bullet and came over to where Simone and I were standing. I asked her what was up with that, because from where we were standing, they looked like they were in love.

“Yeah, he’s been on me real hard since I got here,” Bella admitted.

“Well, is he a potential customer or a freebee?” I asked.

Bella looked at me and sucked her teeth. “Girl, please, who you talking to? You of all people should know. Aren’t you the queen of not giving up the goods for free?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “Yeah, you got that right. But I was just checking,” I said.

When Chante walked up Bella slipped away, and a few minutes later, I saw Bullet walking over to her. “What happened to the dude you were all up under?” I asked.

“Jada, I’m telling you, he’s a trip. All over me, but wanna talk about we need to go to my place because his fiancée is at his house!” Chante said with tons of attitude.



“Hmm, interesting,” I said, storing the information for later use. “I’m kind of tired. I’m thinking about getting out of here soon.”

“Yeah, you mind if I ride with you?” Chante asked.

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I shook my head. “Not at all.” It was obvious that she had had too much to drink. “Let me go check on the ladies.” After wandering around the house for a while, I found Diane. She told me that Simone was out by the pool talking with a couple of football players. “You seen Bella?”

“Simone said she left with Bullet.”

“We’re getting ready to leave. I’m tired and Chante is drunk.”

“I’m not drunk, Jada.”

“Whatever, Chante.”

“I’m gonna go too. Nothing here I’m interested in. I’ll let Simone know we’re going,” Diane said.

On the way back to my place, Chante went to sleep in the backseat. She was able to make it as far as the couch before she was out cold again. It was funny, I couldn’t wait to leave the party because I was so tired, but once I got home, a burst of energy popped up. So while Chante slept, me and Diane talked about Creme. How sad it was to see her looking like that.

I remember her offering me a bump before I went onstage that first night. “I was so nervous that night, Diane; and I was so tempted to hit it.”

“You see where you’d be if you did,” Diane reminded me.

It was maybe an hour after that when Simone came in. Once Simone started talking, Chante woke up and joined the conversation. I looked up and we'd been sitting around chit-chatting for nearly two hours. It was almost seven in the morning. Just as I was about to break things up and retire to the bed, the door opened and Bella stumbled in.

"What the fuck!" Simone screamed. Her horror was well justified. Bella's clothes were torn and stained with blood. One of her eyes was bruised, and blood was trickling down her lip and chin.

"What the hell happened to you?" I jumped from the couch. By the time I got to her, she nearly collapsed right into my arms.

"Somebody call 9-1-1!" Diane screamed. She rushed to my side and helped me move Bella's body to the couch.

"Forget 9-1-1," Chante said. "We need to get her to a hospital now. We can get her there a lot faster."

What she said made sense. We piled into my car as Chante nursed Bella in the backseat. When we arrived at the hospital, I didn't even take time to park the car. I pulled up at the emergency room entrance and I ran inside screaming for help.

"Please. . my friend. . she needs help! She's in the car!" I yelled. Two ER workers ran out to the car. I was so glad to have Chante there. She talked to the police and told them everything we knew, because the rest of us were useless. By the time Chante came walking into the waiting area where the rest of us were, everyone was silent with our own thoughts.

When the doctor came out, he told us that the beating Bella had taken had caused some internal bleeding. "Internal bleeding?" Diane questioned.

“Internal bleeding is the leaking of blood from blood vessels into spaces in the body. Deeper bleeding which involves arteries and veins can result in severe blood loss, which can result in shock.”

“What causes that?” Simone asked.

“It can be caused by a violent blunt force, such as being thrown against an object or the beating she apparently took.”

“But she seemed all right on the way here,” Simone said.

“Signs and symptoms of internal bleeding are less obvious than that of external bleeding. In fact, an injured person may appear normal at first.”

The doctor promised he would do all he could to help Bella, but when he came back an hour later, he didn’t even have to say a word for us to know the diagnosis.

“I am so sorry, ladies. There was nothing more we could do,” the doctor offered up. “The beating she took caused a lot of internal bleeding. It was just too severe,” he said somberly.

My head was spinning and pounding at the same time. I was fuming! I still couldn’t believe Bella was gone. Before the doctor could even finish, two detectives walked into the room.

“We need to know who was the last person to see her alive,” one officer said.

Bullet.

Unfortunately, I didn’t know his government name, but I knew where to find him. And once I did, he’d be sorry he ever laid hands on Bella.

We sat through the intense questioning with the detectives. When it was over, Chante drove us all home, and the ride was the longest I'd ever endured. I couldn't be sure just when Chante went home, but I know none of us ever got any sleep. We stayed up talking about Bella, still unable to come to grips with the fact that she was dead.

"I'm about to go find this nigga," I screamed.

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“What? And do what when you find him?” Diane wanted to know.

I stormed across the room and dug into a nearby closet, pulling several boxes before I found what I was looking for.

“When I find this muthafucka, I’ve got a bullet with his name on it.”

“Okay, you need to chill out,” Diane said. “You know the cops will find him.”

I looked at her, sucked my teeth, and tossed the gun into my bag. “I’m going to the studio; I’ll be back,” I said, leaving the rest of the ladies in the room in awe.

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Chante

I could tell something was wrong the moment I knocked on the door and no one answered. I knew for sure they were home. It was as if they were just sitting there, listening to me knock. I reached for the knob, and without much effort pushed the unlocked door opened. “H-h-hello?” I started to reach for my piece, thinking something just wasn’t right. “Is everything okay?” I walked down the short hall slowly, not sure if I should have my weapon drawn already. When I rounded the corner, I was confused by what I saw.

Somber faces stared back at me. I looked around trying to figure out where Jada was. “Hey, guys, what’s going on?” I asked no one in particular.

Diane buried her face into the palms of her hands and started sobbing.

“What’s wrong?” I looked around at Diane and Simone. They sat there stone-faced, not even acknowledging my presence.

“Where’s Jada?”

That’s when Diane looked up at me. Her eyes were swollen and red from crying. “She went after him.” She cried. “She went after him and I’m afraid of what’s gonna happen when she finds him.”

I stepped closer to Simone. “Who’d she go after? What are you saying?”

Simone sucked her teeth and rolled her eyes. “She went after Bullet. And I hope she finds his ass. Bella never hurt a soul. That muthafucka deserves exactly what he gets. I should’ve gone with her.”

I immediately started blocking Simone out. “How did she find him?” I asked Diane.

“She, um,” she said. Diane hunched her shoulders. “I don’t know. She just said she was going to the studio.”

“What studio?” I demanded to know.

“Triple Platinum,” Diane mumbled over her tears.

I turned to leave, but Simone grabbed my arm. “Where you goin’?”

“I’m going to find Jada.”

“I’m coming with you,” Simone said.

“No. You stay here and take care of Diane. Maybe Jada will change her mind and come back here. If she does, call me,” I told her and dashed out of there. I couldn’t allow Jada to go out like that.

Jada West

I was crying my eyes out when I got to the studio. I just hoped that he would be there. There were a lot of cars parked outside, so I didn’t want to walk in there waving my gun and yelling “Where’s Bullet!” Even though that’s what I wanted to do.

Then I got lucky. Bullet came out and walked to his car. I started mine and was about to follow him when he shut the door and went back inside. At least I knew he was there. So I turned off my car and waited.

A few minutes later a group of guys, including The One, came out, and within minutes, Bullet’s car was the only one left. I got out of my car and walked toward the door. As I passed his car I looked in the backseat. It was full of suitcases. He wasn’t getting away after what he’d done. I took out my gun and went inside.

It didn’t seem like there was anybody left in the building. Maybe Bullet had left with everybody else and I just missed him. That wasn’t likely; if he had come out, there was no way I’d miss him. And besides, if everyone was gone, why would they leave the door unlocked?

I wandered around the building looking in every room without success. “Where is he?”

As I continued my search, I began to hear the sounds of music playing and followed the sound. The closer I got, the louder the music became, the madder I got. I was so mad I couldn’t think straight. How could Bullet have done that to her? Bella was the sweetest, most kind and considerate, person I knew.



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When I reached the door where the music was coming from, I smelled smoke. Not weed; it smelled more like something was on fire. I opened the door slowly and walked in. There he was standing over a metal garbage can with a fire extinguisher in his hand. The muthafucka was probably trying to burn the clothes he had on when he beat Bella to death. “Bastard.”

The music was so loud that he didn’t hear me come in. With his back turned and his attention on the fire I was able to walk up on him.

“Put the fire extinguisher down and move away from the fire,” I said with me gun aimed at his head.

Bullet hit the extinguisher a few times to put the fire out and turned around smiling.

“I said put it down!” I yelled over the music.

Bullet laughed a little and put the extinguisher down. He tipped his head to one side and looked at me. When he started to move toward me, I took a step closer to him and screamed. “Don’t move!”

“Okay, okay,” Bullet said and began looking around the room before turning back to me. “You know the whole night I been tryin’ to remember where I knew those pretty-ass titties from. Now I remember you, Miss Kitty.”

“Shut up!” I yelled and my hands started shaking a little. This may not have been the time to think it, but I had never shot at, much less killed anybody before. But there I was, ready to put a bullet in Bullet’s head for what he had done. Bella was like a

sister to me. I couldn't let him get away with it.

"You might as well put that little ass gun down, Miss Kitty. You know you ain't gonna shoot."

"That's where you're wrong. You're gonna die." I knew that he could see my hands shaking. I was so mad that it felt like my whole body was shaking. I gripped the gun tighter.

"No, I'm not. Look at you, can't even hold the gun you're shakin' so fuckin' bad."

"Why'd you kill her?" I yelled.

"I didn't kill that ho."

"Yes, you did! She died this morning in the hospital from the beating you give her."

"She was alive when she left me. I can't be responsible for what happens to a ho when I'm finished with her. That bitch probably went out and found her another john and he killed her ass."

"No, it was you. If you didn't kill her, what are you trying to get rid of? Why is all your stuff in the car?"

"You can't prove that, dead ho's tell no tales."

All of a sudden, Bullet kicked the garbage can in my direction and I jumped back. When I moved, he dove behind a desk. When he came up he had a gun pointed at me.

"Now, I know you ain't gonna shoot me, but I will kill you just like I killed your ho. Now put the gun down."

“Fuck you!”

Bullet took another step closer. The door flew open.

“Freeze!”

Both Bullet and I looked toward the door; and to my surprise, it was Chante. What the fuck is she doin’ here? Whatever the reason, I was glad she was here with that big ass gun.

Chante

“Freeze!” I yelled as I came through the door with my gun drawn. Jada and Bullet had their guns pointed at the other.

“Who is this? Another one of your ho’s come to have a little threesome?” he laughed.

“No, she’s here so both of us can kill you,” Jada said.

“I’m not here to help y

ou kill him, Jada. I’m here to stop you,” I said without taking my eyes off him. I knew neither one of them was going to shoot the other or it would be over. They were both looking for a way out. All I had to do is stall.

“Stop me? What are you talkin’ about? He killed Bella.”

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“I know that. The police are on their way. Let them handle this.”

“NO!” Jada shouted at me. “He killed Bella and he’s gonna die for it!”

“No, Jada,” I said slowly and quietly. The tears were flowing from her eyes.

“He’s gonna die!” Jada screamed and took a step closer to him. Whether he meant to kill her or not, Bella didn’t deserve the beating she got from him. I had to defuse this situation fast or she just might do it. I couldn’t blame her, ’cause in reality, I wanted him dead too.

“Jada, please put the gun down.”

“NO!”

“He isn’t worth it.”

“I’m gonna kill him,” Jada said almost in a whisper.

“Please, Jada, don’t do this. Don’t throw your life away on this worthless piece of shit. The police will be here any minute. Just put the down, Jada. I got him; he’s not going anywhere.”

Jada slowly began to lower her gun. “Thank you, Jada,” I said and glanced at her. When I did, Bullet fired at me. I felt the shell rip through my left shoulder. The impact knocked me off balance. He tried to run.

I was about to return fire when Jada screamed, “NO!”

I saw Jada raise her gun, close her eyes, and empty her clip. The recoil put her on her ass. While she was down, Bullet turned and fired at Jada, but he missed her. I took careful aim and fired. I hit him with two shots to the chest.

He went down and I moved in on him. I held my gun on Bullet and kicked the gun out of his hand.

I looked down at Jada. “You okay?”

“I’m okay-I’m all right.”

Just then the door burst open. “Freeze!” one uniform yelled.

“Put your weapon down!” the other yelled.

I immediately put the gun down, raised my hands, knowing how trigger-happy some of my brothers in blue could be, and yelled, “I’m a cop!”

“What?” I heard Jada say.

I could see the look of hurt and disappointment in her eyes. “Yes, Jada, I’m a cop.”

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Jada West

Ain’t this a bitch? Chante’s a cop. I can hardly believe it, but here I am sitting in the backseat of a police car, somewhere I thought I’d never be, because I was just too smart, too careful. I knew that I wasn’t under arrest because nobody had read me my

rights and I wasn't wearing handcuffs. Bullet was dead though. Chante killed him. The bastard got what he deserved for what he did to Bella. Now she could rest in peace.

I heard Chante tell the other cops that I didn't hit a thing, so I wasn't all that worried. But the fact that Chante was a cop and she was all up in my world couldn't be a good thing. A million things were going through my mind as we drove to the precinct. Along the way, I tried to think of everything I'd said to her. I tried to remember who she'd seen us with. I had a lot of high-profile clients and now their reputations, and maybe their careers, were on my back.

I should have known better; should have seen this coming.

Chante's a cop. Ain't that a bitch?

We arrived at the precinct and I was taken to the same room that I had been taken to the last time I was questioned about a murder. I had been in there for about an hour and a half before anybody came in the room.

It was the same cop that questioned me the last time, and one I had never seen before. "Ms. West, my name is Detective Sergeant Banner; I'm with the homicide division, and I believe you already met Vice Lieutenant Gineconna."

Now I was scared. If this asshole was vice, then they'd been on me for a long time. It was all starting to make sense to me now. And the more it made sense to be me, the more scared I got. I was the target and Gineconna questioning me about that murder at Sensations was just the beginning of it. I should have stayed out of that club after that night; never gone back. But then I thought about it. If I was the target, club or no club, they would have come at me anyway.

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting so long," Banner said. "I only need to take your

statement and then you're free to go."

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I started to say something dumb like, “You mean you’re not going to arrest me for running a prostitution ring?” but I simply said, “I understand.”

Banner placed a tape recorder on the table and asked me to tell them what happened. While I told my story, Gineconna stood behind Banner and never took his eyes off me. Once I was done, Banner turned off the tape recorder, thanked me for my time, and got up to leave. Naturally, I stood up too. I followed the two cops to the door, but when I got to the door, Gineconna turned and blocked my path.

“I hope you learned something from all this Ms. West,” Gineconna said to me. Then he stepped aside and let me pass.

As I walked out of the precinct, I thought about his question. Had I learned anything? And if so, what was it? I was glad he didn’t want an answer, because I didn’t have one. Maybe in a day or two I would, but not now. Right now I was too shaken to think. Bella was dead; murdered by Bullet. Chante was a cop assigned to get close to me. There was definitely a lesson to be learned from all this, but all I wanted to do was go home.

When I came outside the building, the first thing I saw was Chante. She was leaning against my car. “How’d my car get here?” I asked her.

“I had it towed here instead of the impound.”

“Thanks,” I said and walked past her.

“Jada, wait,” she said and grabbed my arm.



I jerked my arm away. “What do you want, Chante? Is that even your name?”

“It’s Rachael, Rachael Dawkins. Chante is my middle name.”

“And you’re a cop.”

“Yes, Jada, I’m a cop.”

“How could you, Chante? I mean, Rachael or whatever your name is. I trusted you.”

“I was just doing my job, Jada.”

“Yeah well, if your job is to betray people who considered you a friend, then your job sucks.”

Chante looked away from me. I could see the pain in her eyes. “You’re right. It does suck.”

I leaned against my car next to Chante. “So, what’s going to happen next?”

“Nothing.”

“What do you mean nothing?”

“I mean that’s it. Gineconna told you that you were free to go, right?”

“Yes.”

“Well, there you go. If there was going to be any charges, you’d be under arrest now. I never told Gineconna anything.”

“I understand that, Chante. What I don’t understand is why, Chante? Wasn’t that your job?”

“You’re right, it was, but something happened to change all that. I wasn’t completely honest with myself, Jada, ’cause if I were, I woulda had to admit to myself who I really was, because I loved being Chante. The truth was that I found your lifestyle exciting. I mean look at yourself, Jada, you always wear the finest clothes, you get chauffeured around, and you’re making mad money. But it was more than that, Jada. I came to like you. We became friends.” That one made me smile on the inside because that’s how I saw her, as a friend.

“That’s deep, Chante. The cop and the Madame-friends.”

“Ain’t it?” Chante laughed.

“What are you gonna do now, Chante?” I asked her.

“I don’t know.”

“Wanna go get a drink?”

“I could definitely use one.”

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“Come on then,” I said and got in the car. Chante got in the passenger seat and broke out her sunglasses. As I drove off, I thought about the fact that it wasn’t all about the money at all. In the end, the money didn’t matter at all. It was about friendship.