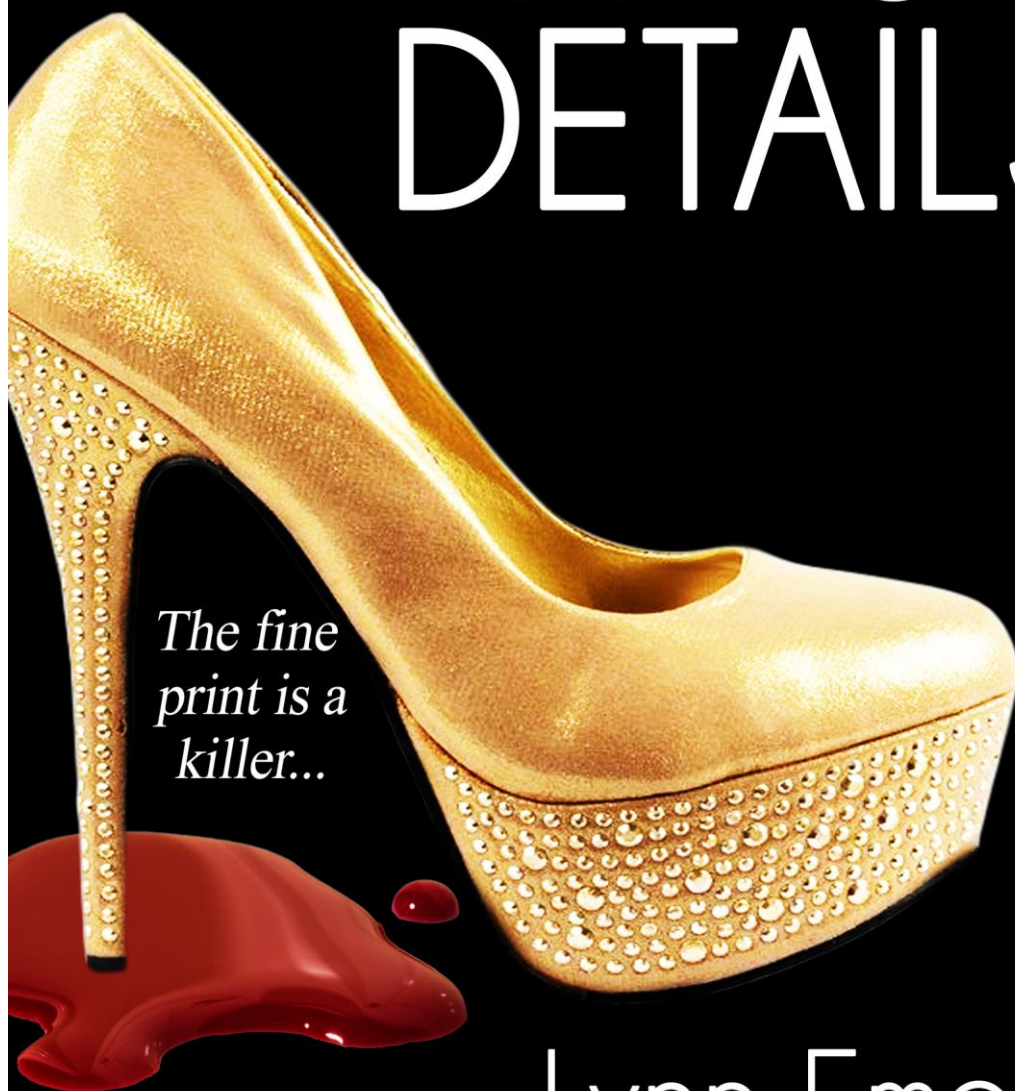




A Triple Trouble Mystery

DEVILISH DETAILS



*The fine
print is a
killer...*

Lynn Emery

Jazz stood outside leaning against the police cruiser watching the festivities. Nine o'clock on a Thursday night, the start to the weekend when she made sixty-percent of her profit. Candy Girls didn't have "exotic dance interpretation" every night like some clubs. Instead Jazz opted to have two quality dancers rather than a stable of hard looking girls that she could pay less money.

She tamped down the urge to cuss out the police officers strutting around on her property. At least they'd turned off those damn flashing blue and red lights on top of the three cruisers. After years of working in broken down clubs as first, a waitress, then a bartender, and last a dancer, Jazz had managed to pull together money to buy her own club. Okay, so Candy Girls wasn't the classy place she wanted, but it was a start. Now these damn cops...

The three waitresses working that night stood in a huddle with the weekend bartender, Tyretta. Two smoked cigarettes as they sneered at one uniformed officer in particular. He kept glancing at them. Dressed in the requisite tight, sexy red body suits and shiny black shoes with red bows, Jazz had to smile with pride. All three had figures that made men stare. Chyna, a petite twenty-year-old Chinese-American, crossed her arms over her enhanced breasts. Her given name was Hua, but she never used it. Chyna eyed the police officer as though keeping him in sight would ward him off. Jazz walked over to them.

"Y'all just be cool. This should be over in a minute," Jazz said. When Tyretta snorted, Jazz moved closer to her. "I mean it, Ty. Don't let your smart mouth write a check I have to cash. There is nothing for them to find."

“You better hope none of your customers are holding,” Tyretta muttered and sucked in more smoke from her cigarette. Holding was her way of saying they had drugs on them.

“Then that’s on them.” Jazz frowned when Tyretta gave another snort and added a grunt at the end for emphasis.

“They’ll take us all in, girl. Why you think they showed up? Cops don’t care about loud music in this hood,” Tyretta replied and went back to work making her long cigarette shorter.

“What? I-I can’t be arrested. My parents can’t find out I’m working here,” Chyna blurted out as her eyelids fluttered.

The police officer that had been eyeing the waitresses up and down popped out of nowhere it seemed. His hands rested on his duty belt. “Don’t worry about it, Miss...”

Silence stretched as he waited for Chyna to fill in her name for him. She inched closer to Jazz and mumbled, “Thanks.”

“What I mean is we’re just here enforcing the noise ordinance. Two of your customers were fighting in the parking lot when I pulled up. Another one has an outstanding warrant.” He spoke in an officious tone, trying to convey that he was somehow in charge of something. “I’m Officer Tim Mathis by the way.”

“Thanks for the information Officer Mathis,” Jazz said with a smile. She moved a little to partially block his line of sight on Chyna. “The other officers over there patrol here often, so they know my club is usually no problem.”

“Yeah, right,” Officer Mathis said gruffly. He was about to go on when the supervising officer on the scene called to him. He walked away, but looked over his shoulder before leaving.

“He keeps staring at me in a way I don’t like,” Chyna whispered.

“What you expect with them twin volleyballs you got?” Tyretta retorted, once again baiting Chyna about her breast implants. “Besides, guys stare at all of us all night. Hell, you oughta be grinning right back at that cop. We always could use a friend on the po-po squad in this part of town.”

Chyna ignored the dig about her newly acquired “C” cups. She didn’t get any bigger implants because of her slender frame. Still, because she was so tiny and just under five feet five, even in heels, she looked voluptuous. She grabbed Tyretta’s cigarette and took a puff.

“Yeah, you could be right. He’s not bad looking either,” Chyna said. She looked at the brown-haired man with interest. “For a white guy and all.”

“You gonna go for it?” Rochelle, the third waitress, nudged Chyna with an elbow.

“I don’t want no cops, on duty or off, hanging around my place,” Jazz cut in shortly. She tapped Chyna’s arm to pull her attention away from the officer in question. “Hey, you heard me?”

“Yeah,” Chyna replied, still looking at him. Her tone said she wasn’t listening. She’d given the policeman a slight smile, and he’d smiled back.

“Damn it,” Jazz started but broke off the beginning of her lecture when a familiar tall, dark frame came toward them.

“Well, looky here,” Tyretta whispered. “Humph, now that’s what I call a nice chunk of change right there.”

“Another cop,” Rochelle spoke low through tensed lips.

“I’ll be happy to be nice to this one.” Tyretta stood straight to give him the full effect of her almost six feet of curvy girl appeal.

Jazz sighed and wished she had one of her smooth smoking, slender cigarillos. Then she remembered that she was trying to quit. Detective Don Addison looked at ease despite being built like a professional wrestler ready to deliver a beat down. He wore a dark leather jacket over a sweater against the cool, late, last April night air. Jazz figured he had to be at least six feet four inches tall. Not that she was measuring him up or anything. Detective Addison didn't like her. She didn't like him either, not one bit. Okay, so maybe he looked good, but like one of her former foster mothers used to say, "Everything that looks good ain't good for ya." She must have been talking about Detective Donald Ray Addison for sure.

"Evening ladies. Another exciting night at Candy Girls I see," Detective Addison said in his silky baritone.

"Yeah, we always have something fresh over here," Tyretta said. She smirked when Jazz shot a heated look in her direction. With a jerk of her head, she led the other two women away. They joined the dancer on duty.

"I was in the neighborhood and just dropped by to say hello," Detective Addison quipped. He crossed his arms and watched his colleagues.

"Yeah, right. You moved from homicide to the loud noise patrol."

Addison's solid milk chocolate face moved closer to a smile, but it faded. "Nah, dude got killed over on Dalton Ave."

"I knew it. You showing up ain't a coincidence. Anybody I know?" Jazz's heart sped up despite the casual way she asked the question. "Or you can't talk 'cuz it's an on-going investigation like y'all tell reporters."

“It’s already been on at least one news show. Some guy name of Brandon Wilks. Got shot tryin’ to rob another drug dealer. Do you know him?” Addison went from watching the cops searching Candy Girls to studying Jazz.

“I don’t associate with drug dealers, Detective Addison. At least not anymore,” Jazz added when his left eyebrow inched up. “That kind of crap is bad for business.”

“This,” Addison swept a hand at the nightclub. “This is not a business for you to be in. Not if you want to stay away from bad things, Jazzmonetta.”

Jazz sucked in air and let it hiss out. She bristled at his presuming he knew her well enough to use her full name, and lecture her. “Well, thank you for that inspiring mini-sermon, Deacon Addison, but my club is legitimate. I have security, and I can take care of myself.”

“I’m not a deacon,” he replied mildly. “You sure didn’t mind getting spiritual guidance from that slick Reverend Fisher. Y’all still dating? I’m surprised his congregation didn’t toss him out of that big fancy church.”

“Lawrence, *Reverend Fisher*, is respectful and discreet.” Jazz tossed a section of her dark red weave over one shoulder. She noted with satisfaction that Addison looked at her with less than professional interest.

“So you didn’t answer the question,” Addison said.

“No, I’m not seeing Reverend Fisher anymore. Not that it’s anybody’s business,” Jazz said, putting enough sass in her tone to irritate him, she hoped.

“Humph, interesting. I meant you didn’t say if you knew Brandon Wilks, the dead robber,” Addison said dryly and gave a soft chuckle.

Jazz spun to face him. The twinkle in his eyes inspired an urge to slap him. “You think I’m hooked up to any crime within ten miles, huh?”

“Now, honey, don’t make me call out your rap sheet.” Addison took a step back and held up two huge hands, palm out. “Calm down now. You don’t want my fellow officers to come storming over here.”

“You- you...” Jazz no longer saw a tall, handsome, thirty-something man with the kind of muscles she liked. No, he was another tool of the system looking to have fun messing with other people’s lives.

“I’m just teasing you. I already know you don’t. I’ve tracked down Wilks’ known associates in the last twelve hours since they carted off his sorry carcass.” Addison tilted his head to one side. “Okay, so bad joke.”

“Humph.”

Jazz spun until her back was to him. She pushed down the anger bubbling in her gut. She’d spent a big part of her youth having people play head games on her. First, her mother. Vivienne had no business giving birth. Apparently God, Allah, Buddha, or whatever deity in charge at that moment didn’t give a shit about the poor kids she pushed out. Then a succession of social workers, unfit adult relatives, and foster parents had their turns. At sixteen Jazz decided she was done with people screwing with her. In the twelve years since, she’d kept that promise to herself.

“Bullshit. You wouldn’t be here if you didn’t think he, or maybe the dealer that shot him, was connected to me.” Jazz flipped back to street smart mode. “Well?”

“Just so happens the guy that shot Wilks, Cleavon Bennett, goes with a woman that used to perform with you. She works for your old boss now. But that’s not why...”

“Uh-huh, I knew you didn’t end up over here cuz you took the scenic route on your day off. I haven’t seen Kyeisha in almost a year since she took her thieving butt off my property.” Jazz scowled at him and looked away again.

“You and Lorraine still have bad blood about you buying Candy Girls out from under her, huh? Then Kyeisha pretended to be your friend, but was spying for Lorraine.” Addison shook his head. “Yeah, you got a right to still be pissed.”

Jazz clapped her hands slowly. “Give the man credit. His investigation skills are still sharp. So now you’re going to say I set up her man to get revenge. Like I’ve got time for that kind of petty shit.”

“Hmm, you know, I hadn’t thought of that angle. The case may be solved. Let me make a note,” Addison said and pretended to write with an invisible pen on an invisible note pad.

“Keep working the cop thing. Your comedy is stank,” Jazz retorted.

Addison dropped his hands. “Okay, look. Let’s call a ceasefire”

Jazz felt the heat go out of her animosity, but she wasn’t ready to give much ground. She had to let him know she wasn’t going to just melt because of his overgrown boyish charm. And, he was still a cop.

“Whatever. Go on and ask your questions.” Jazz crossed her arms and stared him down.

“I didn’t know there was a call over here,” Addison said. He sighed when her expression didn’t change. “So, have you talked to Kyeisha in the last twelve to twenty-four hours?”

“I haven’t seen her in almost a year *like I told you*. Let me save you some time. Yeah, I knew Cleavon was her boyfriend, and yeah, along with everybody else in the 70805 zip code, I knew he was a dealer. No, I don’t know where she is, and I sure as hell don’t know where Cleavon is. If they got sense, they’re miles away, ’cuz the guy either has a gang or family looking for them. Probably both.” Jazz finished by letting out a hiss of boredom. She sure needed that cigarillo.

As if on cue, the uniformed officer acting as the supervisor strolled over. “I’m Sgt. Patrick Evans, ma’am. I hear you’re the owner of this establishment?”

“Yes, and I’d like to get back to business. Wednesdays are a big day for me. I’m losing money out here while y’all arrest some folks for misdemeanor possession,” Jazz replied crisply.

“We’ve allowed your employees to go on inside. But are you saying you knew some of your customers were carrying illegal substances?” Sgt. Evans glanced at Addison with both of his blonde eyebrows raised. Addison said nothing, but nodded.

“Oh please. I run a night club serving liquor while girls dance around poles in one of the rough spots of Baton Rouge.”

Jazz pointed to a rectangular board painted white with bold black letters next to the double front doors. The rules were spelled out. “No loitering, no guns, and no drugs allowed on the

Sgt. Evans tapped on the screen of a small tablet. “Okay, just keep the music and the noise on the parking lot to a minimum as best you can.” He walked off.

“Whatever to you, too,” Jazz mumbled low. She swung around to face Addison. “You done questioning me?”

“I wasn’t formally questioning you, Ms. Vaughn. I just happened to see the flashing lights and decided to... Okay, fine. You don’t believe me. If you see your friend Kyeisha, tell her to give me a call. You’ve got my number.”

“Humph, I sure do. And Kyeisha is *not* a friend of mine. Don’t expect me to call you,” Jazz said. “Goodnight Detective Addison.”

“You could call me Don every once in a while you know,” he replied.

Jazz had already turned and was walking to the club. “No, I don’t think so.”

“See you around,” he called back, and gave a throaty chuckle.

She didn’t look over her shoulder. Instead she flipped a hand in the air and kept going. Once inside the club again, she checked with the bartender, cook, and the tall local man she’d hired as security. Jazz looked around. None of the tables, fixtures, or anything else was obviously damaged. She’d check again in the daylight to be sure.

Byron, her security guy on duty, approached. “Hey Jazz, Lilly sayin’ she’s too shook up to finish tonight. She wants to go home. I figure with the smell of cop still around here, might as well let her.” He shrugged his hulky shoulders.

Jazz glanced around at the dark interior of the club. Already, three guys had come in to sit at the round tables scattered around the floor. One was alone. The other two took a separate table about five feet from the stage. Rochelle got busy taking their drink orders. Tyretta was behind the bar. She wiped a spill from the counter top that looked like marble, a cheap laminate surface, obvious even with the lights low. The door swung open and a guy stuck his head in. After looking around for several seconds, he eased inside as though still on guard.

“Y’all want to give up getting paid?” Jazz grunted when Byron didn’t answer right away. “I’m running a business to make money. Get the music ready.”

“Okay boss,” Byron replied. He dutifully headed for the small booth set off to the side that contained a sound system hooked up to three speakers, each attached to a wall in the club.

“Cops asked her maybe one question, if that, and she’s shook up,” Jazz mumbled to herself as she strode across the floor.

Another door like the one that led to her office was on the opposite side of the bar. She pushed through it. A short walk down a hall brought her to the dressing room door, which she entered without knocking. Lilly sat in one of four chairs at a table. A mirror stretched the length of the wall above the table. She half turned when Jazz came in, but went back to stuffing make-up into a worn imitation leather tote bag. Only six two months past twenty years old, she had smooth dewy skin that needed little make-up. Jazz hired her because she saw not just talent, but a chance to keep Lilly from slipping into an even worse kind of profession. The signs were clear to Jazz. Lilly had had to grow up fast and hard, so Jazz made allowances. She considered Jazz old at twenty-seven, but had the good sense not to make that opinion too obvious. Jazz had survived her own tough childhood by learning to read people. She knew exactly what Lilly thought of her.

Lilly was the youngest employee and the one with the snappiest attitude. Cutting some slack was one thing. But bottom line, Jazz had a business to run, and nobody would be allowed to mess with her hustle.

“Byron told you I’m not feeling well,” Lilly said flatly. “I can’t perform when I’m upset. I’ll be stumbling all over the stage. Mama always said I was born with bad nerves.”

“So you don’t need your paycheck tonight?” Jazz replied.

Lilly looked up at Jazz’s reflection in the mirror, a frown on her smooth honey brown face. “Well I did one set before the police showed up and got our customers all jumpy. I should at least get half my pay,” Lilly protested. She turned around on the swivel stool and then stood to face Jazz. She put both hands on her hips. At five eight, Lilly seemed to loom over Jazz, who stood five-feet-five if she had on one inch heels.

“Customers expect to see dancing. I sell more liquor and food when I have a show. You work the full night like I hired you to do, or this will be your last night.” Jazz didn’t raise her voice but returned Lilly’s glare with one of her own.

“Damn, betcha only three old dudes out there,” Lilly shot back. But she turned around and started unpacking her make-up.

Jazz watched for a few seconds as she applied dark red lipstick. Then she brushed out the long, thick black hair that was mostly an expensive weave. Lilly shimmied out of the cotton jumpsuit to reveal she still wore her costume. The shiny neon red halter and matching thong made her honey brown skin seem to glow. Customers flocked to Candy Girls to watch Lilly wrap her long legs around the dancer’s pole. Still Jazz was beginning to look for a replacement. Lilly got on her damn high horse too often. Jazz was sure one night she wouldn’t show, would walk out in a huff, or Jazz would throw her out. The last possibility might be the first to happen. No employee would dictate to Jazz or give her attitude for long.

“Consider that visit from the police a long break. It’s almost nine o’clock. You perform between eight and midnight. I’ll pay the same.” Jazz turned around to leave.

“Gee, thanks.”

Lilly went on applying make-up. She dusted sparkly body powder across her generous cleavage and then the rest of her body, paying special attention between her thighs. The glitter was her signature. Guys lapped it up. Jazz was about to set her straight when Tyretta pushed through the dressing room door.

“Child, you better get your glittering rear in gear. The natives are gettin’ restless. You got some good tips comin’ your way. Guess who just slid in all undercover? Lil’ Bit,” Tyretta blurted out before anyone could take a stab at it. “Girl, you know he got some fifties with your name on ‘em. I’ve been keepin’ him hydrated for ya.”

“Just as long as he keeps his sticky hands offa me. He be tryin’ to sneak a feel when he passes a tip.” Lilly made a face, but began to primp with quicker movements. The sound system kicked in, playing a raunchy song by a local female rapper.

“Them bills gonna spend the same, girl. Sticky or not,” Tyretta quipped.

“You ain’t even lyin’,” Lilly tossed back with a chuckle. She shook her butt as if warming up, humming along with the music. “Later.”

Jazz nodded at her as she walked by. “You have trouble, just signal Byron. These dudes know I don’t play that touchy feely crap with my employees.”

“Okay,” Lilly said. Her tone and attitude were less salty. She dipped and swayed her hips to the music as she pranced out.

“And why are you in here instead of getting guys to spend money on drinks and food?” Jazz snapped at Tyretta once Lilly exited.

“I came in here to save her silly ass from a whippin’, and *you* from getting arrested,” Tyretta replied and pointed a forefinger at Jazz.

“Humph. I think you just delayed what is eventually going to happen anyway. Lilly is on my nerves every chance she gets.” Jazz glanced around the dressing room. “And she better straighten up the mess, too.”

“Oh c’mon, relax boss lady. She’s not the only one that junks this room up. What’s got you in such a bad mood?” Tyretta picked up scarves on the floor and draped them on hooks attached to the walls as she talked.

“You mean losing almost three hours of income, a smaller than usual crowd because of the cops, and being linked to a murder isn’t a clue?” Jazz shot back.

Tyretta dropped a hairbrush on the table and stared wide-eyed at Jazz. “Wait, a murder? Who said anything about a murder? I thought the cops came around because of loud music and noise out on the parking lot.”

“Yeah, they always use some lame-ass excuse to make trouble. Some lil’ dude got shot up by Kyeisha’s thug boyfriend. Addison naturally hauls his long, tall self over here to harass me,” Jazz grumbled. “And, Lilly sure as hell better clean up before she leaves.”

“Right, I’ll tell her,” Tyretta replied. She followed Jazz out, a frown twisting her chocolate brown face.

Jazz headed down a hallway behind the stage out front taking the back route to her office on the opposite side of the club. She turned right at another shorter hallway that ended in her office. Tyretta followed on her heels asking questions about the murder.

“Look, you think I’m CNN or Fox News?” Jazz retorted over her shoulder. “All I know is some dude is dead and they looking for Cleavon. That’s all I want to know. Why in the hell he think Kyeisha is a friend of mine?” She muttered another curse at the ringing cell phone on her cluttered desk. “Well at least nobody stole my cell while I was out there.”

“Detective Addison uses excuses to hang around ‘cuz he’s sweet on you.” Tyretta took a melodramatic step back when Jazz spun around and scowled at her. “I’m so scared, but I gotta tell the truth.”

“Humph.” Jazz sat down at the desk. She found the box of cigarillos, pulled one out, and lit up. She inhaled the sweet smoke and let it out.

Tyretta had become the closest anyone had ever come to being Jazz’s best friend. They’d met at a group home after both had been kicked out of separate foster homes. Despite appearances, their bickering never amounted to more than their unique way of communicating. In some ways they were closer than Jazz was to her older sister, Willa. She thought of her sister because the caller ID on her phone showed Willa was calling. The phone played a popular R&B tune again. Jazz grunted and picked up.

“Yeah, Willa. The cops must call you when they come around here, huh? Get out of my business. I’m grown.” Jazz rolled her eyes to the ceiling. She sucked in more smoke, and let it trail from her open lips. “Yes, I’m fine. Hell no, I don’t need bail money. I’m at the club. I’ll talk to you later. I’ll let you know ‘bout dinner on Sunday. Bye.”

“She cares about you. That’s something. More than I can say for my jacked-up family,” Tyretta mumbled.

“Willa is a control junkie, all right? Not enough she got them two crumb snatchers to take care of, but she gotta be in my face asking questions.” Jazz dropped her cell phone into the pocket of her leather jacket. Then she took it out again and sent a text to Byron. “See if Lilly is out there workin’ her butt to make me some money.”

“I think it’s wonderful that she invites you over for Sunday dinner.”

“You wouldn’t think it was so *wonderful* if you had to deal with her holy-roller Aunt Ametrine preaching at you over mashed potatoes and meatloaf. Sister Ametrine will all but hit you over the head with her Bible. Talks about how Christians need to ‘smite the demons out of misguided folks’.”

Willa and Jazz had grown up in foster care thanks to Vivienne, their troubled, neglectful mother. They’d been separated six times. Jazz being younger had stayed with Vivienne almost four years after she was born. Willa had been removed by child welfare by then. Willa’s fourth set of foster parents adopted her. Through them she gained three aunts and six uncles, “holy-roller” Aunt Ametrine being one of her adoptive mother’s two sisters. Jazz didn’t call them her family, because in her mind they weren’t. No matter what they tried to say.

“Is it good meatloaf? I love me some good meatloaf and gravy. Umf!” Tyretta nodded.

“You’re not listening to a damn thing I say. I...” Jazz stopped when her phone signaled a text. “Damn right she better be dancing. I got bills to pay.”

“Who’d you say got killed tonight?” Tyretta said, switching gears back to the murder.

“It was yesterday or last night. Some guy named Brandon Wilks.” Jazz waved a hand and turned her attention to the invoices on her desk.

“I know that name,” Tyretta said frowning. “I wanna say he ran with the South Side of Town boys, you know that gang from the bottom.”

“You mean one of the four or five gangs in the bottom,” Jazz replied dryly.

“The Bottom” was the nickname for a south Baton Rouge neighborhood. Starting in the forties and fifties, many middle-class and stable blue collar African-American families moved there. The area boasted the first Black high school offering a diploma. Two of the

city's first African-American doctors had offices there and so did a black dentist. Small businesses flourished as well, with upholstery shops, various repairs shops, and more that catered to black customers. Black Baton Rougeans avoided the demeaning experience of being forced to enter through a back door or being called "boy" and "girl". And like many black neighborhoods, the passage of time brought change that wasn't for the better. The downward slide began in the mid-1970s. When crack hit in the eighties, the slide became a speedy tumble down into a crime infested "hood".

"I think they hooked up with some of those Spanish dudes that started movin' south of LSU. Off GSRI Road, you know where I'm talkin' about. Or maybe they got into a turf fight with 'em. I don't know. That was three years ago maybe." Tyretta sat back and warmed to her subject.

"Yeah, I heard they kissed and made up, started doing deals together. Or something."

"Nice history lesson, Tyretta. Now get back to..." Jazz's head snapped up. "What did you say about Spanish dudes?"

"You know I was livin' in Atlanta back in the day, moved there in 2005 for a minute. When I came back in 2007, I dated this guy named Rasheed. Damn, he was fine but he--"

Jazz cut her off to redirect her back. "Right, Rasheed was all that. But what about the Spanish dudes?"

"Some crazy gangsters from Houston and Cali I remember. Rasheed used to party with them. Wonder where he is now?" Tyretta brushed her long locks as though expecting handsome Rasheed to walk through the office door.

"In prison. Got thirty years for stabbing his girlfriend. She almost died. You remember the names of any of those Hispanic gangsters?" Jazz got up and came around the desk.

“Damn, he didn’t even kill the girl and he got thirty years,” Tyretta said.

“She was the third person he attacked in four years, and he had a record for other stuff. That dude is a violent psycho with a nice body and charming smile. Good thing y’all broke up.”

Jazz leaned against her desk and crossed her arms. She’d rattled off Rasheed’s fate, but her mind was on another handsome gangbanger, one from her own past and with a sexy, silky Spanish accent. Filipe Perez had been her lover of the moment four years earlier, but Jazz didn’t remember Brandon Wilks. Not that she knew all of his thug life associates. Like Rasheed, Filipe was in prison. Jazz hadn’t kept in touch, mainly because she’d helped put him there.

“Damn, Rasheed. You crazier than I thought you was,” Tyretta said and stood up.

Chyna knocked though the door was halfway open. “Hey, I wanna take a break, Ty. Not many guys out there, so you won’t be running your legs off. Sorry, Jazz.”

“We’ll pick up by Friday or Saturday,” Jazz said, her thoughts not on the small crowd or weekend.

“Okay, I’m comin”, Tyretta replied and waved to her. When Chyna left, Tyretta turned back to Jazz. “So you know that guy what got shot after all?”

“I’m not sure. Maybe I can find out though. Bet my pain in the ass sister can tell me but not before I have to hear a long lecture. Guess I’m going to put up with her smart mouth kids and crazy aunts.”

“Quit frontin’, ‘cuz you love those kids.” Tyretta had a distracted expression as though her thoughts were elsewhere. “You’re lucky to have a place where you’re welcome.”

“Yeah, whatever,” Jazz retorted with snort. She sent a text message to Willa accepting the Sunday dinner invitation and asking for a favor. Then she plotted out making time to do some of her own research.



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