

JERMAINE CREWS AND J. CERRONE

HOOO

POLITICS



Hood Politics

Jermaine Crews

x

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Chapter 1

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Kareem and Yolanda sat beside each other at the bar inside a hookah lounge on South Street in Philadelphia – drinking, smoking and getting to know each other.

“I’m glad you finally let a nigga take you out! Are you having a good time?” Kareem asked as he turned his head, exhaled smoke from the hookah the couple were sharing and smiled at his female companion.

“Yeah, I’m glad I did too. I’m definitely having a good time with you Kareem,” Yolanda replied, smiling as she sipped her fruit-flavored alcoholic beverage. She clenched the straw between her teeth sensually when she smiled. Yolanda didn’t mean to entice Kareem, but she was naturally sensual and unintentionally provocative at times. The alcohol in her system brought her sexuality to the fore.

“That’s what’s up! Me too,” Kareem gazed at Yolanda longingly as she finished her drink and placed the empty glass on the bar. He casually placed his hand on Yolanda’s leg, hoping she was as sexually aroused as he was. If not, he hoped she would be soon. “You want another drink, sexy?”

“Boy! You tryna get me drunk or something?”

“Never that, shorty!” Kareem objected. “I just want to make sure you have fun while you’re with me.”

“I’m just messing with you. You can relax, Kareem. I’m not one of those ‘Me Too’ bitches,” Yolanda giggled while retrieving her cell phone and unlocking the screen. “But I do have to get home to my boys. I can’t stay out

too long and leave them and my dad home alone all night.”

“I respect that. I could tell you were a good girl when I met you at your job. That’s why I had to shoot my shot after my last appointment.”

“Aw, you’re sweet Kareem,” Yolanda smiled reluctantly. “I’m glad I gave you a chance. We’ll have to do this again sometime when I’m not working or taking care of my twins and my dad.”

“That’s a bet. Any time you wanna spend some of your time off with a nigga, just holla! I guess we should roll out, then,” Kareem suggested as he stood up and pulled Yolanda’s chair out for her. “You gotta use the bathroom before we dip?” Kareem turned and asked Yolanda as he retrieved cash from his pocket and handed it to the bartender.

“No, I’m fine, thanks. We can go.”

Kareem nodded to the bartender and security guards as he placed his arm around Yolanda’s shoulder, escorted her out of the bar and led her to his car, concluding their first date. Kareem quickly navigated the light traffic on I-76 until he reached the Roosevelt Expressway. The young playboy’s luxury vehicle floated through traffic until he exited the highway and reached his neighborhood in the Logan section of the city. Kareem parked on his block, behind Yolanda’s car, exited his vehicle and opened the door for his date.

“So, do you want to come in and use the bathroom or something before you drive home?” Kareem asked somewhat clumsily, breaking the awkward silence between the two.

“You seem awfully worried about me using the bathroom, Kareem!” Yolanda chuckled. “You tryna find any excuse to get me in your crib with my pants down, huh?”

“Is it that obvious? Sike, naw! I’m just trying to make sure you’re good, sexy. But I also wouldn’t mind if you came in and chilled with a nigga for a quick minute before you rush home to your fam.”

“Aw, you’re so sweet,” Yolanda smiled bashfully, revealing her deeply inset dimples. “Thanks Kareem, but maybe next time. I’m not with the ‘Me Too’ shit, but I’m also not the type to go inside a man’s house on the first date, if you know what I’m saying. But if you really want to get to know me, I’m definitely down to hang out again when I’m not working or busy with my family.”

“Yeah, I definitely want to get to know you, beautiful. I’m ready whenever you are,” Kareem hesitated as he stood a few feet from Yolanda who crossed her legs awkwardly, slightly bent her knees and swayed her torso back and forth as she unlocked her car door.

“Okay. Well, I’m gonna get going,” Yolanda began. “Thanks again for taking me out, Kareem.”

“You already know, sexy,” the man affirmed as he pulled Yolanda’s car door open for her. “Any time, just let me know what’s up. Please call or text me to let me know you made it home okay.”

The reserved young woman stepped closer to Kareem bearing a large grin, embraced the man and kissed him softly on his cheek.

“Thank you, King. You’re so thoughtful. I definitely will!”

“You already know, ma,” a now smug Kareem replied confidently. “These streets are vicious. I definitely want to chill with you again, so I gotta make sure you’re good.”

At that, the young man stepped back and approached the sidewalk as he

watched Yolanda start her vehicle. Yolanda slowly pulled away from the curb as Kareem turned and began to walk to his house.

Yolanda slowly drove away from Kareem's house, down the block and began to turn the corner as she retrieved her phone to call her father. As soon as Yolanda turned at the end of Kareem's block and noticed notifications for text messages and voicemails on her mobile device, she pulled over and parked her vehicle to check her messages before continuing to drive away.

"This is *exactly* why I never get to have fun," Yolanda complained aloud to herself. "I can't be away for a whole two hours without them blowing up my phone!"

From her peripheral vision, Yolanda noticed four dark, ski-masked figures exiting a van parked across the street from where Kareem had parked his car. Three of the figures quickly crept across the street, while the fourth waited, standing near the van, smoking a cigar.

"That's weird," Yolanda nervously thought to herself. "What the hell is going on? I know them niggas aren't about to run up on Kareem!"

No sooner had the thought crossed Yolanda's mind when multiple flashes of light reflected from Kareem's porch and shone in the rear-view mirror of Yolanda's car as the young woman heard multiple gunshots ring out. She momentarily watched through her rear-view mirror as she saw the three dark figures run back across the street and return to the van. The man who had been smoking the cigar tossed it before quickly entering the front driver's side door of the van. The cigar-smoking getaway driver removed his ski-mask and shook the other men's hands in a celebratory fashion before quickly pulling away from the curb. At that very moment, Yolanda frantically ducked down in her seat and turned off her vehicle's headlights to avoid

being noticed.

“Oh shit! Oh shit! Oh shit! I know they didn’t just hit Kareem up! Oh my God! What the fuck?”

The young woman remained crouched down in her vehicle, hyperventilating as she heard the van speed by. Yolanda quickly snuck a peek to make sure the van had completely passed and the coast was clear.

“Municipal plates? That’s weird!” Yolanda made a mental note of the fact that the “hit-vehicle” bore Municipal plates as if it were one of the vehicles used by the city workers of many of the local government agencies during the day. Yolanda’s whole body convulsed violently as if she had been enduring sub-zero temperatures, but her reaction was caused by her sheer terror. Within a few short minutes, Yolanda finally regained control of her emotions and dialed 9-1-1 on her cell phone.

“9-1-1... What’s your emergency?”

“Hi... um... I need some help please,” Yolanda sniffled and stuttered into her phone. “I think my date just got shot!”

Chapter 2

“Yes, Mister Billups? When would the doctor like to see you again?” Yolanda asked Kareem after hanging up the phone. Kareem was leaning on the counter, smiling at Yolanda as she sat at her desk, typing, with the telephone receiver wedged between her ear and shoulder.

“You didn’t realize this was my last appointment? I’m free!”

“Oh, really?” Yolanda asked. “No, I’m sorry. It’s been so hectic in here. It’s hard to keep track sometimes. Well, I hope the therapy helped you. I wish you the best of luck Mister Billups.”

“C’mon sis,” Kareem snickered. “I’ve been coming here six months and you’re still calling me ‘Mister Billups?’ I told you to call me Kareem. You know I’m on your top. You gonna let me take you out now that I’m not a patient anymore? We wouldn’t be mixing business with pleasure!”

“I don’t know Kareem,” Yolanda hesitated, tapping her pen on her desk. “I’m real busy. I work here all day then go straight home to my sick father and my twin boys. I barely have time to relax before I gotta do the whole thing over again the next day.”

“That’s why you should let me take you out,” Kareem quickly retorted. “I won’t even take up much of your time. I’m busy too, so I ain’t with wasting time. Put my number in your phone so you can figure out when you have a couple free hours. I’ll come scoop you. I guarantee you won’t regret it.”

“So much for, ‘not regretting it,’ huh?” a visibly shaken Yolanda asked the first-responding uniformed officers after recounting the events leading up to her first date with the now deceased Kareem. She was sniffing and wiping

tears from her face when the two young, Black homicide detectives, Rocky and Antoine, arrived in their unmarked Dodge Charger with dark-tinted windows, approached her and began to ask questions about the events of the evening.

“I’m sorry for your loss ma’am. I’m Detective Rocky Shabazz and this is my partner, Ant Godfrey. We’ve been assigned to this case. What was your relationship to the victim? He was your boyfriend?”

Rocky extended his hand and offered a warm smile as he took over questioning the witness from the uniformed police officers who had been the first to arrive at the murder scene. After hearing his partner’s questions, Antoine introduced himself to Yolanda, trying to hide his smirk, as he allowed Rocky, the notorious ladies’ man of their unit, to take the lead in questioning the attractive, young murder witness. Yolanda quickly exchanged handshakes with Rocky and Antoine as she replied to Rocky’s questions.

“I’m Yolanda Evans, but people call me Yo-Yo. No, Kareem wasn’t my boyfriend. I was just telling the other officers that I met Kareem at work. I’m an office manager at a physical therapy practice and he was a former patient. This was our first date!”

“Some first date!” Antoine tactlessly replied.

Yolanda huffed and darted her eyes at Antoine, folding her arms across her abdomen. Antoine raised his arms passively in surrender, realizing based on Yolanda’s reaction, that his reply had been in poor taste.

“Please excuse my partner’s insensitivity, Miss Evans. His sense of humor has been impacted by many years of working Homicide,” Rocky explained.

“I’m sorry ma’am,” Antoine added. “That was inappropriate and

unprofessional of me to say. I was just trying to diffuse the tension. I know this must be very traumatic for you.”

“Look, I get it – sometimes you gotta laugh to keep from crying,” Yolanda interjected. “The thing is, we weren’t even close. Like I said, it was our first date and he was a former patient. This was my first time seeing him outside of work. But he was a cool guy and I did have fun with him tonight. I work very hard and take care of my kids and my disabled father alone. I never go out. I finally let somebody convince me to go out and I watch him get murdered the very same night! This is why I hate this fucking city! You know the van the shooters were in had ‘Municipal’ plates? These motherfuckers actually stole a city van to kill Kareem! Who the hell did this nigga have beef with?”

“That’s what we’re going to find out,” Rocky stated resolutely. “We understand how difficult this type of situation can be, Miss Evans. We’re here to assist in finding the people responsible and bringing them to justice. We also offer victim services and grief counseling through the city. We can have somebody contact you if you’re interested. I don’t want to take up too much of your time tonight, but I just need to take an official statement to aid in our investigation.”

“How are my favorite ladies in the whole world doing? You need help with those bags, babe?” Antoine asked his wife, Jenae, when he finally noticed her and their young daughter enter the front door of their residence. As was his custom after arriving home from work on most days, Antoine was already in a half-drunken stupor, seated on his sofa, gazing at the television when his wife and daughter, Antoinette, arrived.

“No, I already got it,” Jenae huffed while gritting her teeth as she hastily carried a half-dozen grocery bags into the kitchen. Jenae had already

observed her husband's intoxicated demeanor, sighed and rolled her eyes as she walked by him, carrying the groceries into the kitchen. Upon seeing his wife's perturbed reaction, Antoine quickly sat upright and stumbled as he stood up to greet his family.

"Daddy! I'm good! How are you? You look tired," Antoinette exclaimed, smiling as she ran and jumped into her father's arms.

"Yeah, baby. Something like that!" Antoine chuckled as he sat down again, still embracing his young daughter. How was your day at school?"

"It was good," the young girl hesitated. "Except for a boy tried to kiss me at recess today!"

"Is that so? A boy is already trying to kiss my baby-girl in kindergarten?" Antoine shook his over-protective head in genuine disappointment.

"Yes, Daddy! But I told him no! I told him my Daddy says I can't kiss anybody until I'm married!"

Antoine grinned sloppily as he removed his gun from his holster, his daughter still seated on his knee.

"That's my girl! If he tries it again, you tell him your Daddy is the police and I'm gonna come up to that school and let him kiss the barrel of my gun!" Antoine's speech was slurred but firm. There was no question in his young daughter's mind that her father meant every word of what he said. However, Antoinette was so young she couldn't truly comprehend the gravity of her father threatening to shoot one of her young classmates for attempting to kiss her.

"You're funny Daddy," the kindergarten student giggled bashfully.

“You know how much I love to make my baby-girl smile, but I’m not trying to be funny right now. I’m dead-serious. Let them little boys know!”

Upon overhearing the conversation between her husband and daughter which was quickly turning morbid, Jenae quickly entered the living room and picked Antoinette up from Antoine’s lap.

“C’mon baby-girl. Go upstairs, use the bathroom, wash your hands and change your clothes so you can play while I make dinner,” Jenae instructed her innocent daughter who quickly complied. Antoine and Jenae watched as their daughter happily scurried up the stairs. Once Antoinette was out of sight, Jenae turned and folded her arms as she sharply cut her eyes at her husband. “For real, Antoine? You’re gonna pull out your gun while you’re holding our daughter on your lap and tell her to threaten a little boy in her class?” Jenae was whispering, but she was doing so in the most aggressive manner she could without their daughter overhearing the conversation.

“Hey... she needs to let them little horny, future inmates know her father doesn’t play that shit!” Antoine’s speech slurred as he took another sip of his alcoholic beverage. “Ain’t nothing wrong with guns anyway! That’s the problem with Black people – criminals and thugs are the only ones with the guns! I’m a start taking her to the range as soon as she’s old enough! I’m a make sure she knows how to shoot them little rapist bastards her damn self!”

“The hell you are! You need to stop drinking,” Jenae snapped. “Even our daughter can tell something is wrong with you! You’re tripping Antoine! Lord Jesus, give me the strength! What the devil has gotten into you?”

After hearing Jenae’s last statement, Antoine began to laugh hysterically, catching his wife completely off-guard.

“What? Did you just get possessed by the spirit of an eighty-year-old

Baptist woman? What are you even talking about?" Antoine bellowed.

"I'm talking about how you act and the stuff you say to our daughter. It's totally inappropriate! Your drinking is getting out of hand. You're always drunk by the time we get home. That's when you are actually home and not in the streets working a case. You don't even know what you're talking about half the time if it's not about work! You need to talk to the pastor at my church," Jenae ranted.

"Look, babe," Antoine interrupted before his wife could continue. "I'm glad you're feeling all spiritual now that you got 'saved' or 'born again' or whatever you wanna call it. But you're not even the same person anymore. You're not the woman I married."

"Uh... that's the whole point, Antoine! I've become a better woman, a better wife and a better mother thanks to my Lord and Savior. All things are possible through Christ. Just because you're a detective and lock up criminals, that does not mean your lifestyle is approved of in the eyes of the Most-High. You better save your soul before you lose your family!"

"Aw, here we go with this shit again!" Antoine sighed as he took another large gulp of his alcohol. "You constantly nag the hell out of me and wonder why I drink so damn much? For real, Jenae?"

"You are so lost and disrespectful, it's sad." Jenae shook her head in disgust before continuing. "I love you, but you need to do better. For real, Antoine."

Antoine finished his drink and rose from the sofa. Without uttering another word, he walked past his wife, into the kitchen and refilled his glass with more hard liquor.

“Now I know you’re not in there getting another drink!” Jenae shrieked when she heard the sound of the glass resonating from the kitchen. “Did you hear what I said to you? Antoine. Antoine!”

Chapter 3

“Antoine! Ant! Did you hear me, partner?”

After Rocky called his name several times, Antoine finally snapped out of his flashback and noticed Rocky and Yolanda staring at him with puzzled expressions on their faces.

“My fault y’all,” Antoine apologized, a vexed expression plastered across his face. “Here’s my card, Miss Evans. Feel free to contact either of us with any questions or if you remember any other details about what happened. I’m very sorry for your loss.” He then shook Yolanda’s hand, briskly walked away and entered the passenger’s side of the unmarked Dodge Charger.

Rocky, who was left standing alone with the witness, decided to walk Yolanda to her vehicle and stood by until she drove away. He then walked over to the Dodge and entered the driver’s side.

“You good, bro?” Rocky turned and questioned his partner, motivated by true concern. “Your head ain’t in the game tonight, man. You were zoning the fuck out back there!”

“Yeah, man... the usual bullshit with wifey. We got into it again when her and the baby got home today. She’s always coming at my neck like I don’t bust my ass to provide for my family and protect this city at the same damn time! Talking about I need to chill with the drinking. She has no idea what it’s like to deal with the dead bodies of people that look like us all day every day.”

“Most people don’t, my man,” Rocky admitted. “All the women I date – why do you think I’m still single? Being a homicide detective is a lonely life.

Nobody understands it but us. That's the only reason I'm still cool with your ass! You know I don't even really fuck with you like that! Ha-ha!"

"Yeah, whatever, nigga! The feeling is mutual," Antoine laughed. "Maybe that's why Jenae is tripping, though. She's always preaching, talking about how I'm a 'lost soul' and pushing that 'getting saved' shit. Maybe I really ain't shit!"

"Man, listen! I was just fucking with you. You already know this," Rocky interrupted his partner. "You better man up and stop talking that dumb shit. Yeah, you drink to handle your stress. Everybody copes some type of way. I'm addicted to working out and I run through women faster than Usain Bolt runs through the finish line! Jenae is a shopaholic like most females I know. Ain't nobody perfect. Jenae loves you. She's just on this new religious kick and she's on your top about it because she thinks it's best for your family. I'm sure she'll chill out eventually."

"Thanks for the pep talk. Yeah, it is what it is. Fuck it. Now let's get back to work," Antoine sighed.

Rocky turned the volume of the stereo in the unmarked Charger all the way up and quickly pulled away from the murder scene so the men could make their way back to the precinct.

When the men arrived, they proceeded directly to the break room and drank coffee in preparation for their long night working on the new homicide case. Shortly thereafter, a middle-aged white detective named Richard McGowan, "Dick," entered the break room to refill his own coffee mug. The slim, salt-and-pepper-colored haired man looked at the men, then dramatically looked at his watch, then back at his two colleagues, appearing to be in shock at the sight of Rocky and Antoine.

“Yous guys don’t ever want to go home, huh? Didn’t yous just leave a couple hours ago? I know you probably got some fine piece of ass waiting on you at your bachelor pad, Rocky! You goddamn playboy!” Dick chuckled as he attempted to strike up a conversation with the men.

“Yeah, you know how I do,” Rocky shrugged nonchalantly. “Pussy has never been a problem for me. The job is the job, though. It’s always back and forth. This is the life we chose.”

“Yeah, I had just enough time to go home and get into another argument with my wife before we got called in for a shooting in Logan,” Antoine added.

“Another shooting in Logan, huh? Surprise, surprise! That just happened?” Dick asked, his interest evident in the tone of his voice.

“Yeah, less than two hours ago,” Antoine informed their colleague. “Twelfth and Wyoming. Young, Black male, early twenties. Ambushed and shot multiple times on his own porch. It looks like two different caliber weapons were used.”

“Sounds like somebody was settling a beef. He was probably another young punk who had it coming like most of the kids his age who get hit that many times,” Dick callously speculated. Dick was oblivious to the fact that Rocky had shot him a menacing look upon hearing his comment. Antoine glanced nervously at Rocky, then back at Dick before interjecting.

“It’s messed up because he was actually going back inside from having a first date with a nice, hard-working young lady we had the unfortunate pleasure of interviewing. She’s our witness. She had just pulled off and saw the perps enter and flee the scene,” Antoine added.

“Oh, you got a witness?” Dick’s face lit up with sincere interest upon hearing the details from Antoine. “That’s clutch! That’s gift-wrapped for you!”

“Yeah, only problem is she didn’t see their faces. She said the perps were wearing ski-masks,” Antoine continued.

“Did she ID the getaway vehicle?”

“She just said it was a van,” Rocky interjected. “The witness had a difficult time recalling all the details. She was pretty shaken up – you know how it goes when civilians witness a murder. They aren’t accustomed to it like we are. But that’s why we’re on the job, right? Speaking of which, Ant, let’s get back into the office and dissect this shit!”

“Alright guys. Knock ‘em dead like you usually do,” Dick replied with a smirk. “Hey, at least with the way these animals keep slaughtering each other we’ll never be without work!”

Upon hearing Dick’s last comment, Rocky rolled his eyes, quickly exited the break room and made his way down the hall to the office he and Antoine shared. Following his partner’s lead, Antoine grabbed his coffee, gestured a peace sign in Dick’s direction and walked behind Rocky to their office.

Dick waited several seconds after Antoine exited the break room before closing the break room door. He hurriedly retrieved his phone from his belt clip and dialed one of the young officers on his squad named Brian.

“Hey kid. Stop what you’re doing and call the guys,” Dick barked the command at Brian. “We gotta meet up and talk. We might have a problem.”

Meanwhile, inside Rocky and Antoine’s office at the precinct, Rocky vented to Antoine about his feelings regarding Detective McGowan.

“I can’t stand that ignorant, racist pig of a cracker,” Rocky fumed.

“Yeah, he’s definitely ignorant,” Antoine concurred. “His parents named him Richard for a reason. They obviously knew he was gonna grow up to be a Dick! Ha-ha! Do you really think he’s racist though, bro?”

“You’re kidding, right? C’mon, dog!” Rocky roared. “I know you were always a good student, star athlete and beloved cop. I know ‘The Man’ has always been good to you for the most part and you are preoccupied with family life and all that. But please don’t act like you can’t tell a racist motherfucker when you see one!”

“Dick is definitely an arrogant, old, white asshole! But I’m just saying: we’re already jaded from this shit and he’s been on the job a lot longer than us. I just think he hates all criminals in general. He talks about all the perps and suspects like that!”

“Yeah, alright partner! If you say so,” Rocky chuckled as he rolled his eyes. “I will never understand how you’re so naive when it comes to that shit after everything you’ve been through and witnessed. I don’t trust that pasty motherfucker for shit! And you know he’s always low-key hating on niggas, throwing subliminals at all the meetings and shit. Fuck that bitch-ass white-boy!”

“Damn bro! How do you really feel?” Antoine laughed heartily. “You ready to get back to work or do you wanna go whoop his ass right-quick first?”

The two detectives laughed together before continuing to review the details of the Logan homicide.

Per Dick’s instructions, his entire squad: Brian, DJ, Barry and Ricky; met

in the parking lot of the Philadelphia Mills Mall near the old Toys 'R' Us entrance near Woodhaven Road and I-95. They parked their vehicles and stood outside to discuss the events of the evening.

“So, we got a potential problem, fellas,” Dick began. “Our two favorite pains in the ass were assigned to the Logan homicide and they got a fucking witness!”

“Witness? I didn’t see anybody the fuck out there,” a Puerto Rican detective in his early thirties, DJ, blurted out after hearing the shocking news.

Barry, a Black detective who had worked closely with DJ for quite some time looked over at him, revealing a sly grin.

“Nigga, you’re always so high off that wet you probably saw the witness and thought you were hallucinating,” Barry sneered.

“Fuck you B!” DJ snapped. “Anyway. Where the fuck did they find a witness that fast?”

“Yeah, I fucking hate that arrogant jerk-off, Rocky,” Brian added. Brian was a young, white detective who happened to be Dick’s unofficial protégé. “He’s so anal about everything.”

“Yeah, fuck Rocky. Cocky bastard,” Dick agreed. “But this time it was luck. The fucking mark was on a date. Their witness was some Black bitch the mark took on a date before yous guys blew his fucking chest apart.”

“Ay dios mio! Ain’t that some shit,” Ricky, another Puerto Rican detective interjected. “Where the fuck was she?”

“Who fucking knows? She might have been in the house already,” Dick sighed, shaking his head in disappointment. “That’s why we should have

been there early. I keep telling you guys how important these missions are and how we *cannot* fuck this up! Our careers and families' futures are riding on this shit!"

"Well," Barry began, as he turned to DJ, "we would have been on time if this wet-head motherfucker wasn't always going MIA and forcing everybody to go looking for his dumb-ass before every mission!"

"Oh, here we go! Let's blame DJ for every fucking problem in the world! You sound like my parents! Get off my dick, man," DJ whined.

"Shut the fuck up! Both of you! Arguing over the shit isn't gonna solve our problem," Brian barked at his colleagues. "But you definitely need to tighten the fuck up DJ."

"You got that abso-fucking-lutely right," Dick added. "So, anyway, any suggestions on how we're going to handle this potential monkey-wench, I mean, 'monkey-wrench' in our plans?"

"We just gotta find the Black bitch and get rid of her," DJ suggested, stating what he felt was the obvious solution to their problem.

"*Mira! Cabron,*" Ricky snapped in Spanish, shaking his head in disgust. "The whole point of the missions is to get rid of more bad-guys, *not* innocent women who happen to witness the executions while minding their own goddamn business! You really need to quit smoking that shit! It's frying your brain!"

"Fuck you, you punch-drunk motherfucker!" DJ screamed wildly, his fist balled as spit flew from his mouth.

"Both of you, just shut the fuck up! We'll do whatever the fuck we gotta do, but let's not go from zero to one hundred with the dumb shit DJ! I got a

better idea,” Brian stated arrogantly.

“I figured you would.” Dick patted Brian on the back and gazed at him proudly for a moment. “That’s why you’re my right-hand man. Let’s hear it!”

“We can use the system to get all of these motherfuckers out of our hair and get away clean,” Brian continued. “We just gotta set Rocky and Antoine up with Internal Affairs to get them off the case, maybe even lose their jobs. In the meantime, we can just shoot one of the mark’s known enemies to make it look like another ongoing beef in the hood. Kill two Black birds with the same stone.”

The group of corrupt detectives nodded their heads in agreement upon hearing Brian’s idea. Barry, the sole Black member of the hit squad, grimaced and shifted his body uneasily. As usual, he was irritated by the constant derogatory racial comments made about Black people by his colleagues.

“See! This is why this kid is my protege!” Dick jovially placed his arm around Brian’s shoulder. “See how fast he came up with a solution? You guys should take a lesson from him! I’ll plant a seed with my contact in IAB to get them to investigate Rocky and Antoine. Me and Brian will discuss the details on how to handle the next mark. In the meantime, you guys just do your jobs and don’t do anything else until you receive further instructions from either me or Brian. And of course, this information is not to be shared with *anybody*.”

Chapter 4

A silver-haired, sixty-five-year-old Italian-American man sat behind a large oak desk in his opulent office overlooking Center City Philadelphia. Alvin DiCicco, a second-term mayor of the city, lounged with his feet propped up on his desk, his tailored suit unbuttoned. Detective Dick McGowan and Thomas Strickland, the Chief of Police, sat directly opposite, facing the mayor, deeply engrossed in a conversation of great importance to the internal political workings of the city.

“So, basically, Dick and his squad will target and assassinate known, drug-dealers and other violent offenders,” Thomas informed Mayor DiCicco. “Nobody really cares when people like that are killed anyway. We’ll attribute the killings to an ongoing drug war and promote the narrative in the local news to garner support for increased police presence in the neighborhoods with the highest murder rates and drug trafficking. Eventually we can make a few ‘big’ arrests, pin the murders on the major players we arrest and discontinue the program. You’ll be a hero.”

“And you will be a hero too,” the mayor added enthusiastically. “I must admit it’s an excellent plan. It’s reminiscent of that old-school, J. Edgar Hoover-style COINTELPRO police work! It almost sounds fool-proof! Do you think we can execute it effectively though?”

“Yes sir! We can definitely pull it off,” Dick chimed in. “I hand-picked the team and I can vouch for their dedication and commitment to clean the streets of these savages. You can count on us sir!”

“Sounds good,” Mayor DiCicco nodded in approval. “Well, you have my permission to proceed... off the record of course! It is imperative that this

information be kept on a ‘need-to-know’ basis. Dick, you and your team handle everything the way you see fit, but they should *not* know about this meeting. The less people who know the details, the better. This office can’t afford another scandal!”

“Understood sir,” Dick affirmed. “We won’t let you down.”

“I’m sure you won’t. I’ll be in touch Thomas.”

The mayor shook his subordinates’ hands and spun around in his chair to enjoy the neon lights of the cityscape, which glowed green in honor of the city’s professional football team. Thomas and Dick exited the mayor’s office and engaged in quiet conversation as they made their way down the hallway.

“I’m trusting you and your team to execute this covert mission flawlessly, Dick,” Thomas sternly began. “Our careers are riding on this. If we pull this off, the mayor will be the next Governor, I’ll be the next mayor and I’ll make sure you’re the next Chief of Police.”

Thomas Strickland was a traditional man in many ways. He was born and raised in South Philadelphia by a zealous Christian mother and his hard-working father who happened to be a decorated Korean War veteran. Now, at fifty-five years old with two deceased parents and two adult children who live independently; Thomas shared his childhood home with his docile, submissive wife of thirty-five years.

Thomas and his wife, Brenda, had married at the tender age of twenty and Thomas joined the police force less than a year later. He worked diligently and maintained a strict moral code and loyalty to the department which initially propelled his career, fast-tracking him to the position of Police Chief, which he continued to hold for more than eighteen years. After spending over thirty years on the police force and witnessing so many political high-

jackings, injustices and numerous acts of high-level corruption which not only affected his job but also his community; Thomas became disillusioned shortly after attaining the long-coveted position of Chief of Police.

Thomas had reached the point where he hated the job he once loved. He had been forced by his superiors to make unethical decisions which negatively impacted individuals and entire communities on too many occasions throughout his tenure on the police force. These political power-plays used to infuriate him when he first became involved. After a while they only irritated him and caused him inconvenience. More incidents came and went and Thomas grew immune to the way things were. Decades later and Thomas had become fully immersed in the corruption, leading him to, upon direct request for assistance from the mayor, master-mind the plan to create a secret detective unit used to execute low and mid-level “gangsters” and drug-dealers in the city.

Thomas had long held aspirations to become mayor of the city after Mayor DiCicco’s last term ended in the near future. His COINTELPRO-style strategy to assist the mayor was Thomas’ method of positioning himself to replace Mayor DiCicco in office at the end of his term. Upon hearing Thomas’ proposal, the mayor had in fact promised to maneuver events for the Chief to become the next mayoral candidate if he was able to effectively help lower the homicide rate. As many corrupt, powerful people have the tendency to do, Chief Strickland justified his corrupt actions by convincing himself, and others when necessary, that his corrupt deeds were done for the “greater good” of the citizens of the city and the members of his own family.

“You don’t have to tell me twice, sir,” Dick nodded as the men quickly exited the building and disappeared into the shadows of the alleyways of Center City Philadelphia. “I understand. Thank you for choosing me for the

assignment. You already know how committed I am to this city and the department. My guys are good and you know I don't make mistakes."

Dick's arrogance caused a knee-jerk reaction inside the older Black man who had been raised attending church services weekly and reading the Bible daily. He discreetly rolled his eyes in the darkness before responding.

"I trust your work ethic and commitment, but please remember, 'pride comes before a crash.' Don't let your confidence in you and your team's abilities cause you to get sloppy. You've been on the job long enough to know all the variables outside of our control. We cannot afford to get caught up in this shit. If any of this comes back to bite us, we're all gonna be in jumpsuits instead of nice offices! I know you don't want that for yourself or your squad and I'm too old for that shit!"

"Understood sir," Dick sighed and rolled his eyes as Thomas approached and unlocked his vehicle. "We're the good guys, remember? Just like the mayor said – we're basically doing the same thing J. Edgar Hoover did in the sixties and seventies."

"True, but we have yet to reach J. Edgar status and the problem is the COINTELPRO Program is public information now. If anybody should *ever* find out about what we're doing here, they're going to treat us much more harshly than they treated Hoover! They'll throw my Black-ass under the jail along with you and the rest of your team!"

"Understood sir. I'm definitely not going to let that happen," Dick replied, his head held high.

Chief Strickland entered the driver's side of his truck and extended his arm to shake Dick's hand.

“I have faith in you Richard. I’ll be in touch.”

Chapter 5

The morning after the hit squad's impromptu mall parking-lot meeting, Dick walked into the Internal Affairs office under the guise of handling some official police business. Upon entering the office, Dick noticed exactly who he came to visit – Bathsheba Hayes, the Director of Internal Affairs, with whom he had somewhat of a rapport. Dick was not the type of man to be direct and honest with those he felt could exercise authority over him or who he intended to use. On this occasion Dick maneuvered and “accidentally” bumped into the tall, attractive, well-toned brown-skinned Director who moonlighted as a yogi; the man pretending to be preoccupied with paperwork he shuffled as he briskly walked through the office.

“Excuse me, Miss! I’m sorry,” Dick feigned surprise after the two collided. “I can chew gum and walk at the same time but I guess I’m not so good at reading and walking!”

“No problem, Dick!” Bathsheba laughed and extended her arm to shake Dick’s hand. “I guess you should just stick to chewing gum and walking! Long time, no see! How you been? What you doing here?”

“I’m doing great! Living the dream!” Dick smiled so wide Bathsheba could see his back teeth. “I’ll tell ya, though, Bathsheba,” Dick continued, shaking his head theatrically in false frustration. “No offense, but coming here is my least favorite part of this job! I gotta do some research on a particular officer’s history before referring him for a specific case. I was told he has some outstanding complaints against him.”

“No offense taken. It’s an ugly, but necessary aspect of what we do.”

“No kidding,” Dick agreed. “I know this guy and he’s a good cop, so I’m

not too worried about what I'll find. I'm pretty sure the complaints were probably from some perps who were mad they got caught and were trying to use the system to retaliate. A lot of these dumb criminals think they're smarter than they really are!"

"I know what you mean! I see it every day," Bathsheba smugly agreed.

"I'm just glad I don't have to work closely with those two loose cannons, Rakim Shabazz and Antoine Godfrey," Dick continued. "They close a lot of cases, but their methods are going to come back to bite them one of these days."

"Oh yeah?" Bathsheba's voice cracked, her interest visibly piqued "What makes you say that? I know of them. They have a reputation for being very good at their jobs from what I've heard."

"You don't know about the *other* side of their reputation?" Dick focused his effort to act as surprised as he could without seeming too dramatic. "You've been Director of IAB for what, five years now? Do you mean to say Rocky and Ant have been skating under your radar for all these years? They must have friends in the right places or something!"

Bathsheba snapped her neck to the side, placed her hand on her hip and rolled her eyes dramatically, putting forth no effort to hide her displeasure in Dick's comment.

"What do you mean by that? I mean, I know Shabazz has a checkered past and I know about that brawl Godfrey got into at Temple U years ago. But wasn't that before they made the force, let alone Homicide?"

Dick chuckled and rolled his eyes upon hearing Bathsheba's reply.

"Yeah, I'm definitely not talking about that ancient history. From what I

hear, neither one of them left their violent tendencies in the past. Granted, we have a rough job and they get a lot of collars, so it's understandable when their misconduct is overlooked. I just feel like they're playing with fire and whoever is turning a blind eye to their rule-breaking is too. One of these days – never mind..."

"Dick, if there's something I should know, please tell me," Bathsheba whispered as she stepped even closer to Dick. "The conversation will stay between us for now. You know if you help make my job easier, I'll be in a better position to return the favor. We're the good guys. We gotta make sure only the good guys are wearing badges."

"Roger that," Dick whispered. "Look Bathsheba. Alls I'll say is this: from what I know, both Rocky and Antoine's closets are full of skeletons that would make the whole department and the city as a whole look bad. And honestly, off the record, Godfrey smells like he's on the sauce damn-near every time I see him! He's obviously having problems at home because he's always bouncing back and forth from living with his wife and kid, to staying in hotels or rooming with his partner, Shabazz! I'm not really sure what's going on there. Those 'brothers' might be on the down-low, if you're picking up what I'm putting down. But, of course, you didn't hear it from me!"

"That's disturbing," Bathsheba replied, wearing a concerned facial expression as she extended her arm to shake Dick's hand. "I'll do some homework. Thank you very much for the information Dick."

"No sweat, Bathsheba. I'm not trying to gossip or anything, but I don't want to see anybody get hurt or anybody's career's being shot to shit. You know how one bad apple can ruin the whole bunch. We've already seen whole departments dismantled and good cops locked up because of superior officers allowing rogue officers to break the rules without being held

accountable. Then the brass or the media catches wind of the situation and it's curtains for everybody!"

"Very true. Very, very true." Bathsheba nodded in agreement.

"But let me get going and do what I came here for so I can get out of this hell-hole! It was good seeing you Miss Hayes!"

Bathsheba gazed into the air pensively as Dick quickly scurried away, his manufactured concerned facial expression quickly turning into a smug grin as he shuffled down the hallway and out the door.

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