

Clyde Harrison

“Sure guys, I’ll be glad to give you a sample. Anything I can do to help. Just let the El Tee know that I cooperated fully, maybe it’ll help my next fitness report.”

Officer Casey stood and shook the hands of both detectives and started for the door.

“Just drop by the lab on the way out, would you Bill?”

“Sure Thom. Let me know how this thing turns out.”

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Veronica Carter had spent most of the early afternoon on phone calls to Atlanta. She had updated her boss on the status of her father’s health and advised him that she would probably be another week or so in New York. He told her to check in at the New York office, that he would call someone there and arrange for her to do something while she was there. That way she wouldn’t have to take as much leave time, and it would give her an idea of what was happening in the City.

She had looked in on her father several times since they had breakfast. He had been resting peacefully, just like the doctor had ordered. *He must have really needed some rest* she thought, *“It’s so unlike Daddy to lie so still for so long.”* Veronica had taken a seat in an oversized chair that was set in front of the flat panel TV and had started watching a congressional panel quiz Alan Greenspan on C Span when she heard her father come downstairs.

“I was wondering how long it would take you to get out of bed, Daddy.”

“Yeah, I was wondering the same thing too. Are you hungry?”

“A little bit, do you want me to fix some lunch?”

“You don’ have to do that, Punkin, let’s order some Chinese.”

“O.K., but that won’t spoil your dinner will it. It’s starting to get close to dinner time.”

“I don’t usually eat a large dinner, so this will be my big meal for the day. If you think it’ll spoil your appetite, though, we can have sandwiches.”

“No, Chinese is fine, I haven’t had any good Chinese food in a while. I think the real Chinese cooks live on the coasts and we get faux Beijing.”

“There’s a menu in the top drawer next to the refrigerator. I’ll have broccoli with garlic sauce and vegetable fried rice. They have a charge card number on file, they’ll recognize the phone number when you call.”

“O.K. daddy, I’ll call it in, you just come over here and have a seat. I know that bed is wearing you out, but the doctor still wants you to take it easy, so get off of your feet.” Veronica walked toward the kitchen to phone in the order.

“Yes ma’am.” Reginald responded, and walked slowly over to the love seat that was on the other side of the room. Roni kissed him on the cheek as they passed. The family room extended from the kitchen at the back of the townhouse. It was of appreciable size and tastefully furnished, like the rest of the house. There was a large sofa upholstered in a subtly patterned fabric with a coordinated love seat. The oversized chair that Veronica had been enjoying was made of a butter soft leather that was dark tan, it picked up one of the lesser colors of the upholstery. Along with a custom designed, large square table, these made up the furniture grouping that was the focus of the room. There was also a large fireplace and a vaulted ceiling. The fireplace was angled in a corner of the room and established the orientation of the

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furnishings such that it flowed freely and not parallel to the walls. A large flat screen TV was inset in the wall above the fireplace. The other walls were adorned with original works of art by Frank Frazier and a large landscape by Richard Mahew hung on the wall behind the sofa. There were also small originals by Frank Morrison and Alonzo Adams, both New Jersey artists.

French doors led out to a deck at the rear of the townhouse. Floor to ceiling panels of windowpanes surrounded the doors, creating a wall of light to the outside where the trees were already starting to show the first colors of fall.

Veronica hung up the wall phone in the kitchen and took her place in the oversized chair. “They said it would be about twenty minutes, Daddy. They also asked if you were doing O.K. and said they hope you feel better soon.”

“That was nice of them, they must have seen the reports on the news. Mrs. Ting will probably send some special herbal tea to help me recover. They’re really nice people.”

“Yeah, and you probably spend a lot of nice money with them too.”

“Don’t be so cynical, Punkin, once you get to know people, and they get to know you, I believe there’s genuine concern for each other’s well being.”

“I know I’m cynical, especially about immigrants that move into the community and take over the businesses. Especially in our communities. Not that you live in ‘our’ community.”

“What do you mean by that? I live in a nice neighborhood. It provides me a sense of comfort and I have access to the things I want and need when I’m home. I also live where I can afford to live. Are

you suggesting that because this is a multi-cultured community, I shouldn't be living here?"

The debate had started. Veronica and her father had extremely different views about their "community" responsibilities. Although she was a member of generation X, she had the sensibilities of many Blacks from the sixties and seventies. She thought of her community as a segment of society that was still disenfranchised and in need of broad action to improve. She also felt that it was being abandoned by successful Blacks who fled the neighbor-"hood" to enjoy the benefits of living on the other side of the tracks.

"I guess you can make a case for this being an integrated neighborhood. What, you have maybe two other Black families in your complex?"

"We have four total, if you include the Mortons. Mrs. Morton is Black."

"That is so funny Daddy, and what about the other cultures that make up the rainbow?"

"Let's see...", Reggie searched his memory of his neighbors,... "there's quite a few Indians, and several Asian families...also there are at least two Latino residents that claim to be Latino, you know they sometimes just pass for white." Reginald was joking with his daughter at this point, raising his fingers one or two at a time to keep track of the count. He never felt guilty for being able to afford to live in better neighborhoods. Sure, most blacks couldn't afford to live in his neighborhood, but neither could most whites. After raising ten fingers he said "See, that's more than two handfuls, what more can you ask?"

"Sure, ten out of how many, two hundred and fifty units?"

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“I have to correct you, Punkin,” he said with facetious indignation, “this is an exclusive neighborhood, we only have one hundred and fifty units in this complex. And I think the rainbow is well represented here, all things considered.”

“So, you’re saying there are no ‘exclusive’ black neighborhoods in New Jersey?”

“You know the landscape is a little different up here. It’s not quite the same layout as in the South.” Reginald folded his hands in his lap and looked up at the ceiling as if in deep thought. “Most neighborhoods up here are segregated by income, not by race. It just so happens that a disproportionate number of us are in the lower income brackets, so you find us clustered in urban areas. That’s just reality.” He obviously thought that this was a reasonable explanation for minority urban cluster.

“That’s my point exactly, Daddy. A disproportionate number of us are poor. Did you know that Black folk in America represent about six hundred and fifty to eight hundred billion dollars a year in income and spending power?”

“Yeah, I know it’s quite a bit,” he said with uncertainty.

“Did you know that if we were viewed as a separate country, we would be ranked at number ten or eleven in the world, larger than Russia, or Sweden, or Spain?”

“Go on, I’m impressed.”

“Well, what I’m saying, Daddy, is that we don’t have to be poor as a community, we just have to start acting like a community. You know those same Asians that we ordered lunch from will drive clean across town to make sure they buy as much as they can from other Asians, supporting businesses owned by people like them?”