

he definitely had a Superman-sized heart beating in his chest. *A cat with a cause . . . Man, was I glad he was on my side.*

“Alright Al. You got a deal.” We shook on it. Between friends and equals, name abbreviation was okay.

“Chris, you won’t be disappointed. I promise.”

“I’m sure I won’t. By the way, Dorian & I are going to this club Friday night. You want to roll?”

“Count me in.”



The info stared back at the man in the suit from the computer screen. Unbelievable. The information available on the internet was incredible. It could cause major problems.

He picked up the receiver of the phone on my desk, but thought better of it. This was no time to share. Not yet. There certainly was no easy way to explain away this situation. No. The thing to do here was to stand pat. When the time came, if it came, the details would be revealed. Until then, the better strategy was misdirection. He picked up the phone again. This time he knew exactly whom he needed to call, whether that person liked it or not.

CHRISTIAN



A zillion messages awaited my attention. Six were from Ethan. Damn, didn’t I just leave that jerk? Some were from the lawyers for Jackson Memorial. One was from Nona Jones. We played phone tag over the last week. One thing I can say for her. She had a vibrant tone phone voice.

Her messages to me always started, “*Hey this is Nona. Where are you? And how dare you not be available when I call.*” Laughter, tailing off, usually concluded her voicemails.

Whatever. This sistah was preventing me from getting another checkmark on my “things to do list.” And not getting check marks was a brotha’s pet peeve. I dialed her number.

“Hello!”

“Ms. Jones, please. This is Christian James calling.”

“Well, aren’t we formal today? It was Nona the other day.”

“Sorry. You know how it is when you get into work mode. Is this a bad time, *Nona*?”

“Not at all. What’s up?”

“My firm wants to offer you significantly discounted legal counsel in the Richards DUI case. Interested?”

“I already have an attorney. What do I need you guys for?”

“Let’s just say that my firm has special motivation that you’ll not likely find elsewhere. Obviously we can’t guarantee an outcome, but we’re pretty confident. I’d like to meet to discuss the details. Are you available this week?”

“Sure, but I’m not committing to anything.” She added quickly.

“That’s fine.”

“How’s Friday for you?” She asked.

“That works. Say about five o’clock?”

“Sure. Where?”

“Are you familiar with Java Jones on Wilshire,” I started. Do your people own that spot?”

“Yes, I know the place.”

“Okay. See you there.”

Java Jones was a buppie hang out where brothas and sistahs got their caffeine fix and their mack on at the same time. It was a great place to meet the next Mr. or Ms. “Right Now”, if not Mr. or Ms. Right. To prepare for the occasion, I wore my three-piece charcoal

grey pinstripe suit with the triple button jacket, a light grey shirt, and a cappuccino tie with matching shoes & belt. Nothing like a power suit for a little power networking. I arrived at JJ's early to check out the scene.

"Big Money! Where you been, man?" Tiny shouted from behind the counter.

"Sup, Tiny!" I shot him a quick nod the way brothas did when they greeted each other. It's amazing how no smile and a slight movement of the head up could send a little love.

Tiny's voice boomed throughout the shop. "My man! The big-time lawyer. You too busy for us little folks these days, huh? Can't stop by and have a cup of coffee?" He laughed at his imaginary snubbing.

I returned the favor. "See it's not like that, Tiny. I've been busy getting my hustle on so that I *too* could one day be a business owner like you."

"Well, it must be working. Coming in here lookin' cleaner than the Pope on Christmas." The breadth of his smile and the twinkle in his eyes beamed warmth right back at me. A little love returned. I feel you, Black Man.

If this was an awards show, I couldn't have asked for a better person to *introduce* me. Tiny was doing some major promotion without knowing it. *Or maybe he did.* Maybe this was one way he was able to secure such a loyal following in light of the competition from the major chains. Whatever. Other patrons looked up from their libations to see whom Tiny was giving the

Big Willie style treatment to. Since celebrity watching was damn near a blood sport in LA, they searched my face for recognition. Finding none, most returned to their brew and conversations. Still, a couple of women craned to get a better view. I took off my jacket and placed it on my chair. Might as well take advantage of the extra reps I'd been doing at the gym lately.

“Here’s your usual, Chris,” Tiny said as he passed me a mocha and a giant gourmet cinnamon roll.

“Thanks little man,” I replied jokingly. God knows why he was called “Tiny.” Standing 6’8” and weighing at least 285lbs, he was anything but. He’d owned the shop for as long as anyone could remember, but claimed to have been a pastry chef in the army during Vietnam. *But I wasn’t buying that.*

First off, since when was the military renown for their desserts? *That doesn’t even sound right.* ‘If you Viet Cong don’t behave, they’ll be no mud pie for you.’ *I don’t think so.* Secondly, even in his late 50’s, Tiny was way too chiseled to have been just a cook. Some old heads that visited now and again whispered about him belonging to a Special Forces unit. Now only in the big city can you find a certified trained killa’ passing out coffee and doughnuts. *Remind me to leave a big tip. Okay . . . I’m just kidding. Tiny was cool people.*

As Tiny and I finished our banter, Nona walked in. She struck me immediately. I hadn’t noticed how attractive she was the night of the accident. But, now in the calm that followed crisis, her attractiveness shone through like a beacon. Her beauty transcended outward features such as make-up, hair and nails. Don’t get me wrong. Nona had all of this going on too.

Yet, her beauty radiated from inside out. The way she lifted up her head revealed self-confidence and a willingness to connect with people. The way she held her shoulders back spoke to pride in herself and in the nobility of her people. The glide of her stride whispered about grace and elegance. The cut of her biceps symbolized strength, while the lithe smoothness of her skin spoke of sensitivity. She epitomized womanhood, motherhood and sensuality all at the same time. She was the total package. There was no denying it. I liked her already.