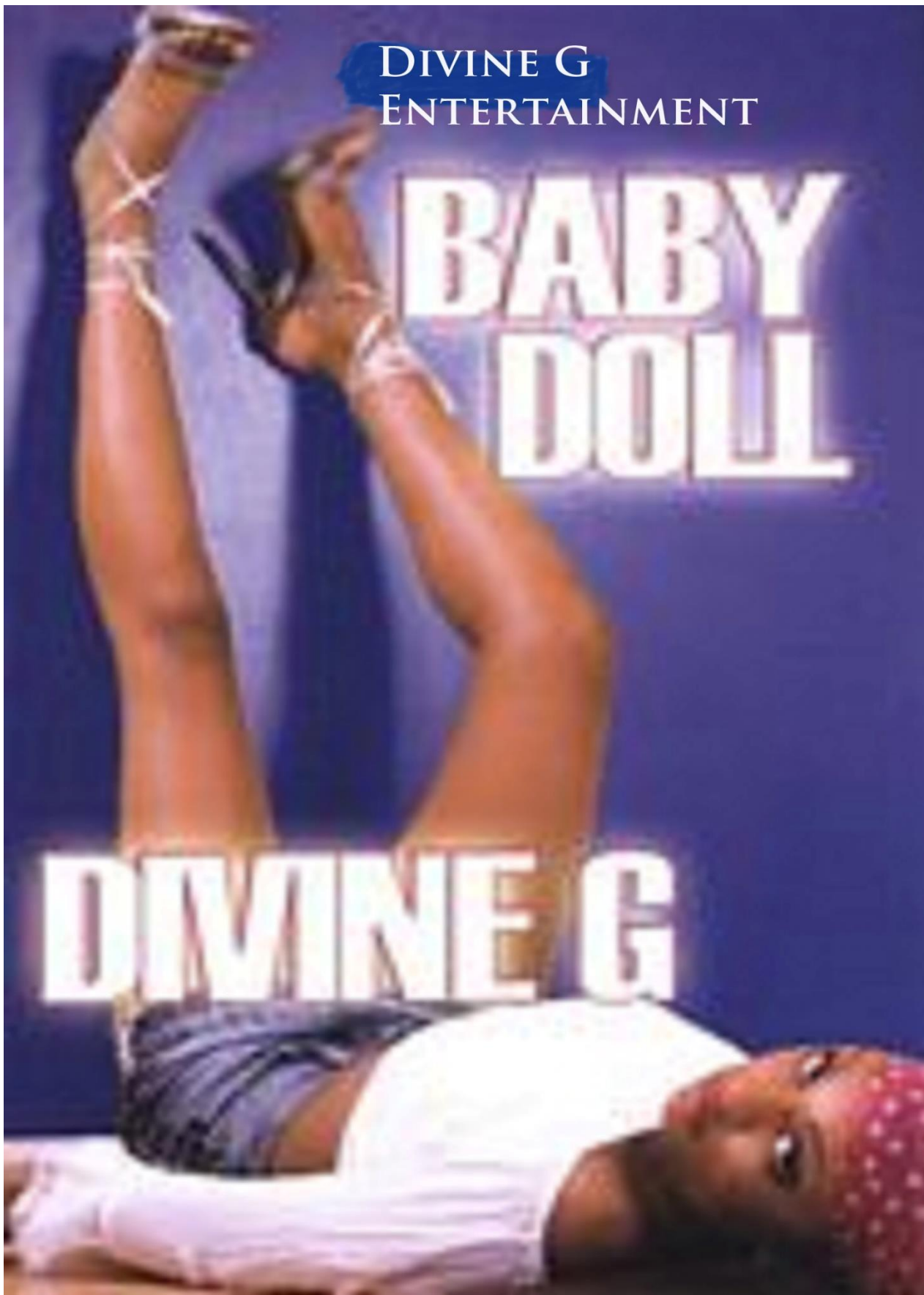


DIVINE G
ENTERTAINMENT

BABY DOLL

DIVINE G



BABY DOLL

A Novel By Divine G

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Money-Grip (Published by Street Knowledge Publishing)

Money-Grip 2 (Published by Createspace)

Enigma of Love (Published by Divine G Entertainment)

The Canarsie Connection (Published by Divine G Entertainment)

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Averted Hearts (appearing in *The Game*, published by Triple Crown Publications)

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BABY DOLL ®

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Dedication

This novel is dedicated to Divequa, Karron, and Dinasia. I love y'all!

I also dedicate this novel to the numerous other family members, friends and associates who were very instrumental in helping me to get this novel written, edited and published. The list of supporters is so huge and extensive, I am very apprehensive about attempting to mention names, because from past experience, if anyone is inadvertently left out and feels he or she should have been mentioned, it creates a lot of bad feelings. So, this time, I am taking the safe road by sending out a universal dedication to all those who played a part in the success of this novel, without itemizing each individual name. If you were there, by my side, had my back, and was supportive, then you are the person I am referring to when I send out this dedication. This novel is dedicated to you for being there when times got extremely rough, rocky and raw. Once again, thanks for all the support, love and understanding.

CHAPTER 1

Breana “Baby Doll” Winbush swung at Nicole when she came rushing at her with a violent overhand right. Nicole’s wild, uncoordinated swing just missed Baby Doll as she weaved the blow and caught Nicole just below the left eye with a straight right jab, causing a muttered shriek to escape from Nicole’s lips.

Nicole was twice Baby Doll’s size, but that didn’t mean shit to Baby Doll, since she was used to these odds.

Nicole was furious now, especially since her five schoolmates and friends were standing on the sideline watching, and rooting for her. Her bull-dagger features were growing manlier by the seconds.

Baby Doll saw the rage and embarrassment in Nicole’s eyes; she was about to get real ghetto. The second Nicole rushed in again, Baby Doll blessed her with a two-piece.

Nicole’s knees wobbled as she jumped away as though she had just touched a hot stove.

“Come on bitch!” Baby Doll said menacingly in a smooth and venomous tone. She saw Nicole trying to regain her bearings, and wondered should she rush in for the knock-out.

“You think I’m soft!?” Baby Doll’s drop-dead gorgeous persona, along with her caramel complexion and chinky exotic eyes were now drenched with a viciousness that didn’t fit her age. She was sixteen years old, but from the way she danced around with her fists cocked, she looked more like a mixture of an Olympian boxer and a beauty pageant contestant. They say growing up in the

hood had a remarkable way of epitomizing the saying “only the strong survives,” and Baby Doll was a classic example of that fact.

The crowd of five schoolgirls looked on with jealous and envious eyes while rooting Nicole on. All of them were Nicole’s friends, but Baby Doll didn’t care. She wasn’t unfamiliar with being picked on, while confronting totally uneven odds.

A crowd started to form as several other Canarsie High School students rushed over to watch the fight.

“Punch that bitch in her face, Nicole!” a teen with sleepily eyes shouted. “Beat her ass, girl.”

“Fuck that conceited bitch up!” Nicole’s best friend Jada shouted while clutching her schoolbooks close to her chest.

Nicole stood huffing and puffing with exhaustion and rage; her hesitancy was a clear indication that she was scared, and she was hoping nobody noticed.

Baby Doll saw Nicole was fronting by the look in her eyes, and was wasting her time, so she decided to end this bullshit, right here and now. She stepped toward Nicole while unleashing four swift, left jabs. Two of them hit their target: Nicole’s nose. After implementing this setup maneuver, Baby Doll let loose a vicious overhand right to her jaw that took Nicole down to the pavement as if a rug was snatched from under her feet.

Staring down a Nicole clutching her jaw, Baby Doll said, “You better stay your big ass down, or—” Baby Doll saw Jada rushing at her and she turned to give her a piece of the action, but before she could turn completely around, she felt a hard blow to the back of her head.

Oh, so you bitches are gonna me! Baby Doll stumbled slightly from the sucker punch and started swinging savagely, not completely surprised the girls were now ganging up on her. In fact, she was kinda expecting this since it was obvious they

were cowards and bullies, and just like cowards and bullies, they never did the “fair fight” thing.

Jada caught a fist to the nose, and like the coward she was, she quickly pulled back from the fight out of fear of messing up her hair or getting a permanent scar on her face. In an instant, she decided to wait for the others to get Baby Doll in a position where she didn’t have to put in too much work.

As Baby Doll and the four remaining girls were going at it toe-to-toe, Nicole sprung to her feet and got back into the fight with a wicked kick to Baby Doll’s stomach.

Baby Doll saw stars twirling before her eyes and felt the wind shot from her body; she instantly knew she was in serious trouble when her knees buckled. *My face! They’re gonna mess up my face!* She covered her face as the blows rained down upon her head; she knew the sole reason they hated her was because of her beauty. Everybody hated her because she was utterly beautiful, and these ugly, no-boyfriend-getting bitches were just like all the rest. Even her mother and two sisters despised her because of the way she looked. To say she earned the name Baby Doll because she looked just like one would have been a gross understatement.

As Baby Doll weaved with her fists and arms shielding her face, looking like Muhammad Ali doing his infamous rope-pa-dope, she sensed her attackers were becoming even more enraged because they couldn’t scratch and pound her face, and she was still able to get off punches despite the uneven odds.

Jada, however, was an expert at dirty fighting, and so she swung her leg in sweeping fashion and tripped Baby Doll.

Baby Doll fell hard to the concrete, allowing her forearms to cushion the fall and the terror gripped her because it was obvious they were going to stomp her out. The moment she hit the pavement, the Nike sneakers, and soft and hard

sole shoes started raining down upon her from all directions, aimed at all parts of her body, but Baby Doll protected her face, and prayed that someone would come to her rescue. When she realized she had no friends in this school, she held back the tears of rage, and rode the waves of this ass whipping like a true project trooper, vowing to get each one of these bitches back in the worse kind of way.

* * * *

Tera Smalls was behind the wheel of her cranberry red Ranger Rover Jeep with her uncle, Big Daddy Blue, in the passenger seat. Jodeci's "Stay" was blaring through the radio tuned to 98.7 Kiss FM, and Tera was tapping her foot to the beat. She was cruising down Rockaway Parkway and it was obvious it was around three o'clock, since the high school students were moving about in droves. Despite her outwardly uppity mood, she was still upset that she had to drive her uncle to the club, since both of his cars were in the repair shop. As she was still contemplating how she was going to get Big Daddy to the club and get to her inventory meeting without being too late, she saw a huge crowd up ahead. Upon closer scrutiny, she saw it was a fight between a group of schoolgirls. The light turned red and she brought the Jeep to a stop directly across from the commotion.

"Look at this foolishness," Big Daddy Blue said disgustedly as he watched the group of five teens trying to lay down a vicious beating on another teen. Images of the Rodney King beating and several similar vicious gang assaults at various prisons he was once housed at flashed across his mind. Just before they brought the girl down to the pavement, and started stomping her, he was able to see the victim's face, and as pretty as the young girl looked, and as hard-looking as the attackers appeared, it was clear this was a case of young women's envious emotions gone wild. The sight turned his stomach upside down, and the urge to

do something grew to an unbearable level. After a moment, he sighed and said, “Double park the car, Tera.”

“Come on, Big Daddy,” Tera shifted in her seat, realizing she was definitely going to be late now. “These young folks are crazy out here. It ain’t like it was back in the day. They got guns, and don’t mind using them, either. We need to mind our business.”

“Just pull the damn car over,” Big Daddy Blue demanded. “These children are our business. That’s why the neighborhood is fucked-up the way it is; ‘cause folks turning their backs when they supposed to be stepping up.”

Tera sighed angrily, realizing it was futile to try to convince Big Daddy to look the other way once his mind was made up; she made a right turn when the traffic light turned green, and double-parked the Jeep.

Big Daddy Blue zipped out the vehicle with remarkable agility despite the fact he was fifty-nine with a head and face full of salt and pepper hair. The way he handled his medium built frame, the average person would’ve thought he was in his early forties. He yelled at the top of his lungs. “Hey, what’s this!?”

Nicole and the others stopped on a dime, feet suspended in mid air. One of the girls took off running, thinking it was the police; one more arrest and she was on her way to juvy. Jada scurried away, picked up her books from the ground and was about to run until she saw Tera approaching dressed in a sexy mini-skirt while styling the latest hood-oriented hair style and knew instantly that these people weren’t cops.

Big Daddy Blue marched toward Baby Doll, who was curled up with her arms covering her head.

The girls who were stomping her moved out of Big Daddy’s way with frantic haste as though a Mack truck was about to run them over. The bulk of the crowd of on-lookers started dispersing, realizing the fun was over.

Nicole spoke with an attitude, “Y’all need to mind y’all fuckin’ business.”

Big Daddy Blue ignored the comment as he kneeled and shook Baby Doll’s shoulder. “You all right down there?”

She eased her arms down from her head; he saw she was indeed a pretty little dime piece and a half. Her infant, but regal facial features were super star model material if he ever saw one.

“It’s all right. Come on, get up.” Big Daddy rose to his feet.

“I don’t know who the fuck y’all think y’all are,” Nicole said in a real nasty manner. “Y’all rolling up like y’all running shit around this mu—“

“What you said!?” Tera stepped straight to Nicole and saw this big mouth, disrespectful chick needed an eye opener. She moved toward Nicole with a devious smile. “What if I slapped your disrespectful ass into next week!?”

Nicole stepped away, now scared out of her mind because it was obvious this woman had hood written all over her. *Wow, this lady ain’t playin’!*

A male teen wearing baggy jeans and a baseball cap turned backwards, was closely observing Big Daddy Blue and realized who he was. He inched over to Nicole and whispered in her ear. “Be easy, stupid! That’s Big Daddy Blue! That nigga’s a real O.G. He just came home from doing thirty years on lock down. He got mad shit in the smash; clubs and shit all over the place!”

Big Daddy Blue helped Baby Doll to her feet; he was about to go into one of his gang prevention lectures he’d utilized when he was a part of a prison youth outreach Program in an effort to talk some sense into these girls, but the moment this pretty little girl was fully onto her feet, she jetted toward the bigger girl.

In a flash, Baby Doll got off a vicious overhand right that dropped Nicole. It looked as though a rug was viciously snatched from under her feet by the way she rapidly collapsed to the pavement.

Big Daddy Blue didn't budge an inch as Tera went after Baby Doll and pulled her away immediately after she got off the blow.

The other girls were gearing up for another attack. Some of the boys made comments designed to instigate another round of fighting.

Sensing the situation was about to blow out of control, Big Daddy Blue went to Baby Doll, gently took her arm. "We'll give you a ride home, okay." He escorted her toward the Jeep.

Baby Doll didn't resist. It didn't take a scholar to see that she wasn't going to make it home on the bus without having to fight every step of the way. As she headed toward the Jeep, she scooped up her book bag, feeling good knowing she got the last hit in. That, according to her standards, made her the winner, even though they got the most hits in, and stomped the shit out of her.

Baby Doll got in the back seat while Tera got back behind the wheel and Big Daddy Blue in the passenger seat.

The Jeep sped away.

Baby Doll sat looking mean and ready to continue fighting if she had to. She decided to keep her guards up, since she knew that children her age were being kidnapped everyday and that this could be a setup. She looked around to make sure the doors had a lock button that she could control and made a mental note that they did. Meanwhile, she heard the lady on the cell phone telling someone she was going to be late.

Big Daddy Blue turned in his seat and said, "What's your name?"

Baby Doll thought about the question, wondering should she give him her real name or her nickname. She stared into the old man's eyes, and she truly didn't feel scared or threatened. In fact, she felt a profound sense of security. She'd never had a father figure in her life, and realized if she could have one she would

probably want one that looked like this man. It was like his smile resonated a loving vibration. She decided to go with the nickname. “Baby Doll.”

“That’s a pretty name, Baby Doll,” Big Daddy Blue said. “It fits you to a tee.” After a moment, he probed further. “And where you live, Baby Doll? If you don’t tell us, we can’t drop you off.”

“I live in Brownsville in Tilden Projects. You can drop me off right on Livonia Avenue near the 3 train, and I’ll be alright from there. And what’s y’all names?”

“I’m Tera,” she said from behind the wheel, realizing she was going the wrong way and would have to take a hard right at the next turn. She turned on the Bobby Brown CD, her favorite R&B artist. The song, “Rock Wit Cha,” seeped through the car’s stereo system in a whisper-like fashion.

Big Daddy Blue faced front, and then said. “Well, they call me Big Daddy Blue.” Before she could start asking why, he continued. “What’s a pretty girl like you doing fighting in the middle of the streets?”

“Cause I don’t let jealous bitches fuck over me any ole way they want to.” The energy within Baby Doll’s words was as serious as a pissed-off pirate who’d just lost the map to his hidden treasure.

Tera nodded her head to that with a smile and said, “Sounds like my kinda girl. Full of spunk and feisty as hell. That means they was fuckin’ with you and you showed them a thing or two.”

Big Daddy Blue gave Tera a disappointed expression. He knew violence was a fact of urban life, but he also believed these young folk had to find better ways to deal with their differences. “So, what grade are you in, Baby Doll?”

“Tenth grade,” she said, watching the people strutting along Rockaway Parkway, entering and exiting stores and other shops. Suddenly, the pessimistic component of her mind started coming to life. *Why did they stop to help her?* it wanted

to know. They definitely didn't do it because they liked her. Nobody liked her. Everybody hated her. And even all her friends were nothing but a bunch of fakes that only wanted to be with her when they could get something out of her. Definitely every nigga in the hood was out for some pussy, point blank and simple. Then, suddenly, a revelation dawned on her. *Yeab, that's what it is; this old ass nigga want a piece of this young pussy, and this bourgeois chick is some kind of freak bitch or something, cause she's gonna help him.*

After tumbling this scenario around in her mind, she shot it down because the old man, didn't seem like a pervert. He was nothing like her mother's boyfriend Kevin, who was the ultimate pervert. But why did they help her? After toying with the question, she realized that maybe they really cared about her. She needed to search further, and so she put on her tactician hat and decided to start picking their brains. It couldn't hurt, since if they got crazy she could simply break out at a stoplight. "Why y'all stop to help me?"

Big Daddy Blue turned and faced Baby Doll. "I stopped because I think it's wrong to turn your back when someone is getting beat-up by a gang."

"But what if they was in the right? What if the person they ganged up on did some foul shit and was getting what they deserve? Would that still make it wrong?"

Big Daddy Blue smiled. He was impressed, since it was clear shorty was real sharp, and was trying to pick his brain. "Well, let's put this way. I'm from the old school, and we old-timers got a good eye for detecting coward moves. It don't take six people to stomp someone out, even if the person gettin' stomped out was in the wrong. Plus, I know how school kids are and how they got this way of dealing with pretty folks such as yourself."

Baby Doll lit up with something she couldn't describe. He understood her situation. She felt funny hearing those words that indicated he knew they assaulted

her because she was pretty. That bitch Nicole thought she was trying to mess with her ugly ass, bad breath boyfriend, Abar, and had stepped to her pointing her finger in her face, talking all this shit about she was going to fuck her up after school. Baby Doll scanned Big Daddy's eyes and saw the sincerity in them were just as genuine as his words had sounded, and they didn't make her feel uncomfortable about her beautiful looks. After spending her entire life around folks that literally hated her because she was "pretty" and "cute", it was refreshing to finally come in contact with someone who wasn't out to hurt her because they were jealous of the way she looked.

Tera chimed in as she pulled the Jeep to a halt at a stoplight at the intersection of Rockaway and Linden Blvd. "To be honest with you Baby Doll, I wanted to keep going, but Big Daddy made me stop. But, after meeting you, I'm kinda glad we stopped. I like your style shorty. You got boss in your blood, girl, and all you gotta to do is get you a plan, stick with it, and you'll be a'ight." She saw Big Daddy Blue's familiar smile of approval, and knew she scored a major point with him. She never fully understood why he was so fond of helping these badass kids in the hood, especially since he stayed getting stung by them. Just recently two of them tried to rob one of his clubs in East New York. She often suspected he was doing this with the kids because of all that time he did in prison and he was trying to make up for not being there for his own four children, who apparently grew up without a father. "You not only look like a fighter, Baby Doll, but also a winner. I can see it in your eyes, the way you walk and talk and think. And especially from the way you popped that big bitch in the mouth." She heard Baby Doll respond humorously to her comment, and she smiled. "Just don't waste or throw away your gifts like so many of the kids growing up in this place."

Baby Doll sat silently, allowing their words to churn inside her mind. She was blown away by their remarks. These people were acting like real friends, and

they obviously liked her. They'd just met her, and already they showed her more love than she'd ever received from her entire family. Not only that, she could see they had big cheddar. By the way Big Daddy was dressed, he wasn't no bum ass dude, that's for sure. And this fancy-ass Jeep Tera was wheeling had to cost some major loot. But the most outstanding thing of all was . . . They were obviously feelin' her! They said they loved a fighter!? Well, once they got to know her they were really gonna love her! This really started causing her nature to rise because she was certain they were going to go head over hills for her, since she was a master hood fighter by all standards. She'd been fighting since the day she came out her mother's womb, and fighting was a thing she did better than anything else, since she was taught by some of the best; in fact, fighting came easy, since her sisters, her mom and her so-called friends made sure of that. It was time to go in deep. Find out more about them and see if she could use it to her advantage. "So what y'all do for a living?"

"I'm what you might call an entrepreneur," Big Daddy said, his voice deep with pride and confidence. "I work in the entertainment and retail businesses."

He's a businessman! That's why he's dressed like that. Baby Doll smiled as she spoke. "So you do stuff like Puff Daddy. You get people into the rap game!?"

Big Daddy turned and faced her, "Not that kind of businessman. I own the places where rappers perform. I own clubs and other businesses like clothing stores, stuff like that. You probably don't know much about clubs, but those are—"

"Why not?" Baby Doll said, almost offended. "I been to mad clubs before. I be sneaking in and everything."

Tera and Big Daddy laughed.

Tera said through her chuckles, "I'm also a business woman. I'm the manager of a Hair Salon, and a clothing store in Albee Square Mall. Big Daddy

here is not only my uncle, but my boss as well.” She felt proud talking about what she did in light of the fact she came a very long way. She grew up much like Baby Doll, in the projects, poor with low self-esteem, battling against drugs, prostitution, and horrific abuses, even though her father and two uncles were the founders of one of the biggest drug organizations in Brooklyn and were eventually snatched away from the family when she was around seven years old and were sentenced to numerous decades in prison. Big Daddy was the only one who made it out alive.

Big Daddy faced front. “So what you wanna be when you grow up, Baby Doll?”

Baby Doll smiled because she sure did have a dream. She’d known what she wanted to be by the time she was old enough to comprehend the Jet, Ebony and Essence Magazines she enjoyed looking at. It wasn’t like she was interested in any particular profession, like becoming a nurse, a lawyer, or scientist. She was more geared toward an outcome, and would become anything as long as it could help her get to that outcome. She wanted to be rich! Filthy rich! Dirty rich! Ugly or beautifully rich! Rich! Rich! Rich! A long time ago, she figured out that everybody who was somebody was rich. They had money, and everybody loved them. It went without saying that if she could become rich like those beautiful women in the magazines, she could stop everybody from hating her, envying her, stabbing her in the back, the rapes would stop, as well as the abuse, and people fucking her over for the dumbest shit imaginable. She had another dream, but she knew she couldn’t share that one with anybody.

Baby Doll drew in a small breath of air and said with resounding energy, “I wanna be rich.” She then recited Lil-Kim’s adage to give her comment its proper emphasis. “Money, power and respect. Once you get the money, you get the power, and then you get the respect.”

Tera smiled as she made the right turn onto Livonia Avenue and pulled the car to the curb. “Is this good enough?”

Baby Doll saw she was back in her old broken down, beat up hood, and said boringly. “Yeah, this is good right here.”

Tera put the gear in park, turned and faced Baby Doll, and said, “After thirty seven years on this planet, and going through a divorce with two kids a little younger than you, I would say you sound like an old soul, Baby Doll.” She smiled and then faced forward.

Baby Doll didn’t want to leave and definitely wanted to see more of these people. She was about to give hints, but figured it was best to be herself and come straight out with it. “Hey, how can I keep in touch with y’all? I ain’t never talk to peoples as nice as y’all before.”

Big Daddy pulled his calling card from his inner breast pocket, turned and handed it to Baby Doll. “Here’s, my card.”

After Baby Doll took it, he stared deep into her eyes, and an onslaught of memories assaulted his mind. Besides the fact Baby Doll reminded him so much of his deceased daughter Amber, seeing her also made him remember how in prison he used to debate with other prisoners about how to solve the problems in the hood. His position was always that most of the children were never offered an opportunity to better themselves, and unfortunately, most of the Black folks that could offer opportunities were too mentally and emotionally fucked-up to reach out and help those who were clearly deserving of an opportunity. There was no doubt in his mind this gorgeous little fighter was hungry, and was sharp enough to become something in life. All she needed was an opportunity. In that moment, he decided to give her one and hoped she was smart enough to see it coming, and to utilize it for all it was worth.

“Listen here Baby Doll, how you feel about working after school? You ever had an after-school job before?”

“Yeah,” she lied, since she knew where this was going, and wasn’t about to say something to mess it up. “I even worked a summer youth job.” This was the truth, but she had no intention of telling him she lost that job only after working two weeks, because she had a fight with her supervisor when he kept giving her hints about wanting to fuck her, even though she was only fourteen and he was in his mid-twenties. The lanky, nappy-headed Black man named Clarence Matthew had squeezed her ass and she busted him in the face with a beer bottle. Of course, he lied on her, claiming she attacked him for no reason, and since she wasn’t into the snitching business she didn’t tell on him; mainly because she knew he could go to jail, and putting people in jail was something she could never get with, especially after her mother made it clear that snitching was a cardinal sin even for the most pettiest of beefs. In the end, she was subsequently fired.

“So what kind a work is it gonna be?”

“It’ll be something you’ll find interesting,” Big Daddy Blue assured her.

Baby Doll’s enthralled mind stopped dead in its tracks. Her instincts were telling her to slow down as she remembered Big Daddy was a club owner, and clubs obviously had stripers. “I’m telling you right now, I ain’t into showing my ass to a bunch of horny ass niggas, and shit, so if—“

“I look like that kind of person to you?” Big Daddy said smoothly. “What makes you think I’m stupid enough to jeopardize my business by allowing minors to work in one of my spots?” He saw Baby Doll flush with embarrassment. “Take it easy, Baby Doll, I’m not trying to jerk you around. There are some good people in the world.”

Baby Doll wanted to tell him to prove it, since every person she’d ever met had a hidden agenda, and she knew damn well Big Daddy Blue was no exception

to the rule. Some how, some way, he was getting something out of it for helping her.

Big Daddy continued. “Actually, I haven’t figured out exactly where I might put you, but in few days I’ll figure it out.”

There was a moment of silence.

“Here’s what I need you to do,” Big Daddy reached in his pocket, retrieved a huge web of money, peeled off a fifty dollar bill and handed to her. “This Saturday, get in a cab and come see me at that address anytime after twelve noon. We’ll talk and I’ll fix you up with a good paying job. You cool with that?” He smiled.

“Yeah, I’m cool with that,” Baby Doll said, mesmerized by the fact he gave her so much money just for a cab ride.

Tera spoke with a smile, “You take care, Baby Doll, and I’ll be seeing you around. Be careful tomorrow; you got the last hit in, so that big bitch might want some get-back.”

She dunked the money in her pocket, and said, “Then I guess I’ll have to beat her ass some more.” She got out the car as Tera laughed. She closed the door and waved as Tera pulled from the curb.

Baby Doll watched the Jeep fade away down Livonia Avenue, feeling as though she was being pulled into two different emotional directions. Furious because of the beat down, but utterly elated by the fact she could see a major payday hovering on the horizon. As she crossed the street, she knew Big Daddy’s job offer was too good to be true. The song by Jermaine Jackson, “Tell me I’m not dreamin’,” danced in her mind. Her mom played that song so damn much when she was a kid, every time something happened that was too good to be true that song had a way of popping into her mind.

As she approached her project building, 265 Livonia Avenue, Baby Doll was wondering if it would be a good idea to get her crazy-ass thuggish boyfriend, Ka-Born, to come up to her high school with a few of his homeys, so they could put the fear of God in Nicole, Jada and the rest of their coward-ass crew. One thing that was definite: she was not going to let them bitches get away with what they did to her, even if bringing Ka-Born up to the school might result in somebody seriously getting hurt. He had made it clear to her to never ask him to step to things that didn't call for bullets flying, because that was the only way he knew how to communicate. After considering the foul, dirty shit they did to her, stomping her out when it was a straight-up fair one, and Nicole was twice her size from the jump, she was willing to take it there.

CHAPTER 2

Baby Doll stood in front of the bathroom mirror half naked from the waist up with another mirror in her right hand, checking out the bruises, scraps, scars and other injuries scattered about her body. Her sculptured breasts with prickly nipples stood at attention and had pure youth resonating from them. They weren't outrageously huge, but they were surely much more than a mouth full, but her huge, shapely ass and a tiny waist were her strongest bodily features. Beyond the bathroom door, somewhere in the front of apartment # 5C, she could hear her older sister Tracy cursing out Jasmine (the baby of the family) for eating her hero sandwich she stashed in the refrigerator.

Baby Doll bumped into the cloth hamper as she moved to get a look at the bruise on her left side near the ribcage. She realized she hated this claustrophobic bathroom that matched the small three-bedroom apartment; the closeness of the sink to the bathtub looked like two wrestlers tussling on the canvas and bumping into things was standard practice. In fact, the entire room was no bigger than an oversized closet. As she examined the battle bruises on her shoulders, while struggling to block out the yelling match between her sisters, she was grateful she'd only received a few very minor scraps on her face.

"You better watch your fuckin' mouth!" Tracy screamed. It sounded like she then pushed Jasmine. "I'll slap the shit out your little fast ass!"

Jasmine shot back, "I didn't eat your stuff!" Her ten-year-old voice was squeaky, and didn't match her age. She sounded at least five-years younger. "You buggin', Tracy! And you better not push me no more!"

Baby Doll wanted to go out there and tell the both of them to shut the fuck up, but she knew that would be like throwing cooking grease on a blazing fire, since she and Tracy were like archenemies. The deep-set hatred between them was mutual, but Tracy's extreme dislike stem from the fact she was insanely jealous of Baby Doll because of her looks, and she was still harboring animosity over the fact Ka-Born dropped her to get with Baby Doll. The craziest thing about it was that Tracy got caught cheatin' on Ka-Born, and couldn't understand why he was shittin' on her. Vibing with her younger sister was Ka-Born's way of getting back at Tracy, and Baby Doll saw it as a golden opportunity. She had this trick-ass nigga splurging and showering her with gifts of all sorts, and she took advantage of every opportunity to fuck with Tracy's emotions, since Tracy had been fucking her over in the worse kind of ways ever since they were mere toddlers.

Some of the atrocious and unspeakable things Tracy did to her made it clear that they were not sisters even though they both came from the same woman's womb. No one could possibly call themselves a sister while standing by, enjoying herself and laughing as a perverted child molester raped her little sister. As though that wasn't foul enough, when Baby Doll tried to tell her mother about the vicious assault, Tracy had taken the side of the rapist, making her look like she was a liar. Her mother's boyfriend, Kevin Brown, apparently had this secret thing for young girls, and because Kevin was daggling a huge secret over her head, threatening to reveal this secret if Baby Doll refused to have sex with him, she was caught up in a vicious Catch-22 situation complete with never ending pain, suffering, and degradation. This, among other things, was the reason Baby Doll couldn't wait to get the hell out of this apartment, away from all these foul motherfuckers! Even their mom, Mildred, hated her, and the manner in which the jealousy often revealed itself made it very clear that it was because she was the finest looking woman in this whole twisted-ass family.

Looking at the rapidly formulating bluish mark on her chin, and the other one near her left temple, Baby Doll promised to tighten up her facial blocking game. The last thing she needed was to let one of these jealous hoes destroy her greatest asset, her beauty. The more she looked at the facial scars,- the more she couldn't understand how them bitches slipped in a few hits to her face. She could've sworn she properly covered up.

Baby Doll moved the mirror in her hand while repositioning her body, and saw she had black and blue whelps all over her arms and her back. She pulled her pants down and saw a bruise on her right ass cheek and more on her legs. The more she looked at the bruises, the more her fury grew. There was no doubt, in the morning she was going to be sore and aching like there was no tomorrow. She stepped completely out of her pants, laid them on the hamper and opened the makeshift medicine cabinet just above the sink. She found the rubbing alcohol and the pack of cotton balls and began cleaning up her wounds. The alcohol caused a burning sensation that only served to lock her mind on getting them back. She was never the type to accept mistreatment lying down, and was as vindictive as they came. Unfortunately for Nicole and her crew, they would learn this the hard way.

After finishing the alcohol rub-down, Baby Doll exited the bathroom, heading for the front door, planning to get the hell out of this mad house. Since her mind was filled with mixed thoughts of revenge as well as happiness, she felt the need to talk to someone. Jeanette was her ace rolling partner, and it was time to pay her a visit.

As Baby Doll approached Tracy, she saw her eyes lit up with hatred the second they landed on her. She geared up for another fighting match, and before Tracy could open her mouth, Baby Doll made an attempt to shut her down. "Don't look at me, 'cause I ain't have nothing to do with it."

Tracy hunched up her back like a cat as though she was about to pounce on Baby Doll. “Ain’t nobody say shit to you, bitch.” She knew Baby Doll couldn’t have eaten her hero because she just walked in the door, but she was dying to find a reason to start some shit with her and this seemed like the perfect opportunity. “Since you so quick to put your two cent in this, it probably was you who ate my shit.”

Baby Doll eased past Tracy, and was heading for the door when she felt the violent push. She stopped and turned.

“Don’t roll your eyes at me,” Tracy said with her eyes brewing with malice. “Mommy ain’t here to stop me from fuckin’ you up, so you better keep it movin’.”

Baby Doll wondered should she beat her ass again as she stared at Tracy with a serious screw face. The bruises from her earlier fight helped her to decide to take Tracy’s advice and keep it moving, but not without getting Tracy back by rubbing a nerve the wrong way. “You’s a freak for ass whippings, ain’t you? No matter how many times I beat flames out your no-fightin’ ass, you still keep coming back for more.” As she unfastened the lock on the door, Baby Doll decided to hit her below the belt. “If you were that persistent with your men, you might be able to hold on to them, and stop them from riding my bra strap.” She zipped out the door as Tracy started cursing and ranking like a lunatic.

Baby Doll decided to slide down to the corner bodega store on Livonia and Rockaway Avenue. As she strutted toward the store Baby Doll decided she was going purchase four forty ounces of Colt 45, a pack of Newports, two big bags of barbecue chips, two pounds of ground beef, a bag of hamburger buns, and two bags of French fries. She knew what Jeanette liked and figured since she had some extra dough, she might as well show some love to the only person who’d ever really showed her some love.

Baby Doll entered the store, waved to the Arab owner whose name she couldn't pronounce, even though he'd been working here for a month and change. The curly black-haired store owner usually would always smile at her in a flirtatious fashion, but today she saw he was cutting his eyes down one of the aisles. Baby Doll grabbed a red shopping basket, and went to the freezer near the back of the store. As she opened the freezer door, Baby Doll saw what the owner was hyped up about; two little Black boys, one dark skin while the other was much lighter, both no more than ten years old, were roaming the candy section looking like they were about to shoplift. She shook her head disgustedly because the two kids were a dead giveaway; it turned her stomach to see little shorties stepping to their business on some real reckless shit.

Baby Doll looked the other way and saw the other owner of the store come from the back, pretending he was a shopper, while inconspicuously watching the boys. Baby Doll snatched up four bottles of Colt 45, placed them in the basket, vowing that she was going to mind her business. Basically she was going to turn her back on the whole situation and let these tacky, sloppy little fools go on and jump out the window, but her heart was talking to her. Her heart was rock hard when dealing with most issues, but it became as soft as baby shit when it came to issues dealing with folks much younger than her. She saw both boys pick up a bag of Charms pops, look around suspiciously, cram the bags down the front of their pants, and kept pretending to be looking at items as they eased down the aisle. Baby Doll then she saw the owner rushing toward the boys about to make his bust for the day, and she rushed over as though her feet moved on their own volition.

Baby Doll said to the owner while waving her hand, "I got that. Be easy, be easy, man. Don't worry about it. I got them."

The owner said, "No, Baby Doll, me no want to hear it! They steal, they will go to jail!"

The boys frantically pulled the bags of pops from their pants as if they could somehow undo what they had just done by placing the items back on the nearby shelf. Their eyes were wide with genuine surprise, since they thought this dude was a customer.

“Come on, man,” Baby Doll said to the owner, wishing she could remember this guy’s name. But she was glad he remembered hers. “I got money, papa, and I’ll pay for what they want.” Baby Doll gave him a smile, and she knew she had him when she saw the blushing expression he gave her.

The owner then gave the boys a hard stare and said, “I no want to see you two in this store ever again.”

After Baby Doll paid for items she purchased and the pops the boys tried to steal, she and the boys exited the store. Baby Doll looked down at the boys with a motherly disappointed smirk, handed each one a bag of pops, and said, “What’s your names?”

The light-skinned boy said, “Jabari.”

The chocolate-brown-skinned kid said, “Jason.”

“Where y’all from?”

Jabari said, “From projects right down there.” He pointed.

Baby Doll knew he was referring to Brownsville Houses or Langston Hughes Projects. “Y’all ain’t see that dude scoping y’all out like that? Y’all better tighten up y’all boosting game or y’all asses is going to jail, homie.” She smiled at the two.

The boys laughed, and skipped away.

“The least you can say is thank you,” Baby Doll shouted at their backs.

Jabari shouted over his shoulder, “Thank you, Baby Doll.”

Jason repeated, “Thank you, Baby Doll.”

Baby Doll headed down Livonia Avenue, feeling good she did a good deed for the day, while noticing her bruises weren't as painful after what she had just done. She returned back to her building, but went up to the twelfth floor and knocked on apartment # 12B. When Jeanette Morrison answered the door, Baby Doll saw her missing-tooth smile was resonating with happiness and it made her look like the ultimate alcoholic. Even the raggedy housecoat and the worn-out blue jeans she had on announced her substance abuse status. Her dark brown skin looked like crusty hard shoe leather and her eyes glistened with a delirium that perfectly matched her deep, scratchy voice.

"Baby Doll!" Jeanette was truly glad to see her young homegirl. The sight of the bag brought on a case of anticipatory delight. "Come on in here, girl." She held the smile as Baby Doll entered, and when she heard the lovely sound of those beer bottles jangling inside the bag, she knew it was party time. "I see you came correct today, girl. Got some goodies, huh? Somebody must've hit you off some kinda lovely." As Baby Doll sat the bag on the rickety kitchen table that had thick gray construction tape holding one of the legs together, Jeanette's mouth started watering as Baby Doll reached inside the bag, and pulled out a bottle of Colt 45. She hadn't had a good drink since yesterday and her body was aching for some alcohol.

As Baby Doll continued pulling the bottles of beer from the bag, she turned and saw Edna approach from the back section of the apartment. She had a light brown skin complexion, very rigid facial features, a short haircut, was dressed in faded blue jeans, and could've passed for a man, if it wasn't for the medium-sized titties protruding from the wife beater T-shirt she wore. Baby Doll could never understand what could make women become sexually attracted to other women, and if it wasn't for Jeanette's open-minded attitude and the true friendship she

displayed toward her, Baby Doll would've never got into the habit of hanging out with a lesbian.

Edna saw Baby Doll and sighed jealously, struggling not to display her impatience with Baby Doll's habit of showing up any time she needed to burn Jeanette's ears out with a bunch of project drama, "What's up, Baby Doll." Her attitude changed instantly when she saw the four bottles of Colt 45. "Hey, I see we about to do this damn thing." She picked up a bottle, cracked it open, and took a swig.

Baby Doll saw Edna's response and was glad she brought something for a change. She pulled out the hamburger meat and said, "I hope you feel like cooking, 'cause I don't." Although Baby Doll was a superb cook and had cooked numerous meals in this apartment, today it wasn't happening because she had to kick it with Jeanette.

Jeanette smiled as she went for the hamburger meat, "Girl, you must've won the lotto, coming in here with a dinner and shit." She reached inside the bag, found the French fries, scooped up all the cookable items and headed for the stove a few feet away. She turned and examined Baby Doll's face, sensing something was wrong. She saw the scratch on her chin, and knew it was time to take a timeout. "Oh shit, Baby Doll, I see we gotta talk, don't we? Hey, Eddie, come on over here and fix up this meal. Me and Baby Doll gotta do some girl talk."

Edna burped rudely, sat the quart bottle down on the table, and jumped to the command as Baby Doll and Jeanette went into the living room. Baby Doll sat in the dingy, moth-eaten, dirty-gray armchair, while Jeanette sat in a stain-ridden beige sofa. Baby Doll leaned back comfortably and glanced up at the poster-like pictures plastered on the wall. There was about a dozen pictures of Black men and woman who were influential in the Black Power Movement of the late sixties and early seventies, and she could still remember the first time Jeanette told her about

the great things Malcolm X, Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale, Eldridge and Katherine Cleaver, Joanne Chesimard (Assata Shakur), George and Jonathan Jackson, and Angela Davis had done to help change the way Black people were treated in this country back then.

Jeanette pulled a Newport from the pack and lit it up. “What happened to your face, Baby Doll? And what’s up with the bag of goodies?”

“I got jumped by this bitch name Nicole and her peoples.” Baby Doll said. “They from Bruekelene, and they think they run Canarsie High.”

“Damn, how many of them was it?” Jeanette said in a motherly fashion.

“It was about five of ‘em.”

“If you need me go up there with you just say the word now. I can still throw down, you know. My knuckle game is still as wicked as it wanna be.”

Baby Doll giggled inwardly, imagining Jeanette going up to the High and getting her feelings hurt. Jeanette was far too washed up to lock horns with one of them young hood rats. “Naw, I’m cool. I don’t need you to hold me down with this. Them bitches are cowards. It took five of them to step to me, and believe it or not, I still did my thang. Plus, I was thinking about bringing Ka-Born up there with me, and let him do him. He be talking all this thug shit about how he bust his gun, I’m a see if he’s the real deal.”

Jeanette vigorously shook her head no as she blew out the cigarette smoke. “I don’t think that’s a wise thing to do. He go up there shooting and shit, and the next thing you know, your ass’ll be sittin’ up in jail with a big ass bid hanging over your head. They got conspiracy charges, acting in concert, and all kinds of shit to get at folks that didn’t even pull the trigger. You know how stupid these trigger-happy-ass niggas can get.”

Baby Doll didn’t want to admit it, but Jeanette was right. The last thing she needed was to be sitting up in jail because some dumb-ass nigga done went and

killed somebody. But the thought of seeing them bitches lying in the gutter with some hot ones inside of them sounded real good. However, the reality was that if something did happen to them she would definitely be the number one suspect. Half the school knew about their scuffle and somebody was bound to talk if shit got funky.

For some odd reason this dilemma reminded her of her dream of getting the hell out of the hood. She hated this place with a passion, and her greatest fear was ending up like so many of the people around her: Trapped, ignorant, frustrated, uneducated, and filled with a hopelessness that could bring the most optimistic person to tears of despair. One of the forces that kept her going was the innate feeling that she was different from most of the teens around her; she wasn't a dummy and always believed she was destined for greatness.

Most of the time she felt like an adult trapped inside a teenage body. The way she saw the world around her was like she was viewing it through the eyes of someone else, and she felt comfortable hanging out with people almost twice her age and had been doing it that way for as far back as she could remember. When she was amongst girls her age, she literally felt like an oddball, since the things they talked about and the activities they engaged in were the most childish things that drove her crazy. Jeanette's words regarding Ka-Born doing something to get her caught up circulated through her mind, but despite the potential risks, she couldn't let Nicole and her crew get away without some type of punishment. "What I'm gonna do is get Ka-Born to come up there with me tomorrow and make sure I get a fair one with each and every one of them bitches. He ain't gotta get his hands dirty; all he gotta do is post up on the sideline and make sure nobody jumps in."

"Shit, I can do that for you," Jeanette said seriously as she flicked ashes in the ashtray. "I still say bringing Ka-Born up there ain't a good idea."

Ka-Born's most recent misadventure tugged at Jeanette's memory. "You know that fool shot some dude from Howard Projects the other night, and now the guy's peoples and Ka-Born are playing tit for tat. He shoot at them, then them fools shoot back at him." She shook her head in disgust. "I don't know what made you even dream of fucking with that crazy motherfucker. He ain't got shit going for himself, and he's gonna end up in prison or in the cemetery." She looked at Baby Doll as she snuffed out the cigarette in the ashtray. "Just make sure you don't get caught in any cross fire, Baby Doll. Getting you sister back for shitin' on you can't be worth all the headaches of dealing with Ka-Born."

Baby Doll wanted to say, "You wanna bet," but instead she decided to drop the issue, "Now we can talk about the good news." She smiled as she leaned forward in her seat. "When I was fighting them bitches, this old-timer name Big Daddy Blue and his niece name—"

"Big Daddy Blue!?" Jeanette was definitely interested because this cat was big time back in the day. "You ain't talking about the one who did all that time and just got out?"

"I don't know if he just got out of jail, but I do know he got mad clubs and other businesses."

Jeanette smiled, "Yeah, that's him. He's into the club thing now. Yeah, that's him. You said you met him!? How the hell that happened?"

"I was fighting them bitches, and him and his niece Tera pulled up in a Jeep and broke up the fight. They gave me a ride home." She was about to mention the fifty dollars Big Daddy gave her, but put the brakes on that with the quickness. Although Jeanette was considered her best friend, Baby Doll had learned many years ago to keep all her money matters strictly to herself. "And he offered me a job."

“A job!?” Jeanette instantly assumed Big Daddy wanted to throw Baby Doll’s pretty little ass in a G-string and put her on stage. “Did he say what kinda job it is?”

She saw it in Jeanette’s eyes; she was thinking exactly what she thought upon hearing his job offer. “No, but I told him straight up, I ain’t into strippin’. He got some stores, and Tera works for him as a manager. The way he was kicking it, I don’t think he’s on some grimy shit.”

Jeanette sighed while struggling not to say something to burst her bubble. Reflecting back on Big Daddy Blue’s reputation prior to him going to jail, she had to admit the man wasn’t grimy, but he sure was ruthless. He’d probably sold as much drugs to the Black community as Nicky Barnes, and probably cracked as many heads as John Gotti. Her perception of Big Daddy Blue at that time was that he was the ultimate enemy of the people, and several times her Black Panther chapter tried to undermine Big Daddy’s operation without even a smidgen of progress. But, recently, she did get wind that he was nothing like he was back in the day.

Baby Doll noticed Jeanette was deep in thought, and wanted to know what she was thinking. “So what you think? You know I got’s to get your view on this, girl.”

“Hey, times are rough when it comes to finding jobs. With that maniac Bush in office, ain’t no time to be thumbing your nose to a legit job. But I will tell you this. In my opinion, Big Daddy was a diehard hustler before he did that bid and might still be that same person. People that hustle at that level and intensity don’t get that stuff totally out of their system, no matter how long they ass get put on ice. Of course, there’s exceptions, but I don’t know if Big Daddy’s one of them. Despite what’s said and done, I say go for it, girl. Just keep your eyes and ears open.”

Baby Doll was glad she got Jeanette's blessing on this. With that all cleared up it was time to celebrate. "We better get us a hit of that Colt 45 before Edna dust it all off." She went to the kitchen, retrieved a bottle, two cups, and returned to the living room. Baby Doll cracked the lid, poured two cups, handed one to Jeanette, sat down, and sipped the malt liquor. "You mind if I holla at Ka-Born, and have him come here?"

Jeanette smiled. "Do you Baby Doll."

Baby Doll took another huge gulp, and felt Jeanette's energy vibrating through the air. Her gestures indicated she didn't want Ka-Born in her apartment, and Baby Doll wanted to ease her concerns, since she had no intention of violating in that fashion. "Don't worry, Jeanette, when he comes, I'm breaking out. I know you ain't feelin' him, so I ain't gonna let him in your crib." She went to the kitchen, and dialed his beeper number and hung up. She smiled because she used the emergency code, and knew he would come rushing over thinking the shit was on.

Meanwhile, Ka-Born stood on the corner of Blake Avenue and Bristol Street looking at the emergency code on his beeper. His smooth dark chocolate complexion, his beaded eyes, and muscular built made him look like a displaced Zulu warrior. If it weren't for the baggy pants, the cream leather Timbs, and the expensive Sean John jacket he wore, with a diamond stubbed gold bracket dangling from his wrist, he could've passed for a handsome Congonese African. Standing next to him was his street team, Sinister and Ramsey. Ka-Born's heart started accelerating with excitement as he realized the emergency code number was coming from Baby Doll, his fine little trophy.

He snapped out of his semi-trance, and started barking at his team. "Yo', son, I got some drama poppin' off in Tilden. My little shorty got a beef or some shit." He caressed the 9mm tucked in his waist. "Sinister, go get the ride, and tell Weasel to get on this corner until we get back." As he watched Sinister swagger

down the block, Ka-Born smiled inwardly because he had been itching for some drama all day, and he was apparently getting his wishes.