

Enigma of **LOVE**



A Novel By Divine G

ENIGMA OF LOVE

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Also by Divine G

Novels:

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ENIGMA OF LOVE ®

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Dedication

This novel is dedicated to the numerous 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

Danielle was in the passenger seat of the cream colored Lexus, watching the late night deserted Bronx streets scroll across her vision. She was contemplating her answer to Jamil's question. After he made a right turn onto Kingsbridge Road, with the ghettoized Tenement buildings sliding across her vision, she said, "It's a surprise."

Jamil Nevez momentarily took his eyes off the road, glancing over at Danielle. His golden brown skin, strong baby face features, hard brown eyes, and that contagious smile made him look like a cross between the ultimate choirboy and an urban ruffian. Expertly concealing his dislike of surprises, with humorous vigor, Jamil said. "I see you gettin' ready to take me on one of them mind rides again."

"Believe me, this ain't a head game," She said softly, her voice matching her extraordinarily exotic features. "You know I don't get down like that." Her flawless maple syrup colored complexion, sleek brown bedroom eyes, and long shoulder length hair took on a special glow tonight and was in syche with her mood. She was seconds from blurting out the news, but quickly contained the urge. "I just wanna check out a few things before I jump to conclusions."

"Well, maybe you should've waited until you had all the facts. I hate being left--" Jamil saw two men walking down the street up ahead. One of them looked like Joe Rock-head he realized. He took his foot off the gas pedal, and slowed down the Lexus to an inconspicuous crawl.

"What's wrong, Jamil?" Danielle followed Jamil's stare that was locked on the two approaching men.

"It's nothin', Boo," Jamil said without blinking once. Through the heavily tinted window, he scrutinized the two men as he cruised pass them. *Yeap, it's him.* Jamil smiled inwardly. *Thought you was gonna sneak in and sneak out, huh, motherfucker!?* His adrenaline kicked in; the epinephrine made him feel light headed.

Danielle's heart flickered in her chest as Jamil killed the headlights and made a U turn. Her nervousness caused her to unconsciously turn the gold ring on her pinkie finger. She sensed something real crazy was about to happen.

Jamil doubled parked the Lexus as he observed the two men turn down an alleyway. "I'll be right back, Danielle." He got out of the car, quietly closed the door behind him and walked very fast after the two. His black leather jacket flapped in the early March breeze.

When Jamil turned into the alleyway, he quietly kneeled behind a bunch of garbage cans. The wretched odors struck his senses like a slap to the face with a shit covered glove. It smelled like a conglomeration of shitty diapers, decayed fruits, rotting fish and God only knows what else. With squinted eyes, while breathing very lightly, Jamil pulled his 9mm from the back waist of his pants, reached in his jacket pocket for the silencer, and rapidly screwed it onto the 16 shot automatic.

Peering around the trash cans, Jamil saw a third man approaching Joe and his side kick, Baltimore. The newcomer came from the back of the dead-end alley and stopped in front of the two, talking. The situation was developing so perfectly in his favor, Jamil wondered was this a set-up or a trap of some kind. These chumps had nowhere to run and he had the element of surprise. Indeed, the circumstances were simply too good to be true.

Jamil didn't give a fuck what it was as he flicked the safety button into the off position. He had rage in his eyes, revs of retribution pumping his heart, and murder on his mind.

Jamil rose to his feet and eased towards the trio with his automatic aimed at Joe's back. He was definitely gonna get it first! With his heart rate increasing from the excitement, Jamil smiled when he saw the newcomer's eyes bulge. Just as the three men frantically scrambled for cover, Jamil's trigger finger came to life.

SZK! SZK! SZK!

Silent flames roared from the 9mm. Jamil saw Joe's body convulse when a bullet struck him in the lower back. Joe fell to the ground as two bullets struck Baltimore in the chest when he stupidly turned around to see what was going on. He fell hard to the pavement. Jamil's eyes got wide when the newcomer pulled a gun.

BOW! BOW!

The two ear-shattering 44 magnum explosions vibrated everything in its circumference as Jamil frantically sought refuge behind a huge garbage dumpster. Bullets ricocheted and whizzed pass him. Jamil peeked around the dumpster and saw the newcomer running deeper into the alley. He took aim and carefully squeezed off two shots. The newcomer flinched from the impact of the bullets, then tripped and fell flat on his face. Jamil sprung to his feet and ran towards the newcomer.

As Jamil moved rapidly down the alley, he saw the newcomer had dropped his weapon and was crawling for it. Jamil increased his speed and fired two shots to the man's head. Chunks of flesh and bone were splattered all over the pavement.

Suddenly, Jamil heard a scurrying noise in back of him. He turned and saw Joe stumbling away. Jamil ran over to Baltimore's motionless body and planted two bullets in his head. There wasn't gonna be any survivors of this conflict. *No tales will be told of this night*, he promised as he turned and saw Joe stumbled into a crowd of garbage cans. The noise of the crashing cans seemed to be ear shattering.

Jamil bolted after Joe. With the 9mm aimed, Jamil squeezed off a shot. It missed. Joe made it pass the entrance of the alleyway. *Shit!* Jamil muttered, realizing there could be eyes all over the place because of those two fuckin' loud ass gun shots! Those fuckin' garbage cans didn't help either.

Jamil fired another shot. The impact of the bullet spun Joe around as he crumbled to the ground. He was just beyond the curb and started crawling desperately into the middle of the street. Jamil's speed increased.

Breathing hard, Jamil kicked Joe square in his ass, catapulting him into a two foot slide on his stomach and his chin. With his foot, Jamil flipped Joe over onto his back. He wanted to see this motherfucker's eyes before he let him have it. Staring down at Joe with a warped smile, Jamil slowly raised his 9mm.

"Jamil, please man," Joe Rock-head slurred from the pain. "He came at me first, I ain't have a choice, man--"

SZK! SZK!

The two bullets ripped into Joe's skull, causing his whole body to jerk and flinch with tremendous force.

Jamil turned and quickly walked towards his Lexus. He sighed with anger, realizing Danielle saw him kill Joe Rock-head. *Damn it!* He didn't

want her to ever see anything like this! *Shit!* But, it was too late to change all that. Unscrewing the silencer, he hastily scanned the surrounding buildings to see if anyone was looking. He saw nothing out of the norm. Jamil stuffed the silencer in his pocket and tucked the hot automatic in the front waist of his pants.

Jamil snatched open the car door, jumped in, slammed the gear in drive and sped off. He maneuvered the Lexus around Joe's body sprawled in the street.

With excitement still racing through his blood-stream, Jamil said to Danielle, "What did you see?"

Danielle was aghast. "You, you killed him?" When she turned and made eye contact with Jamil, something frightening bubbled inside the pit of her stomach. His expression was scary. It took a fraction of a second for her to catch on. "I ain't see, heard or know a damn thing. Absolutely nothing."

Jamil smiled broadly. He always knew Danielle was a trooper. Now he would find out if she was really built like that. He prayed she didn't fail the test; he sure would hate to kill something as fine and perfectly stacked as Danielle.

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Meanwhile, a woman named Debra Holmes crashed from the front door of the tenement building next to the alleyway where the murders occurred, screaming. "Joe! Joe! Oh God, please, Joe!" She hysterically latched onto his dead body, crying profusely. She told him not to fuck with Jamil and them damn drugs. And how the hell could he even think he could come back out here after killing two of Jamil's workers!?! *Stupid! Stupid! Stupid! If he had only listened.*

Moments earlier, Debra heard the two shots and rushed to her window. She saw a double parked Lexus with a woman in the passenger seat. The car window was rolled down and the brown skin black woman was smoking a cigarette. Debra almost became frantic when a closer observation revealed it was Jamil's girlfriend.

A few seconds later, Debra saw Joe stumble from the alleyway, fell and started crawling into the middle of the street. Then, right on Joe's heels, she saw Jamil approaching with a gun in his hand. When Jamil stood over Joe pointing the gun, she was seconds from screaming out the window for him to stop, but common sense told her to be easy; real easy. Then silent flames leaped from the gun, Joe's body jerked from the impact. It took every drop of energy for her not to rush out the apartment until Jamil fled the scene.

With blood covering her hands, Debra sprung to her feet and raced back inside her first floor apartment and dialed 911 with trembling fingers. "Hello, is this the police!?" Crying hysterically she said, "Jamil Nevez killed my man!"

CHAPTER # 2

The following morning, Jamil swirled from the deep sleep and slammed the palm of his hand on the buzzing alarm clock. He laid there for an two extra minutes, then rolled out of bed and stumbled to the bathroom. Last night's drama jumped in his head as he brushed his teeth. He was enthralled at the thought he had finally caught up with Joe Rock-head. He'd been trying to track him down for four months, and had even put out a fifty thousand dollar contract on his big ass head.

After taking a shower, Jamil got dressed, fixed himself a protein drink and exited his six million dollar Westchester County mansion in Scarsdale. He was on his way to the stash-house in Tracy Towers to pick up last night's money. As he got inside his sky blue Mercedes-Benz E360, Jamil re-enacted the discussion he had with his big brother, Kilroy, last night after dropping Danielle off at her crib.

Jamil pulled the car onto the road and still couldn't fix his mind to understand why Kilroy hated Danielle so much. She was a hard-core trooper, was easy to get along with, never nagged, complained or whined about anything, the sex was literally off the Richter scale, she wasn't a gold digging hoochie mama, since she wasn't phased by all his money, she was insanely loyal to him, and most of all, his guilty conscience was growing out of control with each moment he spent with her.

In other words, Jamil truly felt Daneille was a dream girl. And from the perspective of one who's life involved ripping, running and mastering the streets, he believed this was the only rational way to view her. Although he had a major beef with her occupation, Jamil did realized it showed just how much she kept it real and funky, and would never be a cross over Negro.

After he proudly told Kilroy about the dirty little secret Danielle had lingering in her closet, Jamil couldn't believe Kilroy still wasn't convinced she was beyond snitching on him.

As Jamil drove onto the parkway and saw a black couple in a BMW cruising along side of him, he wondered if he was starting to get soft? After a life time spent being a womanizer, a 'hood rat abuser and the ultimate pimp daddy, this feeling was very threatening. Even he didn't quite understand why he was feeling Danielle so much? Maybe Kilroy was right, maybe he was getting soft. If he believed in witchcraft and voodoo, he would've been convinced she hit his ass with some kind of Moe Joe or something. But when he looked closely at what he was experiencing, he sensed it wasn't a pussy whipped feeling; he was sure of that. He was hoping it wasn't a love thing, but his subconscious was telling him that's exactly what it was.

For the umpteenth time, he wondered if he was allowing his heart to taint the rational part of his mind? Under normal situations, Danielle would have to go and would have been dealt with immediately after witnessing the shooting. Kilroy had vehemently insisted they send a hitter to deal with Danielle, but Jamil made it unequivocally clear he was not going to allow it, and when Kilroy saw Jamil's facial response, he instantly retracted the suggestion.

Twenty minutes later, after entering the Bronx, Jamil started spying his rearview mirror much more frequently. A few minutes later, Jamil noticed a green car behind him containing a white and a black man. It took him ten minutes, and six unintended turns to discover they were definitely

tailing him. A small ping of nervousness began beating wildly in his chest as he stopped at a traffic-light on White Plains Road.

When the light turned green, Jamil sped off. He saw the car turn right and sighed with partial relief. He immediately started looking for the new car because it was standard police procedure for several cars to take turns following a target. He was getting far too paranoid to go through with this pick up and decided to head back to his crib.

He made a stop at a red light, looking out his mirrors.

AAARRHHH!!

Suddenly, four unmarked cars came to a screeching stop in front of him. Three similar cars stopped in back of him. All fourteen detectives, sprung out of their vehicles with weapons pointed.

"Put your hands up!--NOW!--Get 'em up!" The detectives screamed.

Jamil put his hands up in the air. He was glad he left his hardware home and hoped they didn't find his secret compartment in the back seat where he hid his back-up 9mm.

The Mercedes' door was snatched open, the heavysset white detective reached over, slammed the gear in park and snatched Jamil from the car, forcing him to lay face down on the pavement.

"You have the right to remain silent . . ."

As the cuffs were slapped on his wrists, and his rights read in full, Jamil forced himself to relax. This was probably just a routine harassment situation. After he paid some extra pay-off funds, everything would be all right.

". . .You're under arrest for murder. . ."

Jamil's heart leaped in his chest. *Murder!?* As Jamil was snatched to his feet and shoved inside the green car that followed him moments ago, his mind was hurling information around in his head. In a restrained panicked state, he was trying to figure out if this arrest was for last night's run? Maybe it was for one of the dozen other runs he'd done in the past decade since becoming involved in the drug game? It couldn't be for any of those previous runs, he easily concluded, because he wore a mask, all those runs were well thought out and he kept his business to himself. The only person who knew of his past exploits was his brother, Kilroy, and he obviously wouldn't flip out.

His inner voice assured him that he was being arrested for last night's run. In a state of dread, he realized there was no one else besides Danielle who saw the incident. She had to be responsible for this! Naw, it can't be! Danielle would never do some shit like that! Kilroy's statement jumped in his mind as the car sped off: "She's even more dangerous to you because of all that shit she got in her closet, fool!"

Jamil gritted his teeth so hard, he heard ringing in his ears. His mind refused to believe Danielle was responsible for this because he felt it in his heart she was built to endure such an incident, and most of all, he realized he loved her. He repeatedly told himself, *it can't be Danielle! It can't be!*

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Danielle sat staring at her make-up laden image in the mirror. The thunderous bass coming from the club dance floor made her shabby, small dressing room tremble and shiver. With the exception of a gee-string and a tiny bra that covered only her nipples, Danielle was naked. She wore a ton of elegant perfume that could clearly be smelled twenty feet away.

She gazed into her brown eyes. In a semi-trance like state, her mind was somewhere else. Even her inner voice was screaming at her, telling her something was terribly wrong. She sighed hard, fighting to stay focused, since she was on deck next. From past experience, she knew she couldn't perform her routine effectively without being totally in the mood and focused.

Danielle reached over and sparked up a cigarette. She cursed at herself because this was the fourth one within a half hour. She wanted to stop this nasty habit, and even tried twice, but there was just too much stress and frustration going on in her life. Plus, her discipline was shot when it came to controlling her habits; especially the bad ones. In between drags on the cancer stick, she rotated the ring on her pinkie finger without realizing what she was doing. Her subconscious was telling her something real bad happened to Jamil. He didn't showed up at the club or called her in two whole days. This was the first time he'd ever failed to pick her up and bring her home after work without calling to let her know he couldn't make it. She beeped him over and over again and got no response. When she called his crib, she got no answer.

Her intuition told her that his current missing in action status had something to do with the shooting the other night. Every bad thing her pessimistic mind could conjure up, took full control of her imagination. Is he laying dead somewhere? What if he was shot and killed by the peoples of the man he smoked the other night? Maybe he had to skip town in a hurry?

She sighed with angry force. This was extremely bad timing. Her surprise was confirmed yesterday, and instead of being a moment of joy and happiness, it was now transformed into a moment of sadness and deep

depression. When would anything, even the most simplest thing, ever go right for her? Just when she started to think her bad luck was about to ease up just a little bit, now this had to happen.

That night of the shooting stayed in her thoughts. It wasn't because of the death of that man Jamil killed. She had seen so much death during her 31 years on this planet, she long since recognized death was absolutely an indispensable part of life. Everybody lived in order to die; some simply died a little quicker than others, and often had a helping hand to assist them with the trip. Indeed, it was nothing short of a miracle she could still feel distressed when death occurred in her midst. But, thanks to the massive number of trials and tribulations she underwent, Danielle was far from one of those sensitive, unblemished, stuck in the house type of women, who would have been shattered by the shooting.

Put another way, she was a gruff woman of the world, who'd been hurt, disrespected, abandoned, beaten down physically, psychologically, spiritually, and emotionally, and had developed an impenetrable shield that could put Teflon and Titanium out of business. The story of her life read like an urban horror tale; tragedy after tragedy was all that life seemed to offer Danielle. She was a loner, and because of her past, she had no choice in this matter. Even her girlfriend and co-worker, Brenda "Sweet Cheeks" Taylor, was not as close as Brenda preferred. As far as Danielle was concerned, Brenda was more or less someone to talk to in order not to go completely insane from loneliness and boredom when Jamil wasn't around.

Danielle's intense, long-standing pain, suffering, alienation and self-inflicted ostracism caused her to hate people; they always seemed to be the root of so much unnecessary heartaches. But, her bitterness and anger was

non-toxic to others in the sense that she never wanted to see other people in the same state of turmoil she was in. The saying, misery loves company was totally inapplicable to Danielle. She attributed this humanity component in her heart to her loving and caring zodiac sign, Sagittarius. But despite all the outer images, the callused coverings and the protective shields, Danielle wanted what most women wanted--a family.

She sighed angrily as the cloud of Newport smoke swirled from her mouth. Her plans for the future were rapidly unraveling before her eyes. Danielle started mentally beating up herself because she should have known getting too deeply involved with a bad boy, sophisticated rough neck type, was not a wise move. After all the madness all the previous 'hood-minded brothers put her through, one would think she had learned her lesson by now. But, she had no control over the way her feelings reacted to matters of the heart.

Plus, Jamil was uniquely different from most men from the 'hood. He was like some kind of character right out of an intriguing romance novel. His amazing sense of humor was a tremendously big thumbs up; she always enjoyed the company of a man who could make her laugh. He was rich, he was feared and respected, and most of all, he wasn't afraid to show his affection in public. If a man was uncomfortable around her when in the presence of others, he had no business with Danielle. She definitely sensed he loved her; he never said it straight out, but his ways and actions spoke volumes.

Danielle always wondered what in the hell did Jamil see in her? Why was he attracted to a strip-tease dancing 'hood rat who was running from her past and had a bad attitude as big as a bazooka blast? At first, she always

thought it was because of her big round ass; all black men loved big butt women, and she knew she had plenty junk in her trunk. But, as time went on and the relationship slowly grew, it became self evident her body wasn't what Jamil was out to get. He sincerely seemed to be after her heart. That day she first met Jamil, about a year ago, when he entered the club and walked over to her, introduced himself and started cracking jokes on Big Pete, the bouncer, would live in her mind for eternity. The vibe he gave off made her feel like she knew him all her life.

There was only one other man in her life who made her feel as good as Jamil did, but the harm he inflicted on her heart and mental well-being caused her to literally hate him with an unmitigating passion. There was indeed a very thin line between love and hate, and when he crossed that line, Danielle developed an aversion for him that was so profound there was no word in the English language to describe the hate she felt. She despised the ground he walked on.

There was a sudden knock on the door.

"Come in!" Danielle shouted.

The bouncer, Big Pete, opened the door, and stuck his high yellow fat face inside the room. "It's time, baby girl." He smiled, showing off his gold plated front tooth.

"I'm on my way," Danielle snuffed out her cigarette as she rose to her feet. She didn't hear the door close and turned. "I said I'm comin', Pete."

Pete was smiling broadly, enjoying the view. He closed the door and headed down the corridor towards the dance floor.

Danielle checked herself in the mirror one last time and pranced out of her dressing room. The song, Slam it and Jam it, was booming through the

speakers, which was Sweet Cheeks' finish-line song, indicating she was whining down her routine. Danielle stood near the dance floor entrance for the DJ to see her. She saw the house was almost full, with the exception of four tables.

She shook loose of the stress and started tapping her foot, allowing the bass to draw her into dance mode. The electrical vibe struck and started with her foot and moved upwards. Her hips started moving to the beat, then her shoulders, and before she knew it, her whole body was bouncing to the beat.

A minute later, the music was slowly turned down. When the music was just above a mellow level, DJ Freaky Frukwan said into the microphone. "Come on! Let's show my girl Sweet Cheeks some love my brothers! Yeah!"

There was a huge round of applauds accompanied with whistles and heckling comments of pleasure and delight.

Frukwan continued. "Our next dancer needs no introduction. With the biggest butt in the Bronx, and the sweetest smile you ever did see, please welcome and show some heavy love for the one and only Danielle, AKA Midnight Flower!"

Danielle strutted seductively towards the two foot platform. Her song, *Swing Those Things*, lit up the club. There were hoots and hollers of joy and happiness as she mounted the stage and went into her routine.

Twenty minutes later, sweat was oozing from her pores and her g-string and bra strap was littered with bills of all denominations from her regular horny old customers. Her whine down song came on and she sighed with relief. All throughout her routine, Danielle was looking into the sea of

faces, searching and hoping Jamil's face would pop-up, but in accordance with her bad luck, that didn't happen.

Danielle rhythmically pranced off the stage, across the dance floor, and down the corridor to her dressing room. She opened the door and was surprised when she saw Sweet Cheeks in her dressing room. She was a light skinned, petite sister with real reddish brown hair and aqua green eyes. Her unusually large and shapely hips and thighs with a tiny waist were her best features. However, she was twisted in the breast department.

Danielle saw the troubled expression on her face. "What's wrong, Brenda?"

Brenda excitedly grabbed Danielle's hands, and pulled her over to the chair. "Girl, I think you should have a seat before I tell you this."

Danielle's heart dropped to her pelvic bone. She struggled to keep her eyes from taking on a terrified look. "What is it!?" She sat down.

Brenda stretched out the torturous suspense for as long as possible. She enjoyed teasing people in this fashion. "You know that cat who got all them spots in Bronx River Projects locked down? I think his name is BJ? He works for Jamil?"

"Yeah, yeah, I know him." She just knew Jamil was dead.

"He told me Jamil got arrested for a triple homicide the other day. That's why he ain't been around here."

Triple homicide!? She whistled. That night of the shooting flashed across her mind. She felt a stabbing sensation in her chest. "Did he say where the homicides happened?"

"Naw, he ain't go into all that."

Danielle stared at her image in the mirror for a moment. "I gotta go see him. He should be on Rikers Island, right?"

"Danielle, I know you ain't gonna start runnin' this nigga down, now that he's on lock down?"

Danielle screwed up her face. Brenda was the epitome of a gold digger and had no shame in her game when it came to jumping from man to man as long as it worked to her advantage. "I ain't flippin' on Jamil 'cause of this. I'm gonna go see him tomorrow morning."

"And how you plan on doing that?" Brenda said matter of factly as she propped her soft, plump behind on the counter. "We gotta do that Wall Street job tomorrow."

"Shit!" Danielle muttered. "Yeah, you right." She quickly analyzed her schedule inside her head.

"And don't forget the day after tomorrow we supposed to go to Long Island to Jason's mansion. I heard that party supposed to be the bomb. He wants us to get there before noon so we can rehearse. This is the biggest week we gonna see for a good while."

Danielle gritted her teeth. Brenda was right; they were going to be busy most of the week. But, she had to make a sacrifice. "I ain't gonna be able to go to Long Island. You gotta do that one without me."

"Naw, Danielle, you know we roll as a team, girl. Jamil can wait until the weekend. Business before bullshit is the rule in this--"

"What the hell are you talkin' about!? This is business. Keepin' it real is all about the business. This ain't open for discussion. I'll do the Wall Street gig tomorrow, but the Long Island one is dead."

CHAPTER # 3

The following morning, as Danielle and Brenda were on the #2 train on their way to Wall Street, Jamil entered the visiting room floor of Rikers Island's HDM (House of Detention for Men), dressed in a gray jumpsuit. The huge sliding door gate closed behind him. His eyes scanned the area with smooth precision. The visiting area was filled primarily with women and children. When his eyes landed on Brute and Cleavon, he noticed they stood out like a white speck of lint on a jet black piece of cloth. They had thug written all over them.

As Jamil approached the small plastic table, he realized Kilroy had to be in war mode for him to send these two crazy fools. That was a good thing, since this situation was going to require the use of some very serious measures. They both stood up when they saw Jamil.

Jamil gave them both some dap (striking their clinched fists together) and sat down. "Nigger, you brushed your teeth today?" He said to Cleavon with a crazy smile. "I ain't in the mood to be smellin' no shit."

Brute unleashed a deep baritone chuckle. "That's why I like you, Ja. You crazy as hell, man." The bass in his voice matched his big, burly body.

Jamil continued. "I smell enough foul ass odors in this place, I don't need you comin' in here fuckin' up my breathin' air."

Cleavon smiled. His ruthless persona was turned down two notches. He was in the presence of one of his bosses; the second in command of the Nevez Brothers' drug syndicate and he struggled to act accordingly. "Damn, son! You don't ever take shit serious, do you? This ain't the time for your little ranking games. These crackers are gonna fry your black ass as sure as the white man is the devil."

"They need to fry that shit on top of your head. Maybe a little heat'll straight out that silly ass Wally way back hairline of yours."

Brute laughed harder. He loved when Cleavon got dissed because he was so hard on everybody else it was a relief to see him get a taste of his own medicine.

Cleavon was seething with anger, but didn't reveal it. "You ain't gonna be laughin' when you hear what's up with that fine bitch of yours."

"What? You jealous, motherfucker?" Jamil teased. "I get the fine ones while you get them old busted ass crack smokin', dog dick suckin', crusty ankle havin' ass bitches."

Brute exploded with laughter, drawing attention to their table.

Cleavon laughed as well. "You know I ain't never trusted them fine bitches. They ain't nothing but foul and trifling motherfuckers, out to suck a nigga's pockets bone dry like a Hoover vacuum cleaner. Give me an ugly broad any day."

"Nigger, like you got a choice in the matter. Ain't no fine bitch in their right mind gonna want your twisted ass. Look at you, your furniture is fucked up, you got a ole lumpy ass head, breath smell like buzzard ass, your hairline starts at the top of your head, and you keep a set of black eyes. I'ma start calling you asscoon. You smell like ass and look like a damn raccoon. Asscoon motherfucker! That's you."

They all laughed.

"At least I ain't no pussy whipped, strung out motherfucker, jumpin' through the bra strap, and funky ass G-string of a strip club tramp."

Jamil was smiling, but he didn't find that funny. He locked eyes with Cleavon as the smile disappeared. His face was as blank as a sheet of clean notebook paper and as cold as freon. He deliberately rode the silence.

The silence was long and penetrating.

Cleavon started getting nervous. *Ah, shit!* He done fucked around and crossed the line. It was time to cop a plea. "I'm—I—you--I--" He swallowed hard. "Come on, Jamil, we was jokin', man. You started it first. Now, you gonna spazz out on me!?"

A moment later, Jamil said, "You see, look at him, Brute." He burst out laughing. "He's a bitch. Cold blooded bitch, tremblin' like a Mexican Chihuahua about to get fucked with some horse dick."

Brute laughed, but Cleavon silently sighed with relief.

"All right, all right," Jamil held up both hands. "Rec. time is officially over. The next motherfucker crack another joke from here on end, will feel the wrath. These motherfuckers are about to fry my black ass . . . So, what did Kilroy find out?"

Cleavon spoke enthusiastically. "Kilroy found out the snitch is your girl Danielle."

Jamil put his head down. He was devastated. He sensed it was her, but was hoping and praying it wasn't the case. His eyes started getting misty and he struggled to keep from showing his pain.

Cleavon was staring at Jamil's eyes. He always thought Jamil was pussy whipped; now he knew it was true from the way he responded to this news. "Sorry, Jamil, but she's gotta go."

Brute spoken seriously. "Kilroy wants to send some hitters out tonight. He wanted us to let you know what's going on. This is a triple

homicide case and we gotta step to this real quick before they take her to the grand jury."

Jamil went into a deep silence. This was strictly survival from here on end. He loved Danielle, but Cleavon was right; she had to go. There was no question about that. Even if she wasn't the snitch there was no time or room to take chances. And it had to be done right. All variables had to be confirmed and neutralized. "Tell Kilroy to keep his eyes and ears open even after we do this run. There could be other witnesses. I ain't takin' no chances."

"He said Danielle was the only one," Cleavon said, "He got his inside peoples to check this shit out."

"I don't give a fuck who he got checking, tell him to stay on this shit." He still had his doubts about Danielle being a snitch, but a triple homicide beef didn't allow him the luxury of permitting his heart to guide his decisions. "Check it out, Brute. You know that hitter named Hair-trigger . . . Tykim?" He saw Brute squint his eyes. "He just came home from up north. He's from Brooklyn."

"Oh, yeah! Yeah, I know him."

"I know him too." Cleavon said, wondering where the hell Jamil was going with this. "I heard he's runnin' around blazin' drug dealers."

"I want him to do this hit," Jamil said, "Tell Kilroy this is gonna be a two man run. He can hire one of his own hitters, and Tykim is gonna be my hired hitter."

"But, but," Brute was bewildered. "Kilroy wants to handle this straight up. He's making plans right now as we speak."

"Yeah, Ja," Cleavon said, "He got Hector and Lunatic on standby, waiting for the green light."

"You tell Kilroy I said this is my black ass on the choppin' block. I'm gonna have some input in this shit, case closed. Any way, Lunatic and Hector are known to get real sloppy when they think shit is in the bag. Tykim is top grade material. Big dog status. He'll organize the hit professionally. Even if the police got her under watch, it'll go down correctly."

"You know how much it's gonna cost to hire this motherfucker?" Cleavon said, "And how the hell do we know he's even gonna take the job?"

"I'm offering him 150 gees for this hit," Jamil said, "Half up-front, the other half upon completion." He smiled when he saw both their wide eyes. "Imagine any 'hood hitter turnin' down that kind of money?"

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Tykim "Hair-trigger" Hall sat at the poker table staring at the cards in his hands, waiting for Smithy to throw out a card. A rap tune was playing in the background, it was loud enough to be heard clearly, but low enough not to require the four men to shout over the music. The Queens club located on Jamaica Avenue was empty since it was about 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

Tykim's light brown skin and matching brown eyes were as deeply focused as his concentration. His neatly groomed goatee and his head full of corn-row braids made him look like the epitome of a ghettoized brother from the 'hood. "Come on, Smithy, throw a damn card out, man."

Primo, who sat on Tykim's left side, said, "This nigga's procrastinating. He ain't got shit, but he's too scared to turn that fucked up hand in. Come in, bow down gracefully, Smithy."

Smithy looked up smiling. "Patience and contemplation is the mark of a true winner." He tossed a card on the table.

"Hey! Tykim!" A brown skinned woman with big sensuous eyes and finger waves in her hair, shouted from the threshold of the back room door. She was chewing gum with nasty girl vigor.

"What's up, Charmaine?" Tykim said, still thinking about his next move.

"You got a phone call."

"I thought I told you to tell anybody who calls, I'm not--"

"Whoever it is, told me to tell you it's important. He told me to tell you something about a Universal Mathematic Supreme or something or another."

Tykim's heart started beating faster. That was the code word and it meant this call was confirmation that it was work time. "I'll be right back." He laid his cards down on the table and rose to his feet.

"What are we suppose to do about this hand!?" Smithy was pissed off. "We ain't throwin' this hand in, fuck that!"

As Tykim headed towards the door, he said, "Put the game on pause, I'll be right back." Exiting the room, he heard them bickering over whether or not they should scrap the hand.

Tykim strutted across the empty club dance floor, then down a corridor towards the office. He entered and Charmaine handed him the phone. He took it and waited for Charmaine to leave. When the door closed behind her, Tykim spoke into the phone receiver. "Peace. Tykim speaking." He nodded his head as Intelligence, the person on the other end of the line, spoke.

A few seconds later, he said, "Make knowledge born in mathematics." About thirty seconds later, he said, "That sounds good, but I need a picture of her." He nodded his head, listening intently. "You know I'm a dough-low artist . . . Tell him I'll meet him in about an hour. We can go in-depth then . . . Don't worry, I'll be there." He laid the receiver down in its cradle.

He leaned against the maple oak wood desk and folded his arms, in deep thought. There was something up with this run. But his intuition was telling him to be easy and not to jump to any conclusions. Proceeding with extreme caution was going to be an absolute prerequisite. This was the biggest payment he'd ever been offered. It was so huge it made him nervous because it could be a trap.

Maybe one of the drug gangs he had hit, found out it was him and were tryin' to draw him out into the open? After some deep pondering, Tykim dismissed that possibility since the target was a woman. Whoever this woman was, she had to be dangerous to someone important. Or Intelligence wasn't telling him everything. He sighed, shook loose of the invading doubts and headed back to the card game.

For 150 gees, he didn't give a fuck if it was the daughter of the biggest mobster in the United States, she was going down tonight.