

**BLING, BLING
&
DISCREET FLING**

TWO SHORT STORIES

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BLING, BLING

MIGHTY MO' MAC was not his real name. It was Myron Epps. He wasn't born or raised in South Central LA. Not even in the South Bronx. He grew up in Granville, Ohio, a small, rural college town thirty-five miles northeast of Columbus. No, his mom wasn't a crack whore selling herself out of a double-wide. She was a professor of English at Dennison University. And no, his dad wasn't serving five-fifteen in prison. He served on the Granville Board of Trustees.

But being a young man growing up in a well-to-do family in Middle America did not sell rap albums. And ever since before he could remember, all Myron Epps ever wanted to do was be a rap star. And not just any rap star. Myron wanted to be the biggest, the baddest rap star there ever was.

Rap stars grew up in LA and New York, even Detroit. Not places like Granville, Ohio. They had names like Tupac and Snoop Dogg and 50 Cent. Not Myron Epps. Most of all they had street cred. They had reps. They had juice.

Mo' Mac had credibility; he had a reputation. He had the juice. So what if it was all a lie. "Who's this?" he asked.

I offered him my business card. It read simply:

Grace deHaviland
Bail Enforcement Specialist

Mo' turned from the wall of windows where he stood, staring out at an Olympic-size pool surrounded by a landscaped patio with rock outcroppings and flowing waterfalls and tropical plantings with flowers and a wave slide and tiki torches and strung with lantern lights and a wet bar and a smoking B-B-Q pit, all overlooking the forested banks of the Scioto River below. Good

looking people in barely there bathing suits frolicked and drank and ate, all to the booming beat of rap music with bass so heavy it vibrated the glass and the whole house. It sounded like N.W.A. or maybe Public Enemy, but what did I know, rap's not my thing.

A short, rotund figure, Mo' Mac took the card with pudgy fingers full of gold. He wore an open silk shirt with the sleeves rolled two turns up his arms and sweat rings darkening his armpits and enough gold draped around his neck to make King Midas jealous. Oh, and diamond studs the size of nickels in each ear.

He scrutinized the card with a furrowed brow. I wondered if maybe he couldn't read. Finally he looked to the man standing beside me, his attorney, Saul Rosenfeld. Rosenfeld answered the door when I rang, had led me into the vast living space in the rapper's palatial mansion nestled on the banks of the Scioto River, north of Columbus.

"Bail Enforcement. What's that?"

I told him, "Bounty hunter."

He arched a thick black eyebrow. "Really?"

I nodded. "Really."

The eyebrow still raised, he said to Rosenfeld, "She's the one's gonna get Jimmy?"

An older, conservative fellow, Saul Rosenfeld wore a dark blue suit with a white shirt and red tie. A man with a thin build and darkly tanned features, he had a full head of white hair and sparkling white teeth. He shrugged. "I guess."

Mo grinned. "No shit?"

"No shit," I said. "I'd like to ask you a few questions. Get some background information on Jimmy Dolens."

"A sweet sista like you, darling. Ax me anything."

Being half-Latina, I have dusky brown skin, long, wavy, black hair, and my eyes are emerald green like my mom's were, so I get that sista stuff a lot. I didn't bother to correct him.

Mo' hooked an arm out, aiming to drape it over my shoulder.

I sidestepped out from under, smiling politely.

He frowned, not amused.

But his wife was. LaKendra sat on one of two facing couches by the fireplace. She flipped noisily through a copy of Variety magazine draped on her lap, snapping her gum, and snickered. Big, gold hoop earrings dangled from her ears. She wore silver, glittery short-shorts and a white

sleeveless shirt, tied between her notable boobs to reveal her bare, brown belly and the diamond stud in her navel that exactly matched the one in her nose.

LaKendra had a music career of her own before teaming up with Mo' Mac a few years back. A duet that led to a tumultuous marriage: think Whitney and Bobby on that one. By all accounts, neither the marriage nor the partnership had done anything to stop the tail-spin their careers were in. Not unlike the rest of hip-hop, and the music business in general.

"You better watch yourself, Mo'," LaKendra said, nodding at me. "This cat's got claws, baby. And a bite too. Am I right, honey?"

"Ain't you got something to do?" Mo' asked. "Paint your nails or something equally as important?"

"Better than watching you make a fool of your own damn self?" She snapped her fingers and shook her head. Her gold hoops caught the light, winking. "I don't think so."

Mo' raised his arms, then slapped them down to his side, gazing around the gargantuan living room, as if looking for help. He settled on Rosenfeld. "Saul. Do something with her wouldcha?"

They were like squabbling siblings.

Rosenfeld tried to not look put upon. He failed. "Kendra, perhaps now would be a good time to look at those contracts the studio sent over. I have them in the kitchen."

LaKendra slapped her magazine down. "Fine. Whatever."

Rosenfeld put a hand to the small of her back, hovering just above her glittery spandex encased bubble-butt, and guided her out of the room.

"We don't pay you enough for what you put up with, Saul," LaKendra said. "You know that?"

Rosenfeld sighed. "I know it."

If Mo' heard the exchange or cared, he didn't show it. He led me toward the front foyer. The ceilings throughout the house were twelve feet high, the walls painted a creamy white with expensive-looking blonde wood trim and bleached wood floors. The foyer was laid with tile so white I thought about putting my sunglasses back on. We started down a hallway. Memory lane. The walls were covered with framed CD covers and professionally shot photographs of Mo' and LaKendra on tour in various concert venues. Each cover and each photo was individually lit with its own spotlight.

“Whatdya wanna know about Jimmy? Besides he’s a thieving, slimy, back-stabbin’ dawg. That he ripped me off for over forty-million bucks. That he left me high and dry with egg turd on my face. That if I ever got my hands on him, I’d choke him ’til his eyes popped and his sockets bled. That’s what I know about Jimmy Dawg Dolens.”

Colorful.

What I knew about Jimmy Dolens was he was a financial management guru by trade, specializing in the entertainment industry. That he spent the last seven years as Mo’ Mac’s business manager until Mo fired him for, among other things, negligence, breach of conduct, misdirecting funds, and dereliction of fiduciary responsibility.

I also knew that the state’s attorney general’s office had him arrested six months ago, charging him with fraud, theft of services, and grand larceny.

Now out on bail and countersuing Mo’ Mac for hundreds of thousands of dollars, his criminal trial was scheduled to start next week. The day before yesterday Jimmy Dolens missed a pre-trial court appearance. That caused the judge to issue a bench warrant. The ink on the warrant wasn’t dry before Dolens’ bail bondman—on the hook for a hundred thousand dollars—called me to “track his worthless ass down”.

“That’s all well and good,” I said in response to Mo’s rant. “But I’m more interested in where he might’ve gone. Who he might contact? Who might help him now that he’s on the run?”

“Man, I wish he’d come to me.” He slapped a fist into his palm. “I’d help his ass all right.”

I was getting nowhere with and a little tired of, Mo’s pseudo-gangsta act. I grabbed the crock of his arm, pulling him to a stop. “Look. You want Dolens to get what he deserves. I get that.”

“You do, do you? Tell me. Whatdya think he deserves, huh? Prison? Jail time? That’s for pussies, girl. Justice ain’t no prison cell. For me, justice is you cap his ass.”

“Really? For stealing money, he deserves to die?”

Mo’ took a moment to think on that. Once he did, he shook his head, like something he ate didn’t agree with him. “Grace? It’s Grace, right? You any idea how many cribs I got?”

I shrugged. “A few.”

He liked that. “Yeah, a few. I got me seven right here in the U.S. of A. This one and two more here in Ohio. I gots a castle in Scotland. Cost me twenty-seven million bucks to renovate it. I don’t even know how much to buy it. I’ve stayed there twice. You wanna talk about cars?”

I didn't.

He waved a hand in the air. Every finger had a ring on it, all of them sparkling gold and silver and diamonds. "More 'an I can count. Bentleys, Mercedes, Ferraris, Maseratis. Cars I ain't even driven yet. I even owns an island somewhere down in the Caribbean. A whole island. All mine, you dig?"

I started to say I didn't give a—

But he wagged a finger in front of me.

"That ain't all. I gots planes and boats and them Jet Ski things, and I gots me a record collection that's sick. Old stuff on vinyl, on tape. CD's. Thousands of 'em. Hundreds of thousands of 'em. And you know what?"

Bored, I was forced to shake my head.

"Two of my cribs? They in foreclosure. The feds? They say I ain't paid taxes in over two years. Six million dollars I owe them. Plus interest and penalties. Dolens was supposed to do that for me. I got liens on my properties. I got liens on my assets. I got liens on my mutherfucking ass. All 'cause of Jimmy fuckin' Dolens."

"Then tell me where to find him."

Mo' looked around the hallway, frustrated, like I hadn't been listening to him. He shrugged. "How the hell I know where he's at? He ain't talking to me. Ain't talking to none of my people, you know?" He looked around some more. "Ain't nobody out there gonna help him. He's burned all his friends. Ain't got no family. No bruthers, no sistas. His ex-wife, maybe. Mindy. You talk to her yet?"

"I went to her house before coming here. No answer. Left messages on her cell."

"Yeah. Well, anyone knows where Jimmy's at, maybe it'll be Mindy."

From behind us, Saul Rosenfeld said, "I have an idea that might help."

In tandem, Mo' and I turned. I wondered how long he'd been standing there, listening. "Jimmy kept a small office downtown, leased by Mo' and Kendra's corporation. I have the keys. Could something there help you? I can take you if you'd like."

"That would be great."

Rosenfeld stepped to one side and waved us toward the front foyer. He looked at Mo'. "Kendra's in the kitchen. You two need to talk."

“Right.” Mo’ stuffed his hands in his pants pockets and walked away from us. His head bowed like the weight of a world was on his shoulders. I guessed it was. His financial world. He stopped at the foyer, turned back.

“Grace, you don’t like me much.” At my protest, he held up a hand. “It’s cool. You don’t get to where I’m at without reading people, and fast. Now I know, you’re looking at me and saying to yourself, I ain’t got no sympathy for ole Mo’ Mac. He ain’t raking in forty million a year like he used to but so what? He’s for-closed on two cribs, but he’s got five more he can live in. He can maybe sell off a few of them, too, or that castle of his in Scotland or his Caribbean island to settle up with the IRS deal. His shit ain’t so bad. Not like he’ll be on no unemployment line any time soon. You be thinking that, and you’d be right.”

He swallowed hard. “But it ain’t all about the bling.”

“What’s it about, Mo’?”

“It’s about the work. It’s about drive, pouring your heart all in your art. It’s about what I do and how I do it. It’s about delivering product to the people. It’s about me being me. The whole package. It’s about—”

“Your rep.”

He smiled. I was getting it. Getting him. “That’s right, girl. It’s about the rep. I ain’t like other people. Never have been, never will. I do what I do ’cause I love it and people respect me ’cause of it. The bling? That’s just icing on the side. But to do what I do? People’s got to respect me. That’s what Jimmy Dolens took from me. That’s what he stole. You dig?”

I nodded. And maybe I did, a little.

“Good. So do me a solid.”

Skeptical, I said, “Ask, but no promises.”

“Fair enough. What I’m axing is this. When you bag Jimmy D’s, you call me.”

“Why?”

“I wanna see him going down. I need that. You feel me?”

I nodded. “I feel you. But no promises.”

Jimmy Dolens downtown office was on Gay Street, next to the old Modern Finance Building. It had two large windows and an alcove for an administrative assistant. I sat at the big oak desk while Saul Rosenfeld sat in one of two director chairs, watching me. He looked grateful to be able to sit and just relax. I let him.

Several metal filing cabinets lined one wall, there was a small coffee table, and two low overstuffed chairs set off in the corner. The walls were filled with dozens of pictures of Jimmy with rap stars (Snoop Dogg, Lil Wayne, 8Ball, Eminem); Jimmy with movie people (Denzel Washington, Danny Glover, Spike Lee, Russell Crowe); and Jimmy with rappers-turned-movie people (Ice Cube, Mark Wahlberg, Ludacris, Will Smith).

“What are you hoping to find?”

Tossing the desk drawers, I said, “Hard to say. Client lists. Contact information of people he knows. Places he’s known to frequent.”

There was no computer in the office. It had probably been seized by the authorities when they arrested Dolens. There was no BlackBerry, no Rolodex. Even his files had been picked through and cleaned out. The trip to the office was beginning to look like a waste of time.

Because Rosenfeld sat there, staring, I felt obligated to say something, to talk. “Most people are creatures of habit. They have a comfort zone. They do the same things, eat at the same restaurants, go to the same movie theater, buy their cigarettes at the same corner market, their lattes at the same Starbucks. Change makes people jittery. They avoid it, and that makes my job easier.”

I closed the last drawer in the desk. It, and the office, was a bust.

“Tell me more about Mo’ and LaKendra.”

“What’s to tell?” he said. “Mo’ and Kendra are into the IRS for millions in unpaid back taxes. When they started calling, Jimmy’s...shortcomings surfaced. They’ve foreclosed on properties that are underwater, unsellable. They’ve defaulted on dozens of loans. Their credit’s been stretched to the limit with Jimmy taking out loans to cover old loans. It’s a mess.”

He shook his head like a disappointed father. “They’re blaming it all on Jimmy, of course. Accusing him of stealing millions over the years while keeping them in the dark about risky business investments he’s entered into, using their names to get in, exaggerating the value of their assets to get credit, defaulting on payment due dates even after they’ve been extended. And of course, finally, not paying their taxes.”

“And did he?” I asked. “Do all those things?”