

That Night
By
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Tommy closed his netbook with a snap and extended his arms in triumph.

"Finally!" he shouted, his voice booming between the walls of his 22nd floor Ritz Carlton room. With the report finalized and e-mail to the boss it was time for him to discover what Atlanta had to offer on a cool Saturday night. He pushed away from the desk and scampered to the window, the city beckoning him to explore the night life he's heard so much about. He hurried in and out the shower, put on his favorite dress jeans, casual shirt and black sports coat and jaunted to the elevator. In moments he strode across the lobby, greeting the concierge with a victorious smile. Samuel, the concierge, a tall cocoa man with luminous eyes matched his smile.

"I've seen that look before," Samuel said.

"Victory!" Tommy shouted. "Work is done now its time to play."

"What's your pleasure?" Samuel inquired.

"Good food, good music and good company."

Samuel struck an exaggerated thinking pose. "You like blues?"

Tommy beamed. "Love it!"

"I got just the place." Samuel took out his Berry, his fingers flashing over the keypad. A black limo pulled up moments later, the gull wing door lifting to the empty interior. Tommy jumped into the driverless vehicle, stretching his long legs and folding his hands behind his head.

"So where am I going?"

"Two Urban Licks," Samuel answered. "The perfect place for all the above."

The door eased shut and the limo merged into programmed traffic. The A had become too overcrowded for personal transportation, but no one minded the Marta System. Perfectly synchronized traffic totally

eliminated the infamous ATL traffic jam decades ago, not that that was a problem on a Saturday night. The limo cruised through up Peachtree Street then took a smooth left onto Northside Drive. The surrounding neighborhood transformed, tumbling from upscale to borderline in moments. Tommy became nervous as the limo took a right down a street lined with empty buildings; he got down right scared when it entered a parking lot filled with cars surrounding a group of warehouses.

"Samuel must have made a big mistake," he whispered. He took out his Berry and quickly texted the concierge.

"Don't worry," Samuel texted back. "You're at the right place."

The limo took another right, following the narrow pavement between the cars to the rear of one of the warehouses. He relaxed as he saw the crowd of men and women standing on what once was a loading dock, a line of cars releasing and accepting the revelers. His limo rolled up the ramp and stopped before a brightly dressed valet. The door lifted and Tommy stepped out.

"Welcome to Two Urban Licks," the valet sang. "Just follow the crowd."

Tommy followed a group of pretty Georgia peaches through the tall screen doors into a long corridor. When they stepped through the second set of doors, the blues hit him like a welcomed blast of cool. A cacophony of smells and sounds put him in the mood and he quickly went to the bar. The house band was crammed in a corner, belting out B.B. King as if the Master himself was judging every guitar lick. Tommy took out his Berry and set in on scan. He was on the market tonight; he hoped one of the pretty ladies eyeing him as he sat was open as well.

He hadn't ordered a drink before his Berry flashed. He picked it up and smiled at the face in the screen. The Berry synchronized with hers, sharing data as they checked each other out. The pulsing lights ceased and Tommy smiled; this young lady was a 92% match. The personal GPS pointed the direction. He looked to the right into the smiling eyes of Carla Mosley. She approached him wearing a little black dress that hung from one shoulder. Thick dreads cascaded from her head down to her shoulders, framing her ebony face and sparkling caramel eyes. Large

golden hoop earrings peeked from under her dreads, complementing the tiny golden cross resting just above her breasts.

"Our Berrys like each other," she said, a smile hiding in her honey sweet voice.

"I can see why," he replied. Tommy wasn't a ladies man, but he definitely wasn't a wall flower. But there was something about Carla, a vibe that went deeper than stats on a screen.

"You hungry?" he asked.

"I could eat a little something."

"I'm famished." Tommy ordered a burger for himself and the empanada appetizer for Carla. They sat close at the bar not speaking, just letting the music flow over them. A group of excited brothers squeezed their way to the bar, forcing Tommy against Carla's back. The touch was like electricity and he almost gasped. Carla leaned into him and he could hear her breathing. Suddenly he wasn't hungry.

"Where do you want to be?" he whispered.

"Wherever you are," she whispered back.

He paid for the food and drinks and they hurried to the valet. Tommy's fingers flashed across the Berry and the limo was waiting when they stepped outside. He tipped the valet and they were on their way back to the hotel. They sat across from each other, Carla's face locked in a stunned expression, Tommy's mouth open in wonder.

"I've never done this before," Carla said.

"I have," Tommy admitted. "But never have I wanted to so bad."

They were out of the limo before the door could lift all the way. Tommy barely acknowledged the concierge as he and Carla rushed to the elevator. The ride to his floor was torture; they ran down the hall, giggling as he fought to slip the card into the slot. And then they were in his room. Tommy reached out to Carla, touching her like fragile glass. His hands slipped around her waist as he kissed her lips, her shoulders, her cross, her cleavage. Carla's fingers gripped his hair, her thigh sliding up his side. They fell onto the bed, easing into the moment expectantly, Tommy amazed at his feelings. This is so right, he thought. This is perfect...

The morning sun patted his eyes with warmth and he opened them. Tommy stretched and reached out to side. The bed was empty. He smiled. Carla was probably in the bathroom freshening up. He sat up and saw breakfast resting on the coffee table. He jumped from the bed and knocked on the bathroom door, frowning when he got no answer. He opened the door slowly.

"Carla?" He stuck his head in. The bathroom was empty. Uneasiness invaded his stomach as he searched the rest of the room. He finally called down to the concierge.

"Sammy, did you see the lady I came in with last night?"

"Boy did I!" Samuel replied.

"When did she leave?"

"I didn't see her leave," Samuel said. "My shift doesn't start until eight. She could have left before then."

Tommy frowned. "Thanks, Sammy."

He rustled through his clothes and found his Berry. He typed in Carla Mosley and nothing happened. He searched googled her and found nothing. Even the memory from the night before was empty. Tommy sat confused. Carla was gone, completely and totally gone.

Tommy took the monorail back to Chi-Town. A flight would get him there too soon. He kept searching his Berry for some scrap of data, any sign of Carla's data. As the miles streamed by he began to doubt himself. Was this real? Had he really met Carla that night, made love to her? The night was burned in his mind but non-existent in his Berry. He finally slept, lulled by the rhythmic thumping of the rail. He dreamed of her.

When he stepped into the office the next morning a celebration awaited. He strode through a gauntlet of high fives and fist pumps culminating with a hug from his boss. The Atlanta contract was a life saver, securing the future of their company, at least for the next ten years. Tommy smiled and said all the right words but he didn't care about the contract. He had to find Carla. He went to his office, closed the door and called Gomez. The head of the IT department picked up his phone, anime theme music roaring in the background.

" 'Sup, bro?"

"I need you to check something out for me. You alone?"

"Oh, it's like that! Yeah, I'm alone. Come on down."

Tommy trotted down the hall to IT. Gomez was standing at the door, and eager smile on his young face.

"What you got?"

Tommy walked past him into the clutter of hard drives and circuit boards. He handed Gomez his Berry.

"I met a girl a few days ago through my personal scan. We had a good time and she disappeared. Can you trace her?"

"Everything leaves a trail, bro." Gomez twirled the Berry. "Leave it with me. I'll have her stats by the end of the day."

Tommy went back to his office, smiling at the compliments. He worked his way absently through a pile of bids, his mind on Carla and what Gomez would find. It was then minutes before lunch when his phone buzzed. It was Gomez.

"Yo bruh, you better come down here."

Tommy ran down to IT. Gomez sat at the workstation, Tommy's Berry laid open like a surgery patient.

Gomez took off his glasses. "I got bad news and worse news."

Tommy closed his eyes. "Give me the bad news."

"I killed your Berry."

Tommy's eyes clinched tighter. "What's the worse news?"

"Your girl was a hacker. She cracked every code you got. She had your bank accounts, credit cards, IRAs, IOUs, everything wide open."

Tommy's eyes snapped open. "Are you serious?"

Gomez nodded. "Beautiful work, actually. But check this out. She didn't touch a thing."

"She didn't take anything?"

"Nothing, bro. You must have hit it right."

Tommy wasn't amused. "Get me another Berry."

He stormed back to his office, called the boss and took the rest of the day off. Gomez tossed him a Berry on his way out. He was so stupid! He should have known better. Tommy was playing with his pizza at Uno's when his Berry chirped.

"Speak."

"Tommy?"

Tommy dropped his fork. "Carla?"

"I'm sorry Tommy."

All the anger Tommy hoarded melted at the sound of her voice. "No harm no foul. Where are you?"

"I can't tell you."

Tommy held his Berry like a lifeline. "When can I see you again?"

"We can't," Carla said. "Let's let it go as a good time."

Tommy closed his eyes. "You know we can't do that."

There was a long silence. Tommy felt like he was suspended in mid-air waiting to be lifted to safety or dropped into darkness.

"I love you," Carla said.

There was a click and she was gone.

He walked down Michigan Avenue absently, ignoring the sprinkles staining his shirt. She was gone. But she loved him. And he loved her, too. He knew it was stupid to think so, but he couldn't deny it. He knew what love felt like, and this was it. He smiled as he walked passed the Wrigley Building towards the river. She would call again and when she did, she would tell him where she was. He had to believe it. Until then, he would have that night.

Carla closed her Berry as she watched Tommy leave Uno's from across the street inside the rented Chrysler.

"Are we done now?"

She looked into Maria's stern face. She'd find no sympathy from her sister.

"Yeah, we're done."

Maria rolled her hazel eyes. "I can't believe you let this happen."

Carla shrugged. "I couldn't help it. I was fine until he touched me, then I don't know what happened. I couldn't help myself."

Maria sucked her teeth. "You sound like a teenager." She looked at her watch.

"We got to go. Our plane leaves in two hours."

Carla wiped her eyes. "I hate Moscow."

Maria shrugged. "I do, too, but this is the big one. When it's done, we're done. You can even come back and finish what you started here."

Carla smiled. "Let's go."

Maria grinned, started the car and merged into traffic.

To be continued...