

Where Present Meets Past: A Scene from the Indigo Lounge

by KAMICHI JACKSON

Time had been kind to Dionna Perry—Veronica Mills, as she was now known. Telltale signs of passing years almost inevitably manifested themselves on most women her age and possessing her life experiences. Not so in Veronica's case. She was as shapely, as vivacious, as sharp as she'd ever been. Her eyes gave her away, though, but even then they did so only to the extent that one could look into them and discern that this was a woman who had *lived*. It was almost as if time had paused just for her.

But it hadn't. That was clearly evident the moment *he* stepped into the Indigo Lounge. He was a young man—twenty-four years old to be exact—and although she hadn't laid eyes on him in nearly as many years, she knew right away who he was. They had not yet spoken, but she felt

certain of the reason for his sudden appearance.

His entrance had been almost cinematic, the bright streetlight casting his figure in silhouette as he'd stepped into the doorway of the popular Philadelphia supper club. Veronica had been onstage at the time, engaged in lively banter with a distinguished gentlemen sitting at a table just beneath her feet, in mid-sentence reply at the very moment the lobby door opened and the young man stepped in. His build, his movements, something about the way he stood there for that brief moment had startled her into a pause and the audience had laughed, thinking her loss of words was the result of the gentlemen's flirtatious proposition of dinner and dancing for two. Veronica had recovered quickly, returning with some witty retort that solicited more laughter and then a round of applause as she left the stage. She made a mental note to ask Ellis Vaughn—her long-time friend and business partner—just what it was she'd said and agreed to.

She'd watched him cross the room from the corner of her eye as she swiftly made her way towards the exit, intent on reaching her dressing room before her emotions could get the best of her. Closing the door behind her, she sat down at her dressing table, the shock of seeing him still on her face as she stared at herself in the mirror. Eyes closed, she counted aloud to ten several times with slow, deep breaths in between, almost regaining her composure by the time three short, familiar knocks came on the door.

“Come on in, Ellis,” she called, taking one last look at herself in the mirror before getting to her feet, carefully clutching the folds of her evening gown as she turned to the door.

“Royce wants you to join him at his table,” Ellis said in the rich, deep voice that had earned him national acclaim on the syndicated talk music show that broadcasted from one of the region's black-owned radio stations.

“Not tonight,” Veronica replied as Ellis picked up and finished off the rum and coke

she'd been nursing since spotting the young man in the audience.

Ellis sighed. “Ronnie, baby, I don't have to tell you how badly we need Royce to make us that loan. Without his money, we might have to sell this club of ours. I know you don't like him, but we're almost there, shug. Just sit with him for a few minutes, let him buy you a drink—”

“*Not tonight,*” she repeated in a tone that immediately grabbed his attention. He set the empty glass down, stepping towards her worriedly.

“He's here, El,” she said, reaching out to touch his forearm.

“Are you sure?” he asked, knowing immediately whom she meant.

Veronica nodded. “It's been a long time, but I know my son, Ellis. Or at least what he should look like by now,” she amended, slipping into his outstretched arms. “My boy is out there, baby. I mean, I've always known this day would come. But I've never been able to come up with the right words to say to explain why I haven't seen him since he was three months old. How do I justify that? What kind of mother chooses a singing career over her own baby?”

“A mother who is a child herself. We all make mistakes, Ronnie.”

Veronica nodded as Ellis kissed her forehead and pulled her closer to him. He smelled of Old Spice and Sandalwood, and Veronica breathed it in and relaxed the way she always did when he held her this way. The two had been friends for years and, although unspoken emotions hung heavily in the air between them, only once had they ever contemplated a romance, and that had been before they'd entered into a business relationship as co-owners of the Indigo Lounge. Wisely, they decided that neither relationship was worth risking the other and had remained close friends instead.

“I can only imagine the things his father has told him over the years.” Her voice trailed off and she sighed heavily.