



THE LURE OF OTHER PEOPLES'  
**MONEY**

AN ANDREA FABIANO SHORT STORY

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**THE LURE OF OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY**  
AN ANDREA FABIANO SHORT STORY

By Chris Quarembo

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Sweating, my heart rate up, I was pumping on an elliptical machine at a South Philly gym, waiting for my trainer who was late. I slowed down and checked the time. Keisha was never late, not in the year I'd been working with her. Twenty minutes had used up my strength for the day. A nasty stomach virus had left me less than robust. I stepped off the machine and headed to the women's lockers for a shower.

"I'll catch up with Keisha another time," I told the receptionist on my way out.

"Sorry, Andrea. I've tried reaching her, but she isn't answering her cell. That isn't like her."

"No worries. I'll just reschedule." As I drove home, I wondered why Keisha hadn't shown up. I would have expected her to call and cancel, at least.

The workouts, although pricey, helped me build strength and stamina to handle the rigors of my job as a private investigator, specializing in financial fraud. Thanks to Keisha, I've gained more muscle and greater flexibility than I've ever had in my adult life.

At my apartment I changed from sweats to black leggings, a kelly-green tee-shirt and a worn leather jacket and drove to my office. It's on the third floor of a stone midrise near the bridge leading into University City, west of Center City. The rents haven't reached the stratospheric heights of the gleaming office towers nearer City Hall. Plus, free parking in the back lot was a rare perk in a city where monthly parking fees were as high as car payments.

My phone rang. I swallowed a chunk of soft pretzel, a mouthful of coffee, and cleared my throat. "Fabiano Investigations."

“Andrea, I’m so sorry.”

Keisha’s voice sounded tense.

“Are you okay?”

“I am.” She paused. “It’s my brother Darnell.”

I heard a muffled sob.

“He’s been arrested. I’d like to see you as soon as possible.”

“Come whenever you can. I’m in all afternoon.”

Keisha Evans arrived, wearing gray slacks, a glen plaid jacket and a touch of red lipstick. I was about to say how stylish she looked, but the red-rimmed eyes told me this was no time for small talk. She sank into my client chair, her shoulders slumped.

“Tell me what’s happened.”

“He didn’t do what they say.”

“And what do the cops say he did?”

“That he stole \$100,000 from his employer.” She paused, her eyes focusing on her hands. Then she looked at me. “He’s out on bail, but he’s been suspended from his job.”

Darnell worked in the finance department of The JT Merritt Company, a national plumbing supplier headquartered in Philadelphia.

“You know Dee,” Keisha said. “No way would he steal from his employer. Not after working so hard to get his CPA.”

Months earlier Keisha had introduced me to her younger brother. He was handsome, smart, and exuded lots of positive energy. He was the first male in their family to graduate from college.

"I'm here because I want to hire you. To prove my brother didn't do it."

"I don't go around throwing away business, but your money might be put to better use on a top-notch defense attorney."

"We'll get him a lawyer, but you're an expert in this sort of crime and can find out the truth. Do I have to tell you what it's like for a young black man in trouble with the law? You know they'll figure he's guilty until proven innocent."

Keisha was right. A good defense attorney might get Darnell acquitted but without proof he was innocent, his career as a CPA would be ruined.

"I'll talk to the cops, no charge. I'll find out what evidence they have against Darnell, and then get in touch."

I called police headquarters and asked to speak to the detective in charge of the Darnell Evans case.

"Connelly." A rich baritone voice answered when I was transferred.

I identified myself as a private investigator. "The family has asked me to look into Darnell's charges."

"Come over in an hour, and we can talk," he replied. Connelly and I hadn't crossed paths before. Luckily, he showed no signs of a cop's usual aversion to PIs.

I had enough time to finish a report for an insurance firm that needed a background check on a candidate under consideration for an executive position. Then I left for my appointment.



"Fabiano, what the hell do you want?" A uniformed officer stopped in his tracks and stared at me, his arms across his chest.

I was a familiar face at police headquarters but not necessarily a welcomed one. "I have an appointment." I forced a smile and went through security.

Connelly greeted me with a handshake and pointed to a chair. He had sandy hair, cropped close at the sides, with waves at the top that most women would envy. "An internal audit discovered that the funds in question were diverted during the days and times Darnell Evans was logged into the system."

I could hear him testifying in court and he'd be credible to a jury. "Sounds damning. But have you linked the money directly to Mr. Evans?"

"None of the missing \$100,000 has been recovered, so far."

"Then I'd say your case is weak."

"We had enough for an arrest."

"What's your theory as to where the money is?"

"No comment." He leaned back in his chair. I noticed his side holster and his flat abs. "This is an active investigation," he smiled, revealing teeth so white he could get a gig in a toothpaste commercial.

I smiled, too, regretting I hadn't brushed after lunch. Even though Connelly had shared more information than most cops were willing to, experience taught me he hadn't given me the whole picture.

Back in my office, I phoned Keisha. "I need to talk to Darnell before I sign on. I'd like to stop by to see him this afternoon."

"He has his own place now." Last I knew Darnell was living with his family to save money while he paid off his college loans. She gave me his new address, a condo building along the Delaware River waterfront.

“I know what you’re thinking,” Keisha said. “He didn’t steal money to buy a condo. He makes a good salary. And what young man with a social life wants to live with his family?”

When I hung up, I checked the city’s real estate records. Darnell closed on a \$350,000 studio condo two months before.

I had to admit if I were the cops I’d want to know how a young man only three years in the workforce could buy property when most people need decades to accumulate the deposit.



“I didn’t steal the money,” he told me. We were in his living room, spacious but sparsely furnished. Only an Ikea sofa, a pole lamp, and an ottoman filled the space. Darnell pointed me to the sofa positioned for a view of the city skyline. He sat on the ottoman and massaged his temples.

“Tell me where you got the down payment for this place?”

“You won’t believe me if I told you.”

“Try me.”

“My grandmother helped me out. She gave me \$10,000.”

“That’s easily traced. What about the rest?”

“I won it in poker games over six months.”

“Can you prove that?”

Darnell shook his head.

I was far from naïve about the city’s illegal gambling spots. “You’re facing an embezzlement charge. The cops won’t care about underground poker games.”



“The guys who run the tables will. These aren’t forgiving people.”

“What were you thinking getting involved with bruisers?”

“Money. I wanted money for a condo, and I found out in college that I’m good at poker. Where else could I get that kind of money?”

I was about to say the Merritt company’s books but stopped myself. “I thought you wanted to pay off your college loans before you moved out on your own.”

“I have a girl, and we wanted our privacy. At the rate I was going, it would take me ten years to pay off the loans. I’m young. I want to have a life now.”

“But why not rent an apartment in a less expensive area?”

Darnell laughed. “I work with people who live in Chestnut Hill, the Main Line or Rittenhouse Square. I never talked about where I lived, but they knew.”

“Living in South Philly is nothing to be ashamed of.”

“That’s what you say.”

“Whoa. Your college degree and that job of yours turned you into a snob already?”

Darnell jumped out of his seat, his arms waving around the room. “You see any sign of lavish spending? If I had anywhere near \$100,000, I’d have furnished this place. Go ahead. Look around. Check out the sleep alcove. You’ll find a mattress and an old dresser Keisha gave me.”

“Keisha asked me to look into the case against you. I’ll only do it if I have your word you didn’t do it. And you cooperate with my investigation.”

He nodded. “I never touched company funds. And I don’t want to go to prison in disgrace. Not after all the sacrifices my family made for me.”

“I’ll see what I can do. You need to find a good lawyer, too. Let me know if you need a referral.” I stood up. I stared, eyes intent, burrowing into his. “Be certain to declare that extra gambling income on your tax returns.”

He lowered his eyes.

“Promise?”

He looked up “Okay, sure.”

I handed him my business card and took his cell number.

“I’m not a snob, Andrea. I’ll always remember where I came from.”

“Don’t tell anyone I’m involved. Not your girlfriend, not your friends, and not anyone at the office. Only you and Keisha are to know. Got it?”

Darnell nodded agreement.

As I walked toward the door, I heard the lock turn. The door opened and in walked a smiling, statuesque black woman with a stunning resemblance to Rhianna. She wore a silk pantsuit and carried a Louis Vuitton monogrammed handbag that cost at least \$2,000. Her smile vanished when she saw me. “I didn’t know you had company, Dee.”

“You must be Darnell’s girlfriend.” I reached my hand out. “Andrea, a friend of the family.” She hesitated, and then gave me a limp handshake.

“This is Felicia,” Darnell put his arms around his girlfriend’s shoulders, looked into her eyes, and his face lit up like LED bulbs.

“I was just leaving.”

In my car, I phoned Keisha to tell her I was taking the case. “I’ll charge my expenses but no fee.”

“No way. I’m no charity case.”

I named a fee that was half my usual.

“Deal.”

“By the way, have you met Felicia?” I asked.

“The girlfriend?”

“Is it serious?” I asked.

“He’s a goner, but I’d say she’s still looking around. I saw her at dinner with another guy last week, but I didn’t say a word to Dee. He’d tell me I didn’t want him to be happy.”

“What Felicia’s last name?”

“Palmer, Felicia Palmer. She works at one of those fancy spas in Center City.”

Over the next week, I delved into Darnell's finances and found he had a savings account with a \$5,000 balance and a money market fund with a little over \$8,000. Except for the condo, I discovered no other trace of significant purchases. No evidence of lavish spending on himself or his girlfriend.

I still needed to confirm Darnell’s story that he won the bulk of his down payment playing poker. For two days I kept an eye on his condo. The first day he went to a deli and picked up a hoagie and a six-pack. He went home and didn’t re-emerge. The next day I followed him to a taco restaurant where he met two buddies for lunch. That night he stayed in. No poker game. No sign of Felicia or other visitors. At eleven o’clock I drove home. Surveillance was the most tedious part of my job. It required stamina and a large bladder.

On Wednesday evening I followed him to an Italian restaurant on Walnut Street in Center City. I waited across the street until he was inside. I was about to cross over when I spotted Felicia walking down the street. She wore black leather pants, carried another costly Louis Vuitton handbag and swung her hips as she walked in her stiletto heels. Even from a distance, I spotted her red soles, a signature of the elite Christian Louboutin brand. I slipped into a side alley, holding my scarf over my nose to block the foul odor emanating from a nearby dumpster. I waited until she was inside, then headed to the restaurant.

A hostess greeted me with a smile. "Do you have a reservation?"

"I was just passing and wanted to have a look at your menu."

"Certainly." She handed one over. I glanced at the entrees while I surveyed the room. Darnell and Felicia were at a back table holding hands.

"Looks wonderful," I said, returning the menu to the hostess. "I'll put you on my list to try."

I walked down the street to a Starbucks, drank a vanilla latte and munched on a piece of pound cake, sitting on a stool by the window watching the restaurant entrance. While I waited, I craved the Pasta Bolognese that I'd seen on the restaurant menu. Probably not as delicious as my late mother's recipe but nobody's sauce was. Instead, I had to content myself with two more lattes and a packet of Tastykake chocolate cupcakes that I had stashed in my tote. Another reason I hate surveillance. While Darnell and Felicia were enjoying excellent Italian food, I was getting a caffeine and sugar high. Finally, the couple emerged, smiling and laughing.

Darnell kissed Felicia, and each walked away in opposite directions. Odd. Felicia didn't go back to Darnell's place and he didn't walk her home. Why meet her at the restaurant and send her home alone?

My gut told me to follow Felicia even though I could be wrong and Darnell was heading to his poker game. I trusted my instinct.

Felicia walked to 20<sup>th</sup> Street and turned into Spruce Street. She unlocked the door to a townhouse and then came out again escorted by a tall black man, as muscular as a pro basketball player. I followed the pair as they walked and talked, his arm around her waist. They entered a jazz club on Samson Street.



I gulped down two shots of strong espresso to help keep my eyelids open. I was struggling to stay alert staking out Darnell's condo once again. It was ten p.m. Darnell had been in since six and hadn't had any visitors. I decided to bag it at eleven if there was no action. At ten forty-five a Honda CR-V pulled up at the building entrance. Darnell came out and jumped into the front seat.

I followed the Honda to the Fairmount section of the city where it parked in a public lot. I waited until the two men crossed the street, then parked my car and followed on foot.

Darnell and his pal were buzzed into a townhouse, a few blocks from Fairmount Avenue, the neighborhood's main street.

I waited five minutes then buzzed and spoke into the intercom. "I'm a friend of Darnell."

"We don't allow no females here," a male voice replied.

“My money is as good as the boys. Let me in.”

“Get your ass moving before I come out and throw you to the curb.”

“You like tossing away business.”

“You deaf as well as dumb, girl?”

“Tell Darnell I’m here. Say it’s Andrea.”

I heard the intercom click off, then footsteps rushing down the stairs. I reached into my tote for my brass knuckles and put one in each pocket of my jacket.

To my relief, Darnell opened the door. “You crazy coming here? You got to go.”

“I’m talking to the guy running the game with or without your help.”

“You can’t go up there.”

I used my tote bag as ballast and pushed him into the foyer. “You promised you’d cooperate.”

A door at the top of the stairs opened and out walked a behemoth, taller than six feet, with a girth too wide for a standard seat belt.

“We don’t want no trouble. Take your argument outside,” he said.

“I need to speak to the boss. I’m helping Darnell here out of a jam,” I said, holding onto the brass knuckles in my pockets. “She an attorney or something?” The behemoth asked Darnell.

Darnell nodded. He was smart enough to keep things vague. The behemoth texted someone. Minutes later out came a short toothpick of a man, dressed in a black Armani jacket.

“This guy the boss?” I asked Darnell, who answered with a nod. I began my spiel, explaining the embezzlement charges as quickly as possible, letting him think I was an

attorney, not a PI who might be snooping around his operation. "So, I need to know, did Darnell win \$40,000 playing poker at your . . . establishment?"

"I won't testify to that, but yeah the man's done real good." He grinned at Darnell. "I still want a chance to win back some of that money, bro."

I gave him my best smile. "I'd like you to sign an affidavit. It won't. . ."

Before I could finish, he held up his palm. "Don't push it. I made an exception and agreed to talk to you, seeing how you're helping out one of my regulars. But that's all you get from me. Both of you leave. Now."

Darnell gave me a death stare. "I didn't ask her to come. Why throw me out?"

"Come back another time, and we'll let you in."

"My pal's up there. He's my ride."

"Get out before I change my mind about letting you back, ever."

We walked back to Fairmount Avenue in silence. When we got near the parking lot, I broke the tension. "Come on. I'll give you a lift."

"I needed to win tonight, and you get me tossed. How am I supposed to pay my bills?"

"I had to check out your story."

"You don't trust anyone, do you?"

"Occupational hazard."



If Darnell did steal the \$100,000, it remained well-hidden. The cops had conducted a thorough search and hadn't found the money. Darnell had told me the truth about his poker winnings, although I doubted Detective Connelly would accept my word

for it. But there was still the unsavory fact that Darnell's log-on and password were used to steal the funds. If the cops could connect Darnell to the missing funds, it would be game over.

"You must have ESP," Detective Connelly told me when I phoned. I held my breath. Either he had more damning evidence against Darnell, or he had cleared my client. I didn't need to wait long to find out which it was.

"We've located an offshore account in the name of Darnell Evans. Do you want to guess the amount on deposit?"

I didn't have to.



The JT Merritt company was headquartered in a steel and glass tower on West Market Street. The multi-billion-dollar company was started in the 1980's by its namesake as a one-man operation.

At the reception desk, I handed over my business card to a uniformed guard. "I have an appointment with Bruce Sanford." He was the company's CFO.

"I can't tell you how disappointed I am about Darnell," Sanford said as he pointed me to a client chair. "He's a bright young man. We had great hopes for him. But. . ."

"You think he's guilty?"

"I don't know what else to think. But I don't want to send someone to prison if he didn't do it. That's why I agreed to see you."

"Appreciate that. Tell me how the theft was discovered?"

"One of our staffers picked up a discrepancy. When I checked into the problem, I discovered the missing funds and then ordered an audit."



“Is it possible that someone else could have access to Darnell’s log-in and password?”

“I very much doubt it. Only my direct staff members have log-in ID's for our financial systems, and all our passcodes get changed every month.”

“How many people?”

“We have a professional staff of ten. The support staff has limited access. All are long-term employees. Darnell was our newest.”

And an easy target for suspicion. “I’d like to have a look at the offices if I may?”

Sanford stood up. “Please follow me.”

The work area was a broad open space, affording little privacy and maximum monitoring.

The staffers were a diverse group in gender and race. They continued to work as their boss and I walked around.

Sanford stopped at one of the larger desks. “Laura, do you have a moment?”

“Sure, Bruce.”

“I’d like you to show Ms. Fabiano here how you log-in?”

She complied while I glanced over her shoulder. Nothing unusual. I would learn more if I could check out the system myself, but I knew what the answer would be if I asked. And I didn’t want to get tossed out on my ear, not yet.

“Do you have a contract with an outside computer services firm?”

Sanford nodded. “One of the best. Mission Critical Computer Services, Inc. They keep us running twenty-four seven and secure from hackers and malware. They do a super job.”

“Sounds like a great find.”

Over a chicken salad sandwich and coffee at a nearby deli, I googled Mission Critical Computer Services. The company was located on East Market Street. Its list of clients and testimonials read like a who’s who in Philadelphia-area business. I made an appointment to meet with the vice president of client services later that afternoon.



Vice President Mary Ellen McCauley was confident that Merritt’s financial systems were safe from hackers.

“We get paid to protect the security of our client’s systems, and we take our mission extremely seriously.” She sounded like she was reading from the company’s website.

I figured any computer system was vulnerable when a hacker was determined to break in. “I’d like to speak with whoever is in charge of maintaining the Merritt systems.”

“That would be Reggie Wilson.” She offered me a bottle of spring water and stepped out.

When the door opened, in walked a tall, black man wearing gray trousers and a creme turtleneck that emphasized his well-developed biceps. “Reggie is the head of our technical team for Merritt,” VP McCauley said.

I nearly choked on my mouthful of water but managed to recover and smiled as we shook hands. I recognized Reggie Wilson. He was Felicia’s jazz club date.

I never believed in coincidence or ignored connections.

“I have a few questions about the financial systems at JT Merritt.” I spoke directly to him.

“What can I tell you . . . that is, what can I say that isn’t private and confidential?”

Reggie gave me a quick grin. He came across a bit too cocky for me.

“We do have to be careful,” Mary Ellen McCauley added, “but Reggie, we want to be helpful here.”

He nodded. “We make sure that Merritt has the latest security technologies to keep their data as safe as possible. And our software monitoring their systems would pick up any intrusion. We haven’t had any in the last five years.”

“The police think the theft was an inside job,” I said. “Someone authorized to access the system could have masked their intrusion.” Reggie Wilson would be in a perfect position to steal Merritt’s funds and finger Darnell.

“That’s possible, but unlikely,” he said. His eyes darted away from me for a brief second, and a muscle in his jaw tensed. “The activities on their system are continuously monitored. Passcode must be changed every month. As soon as someone leaves for a new job, their access is shut down immediately.”

“I’d like to take a closer look at the security features of the Merritt system.”

Again, VP McCauley stepped in. “I’m afraid we can’t help you there. We have strict confidentiality agreement with all our clients.”

I figured I’d never get a peek, but I wanted Reggie Wilson to squirm.



“You’re right, you have no proof,” Detective Connelly told me. I was sitting across from his desk at police headquarters.

“Reggie Wilson could have done it,” I insisted. “He had means and opportunity. And greed is always a motive. Or jealousy over Felicia?”

Connelly stared back at me. "We've made our arrest."

"I thought you guys were interested in justice. Do you *want* to convict the wrong guy? At least look into Wilson. He's a computer expert. He could have framed Evans."

Connelly agreed to check Reggie Wilson out, but I left police headquarters wondering how thorough a job that would be.

I went home and prepared for a lengthy surveillance stint. I packed my tote bag with a camera, a dark hoodie, baseball cap, T-shirt, underpants, and socks, plus chocolate bars, energy bars, Tastykakes, and water. I picked up my favorite Dunkin' dark roast on my way to Mission Critical's office. I got there around 4 p.m. and waited for Reggie Wilson to leave work.

My cell phone rang as I was eating a Snickers bar.

"You better watch your back," A male voice said, in a slow whisper. "Snooping can be dangerous."

The voice was disguised, but I considered the possibility that it was Reggie Wilson. He was the only person I could have spooked recently.

The man himself left work a little after seven p.m. and walked to Rittenhouse Square. I followed, making sure to blend in with other pedestrians. Felicia was seated at an outdoor table at Parc Restaurant. I remained across the street behind a tree, using my camera with its zoom lens to appear to be taking pictures of the park while I kept an eye on the couple.

Reggie leaned over to kiss Felicia and then looked from side to side and behind him before he sat down. The palm of his hand slid across his cheeks as though he was

checking out how close he had shaved that morning or deciding what he wanted to tell his girlfriend.

When he leaned across the table to speak to her, Felicia's shoulders stiffened, and she pulled back into her chair. I wanted to hear their conversation but couldn't risk getting too close and being spotted. Through my zoom lens I saw the waiter serve Beef Bourguignon to Felicia, and Steak Au Poivre to Reggie. I nibbled on a salty, dark chocolate bar. Tasty but no compensation for luscious French cuisine.

After I followed the pair to the Spruce Street townhouse, I went home. The next morning at six o'clock I was standing in an alley across the street from their building. I followed as Reggie Wilson walked Felicia to work at a Walnut Street spa before going to his office. At ten he emerged, and I followed him to an office building on Fifteenth Street. I grabbed a Dunkin' and waited.

It was noon when the revolving doors spilled Wilson back onto the street. I tailed him back to his office building and then returned to my office, hoping he wouldn't decide to split for the airport while I was gone.

I settled down on my office sofa for a quick nap. The ringing of my phone woke me. "You don't listen, do you? If anything happens to you, it's on you." Before I could answer with a witty retort, the caller hung up. It was the same male voice that threatened me earlier.

I brushed my teeth and cleansed my face, applied tinted moisturizer, and went out to my favorite deli, which served breakfast all day.

"Cheese omelet and hash browns?" my regular waitress asked when she saw me.

I nodded.

“And coffee?”

“Lots of it.”

“You got it.”

While I waited for my order, I called Felicia's spa and made an appointment for their cheapest service: a foot massage. As I chewed a forkful of egg and melting cheese, I wondered if my accountant would let me take a tax deduction for the massage. In fairness, I did need my feet to be in tip-top shape in my kind of work.

The foot massage turned out to be relaxing. I began to drift off, temporarily forgetting why I was there.

“I see Felicia is working today. I heard she's quite good.”

“Her facials are the best.”

“I'd like to speak with her when we're finished.”

“Sure. I'll let her know.”

I was zipping my boots when Felicia came in, wearing a white coat with her name embroidered above the spa logo.

“Do you have any specific issues with your skin?” Felicia examined my face.

“Actually, I was hoping you could help me on a case I'm working on.”

“I don't understand.” She frowned. “I thought you wanted to consult about a facial.”

“I lied.”

“What sort of game are you playing? Who are you?”

“A private investigator and friend of Darnell's.” I showed her my ID.

“I remember now. I saw you at his place. Why come here?”

“I’m looking into the embezzlement from JT Merritt. You and I know Darnell Evans is innocent.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” She walked toward the door. “You’re a crazy woman, and I’m getting my manager.”

“I wouldn’t do that quite yet if I were you. I know about Reggie. And so do the cops.” Technically not a lie.

Felicia’s eyes opened wider and her hand came away from the doorknob.

“Why frame Darnell?” I asked.

“Do what?”

“C’mon Felicia, stop stalling.”

“I didn’t frame anyone. Okay, I date Darrell and Reggie, but I don’t know what they’re up to when I’m not around.”

“Not buying it. I’ve seen you wearing expensive designer shoes and handbags. Don’t try to tell me you can afford them on your salary.”

“I do very well. Plus, tips.”

“I’m sure the authorities can easily check on your income.”

“Why harass me?” Felicia burst into tears.

“You live with Reggie and it’s only a matter of time before the cops come knocking on your door. Do you want to go to jail with him?”

I closed in on her space, leaned into her face and repeated each word slowly.

“Why frame Darnell?”

“I had nothing to do with it and I told Reggie he’d get caught.”

“You knew about the theft?”

She nodded.

“And you set up Darnell as the patsy.”

“I didn't know Reggie would do that. He found out I was seeing Darnell and he was mad, furious. He said I was dating a loser. He goaded me. So, I told him Darnell had a good job.”

“And you told him where Darnell worked.”

“I don't date losers.” She said it with a combination of pride and defiance.

“Girl, this time you're backing a major league loser who is going to jail. You need to speak with Detective Connelly and tell the truth before Reggie is arrested.”

“I don't want to lose my job. He stole the money. I didn't.”

“You have more to worry about than losing your job. You could face jail time. You knew about the theft and enjoyed the fruits of his crime, don't try to deny it.”

“Reggie's been good to me.”

“It's time you thought about Darnell Evans. Does he deserve to go to prison, his life and career ruined for something he didn't do?”

“I never meant for Darnell to get mixed up in Reggie's business.”

“It was your relationship with Darnell that got Reggie angry enough to frame an innocent man. It's time you did the right thing here. If you do, I'm sure the authorities will be more lenient with you than they'll be with Reggie. I'll go with you to see Detective Connelly, if you agree to go *now* and get Darnell off the hook.”



Felicia nodded. I doubted I convinced her to save Darnell. Felicia struck me as a woman big into self-preservation. She understood that her testimony would help convict Reggie and give her better leverage with the DA's office.

She gave her manager an excuse for leaving early.

In the taxi, Felicia sobbed. "I do care for Reggie. But I can't live with this anymore. He told me he'd stop, but he hasn't."

"Reggie has done this sort of thing before?"

She blew her nose. "He has access to computer systems in his job. He told me it was easy and he could cover his tracks."

In a stuffy police interview room smelling of pine cleaner, Felicia laid out Reggie Wilson's scam for Detective Connelly. She gave up the names of three other companies, in addition to JT Merritt where Wilson had embezzled money.

Reggie Wilson was charged and his passport was revoked because he had stashed his substantial takings offshore. The JT Merritt company filed a civil lawsuit against Mission Critical for negligence. My friend Harrison "Sonny" Waite, one of the city's top defense attorneys, represented Felicia. She pleaded guilty to being an accessory and received two years' probation after testifying against Reggie Wilson. At trial Wilson was convicted and sentenced to three-to-five years at the State Correctional Institution.

Darnell Evans was exonerated and welcomed back to his job at JT Merritt.

I received the benefit of a professional courtesy rate from my trainer Keisha Evans. And a dinner invitation from Detective Connelly. Overall, very satisfying results.





## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Chris Quarembo is a former award-winning newspaper reporter. She also worked as a speechwriter and ghostwriter for corporate executives in New York and Boston. Currently she writes crime fiction. *Killer Deals*, her debut novel featuring Andrea Fabiano, was published in 2023. Chris' crime fiction short stories are available as eBooks on Amazon. Her website is: [chrisquarembo.com](http://chrisquarembo.com).