

Enjoy this excerpt from, *Amerikka: Justice or Revenge* – an upcoming April 2026 urban drama release.

“Ms. Hylton, you have a call on your private line. It’s the one that never rings. You said that I should answer it for you if you appear busy.”

Tori’s shoulders rose and stiffened. Few people had her private number. She could count the number of them on one hand. She wouldn’t even need all of her fingers. Her initial thought was that it was Jayceon. She and Jada must have talked him up. She wasn’t ready to talk to him if his call was to let her know that he was going to be dropping in on her after over two years with no word at all. She knew it was the life of a C.I.A. agent that kept him away, but things were different now. Then again, if it was him, she really didn’t want him here at this time. She hadn’t told him about the secret she’s kept from him since he was last in Paris for his drop-in trysts with her. He still wasn’t aware of the result of his last visit.

Tori reached for the intercom on her desk to respond to her assistant, Camerie Bianchi.

“Is it important? Jada and I are chatting.”

“I’m not sure.”

“Hold the call for a moment,” she said and after muting the line, she turned around in her white and gold office chair to give her attention back to Jada. She noticed that she hadn’t relaxed her shoulders. She was anxious.

“Go ahead and take your call. I need to head back to my office to check preparation for this afternoon’s visitors to the private showroom floor. I’ll hit you later?” Jada questioned.

“Don’t you have a date later? What’s his name? Armand?”

Jada grinned from ear to ear. Tori had hit a soft spot.

“Yes, Armand. He’s cooking me dinner tonight. I can’t wait to see his new place. Are you sure you don’t want to join us? You know his best friend, Santino, has a thing for you. He keeps asking when I’m going to put in a good word about him with you. It’s been a month since he first asked. Is your answer still, no?”

Tori shook her head from side to side.

“Still no. I’m not looking to date right now. You already know when I have time that’s not devoted to work, JJ gets all of me. I don’t like the idea of a dating life taking any part of me away from him.”

“There is an alternative if you would just call him.”

Though she had been looking down to open her electronic calendar, Tori stopped moving and raised her eyes to focus directly on Jada.

“No. I’m not going to change my mind. There’s too much at stake.”

“Still? After all these years? You’re still worried about being found out?”

“That. You know that’s not all.”

Their eyes communicated. They had always been on the same page. Tori didn’t know why Jada was pushing so hard for a change to what had become their norm.

“Alright. I don’t want to fight about him. You already know where I stand. Take your call. I’ll stop in later to get a hug and kiss from my godson and to check on you.”

Jada turned to leave before she could respond. Tori knew that in the next few minutes, she would be calling Jada to apologize for snapping at her earlier when she first came into the office and made reference to Jayceon. Any talk of him was always a touchy subject, something her friend knew. The fact that she had mixed feelings on the subject didn’t mean she had to be combative with her about it. She turned back to her phone line where her assistant was waiting. She shook off any anxiety to deal with the call; especially if it was Jayceon. She ran her hand through her short thick hair. The tight black longer curls on top popped right back into place. She loved the soft feel of her hair that had once been long and flowing. There was Indian in her direct family line. Her heritage was strong.

“Camerie, who is the call from? Can you take a message and I’ll return it later?”

Suddenly, she didn’t want to talk to Jayceon. She wasn’t ready.

“Well, this call is kind of weird.”

That got her interest. Tori raised one of her eyebrows. That was something she did when her curiosity got the best of her.

“Oh? Weird how?” she questioned.

“There is a man on the line asking for a name I’ve never heard before. I told him he had the wrong number. He said he knows who Tori Hylton is. He then asked if I would at least pass the message along to you before I hung up. He said he was sure that you would talk to him.”

“Really? What’s his name?” she asked, standing from her desk, taking a large folder with her over to the large ten-seat glass conference table in her office. That was also her work table with a computer built right into it. She needed to spread her work out. When she connected Camerie’s call to the phone in the center of the table, she waited for the answer as the computer screen rose from the center of the table.

“His name is Levi Asher. He’s an attorney out of New York City.”

“Is he the attorney of one of our clients?” she asked.

“No.”

Camerie was being mysterious. Tori was getting annoyed.

“What’s the name of the person he’s looking for? Let’s start there,” she finally said, exhaling through her frustration over this back-and-forth banter. She was about to take a seat when her heart almost stopped beating when she heard the familiar name.

“Jenay Amerikka Denton. I told him that there was no one here by that name. He is quite insistent that I speak to you before ending the call.”

The name made Tori weak in her knees. She had to grip the edge of the table to keep from falling to the floor. There weren't too many people who would be calling her using that name. No one in Milan knew that name other than Jada. Her worlds were colliding.

“Wwwhhat?” she stumbled out.

“That's the name he said you would recognize. He said it's imperative that he speak with you right away.”

That feeling was back. The one that had plagued her for days was now back and with a vengeance. Her heart beat raced out of control without warning. Her hands shook so vigorously that the folder on the table scattered, its contents sliding across the glass. The only thing keeping her from crashing to the floor was the death grip she had on the table's edge.

“No,” she said softly to herself. The call couldn't be. “No, no, no,” she said again and again.

“Should I tell him that he has the wrong number?” Camerie asked, interrupting her frantic thoughts.

Tori closed her eyes and worked to get a grip. Someone was reaching out to her using her real name. This was definitely that something that had not been setting right with her; it had to be. Her thoughts immediately turned to how her old and new life was suddenly crashing at an apex she wasn't ready for. She had to know. There was no avoiding *this* call.

“Put him through,” she declared and waited nervously. She sat down in the chair and waited as her foot tapped impatiently.

“Hello? Are you Ms. Jenay Amerikka Denton?” the odd male voice on the other end of the phone asked.

Tori held her composure. She tapped the pocket of her suit jacket where her cell phone was. If this call was one that would mean danger to her and her son, she would alert Cash immediately with a one-word text. She had to go on to see what this call was about.

“And you are?” she queried, the words coming out choppy. Her nervousness was evident.

“My name is Levi Asher. Before I can share anything other than my name and the fact that I'm an attorney from the United States with you, I need you to confirm your identity. There is only one person other than me in this world who has the code to identify you. I need you to hang up from this line and call me from your secure phone to allow us to see each other. Your first code will unlock a secure file that contains my image and contact information. You need to confirm who I am before you put in your

second code which will unlock the visual screen for us to see each other. Do you understand? The phone that I'm speaking of – do you have it with you?" he asked.

"Yes. It's with me at all times."

"I need you to get it."

Tori was getting choked up. Something had gone terribly wrong as she had suspected. There was only one reason this man was calling her and asking for the code that only she knew. She had been warned about ever sharing her code with anyone. There was only one other person who knew the code. There was also one other person who could have been a second voice behind this call.

Her heart dropped. Her mind went there. Suddenly, she was finding it hard to breathe. Then she knew. For seconds, or what seemed to her as an eternity, she couldn't form a single word, let alone a sentence. The call was bad. This call was *very* bad.

"Who!" she screamed without even a warning to herself.

"Ms. Denton. I'm sorry. I know that this is difficult, I know. You were once given instructions. I need you to follow them before I say anything else. It's for your safety, yes? You already know that, correct?" he asked. "Please follow the instructions," he added.

Amerikka disconnected the call. She stood and paced around in a circle, her hand against her head where a piercing migraine had suddenly formed. She knew that this was bad. In fact, it was worse than she could have ever imagined. What she knew was that she had to continue. There was no other way for her to get the answer she needed when she had asked him, who. Deep down, she knew he wouldn't answer her. She had to follow the instructions that she had been given after leaving the United States after a warrant for her arrest for murder was issued. She had to follow through.

Finding her legs, she found the strength to move. Tori was nervous. As Amerikka, she was determined. She pressed forward.

Going to the safe in her office, she put in the ten-digit code she created, then placed her index finger over the scanner before finally bending, so that her eye was level with the scanner. No one would ever be able to get into this safe or the one at her home without doing all three. She did this every day when she arrived at the office. No one knew of its existence. Her life depended on secrecy.

The safe clicked open, leaving the door to it ajar. Inside were important papers, stacks of bills that she knew totaled well over a half a million dollars and some jewelry. Moving the money to the side, she reached behind it for one of her three satellite phones with a video screen. Another one was in the safe at her home. The last was in a secure box at her bank here in Milan.

Turning the phone on, she entered the fourteen digits that had been her lifeline since she was seventeen years old. She had created it. Only one man in the world would

know what that code was. Not even the originator of this process knew. This one man, Levi Asher knew. She was about to call him.

Her fingers could barely type in the code. She couldn't control the twitch in them. Nothing good could be coming from the conversation she was about to have. Tears were already rolling down her cheeks. This level of emotion was Tori; Amerikka would never shed even one tear. She now hated that she was more her new self than her old one.

With the code entered into the phone, a few minutes later, the face of the man she hoped she would never have to hear from came onto the screen. She never knew his name. She only knew that if someone were to call her, it would be the gravest of news.

"Mr. Asher," she said, her voice shaking. Tori walked back over to the conference table. She was too nervous to sit down. She just paced in front of it. The sound of her high heels clicking on the black and white marble floor was the only sound in the room.

"Ms. Jenay Amerikka Denton. You have confirmation of who I am?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I, too, am confirming that you are who I expected to see on the other end of the screen," he asserted.

"Who?" she asked again, this time with pain in her voice. "Just say it," she demanded.

Tori knew the words that were coming. She dreaded the day that anyone would contact her by using the name given to her at birth. She had purposely left that name behind in her old life.

"Ms. Denton. I'm sorry to have to tell you that your uncle, Maurice Washington has died."

There. Those were the words. Terror raced through her. Emotion be damned, she thought.

"How?" she asked quickly, unable to control the heaves that her body were going through in hearing the actual words. She knew it had to be bad. She needed to hear more.

"He was killed in Baltimore, Maryland. At this time, that is all of the information that I have on him. As you know, upon his death, I am to call you as his only living relative."

The tears ran down her face like a faucet. Her uncle was gone? Someone had killed him? "Killed how?" she asked hurriedly, pacing near the table while still able to see the attorney's face on the screen.

"I'm waiting to get more information. My instructions were to contact you immediately once I was made aware that anything had happened to him. I'm sorry for your loss. There is more," he started to say.

Tori wondered why she hadn't gotten a call from her brother. Why didn't Colby call her with the news before the attorney did? Then she wondered, why would he say that she was his only living relative. Where was Colby? Then it hit her! No. It can't be, her head screamed.

"My brother, Colby? Where is he?" she spurted out loudly.

She felt sick. Her stomach was in knots. The breakfast she had consumed earlier was threatening to make an appearance through her mouth to cover her expensive white designer suit.

Even before he spoke the words, her body began to convulse because she knew. Still, she tried to prepare herself, for what she was about to hear. She couldn't. Nothing ever could.

"Ms. Denton, I'm sorry to inform you that your brother, Colby Bryant was also killed in Baltimore along with your uncle."

Tori couldn't handle anything else. Uncle Sonny was gone. Colby was gone. The room started spinning. She couldn't move. She couldn't pull any air into her lungs. Her hand went to her chest. She fiercely grasped at the lapels on her suit jacket after dropping the phone.

Without any pretense of being able to prepare for her continued reaction, she dropped to her knees on the floor and let out a guttural scream that even scared her. To her own ears, she heard her terror. Her screams wouldn't stop. Even when she tried to stifle them, the screams won out. They were reacting to what was coming from her broken heart.

Without any pretense, her office door slammed opened and in ran Camerie. Tori followed her movements since she couldn't speak. Camerie came round the table to see what was going on. She was followed by at least five other people who worked for her. All were yelling at each other wondering if anyone knew why she was on the floor screaming her head off. Even with an audience, she couldn't stop crying. The last thing she wanted was attention on her predicament. None of them knew who she really was. They only knew her as Tori Hylton, their boss. Hearing that her uncle and brother were both dead had ripped her life apart.

In the midst of her yelling louder than she ever has before, Tori could hear Camerie calling her name. She felt hands trying to help her up. Grief had her body feeling like a ton of bricks. Nothing or no one could help her right now. Then her stomach gave a big heave and her breakfast did come back with a vengeance and covered the floor in front of her. She could hear the attorney continuing to call her name through the phone. She tried to reach for it but Camerie got to it first. When she asked the person on the phone what was going on, Tori saw the screen go black. He would never speak to anyone else.

She would call him back. For now, she couldn't stop the howling and wailing. She had to get it out. Her life was shattered.

She could hear Camerie crying near her ear. Soon others in her office moved about hysterically.

"Call Ms. Jada! Get her back here now!" Camerie screamed, giving an order to someone. She was thankful for Camerie's fast thinking. No one else could understand her pain. Jada had been there for it all. Just as in the past, she had been Amerikka, Jada had been Michelle. Their old lives were converging. They were no longer hidden. She closed her eyes and waited through the turmoil that pierced her mind. Her next move could be the life or death of her; or the life or death of the person responsible for killing her family. She summoned Amerikka. Only that part of her would make it through this chaos. As Tori, she would never.