

## The Secrets of Newberry

### ***EXCERPT:***

"Bones," he whispered. "How'd you know about this saucy spot? I sure have been hanging my hat at the wrong places."

Bones smiled agreeably. He shook hands with the stoutly-built colored man guarding the door. "He's with me Sty," he said before turning his attention toward Hampton. "Oh, this is just one of the out of the way places I like to slide by every now and again. Let's grab a table by the bar so we can kick back." Hampton was up for it. After three cold beers and a shot of whiskey on an empty stomach, he was up for just about anything.

"I got to tell you, there's a freight car full of girls in here. How is it most of them know you already?" Hampton didn't take his eyes from a hot dish standing in the corner. The moment his gaze landed on her tangerine-colored chiffon dress with the natural waistline and padded shoulders, an old memory bothered him like a nagging toothache. Seeing her again reminded Hampton of the hard time he had getting a handle on his self-respect, once she was finished with him.

"You didn't hear a word I said, did you Swagger?" Bones asked, now with his eyes trained on a piece of Hampton's past as well. "Hey now, that's one I don't know," Bones added. "She's as pretty as a picture and appears kinda high-class at that. Maybe we ought to meet her. Come on. Let's take her down a peg, start at different ends then tie a bow around her at the middle." He stood up to introduce himself. Hampton stuck out his arm to block the impending disaster.

"Uh-uh, you'd be going it alone. She likes a downtown man. A gussied up field hand like me don't stand a ghost of a chance at getting another whiff of that. I know my place and it wasn't betwixt her legs." Hampton sulked in beer when Bones put two and two together then quickly came up with his partner and his old flame naked.

"Wait a minute," Bones whispered across the tiny table. "Swagger, you saying you've already been there?"

"Yep, I'm embarrassed to say. Marie Joliet, that's the name she give me but she'll let you call her anything you want if the price is right."

Bones turned his head to get another long glimpse of chocolate in a tight orange wrapper. "She don't strike me as the street cruising type."

"Nope, Marie is what you call the department store cruising type.. Now don't get me wrong.. It's good work if you can get it but the job don't pay nearly as well as you'd expect." Bones leaned in to listen as Hampton laid it out for him. "See, that philly set my soul on fire about six months ago. I carried her out to eat and took her shopping a couple of times. After the bill was paid, she hurried up and put that fire out."

Disbelief was sprinkled Bones's face. He'd been drinking head to head with Hampton so his reaction time began to wane. "Nooo," he said, in a booing manner. "Man, that ain't right."

"Tell me about it Bones. I thought she was likely to wed and be the one to raise my youngins.. She took me for a ride is all. She used me down to the nub."

Bones noticed the woman was still glancing their way while trying to appear inconspicuous about it. "She's quite a looker. You shouldn't kick yourself too hard for it. What's done is done. Don't let it pick at you no more."

Hampton sniffled like a small child holding a grudge. "You know, I ain't mad with how it went down. What's picking at me is the fact that my money ran out before she could use me a little while longer."