

### Excerpt from *Hammers and Homicide* by Paula Charles

I ended the call then reached into the cupboard for a glass and filled it with infused cucumber water from a pitcher in the refrigerator.

“See her where?” April filled another glass with cucumber water. “What’s going on?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know? Join the Women’s Service Club, and I’ll tell you all about it.”

I’d been trying to get April to join the organization ever since she’d taken over the decorating and furniture restoration side of my business, but so far, she’d refused.

“Whatever, Mom. I’m not ready to wear polyester pants and go to a meddling women’s meeting.” My daughter rolled her eyes and tapped her wrist like she was checking a watch. “At least not for another...oh, let’s see...twenty years.”

I threw my hands in the air and looked down at the pink-and-white striped T-shirt, cotton shorts, and denim shoes I wore. “Do you see polyester pants here? Don’t think so, missy.”

“No, but your meddling is showing. Better get it tucked back in.”

The two of us cracked up like a pair of cackling hens.

“Anyway, Evonne called an emergency meeting tonight. Without a feasible buyer for The Emery, we need to regroup and double our efforts to save the theater for Pine Bluff.”

“See? I knew I wouldn’t have to join your stuffy old ladies club to get the scoop. You can’t keep from talking about it.” April grinned. “But, seriously, it’s a good idea. What time’s your meeting?”

“Seven. Why? Are you coming with me?”

“Nope, not going with you. Will you stop, please?”

I laughed. “Never.”

“I think I’m going to head to the workshop and finish the dresser I’ve been working on. Maybe I’ll work until your meeting is over. It should give me a few hours to paint.”

Workshop was an overreaching word for the storage unit where April refinished and stored the pieces of furniture that were the heart of her business, Carriage House Designs.

“Do you think it’s wise to be there alone right now? You could stay here and bake those cupcakes you promised J.T.”

“It’s too hot to bake. I’ll do it tomorrow morning while it’s still cool. I’ll be as safe at my workshop as I’d be here by myself. Don’t worry. I’ll text J.T. to let him know where I’m at, okay? You need to do the same thing when you leave the house, and then text me when you’re heading back home from your meeting. Plus drive your Jeep. No walking tonight.”

“Deal, bossy cow.”

April and I pinky swore. There was no going back on our deal now. With a pinky swear, it was completely unbreakable.

“The meeting isn’t for several more hours, though. I have all afternoon to kill. Think I’ll turn on the air-conditioning unit in the sunroom and read for a bit after I start a load of laundry. It’s too hot to work in the garden right now.”

“Sounds perfect. And don’t say kill.” April glowered at me in jest before she turned to head outside.

I grabbed the dishtowel hanging on the stove doorhandle and snapped my daughter on the rear end before she made it outside.

“Oh, lady, you’re going to be mighty sorry you did that.” April let the screen door bang behind her for good measure. “Lock the door,” she called over her shoulder.