

MURDER ON THE DOWN LOW

Also by Pamela Samuels Young

Every Reasonable Doubt
In Firm Pursuit
Setup (Landmarked for Murder anthology)

Pamela Samuels Young

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*For my sister-friends whose support went
way beyond the call of duty,*

*Olivia Smith, Russana Rowles, Sharlene Moore,
Donna Lowry Reid, Jewelle Johnson, Cynthia
Hebron, Nichelle Norris, and Bettie Lewis.*

CHAPTER 1

Dr. Quentin Banks was a man's man. The kind of guy other men liked being around. Handsome, but not a pretty boy. Wealthy, but not a showoff. Versatile enough to host a fundraiser one night and chill out with his buddies over a game of dominoes the next.

Standing outside Exam Room 5, the doctor scanned the chart of the first patient he was scheduled to see after his lunch meeting. His office suite in the Horton Medical Plaza was tastefully decorated with muted walls and dark slate tile. Colorful prints of jazz musicians lined the long, bright hallway. The place was classy, but not over the top. Just like Dr. Banks.

He checked his watch. It was almost eleven-thirty. Time to leave. The doctor closed the chart and dropped it into the plastic casing posted at eye level outside the exam room. He strode into his private office, locked the door, then retrieved a throwaway cell phone from his desk.

"I'm about to leave," he said. "The President's Suite, right?"

It was always that cut and dry. He was a happily married man who did not have the time or the need for emotional connections. His lunch meetings were all about the sex.

The doctor slipped out of his white coat and hung it on a metal rack. Casually but impeccably dressed, he wore a khaki-colored shirt and black slacks made from an expensive linen fabric. The kind that didn't wrinkle much. He was forty-two years old, just shy of six feet, and a hearty 215 pounds. He had the build of an aging ex-football player. Not nearly as lean as in his prime, but thick and firm enough to advertise that he still hit the gym on a regular basis.

After telling his office manager that he'd be back by one-thirty, Dr. Banks took an elevator to the parking structure. He eased his black Jag onto Hillcrest Street. At the light, he turned left on Manchester Boulevard and headed for the northbound ramp of the 405 Freeway.

Without question, Dr. Banks was one of the best OB/GYNs in Southern California. From the day he had applied to Howard Medical School, he had vowed to return home to Inglewood to set up shop. And despite the sacrifices, he'd kept his word, turning down opportunities

that were far more lucrative, in terms of both prestige and compensation. Having a predominantly black and Latino patient base meant keeping late office hours and working one, sometimes two, Saturdays a month. The people he served couldn't afford to take time off from work. Not even for medical care.

When he wasn't working, the doctor cherished his family life. Though he now lived just a few miles from his childhood stomping grounds, in many respects it was a world away. View Park was a haven for L.A.'s black elite. Professionals with six and seven-figure salaries who actually liked the idea of having neighbors who looked like them. The doctor's residence spanned five thousand square feet and had a full-length basketball court, a circular swimming pool, and a guesthouse. The Mrs. was a stay-at-home mom who loved her job as wife and mother to their two sons as much as she loved her husband. All in all, life was good.

The doctor pulled his Jag to a stop in front of the Marina Marriott on Admiralty Way, hopped out, and took a ticket from the valet. He felt invigorated by the very thought of the treat that awaited him. Dr. Banks rotated his lunch meetings among different hotels in the area. His favorite was the much more elegant Ritz-Carlton just up the street. As he crossed the hotel lobby, he tossed the cell phone into the trash, then made a mental note to switch locations for next week. He was many things. Sloppy wasn't one of them.

When Dr. Banks reached the hotel room, there was no need to knock. The door was always left open just a crack. He could not risk being seen with his lunch date for even the few seconds it would take to open and close the door.

As usual, the main room of the spacious suite was empty. His lunch sat on a sterling silver room service tray on the coffee table in front of the couch. He'd have the turkey sandwich, root beer, and Caesar salad after his *other* hunger had been satisfied.

Stepping over to the large picture window, Dr. Banks stared across the street at the sailboats lolling in the Marina. Maybe he'd buy himself a boat.

He walked back to the couch, undressed, and slipped into the white terrycloth robe left waiting for him. Another part of the ritual. Dr. Banks sank down onto the couch and for the next five minutes, fell into a

deep, calming meditation. The more intensely he fantasized about what awaited him in the adjoining room, the longer and harder his erection grew. He reached down and gently stroked himself, then picked up the condom on the end table and slipped it on.

Dr. Banks entered the bedroom and nodded at his lunch date, who sat naked in a velvet club chair, a sly grin stretched across his bearded face. Clarence Mitchell was his youngest son's soccer coach. They had been *hooking up* on a semi-regular basis for over a year.

Clarence stood up, showing off a solid, mink brown body. "Good to see you, man," he said, smiling.

Dr. Banks didn't respond, his growing excitement over what was about to occur more internal than external. The two men awkwardly embraced, then let go. Extended foreplay or professions of love were unnecessary. They saved that for the women in their lives.

Clarence walked over to the bed. Following close behind, Dr. Banks discarded his robe and prepared to treat himself.

Just over an hour later, as he exited the freeway, Dr. Banks heard his cell phone ring. He glanced at the caller ID before picking up.

"Hey, beautiful," he said into the phone.

"Hi, honey," his wife chirped back. "I'm catching a movie with Karen tonight. The kids are with my parents."

"Have a good time."

Diana was always good about making sure he knew her precise whereabouts, and Dr. Banks appreciated that. Now that he was free for the evening, the thought of arranging another hookup with Clarence crossed his mind, but he quickly dismissed the thought. He was not a greedy man. He never prowled for sex and the thought of going to a gay bar disgusted him. Only gay men did that, and he wasn't gay.

His lunchtime excursions were just a freaky little hobby. Nothing more. Nothing less. He was a fanatic about safe sex and always chose partners who were family men with as much to lose as he had. Dr. Banks even required his sexual partners to periodically produce written proof that they were HIV negative, and he gladly did the same. He loved his wife too much to demand anything less. In the twelve years since he'd said *I do*, there had only been five other men besides Clarence.

Dr. Banks turned left into the parking structure, made his way to the second level and backed into a stall that bore his name in neat block letters. He hummed his favorite Temptations song, *My Girl*, as he took off his shades and clipped them onto the sun visor.

Pushing open the car door, Dr. Banks planted his left foot on the ground at the same moment that a bullet pierced his cheek, just below his right eye. The force of the shot sent his head hurtling backward, then slowly forward, as a splash of crimson darkened the car's pristine beige interior.

As the second and third bullets entered his neck and chest, Dr. Banks' body fell sideways toward the open car door. His hand reached out for something to grasp, but found nothing to break his fall.

In what looked like a slow motion videotape, Dr. Banks tumbled onto the dirty garage pavement, head first.