

Lady Jasmine

Prologue - March, 2007

Death was on her mind, but Jasmine wasn't thinking of her own demise. Her hands still trembled as she looked down at the letter she held.

Would the charge be first degree murder or would it be more like manslaughter? Either way, she would go to jail for both before she allowed anyone to reveal this secret.

Jasmine read the words that she'd already memorized: *Get your husband to step down from the pulpit or else everyone will know what you did in the summer of 1983.*

Hours had passed since she'd first read the letter last night, and she still trembled. Until a few weeks ago, those days had been totally forgotten; she'd expunged them from her mind many years before. The summer of '83 was just a small blip on her life's radar. A mistake. A secret.

But it was a big secret that she'd kept from everyone - including her husband, Pastor Hosea Bush.

Jasmine closed her eyes and remembered the question Hosea had asked her just five months before when they were in Los Angeles.

"Are there any other secrets, Jasmine? Any other lies?"

She'd told him then every truth she could remember, revealed every lie that she'd ever told - how she was forty-three and not thirty-eight. How she'd been married before. She'd even told him how much weight she'd really gained since she'd had her baby. She'd told her husband everything she could think of.

But she hadn't told him this.

"I have to talk to Hosea," she whispered, remembering the commitment they'd both made to never again keep secrets.

She could tell him - convince him that this was something she'd simply forgotten. But even as she had that thought, she knew that would never happen. There was nothing that would ever make her tell *this* truth. If Hosea found out about this, she'd lose more than her husband - Hosea might even try to take their daughter, Jacqueline, away from her. This was an unforgiveable sin; at least it would be in Hosea's eyes.

No, she would commit murder before she allowed this to come out. No one could ever know that she'd spent the summer of '83 hanging high and swinging low from a pole. No one could ever know that Jasmine Cox Larson Bush, the first lady of New York's City of Lights at Riverside Church, used to be a stripper!