

*A fun, satirical story of a young man, Jazz Jackson, who has struggled with finding his first girlfriend. All thanks to his bad guy persona.*

## **Bad Guys Finish Last**

By Rashun Carter

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*Bad Guys*  
*Finish Last*



RASHUN CARTER

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## Chapter One: Monday Morning

Jazz, I hated my name, but not nearly as much as I secretly hated being teased for never having been in a relationship. It's not like I had allergies toward girls or scared of them, and I definitely didn't prefer dudes. I just didn't see the point of trusting someone to be loyal when they likely wouldn't be. In short, I saw relationships as a waste of time. I'd be lying if I said I hadn't been urged to settle for any girl just to silence previous ridicule from both my family and friends, but there wasn't one girl who'd caught my interest beyond her beauty. If the miraculous were to happen, and I'd find a worthy lady, there'd be no doubt in my mind she'd know she's special. I'd gladly gift her roses with intimate cards on random days of the week, long talks over the phone about anything or nothing, surprise texts just to make her smile, a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on. Too bad such intimacy only existed in fairy tales.

For the longest time, I didn't have the slightest clue as to why my parents had decided to name me, Jazz. Every time I'd ask, only a chuckle would come as my answer proceeded by a swift change of subject. *Every single* time. Suspicion as to whether it had been their clever way of implying they'd always wanted a daughter frustrated me, but what sort of parents would do that? Mine would! I'd call my parents weird, but that word is just... weird, so I just refer to them as being limited edition.

Roscoe's my dad, but I call him, Pop, because his bloated frame literally looked like it'd pop through whatever clothes he managed to squeeze into. Additionally, he often wore a toupee which struggled to conceal his ginormous, balding head. We had the same chocolate skin and five-foot, five-inch height, but our similarities sort of phased out from there. My lanky figure and round head full of short locs were complete opposite of Pop's makeshift hair. I'd suggested he switch to a permanent wig once upon a time, and he slapped the back of my head silly and laughed, like a hyena, with his double chin jiggling as though Jell-o. I was being serious! Too bad he never seemed to take anything serious other than feeding his face and sitting at his desk job for twenty hours a day. Mama was sort of the same, but she could always flip the silly switch in the blink of an eye.

Mama kept her health at the forefront. One would be better off catching a glimpse of a flying unicorn than ever viewing her eat any sort of meat. She hardly missed a morning, afternoon or evening run whether outdoors or on her bedroom treadmill. In fact, she rarely wore anything outside of athletic attire. I'm talking about even when she'd go to sleep! She'd always told me she needed to be prepared for when the urge arises. She also took her appearance just as serious with manicured nails and beautified, shoulder-length hair. Mama was a little shorter than me and a bit lighter than myself and Pop, but she always bragged about how she knew more about our African American history than both of us combined. Yeah, there were plenty of brains in that egghead of hers. I called her and Pop, R&B. Short for Roscoe and Brianna, since they wanted to be funny and name me after music that mimicked a buzz saw chomping its way through concrete. Not that my name had anything to do with my opinion of that musical genre or anything.

Pop, our designated rooster, signaled the early school morning with his blaring classical musical and screeching high notes that could be heard all the way down the hall in my bedroom—where I lay awake with wide, bloodshot eyes and jumbo pillows pressed against my ears.

*Just one more month*, I reminded myself. One more month of school and I'd be free. I didn't care if I had to flip burgers for the rest of my life in order to pay for my own place. Anything beat waking up to someone bellowing at the top of their lungs as though they were competing on *American Idol*. I knew one thing: Pop would most definitely receive all thumbs down. I tossed and turned, trying to fight off the rooster's relentless cock-a-doodle-doo, but the crowing seemed to grow louder. It seemed he knew of my sleep deprivation and refused to let me rest. Pop hit the pinnacle of high notes, and I ground my teeth and shuddered at the torment. Unable to take anymore, I growled and launched my pillows in the direction of my bedroom door.

“Okay, I'm up!” I shouted. Of course, he didn't hear my surrender and continued crowing. The scent of fresh, brewed coffee wafted into my nostrils, as I sluggishly sat up on the side of my bed. The diabolical urge to pour salt into his coffee pitcher downstairs humored me, but my being the only child would have made the sinister deed hard to throw on anyone else. Then again, that'd just be mean. I imagined there'd be no rougher way to ruin a morning after a hot shower than consuming terrible coffee.

*He doesn't deserve that*, I thought. *No matter how much his singing annoys me*. I'd complained to Mama about Pop's morning disturbance, but she'd just say his singing was amazing, and she'd likely sing with him if she weren't already out on her morning jog. She seemed to always make it a priority to be out on her run before Pop tuned his terrible vocals to the shower head. I had a good idea why.

Finally, the sound of that godawful music silenced, and I heard Pop's footsteps thumping toward he and Mama's room. My head continued to stay buried in my hands in darkness. I hated school so much. *Whose idea was it to have school in the early morning anyway?* I wondered. *Had they not considered how tired us students would be? Why didn't they at least give the option to have school at noon? Sheesh!* Regardless of my venting, it didn't alter the fact I had just under an hour to get ready and haul my butt to the bus stop. With a frustrated sigh, I clicked on the curved lamp poised on my gray nightstand which illuminated my room in a dim, yellow glow.

My new school clothes rested in front of the mirror on my small dresser along with junk. I gazed at my reflection, noting my chest and arms had hardly any definition, but smirked while running a hand across my cluster of abs. A visit to the gym would be beneficial, but I'd already broken that promise to myself over a million times. I glanced over at posters of my favorite basketball team, Chicago Bulls, and supermodels displayed on my room's beige walls. Empty soda cans, candy wrappers, and dirty clothes littered my stained carpet. I meant to clean it up yesterday, but I forgot. Just like I'd forgotten to do it for the past couple of weeks. I judged the mess as being not so bad. It wasn't like I had roaches and mice heaving against one another in a tug-of-war dual over beef jerky. A sequence of bangs at my door startled me.

"Jazz! Are you up?" Mama asked. Before I could answer, another pattern of bangs drummed my door. "Jazz!"

"Yeah," I whined. I heard my doorknob jiggle.

"Jazz Pierre Jackson, you open up this door this instant," Mama ordered, "I don't believe you're awake. You've had that light on before and you weren't up. I'm not falling for that foolishness again." Her using my full name before a command always sounded like a death sentence. Why did parents do that? That *death sentence* strummed a whole other string of fear. Even my friends had

been in agreement with me about it when their parents would do it. Regardless, I knew deep down she loved me, and I loved her back. A gesture of profound reverence for my matriarch. An exasperated sigh escaped my lips, while I got up and headed toward my door. A misguided step caused me to slip on a stray can, and I crashed into the door.

“What are you doing in there?” Her scolding tone caused me to recoil and hesitate before twisting the lock on the knob. *Here we go.* Opening the door revealed Mama in a navy-blue jogging suit and white sneakers. Her hair was twisted into cornrows with a braided ponytail. She’d apparently just gotten in from her jog, evident by the hallway’s ceiling light highlighting the sweat glistening on her forehead. Her jogging suit swooshed with the motion of her repeatedly lifting five-pound dumbbells. A prime example of her not messing around about her fitness. She took a step forward and peeked over my shoulder. The grease in her hair wafted a coconut scent into my nose. “How many times have I told you to clean up this pigsty of a room?” she asked, meeting my exhausted gaze. I shrugged my shoulders in defeat and leaned against my door. Any answer I gave would be a wrong one. “Are you deaf?” she asked, cocking her head.

“No,” I yawned. “I’m sorry. I kept forgetting.” She finally stopped lifting the weights and sucked in a deep breath. Their combined ten pounds thudded the carpet. Her hands went to her hips, and she said,

“Well, get to it now that it’s on your mind.” She read my shocked expression, then added, “it’s your own fault. If you had went ahead and did it the first time I asked, this would be a different conversation. Maybe if you cleaned your room up more often, you’d be comfortable inviting a nice girl over here sometime.”

“Can’t I do it after school?” I whined. “I still have to take a shower.”

“*I still have to take a shower,*” she mimicked, drooping her body as if she were tired as me. “No. Clean it all up right now,” she said, weaving her finger across the room. “And don’t even think about taking your sweet time. You’d better be done in time to catch that bus.”

“How am I—” I began, before being cut off by her finger pointing in my room. Her death stare added emphasis to her nonverbal answer to a question that didn’t get to exist. I reluctantly gathered the trash scattered across my floor. I

didn't know why it mattered so much. It's not like I'd planned on having company anytime soon. While in the middle of mumbling complaints, Mama's voice came about again.

"Jazz." I looked over my shoulder with annoyance scribbled across my face. "And put these back on the rack where they belong in the living room," she said, pointing at the dumbbells she'd dropped on the floor. She vanished from sight just as my mouth hinged open. *Are you freaking kidding me? I didn't even put those there!* Slamming a soda can into my overflowing trash can didn't vent nearly enough frustration. I scanned my room and realized there was no way I'd be able to clean this landfill up, take a shower and make it to the bus stop in time. An idea popped in my head while my eyes landed on my bed's foundation.

I went to town on sliding all of the junk on my floor underneath my bed. *Now for the clothes.* The dirty clothes strewn across my floor were launched into my closet with a blind person's precision. Suddenly, I heard a tiny bell's jingle. A quick look in the direction of the Christmas sound brought our Jack Russell Terrier into view. His smooth, white coat was dotted at his midsection, eyes and tail with large patches of brown fur. The canine's tongue sagged from the side of his wide grin.

"What do you want, Bolt?" I playfully asked, stuffing my clothes into the closet. We had adopted Bolt as a pup, and he earned his name by his reputation of snatching belongings and *bolting* out of sight. I can remember a time I had egg rolls—freshly baked from the oven—placed on a plate as an after-school snack. I'd had them on my mind for some reason all freaking day and couldn't wait to gobble them. I'd placed my plate on the dining room table, then hurried to the bathroom. I kid you not. I was gone for less than a minute and came back to find my paper plate gone. I noticed the thief had dropped one of the egg rolls during their escape. Pacing and scanning the adjacent living room, I knew I couldn't have been losing my mind. Then, I heard it. *Crunch.*

I followed the chewing sound which led me to the far end of our plush, ruby-red sofa. Nestled between the wall and underneath the sofa's arm was Bolt chomping away at my other egg roll. At my outburst, Bolt's head snapped up with half of the egg roll hanging from his mouth. His dark eyes were so innocent, but I knew he knew better. I wanted to strangle that little rodent. I reached, and in the blink of an eye, he bolted from my reach and vanished from



sight. By the time I rounded the corner, the only clue he'd left behind of his whereabouts was a half-eaten egg roll. I didn't know whether to take it as a taunt or an apology.

Bolt's small wagging tail and panting made it pretty apparent he hadn't burned off enough energy with Mama during their morning run. Good grief. I wondered if he knew what sleep was. Unfortunately, I didn't have time to oblige his playful desire, so I gave him a quick scrub behind his drooped ears before swiftly tossing my blankets into a presentable manner for, *Her Highness*. A quick glance at my digital clock told me I had twenty minutes at the most before I potentially missed the bus. I nearly trampled Bolt on my way out of my room and toward the bathroom.

The bathroom door opened, and residual heat from Pop's shower wafted me with a strong, musky scent. I hated his body wash. I didn't know why he chose to smell like an ancient attic. I turned on the shower while brushing my teeth, then swung open the bathroom cabinet. No towels. No washrags. *You have got to be kidding me!* I raced to the hallway closet only to be met with the same disappointment.

"What are you doing?" came Mama's voice. I turned from the closet in a panic to notice a laundry basket hoisted at her side.

"Where are the towels and wash cloths?" I pressed, toothpaste foamed at my mouth. She glanced down at the dirty laundry at her side and chuckled, then continued onward. "Ma!" I exclaimed at her back.

"Better use one of those sheets," she said aloud in stride. Her voice faded while she headed downstairs. "Maybe if you cleaned your room up sooner we'd have more towels and wash rags. I told you I'm not waiting on your lazy butt no more. And finish brushing your teeth!" I grunted in anguish, staring at the lone sheet at eye level. Her true words blanketed me with regret. *This can't be happening*. I entered the bathroom ready to take the fastest shower known to man after tossing my toothbrush into the sink. Swiping the shower curtain aside, it occurred to me that something was very wrong.

Normally, the shower's heat would've been felt at that point. *Don't tell me*. Stretching forth my hand, I placed my palm into the steady sprinkle, then yanked it back. Goosebumps erupted all over my body which triggered

chattering teeth. *He used all of the hot water! Could my morning possibly get any worse?* Two horrendous choices awaited me: freeze to death in this cold shower or miss the bus and die as punishment. I'd skip the shower, but I hadn't bathed for two days. Teeth bared, I inched my foot toward the shower basin. The frigid steam trickled upon my leg, and I nearly jumped out of my skin. *So cold!* A bang at the door.

"You better hurry up in there!" Pop shouted. *I'd be done by now if it weren't for your concert,* I thought. The pressure was on. I had to get the shower over with. My body jittered all over while eyeing that icy water. I closed my eyes and leapt into the arctic vicinity. Unfortunately, I slipped and fell directly in the shower head's aim. Glacial water pelted me without mercy. It felt like I was getting turned into a Popsicle. Snatching Pop's body wash next to me, I quickly doused myself in it, then used both hands as washrags.

*How much longer before I freeze to death?* I wondered. Not wanting to find out the answer, I turned off the shower and hopped out with lather still stuck to my body. I resembled a soap monster. It didn't occur to me that I was going to smell like someone's antique, wooden furniture until I was in the middle of drying myself with the bed sheet. The mental anguish was too much. Bloody murder screamed from my lungs as I reared back my head.

## Chapter Two: My Crew

Picture a starving beast chasing after its retreating prey. I was the beast, and the school bus happened to be the prey. I'd barely had time to dress myself before charging through our front door and making my way toward the bus stop which was about a quarter of a mile up the road. I didn't know why our school didn't just have the stupid buses pick us all up from our homes. I could tell from afar when the bus would arrive because my stop was next to a stop sign at a four-way stop. Unfortunately for me, the bus would turn in the opposite direction of where I'd be approaching after scooping the few students who routinely waited there with me. My legs burned with such intensity I had to double over and catch my breath. Then, my heart sank.

My eyes witnessed the yellow bus and widened with panic. *This can't be happening!* I dug into my determination and ran as fast as I could. The bus came to a halt with a hiss, then the doors opened. Teenage students dressed in casual attire entered in linear fashion, which in my mind seemed to be a twisted countdown of when I'd be left behind. My heart pounded, threatening to rip through my white polo. I could feel the rushing wind kiss at the sweat on my forehead. Two students were left to enter, and I was still a ways off. *No!* My arms pumped harder and faster, but it seemed like I was going in slow motion. Then, a lucky break. The final student dropped one of the textbooks she held in her arm while climbing up the steps into the bus. Something told me that was my last chance. However, the final student seemed to move at the speed of light to recover her book, and she reentered the bus. The doors closed.

"Wait!" I shouted. I had no clue where I found the air to gather that shout. My lungs felt as though they were on strike in order for me to stop running. The bus turned just as I made my way to the four-way stop. *I've gotta catch up to it before it picks up too much speed!* Brakes screamed and brought a green sedan to a halt as I dashed across the intersection. The blare of angry horns echoed throughout the suburban neighborhood. Through all the madness, I could just make out the sound of the bus's engine roar for more power. All seemed lost, and I waved my arms in hope of someone seeing me, but the bus kept going. I doubled over, gasping for air. *Mama is going to knock me into the middle of*

*next week.* Pondering this thought of impending torment, I slowly rose, and my eyes widened in shock at the sight of red dots on the school bus's rear. Brake lights!

The bus stopped, and its air brakes hissed once more. *Thank you, Jesus!* An exhilarating wave of relief swept through me. Elation so intense, I managed to jog through my burning legs and into the school bus. I didn't like being the center of attention, and to my dismay, that was one of those moments. I made the brief climb up the stairs and was greeted by our bus driver, Mr. Buck. His heavy-set frame was nestled in brown slacks and a bloated white-collar shirt complete with a brown bow tie. He was white, but his chubby face always had a tomato red shade, like he'd literally explode before the struggling buttons on his shirt. He flashed a polished smile while adjusting his glasses, then—in his usual shrieky tone—said,

“Sorry about that, Jazzy! Good thing Sarah pointed you out after she dropped her book!” *Another reason I hated my name. Jazzy, really?*

“Yeah, thanks,” I panted, striding toward the aisle. I gave Sarah a nod along the way, who replied with a dimpled smile. Nearly everyone recognized Sarah as an overachiever. She'd won class president four years in a row and wasn't exactly the prettiest of girls, but she was still somewhat cute. Her ambition, flawless attendance, hygiene and energetic personality made her the *femme fatale* of good guys. Us, bad guys, felt that was a fitting description since every boyfriend she'd had ended up losing their mind trying to live up to her standards. Personally, I wouldn't mind trying my luck with her, but I knew there was no way she'd be interested in me. Heck, her pointing me out to hold the bus served as a miracle itself. A rumor used to float around about her being shot out of the womb with a book in her hand. Ridiculous, right?

Her straight, brown hair framed her heart-shaped face and rested just below her shoulders, but I could still make out the bold, multicolored words on her pink, short-sleeved T-shirt: *Class Prez*. She seemed to have quite the addiction to cut-out jeans because she always wore them. I guessed she hadn't been to the tanning salon with her girlfriends yet since her skin still had a fair shade. She and her friends were identical in stature: short and thin.

I felt everyone's eyes as I wobbled down the aisle, trying to avoid their gaze while scanning for an empty seat. Just in front of the very last seat was room

for one more student, it was there I reluctantly sat beside a guy snoring so loud I thought he'd shatter the window his head rested against. It sounded like he was trying to hock up the world's largest loogie.

Chatter among the students filled the school bus. Every now and then, I'd break from my straight-ahead stare and glance over at the neighboring window, catching glimpses of familiar neighborhoods and landmarks. I wanted to look out of my own, but I could barely see anything past that snoring sloth. I wondered if he'd gotten less sleep than I did. Probably not. It was a miracle for me to get sleep more than six hours a night. The blend of insomnia and Pop's ringing vocals deserved all of my thanks for that problem. Our school bus hit a series of potholes which rocked all of us in our seats. A clamor of complaints filled the humid interior.

"Sorry, guys and gals!" Mr. Buck bellowed, waving a hand. The complaints died down at a slow pace, but I had a separate complaint of my own. The pothole's heavy vibrations had caused my snoring seatmate to fall onto my folded arms. I nudged him with my shoulder, hoping it would be enough to at least shock him awake. It didn't work. I tried again and again but still nothing. I muttered to him for his attention while poking at his shoulder. Epic fail. Punching him in the head crossed my mind, but I'd come too far in catching the bus just to be put in detention. Plus being violent didn't rest well with me.

My current situation called for drastic measures because if he drooled on me or my new *Ralph Lauren* polo, being a happy camper would be impossible. I pushed up against the sloth's shoulder, revealing his closed eyes and a fresh trail of slobber oozing from his gaped mouth. *This isn't life*. My push must've forced that pool of morning breath from its cavity. Even worse, I wasn't the strongest dude—not strong at all, to be real—and his body weight made my arm bulge with tension. No way could I have afforded to let him fall on me again. I'd lose my mind. I glanced forward, grimacing, and noticed we were pulling into the school's bus loading dock, but an abrupt stop made his weight shift and become too much to hold. My arm gave way. *Oh no!*

My eyes widened. Before I knew it, I leapt from my seat and crashed into the students seated across from me. They looked at me like I was crazy. I didn't blame them, but I did what I had to do. The sloth landed and immediately awakened upon impact, shaking the sleep from his head and wiping that smear

of slobber from his mouth. *Of course, now he wakes up!* I got up and apologized to the shocked students before dusting my all-white attire and checking for accidental drool stains. Thankfully, none were found.

“Sorry about that,” he said, rubbing his eyes. “I hope I wasn’t any trouble. Twelve hours of sleep just isn’t enough for me.” I returned his explanation with a blank stare. *Twelve hours? I’d kill for that much sleep!*

“It’s all good,” I finally replied. “But you should probably think about packing a pillow and laying across the seat next time.” The Sloth cocked his head as if confused. There wasn’t much to understand from my statement, or at least I thought anyone with common sense would get it. Then again, Pop always told me that common sense ain’t common. Student’s began to shuffle to the aisle and make their way off the bus, but were halted by Sarah at the exit.

“Fellow students!” she announced, raising her hand. “Don’t forget to sign you and your special partner up for the *Finale School Dance* coming up this Friday! Tomorrow will be your last chance!” Her announcement summoned a wave of whoops and applause. Was I really the only one that didn’t give a rat’s behind? I’d have no girl to go with anyway. Just give me grades good enough to walk to my diploma, and I’m outta here.

Sarah exited with a group of her supporters in tow. I envied her popularity, honestly. If only I was *that* smart and ambitious, I’d have a clique of buddies with sky-high aspirations along with a possible soul mate at my side. Oh, well. As usual, most of the students were packed under the school’s cement canopy socializing and horse playing. There was hardly a conversation I walked by that didn’t include the school dance.

The hype was larger than any other event throughout the school’s recent history, especially since our senior class was unusually large. A scan of the masses wasn’t necessary to find my crew of three. We always settled in our own little corner and engaged in gossip, trash talk or whatever subject came up. However, sometimes I honestly felt reluctant to join our banter. Banter which sometimes included making fun of others which wasn’t my cup of tea. I didn’t see the point of making a mockery of others to make oneself feel better. One may ask why I cliqued with these guys. Well, I felt that I fit in with them and thought being one of the bad guys projected an aura of coolness. Ambling over to the corner, I found them as expected.

Roddy was the oldest of us thanks to him repeating senior year. His light-skinned, muscular frame, fresh fade haircut, dual cubic zirconia earrings—although, he'd always say they were real diamonds—and high cheekbones on his oval-shaped face attracted many females. In fact, he was the only one of us that managed to juggle four girlfriends at one time. I didn't see how he did it. His athletic prowess was sure a big boost, but dude had to have been one of the smoothest talkers I'd ever been around. Wouldn't surprise me if business was in his future.

We'd met Roddy just last year. He transferred from New York and had just moved to Illinois. We were all out at one of our school's basketball games and noticed his crazy talent. Needless to say, we instantly became his biggest fans. It was very intriguing to come across one of the student athletes that weren't too goody-two-shoes to accept a challenge on a basketball court outside of school. Roddy made us all look pitiful that day on the court, one by one. You'd think he'd be among the popular kids. You know, the ones with straight A's, full ride scholarships, curfews and whatnot. Nope, not Roddy. He'd said he didn't exactly feel like he fit in those uppity circles, so he decided to align himself with us, particularly because of how cool we were with him on the basketball court.

Roddy was poised against the wall with his arms folded, dressed in black jeans, and a *True Religion* shirt that was way too small but matched his red sneakers. He threw his head back in laughter at whatever Emory had said.

Emory was super short, like short, short. I often wondered if he'd stopped growing in the fifth grade. He had a thin body frame with a tiger tattoo that blanketed his right arm. As one could likely tell by Roddy's reaction, Emory always supplied animated jokes and lifted our spirits. He was the only one of us with Asian blood running through his veins, which is why we were usually hesitant to fight him over stupid stuff. Emory's attire was often a black t-shirt and black slacks with black shoes. We'd sometimes joke about him never washing his clothes, but his scent of fresh laundry almost always killed our joke. Emory wore his long, straight black hair untamed most of the time, while other times he'd pull it into a ponytail. Unless of course, his girlfriend felt like doing something exotic with it. Emory was shoved playfully aside by De'arrick.

De'arrick and Emory were constantly bumping heads, and one would swear they'd be twins in another life. De'arrick was about my height with short, curly hair and an average build. His mocha skin was usually covered by a hoodie and denim jeans. Somehow, somehow this guy was born with gray eyes. Yes, gray! His demeanor was bully-like with a splash of dark humor. He was the only one of us that could access grown folk things, like alcohol and tobacco. Thanks to his fake I.D.

Emory, De'arrick and I all met freshman year during orientation. Emory had made a joke about my locs, saying he'd never seen burnt worms crawl through someone's skull before. De'arrick had overheard the joke and burst with laughter, then instigated the following back and forth between Emory and I. De'arrick provoked Emory to the point of shoving me which caused a fist fight between us. Of course, Emory always claimed he whooped me, but I stood on the results having been a tie. We all were put in detention and avoided suspension thanks to that being our only fight.

I walked up to my crew, listening in on what joke had Roddy dying of laughter.

"He acts big and tough!" Emory exclaimed, pointing at De'arrick. "But he put on those lover-boy eyes and became the biggest teddy bear!"

"Eye contact is everything, fool!" De'arrick countered, playfully shoving Emory's shoulder. "I could've gotten your girl the exact same way." Emory's mouth gaped before he exploded with laughter.

"Are you serious?" he managed to ask. "You'd have a better shot at *Halle Berry!*"

"I told you he's crazy," De'arrick scoffed, eyeing Roddy—who nodded in agreement while snickering. I'd be the third in agreement on De'arrick's statement in reference to Emory's claim. Emory had this crazy idea that his girlfriend was the most loyal girl in the world and all about him. Regardless of each one of us having told him we'd spotted her on multiple occasions making out with other guys. Did he care? Of course not. He'd go about his business and continue flirting with other girls as if he were single.

"Hey, fellas," I chimed in, giving them a nod.

"Eyyy, there he is!" De'arrick said, connecting with my handshake.



“What’s going on, J?” Emory asked, colliding his fist with mine. He sized me up in approval and added, “that gear is smooth! I’m loving it. What size is that? I’m going to need to burrow that outfit for about two classes.”

“Not in this lifetime, *M&M*,” I chuckled. “This is Jazz’s size.”

He scrunched his nose, then sniffed at his underarms. “What’s that smell?” We all peered at Emory in bewilderment.

“What are you talking about?” De’arrick asked, sniffing the air.

“Somebody smells like my grandpa,” Emory replied, wearing a face of disgust. *Crap! Pop’s funky body wash!*

“Uh... I think you’re smelling things,” I swiftly remarked, glancing over my shoulder while giving Roddy a handshake. “What’s up, Rod?” He gave a nonchalant shrug, and then replied,

“We were talking about that dance coming up. Somehow we got on the subject of how we met our girlfriends. Of course, I already knew about Emory and his lady but hadn’t heard De’arrick’s story. Emory’s retelling had me in tears from laughing so hard.”

“I can only imagine,” I chuckled.

“Yeah, I can’t exactly remember all of mine,” Roddy said. “You know how I can’t have just one girl.” We snickered in unison, but I suppressed my curiosity as to why he couldn’t. I’d be more than happy to have just one special lady to cater to.

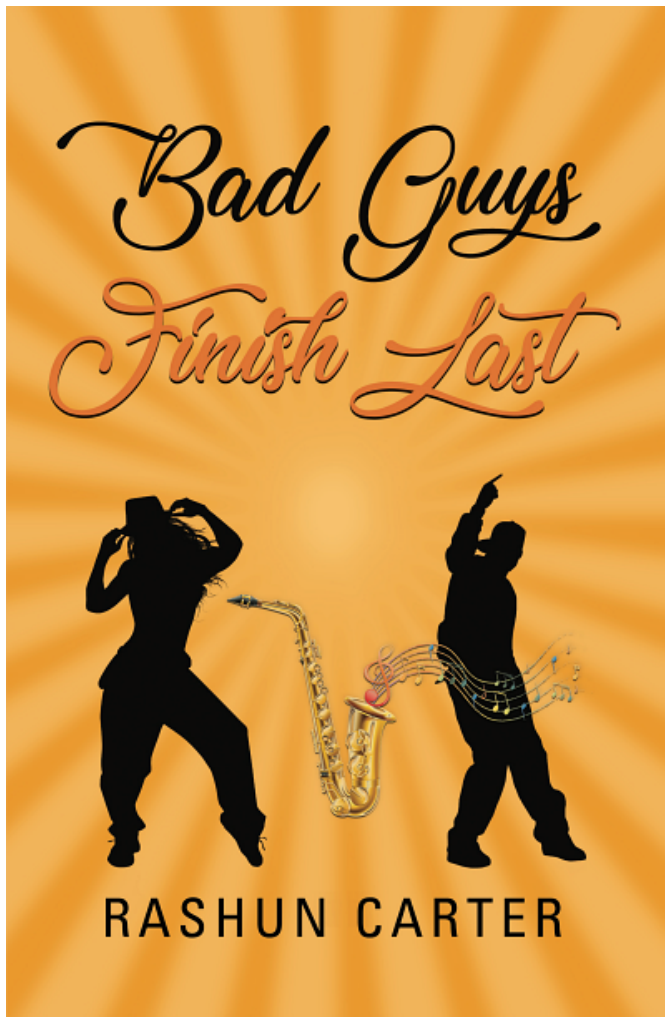
“But what’s your girlfriend story, man?” Roddy asked me, narrowing his eyes. “How come I haven’t seen or heard any crazy girlfriend story from you? I mean, you do have a girl to take to the dance, right?” Emory and De’arrick glanced at one another before their eyes were suddenly drawn to the ground.

“I-I,” I began. Suddenly, the school bell tolled, and the students began parading toward the entrance.

“Don’t worry about it,” Roddy said, patting my shoulder as he walked by and joined alongside Emory and De’arrick. Normally, we always strode inside together. Mainly because we all had something in common. Only this time, I

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was cemented on that slab of concrete, watching them stroll into the building with people they shared a common denominator with. They all had a date to the dance.



*A fun, satirical story of a young man, Jazz Jackson, who has struggled with finding his first girlfriend. All thanks to his bad guy persona.*

## **Bad Guys Finish Last**

By Rashun Carter

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