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Hand in Glove

Andrea Jackson
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A mythical African artifact, a series of diabolical murders, and a torrid love affair all come together like … well, like a hand in a glove … in this romantic mystery set in Atlanta's entrepreneurial Black community. A weekend house party of prominent movers and shakers at Duke Kingston's estate appears to be a fluff assignment for Tyson McAllister and her boss, Patty Sheldon, host of morning television's "Eye on Atlanta" interview program. As Ty and her camera crew rove the opulent grounds, she repeatedly—and literally—bumps into the seductively handsome Victor Santiago, a wealthy businessman who obviously enjoys his close encounters with the comely—if clumsy—TV producer.

Victor, however, has more on his mind than a weekend rendezvous. A devotee of the Nakisisi Way, "a half-secret cult … that was partly a religion and partly a rebel force," Victor has been sent to Kingston's estate by his mentor, Morehouse University professor Dr. Lu Berengi, to locate the Staff, a powerful amulet sacred to Nakisisi's practitioners. Victor is not the only guest pursuing the relic, however; Berengi's rival, Dr. Franklin, also believes the Staff is somewhere on Kingston's property and he resorts to nothing short of blackmail to get it. Someone else gets to Franklin first, and when he's found dead in Ty's bedroom, Victor concocts a barely plausible alibi to protect her.

As Ty and Victor team up to exonerate Ty of her alleged role in Franklin's murder and investigate Kingston's interest in procuring the Staff, the intense physical attraction they feel inevitably deepens into the makings of a more substantial relationship, which neither feels they can afford to pursue. "Fate seemed to be pushing Ty into his path. Why had she come along now after all his years of searching," Victor wonders. And Ty fights Victor's attentions every step of the way: "Something highly volatile seemed to spark and burst into flames every time she so much as glanced into this man's eyes. That wasn't good. She didn't want to get involved where she had so little control over herself."

The author, the self-proclaimed "Paperback Diva," is an accomplished and acclaimed writer of romance and science fiction, including her novel *Bodyguard*. Although her characters often seem two-dimensional, and their dialogue at times wooden and unnatural, Jackson makes up for it by hooking readers' interest with a tantalizing and provocative murder mystery. With rapid-fire pacing and a distinctive premise, Jackson offers enough substance to overshadow any stylistic flaws. The overall result is an enjoyable interlude of sheer escapist entertainment.
CAROL HAGGAS (August 18, 2009)

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