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## Witness for the Prosecution

Only Timika Holiday knows what happened to Princess Hansen. But can she be believed?

BY JONATHAN YORK

Late one night in January 2004, a group of young girls drew hits from a blunt. After they smoked two more, feeling the warm smoke curl into their lungs, they went to a go-go, then returned to their homes at the Sursum Corda housing cooperative. Two of them—Jahkema Princess Hansen, 14, and 18-year-old Timika Holiday—wanted another high.

They entered the blank, narrow halls of the nearby Temple Court apartments to buy dope. Mario Evans stood on the sixth floor with cigarettes and a small bottle. When someone gave Evans \$20, he would open the bottle, dunk an unlit cigarette in it, and give it to the customer. The liquid was PCP; the product was a “dipper.” Others stood nearby: Bernard Smith, Marquette Ward, and three of Ward’s friends, as Holiday later testified at Ward’s trial.

Ward was short and mustachioed with rectangular glasses. He wore a black North Face coat, and he held a stack of bills about 2 inches thick. He wanted his dipper for half-price. But Evans held out—he could judge by the stack that Ward had more than enough. So Ward paid full price, got his dipper, and left with his crew down the elevator.

Then Smith tried for a bargain, Holiday later testified. “Please,” he asked Evans, “can’t I have that dipper for 10 dollars?” When he saw that haggling wouldn’t work, he drew his gun.

Evans backed up. “Son, I know you ain’t gonna bust me for no dipper,” he said.



Holiday had been facing the stairwell door. Now she saw a black boot beneath it. The cops? The door opened, she later testified. It was Ward again, reaching into his coat. He looked hard at Princess, as if to say, "Get out of the way." Then he drew and fired. Evans yelled, Smith fired back, and Holiday ran past the smoking gun into the stairs.

Later, as the crime scene technicians combed the floor for shell casings, with Evans dead under a sheet, Detective Willie Jefferson met Holiday in the lobby six floors down. She was whining; she was nervous; she was scared. She'd seen the whole thing. She and Princess.

This account comes largely from Holiday's testimony, two weeks ago, on the witness stand in Courtroom 116 of D.C. Superior Court. Now 21, she wore hoop earrings and spoke in a drawl as she testified before a courtroom full of Sursum Corda families.

Within the yellow walls of the project, called "Sursurs Quarters" by those who live there, Holiday had found her mother's family, a steady supply of drugs, and a new friend in Princess. By the time the two watched Evans get shot, Holiday had known Princess about a year. Holiday and Princess knew Ward because each had gone to bed with him: Princess for love, Holiday for money. After she told her story, the defense would accuse Holiday of prostitution, suggest that she corrupted Princess, and catch her changing her story.

When Princess got home from school the week after the murder, she ran into Smith. He flashed his gun and warned her not to talk. Holiday had been at her stepmother's, shaken. Princess called; she was scared, too. Both girls noticed signs of intimidation. Ward called Holiday and said to keep quiet. The cops came to Princess's door, and on the way to the station, Ward's truck seemed to follow.

Princess wouldn't tell Jefferson anything, though, except her reason not to be afraid. "I have the best pussy in Sursum Corda," he recounted her saying. She called Ward to prove her loyalty, saying she'd blown off the cops. Ward said his best friend, Frank Thompson, would pay them to keep quiet.

"We goin' to get some money!" Princess exclaimed to Holiday. "We goin' to get fresh and all that!"

Holiday didn't join her enthusiasm. "I was not so focused on gettin' paid, on not sayin' anything," she said in the courtroom much later. "I mean, I was scared."

That evening, Thompson met them in the street. He was a tall, thick man in a black coat, with a ski mask rolled snugly around his neck. He told Princess, "Little sis, you better not be snitchin'."

Later that night, Holiday began wondering where her friend was. She asked her sisters to find Princess. She fixed a plate of half-smokes and sat in her grandmother's kitchen. Outside, the streetlights made broad orange pools, but they left dark spaces in between: an alley, a garage.

Princess came in.

Something stirred in the backyard.

Thompson crashed through the front door. He wore the same coat, and the ski mask was over his face as he started to shoot, according to Holiday's testimony. Bullets went into a chair, a bucket, the floor, and the leg of Holiday's 12-year-old sister. Princess and Holiday ducked behind a bed.

"Frank stood at the top of both of us and shot her and turned the gun on me but it was empty," Holiday told the jury without a breath.

From Princess, the police collected these items: a pair of jeans torn at the thigh, a white shirt stained reddish brown, and a coat leaking feathers from its punctured hood.

Ward and Thompson are charged with conspiring to murder Princess. Their trial, which started on Sept. 27, continues. To make the case hold, prosecutors need to show that the murders are linked. For that, they rely on Holiday. Plenty of people heard why Princess was afraid, but only Holiday claims to have seen Thompson kill Princess and Ward kill Evans.

**So defense attorneys Steve Kupferberg and Rudolf Acree have done everything in their power to play up her troubled history.** She didn't finish 11th grade because the school expelled her for hitting a teacher. She has faced charges for destroying property, misusing 911, and shoplifting. A supervisor at the U.S. attorney's office pulled strings to get the last charge dismissed so the government could take Holiday into witness protection.

Once in the program, she cost the government \$80,000 in counseling and drug treatment services. (She said on the stand that she never needed drug treatment: "You control the drug. You don't let the drug control you.") Then she got expelled from the program for keeping in touch with the crowd from Sursum Corda.

On May 2, 2005, Newsweek published a story titled "The New Face of Witness Protection." It says the federal program is having trouble with young witnesses of violence because they aren't cautious. One paragraph discussed a girl who had seen two murders, was moved four times, and stole cell phones from drug rehab patients to call her old friends. The reporter quoted an unnamed official as saying, "She was a fatality waiting to happen."

Prosecutor Deborah Sines admitted to the judge that, as far as she knew, the paragraph did indeed refer to her witness. In one filing, the U.S. attorney's office alleged that Ward, while on lockdown in jail, read Newsweek and tried on his own to use the story against his accuser. The filing alleges that he told another inmate to relay a message to a relative: Holiday is out of witness protection. Be sure she doesn't get to court.

But Holiday made herself an easy enough target on the stand. She looked bad when the lawyers asked about her small-time prostitution. She looked ignorant when they proved she couldn't

distinguish between a foot and an inch. She looked awful, though, when they caught her changing her story.

**Kupferberg tried to clear up a point from her 2004 deposition. She said then that she'd slept on the street the night Evans died. Pressed by Kupferberg, she admitted to lying under oath because she wanted to protect her Maryland address.**

**"How do we know when you're telling the truth and when you're lying?" Kupferberg shouted. "Can we tell it by your face?"**

The judge struck down the question before Holiday could respond. But her face looked angry, as though she wondered who could doubt her words. ■

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