# Pivotal Moments Back Cover

 Each of us experiences a series of events during our life, some of which ultimately become pivotal moments. This is a powerful story about life’s pivotal moments and the choices that are made in those moments.

 Vic is a common thief, living the life of a thug in the inner city of Atlanta. Underneath Vic’s “common thief” exterior is an unacknowledged desire to be a better person. After robbing an elderly man, Vic encounters a series of life-changing events.

 During this precarious time in his life, Vic meets Lisa. Unbeknown to each of them, events have converged to place them on a path to meet. Lisa is everything that someone like Vic could never aspire to have. Vic is exactly the type of man Lisa was raised to avoid.

 As the story of their ‘chance’ encounter begins to unfold, Vic finds himself immersed in a series of dangerous repercussions resulting from his life on the streets, including the death of a close friend.

 Their experiences become intertwined with a rich cast of characters who are also experiencing repercussions of choices made in the pivotal moments of their own lives.

 As danger closes in, will Vic and Lisa’s relationship be destroyed by repercussions of his past life? Will Vic succumb to the lure of his life on the streets?

 Only their pivotal moments will tell.

# INTRODUCTION

It was early March in Atlanta, Georgia. The feel of spring was in the air and the evening temperatures for the month were already staying near the seventy-degree mark and the humidity, not to be outdone, was following closely. The sounds of the crickets, grasshoppers, and palmetto bugs were in full effect this late evening. He had already started nervously sweating while he’d been standing outside, casing the house for almost half an hour.

Now he was running fast. Sweat was pouring down his face. He snatched the hood off his face as he ran and threw it down in the street. If there were any witnesses, they’d have the police looking for someone quite different then he would be looking in a few minutes. Two blocks later he ditched a glove; another block later he ditched the other one. In the fourth block, he removed his shirt, wiped the blood from his gun with it and threw it down the sewer drain, then tucked the gun back in his pants pocket while continuing to sprint.

This left him only in blue jeans, a white wife-beater, and about out of breath. It was his third robbery of the week and it took all of about three minutes, not including the running and the casing of the house. He gasped for air as he stopped running. He bent over trying to catch his breath and leaned against a tree. He started to smile through his sweat-soaked face, some of which even dripped down the corners of his mouth, leaving a salty taste. He was now over half a mile away from the crime scene.

His name was Victor Downs. He was a twenty-three-year-old thief. A relatively tall young man at six feet two inches, with coco brown skin, and a sleek, muscular build. His hair was cut short to show off its natural waves and his washboard stomach was pumping in and out as he continued trying to catch his breath. Although considered a nice looking guy by the ladies, he had deep-set eyes which at times appeared empty or hardened by too much street life. This combination of good looks, yet somewhat mystifying eyes, contributed to women's interest in him. He could be sweet and charming, but also rugged. The type of guy women thought could be gentle but not a punk.

Victor had already netted over three thousand in cash for the week with this latest robbery and the week wasn’t even over yet. He didn’t want to push his luck though, no sense in being too greedy. He laughed at the thought. *Another day, another sucker.* That’s all it meant to him; one more day in livin’ the thug life.

Occasionally, he would steal over in the white parts of town like Roswell, or over near Emory University, but that was rare. It took too long to get over there, plus didn’t feel as comfortable stealing from over there as he did when he stole in his own neighborhoods.

His first victim this week had been a brotha who lived a few blocks over from his own home. The guy had a family, a great job with IBM, and drove a nice car. Victor knew all of this because one of his homeboys lived in the same block with him and talked to the man every now and then.

Victor had often seen the guy driving around the neighborhood. He’d attempted to speak to him on a few occasions when he’d walk by with his kids, but the man barely offered a grunt and made it pretty obvious he wasn’t interested in chit-chat. So, when Victor’s friend started talking about him one day, as soon as he’d heard the man worked for IBM, he tuned out everything else his friend said because he was no longer interested. He knew if the guy worked for IBM, he obviously made great money. That’s all Victor needed to hear in order to decide that relieving him of a few dollars wouldn’t hurt; especially since the dude never spoke and commonly drove by him like he was a ghost. He figured he owed it to himself because the guy was disrespecting him.

*Typical type of brotha*, Vic thought. *The kind of brotha that lives in the hood in order to show others how much better he’s doing than we all are and who won’t ever speak to nobody. The uppity type; moved away, probably went to some out-of-state college, got a good paying job, and moved back to the neighborhood to “set an example” for the rest of us. Well, I’m gonna set an example for him. An example of how his uppity behind can get robbed for coming back to the neighborhood and acting like he’s better than everyone else!*

That’s how dude was in Victor’s mind. He’d further justified his thoughts because his homeboy said the guy normally kept to himself. *Hmm, hmm. Figures. That type of dude only thinks about himself and his family, the hell with the neighborhood. All the more reason to jack him,* Victor thought*.*

The reality was this particular brotha’s mother had been diagnosed with cancer last year. He had moved back into the hood so he and his wife could afford to help pay for medical treatments that his mother’s insurance wouldn’t cover. “Dude” never spoke because his mind was consumed with his mother.

But Victor couldn’t know anything about that. He’d jacked “dude” for five hundred eighty-seven bucks and some change. Not a lot, but it’d buy something. It would also mean that “dude” would have to dip into his savings account this month to pay for his mother’s prescriptions, but Victor couldn’t know that either. He had managed to have good timing when he’d robbed him because the guy had stopped at the bank to get cash. He’d originally been headed to the drug store to pick up his mother’s prescription, when he realized he’d left her id card at the house and detoured home to pick it up.

Victor’s second and third robberies were house jobs. Old folks. He knew most of them didn’t really trust the banks with all of their money, so he did two house jobs that netted over twenty-seven hundred dollars in cash, plus some jewelry he knew he could knock out a few grand for through a friend that was a pawn broker. He’d done exactly that earlier in the week and kept all of his money stashed in his bedroom drawer, underneath his boxer shorts.

Victor accidentally stumbled onto his “old folks” theory when he’d overheard a conversation while simply walking past one of his neighbor’s porches one evening last summer. He thought it was kind of funny, because had they not been talking so loud, he’d have missed it. But both of them where hard of hearing, so between the “huh’s” and “Say again’s”, he picked up the conversation about not trusting banks.

*That’s the problem with folk, especially old folks. They were always running their mouths, never knowing who was listening. Never thinking that what they were saying could be used against them.* He laughed to himself*. Man, I’m smart, I always find an angle. That’s why I’ve been able to whip up on so many brotha’s on the basketball court. I can out think them.*

He had another name for old folks; old fools. They always got on his nerves with all of their “yappin”. *Always wantin’ somethin’: “Can you help me with this?”, “Can you help me with that?”, “Say ‘please’”, “Say ‘thank you’”, Say ‘yes, ma’am’”, and all the rest of that foolishness*. His mother, Corliss, was always on him about that crap and his grandmother had been even worse. *And what did it get them? Nothing*. His grandmother didn’t have a dime when she died and his mother wasn’t far off. *All those “required” manners and hard work and nothin’ to show for it. Most old people I know are broke anyway, so why respect them? Why respect anybody who don’t have no money?* That was his thinking.

*Ain’t nobody tryin’ to hear that mess anymore*, *it’s played out*. Which brought up a reminder of another problem he had with old folks*;* they don’t know when to move on; move on from the past and move on from this world. Hangin’ around, suckin’ air, using up all the world’s resources for medication, canes, wheelchairs, walkers, oxygen tanks, and for what? Half of them can’t do anything anyway*.* He continued thinking and laughing to himself as he recounted the money from his latest heist*; Wouldn’t it be cool, if old folks had their own sidewalk and their own highway? Or even maybe their own path or lane on the sidewalks and highways. They always walk and drive so damn slow anyway.*

*Even worse, they acted as if they were never young, and they know good and damn well they rushed around when they were, but now that they can’t, they want everybody else to slow down. Bump that.*

 Yeah, Victor was tired of them. He’d taken it upon himself to take advantage of every opportunity he could in life; and right now, that was by helping himself to old folk’s money. *Old folks and young suckers too.*. He wasn’t much for discrimination. Except that it was admittedly easier to rob the old than it was to rob the young. The older were much less likely to put up a fight and even if they did, he was much less likely to get hurt. He felt that having the odds in his favor for this type of work wasn’t a bad thing to focus. He used his conscious to devalue the older generations worth so that it was more acceptable for him to continue stealing from them.

He usually wasn’t violent. Nor did he think of himself as being an uncompassionate person. But then again, most criminals don’t see themselves as they really are. This week’s robberies did seem a little different though. He’d had to pistol whip this last lady because she tried to fight him.

Well, he didn’t really pistol whip her. That’s an exaggeration. She had really been a rather large and strong older woman with a very sturdy grip and a bad attitude. He had hit her with the gun a few times in order to get her to let go of him. That’s how he’d wound up with the blood on it.

The last time he’d been violent before this was a few months back, when he’d punched an old man in the jaw because the man looked at him like he was mad or something. Victor took no prisoners. What he wanted he got, when he wanted it. For the most part, people seemed intimidated by him and easily gave up the money. But lately, it seemed, some folk were feelin’ froggy*. Must be the heat.*

Including the goods he’d pawned, this week had netted him about forty-two hundred dollars for about twenty minutes worth of real work. That’s what he was reflecting on now. Life was great. Only thing was, every week wasn’t like this. If he could do this every week, he’d bethe man. What made the week even sweeter was that this was only Thursday, so he had a few more days left to fatten his pockets even more. He figured he might as well do one more tomorrow to finish out the week right.

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He watched his next victim, an old man, as he’d left the store on this first day of March, a nice warm sunny Friday. He knew this was when they all cashed their social security checks. He’d watched the man as he took his time, walking through the park on his way back to what Victor assumed was the “old folk’s home”, located a few blocks away. That’s when Victor decided to step out and follow him. Casually dressed, he had on some Tommy Hilfiger, oversized baggy blue jeans, a black pair of Kobe Bryant tennis shoes, a black Nike t-shirt and a black New York Yankees authentic baseball cap, turned backwards of course, as was the custom. He fell into step and casually proceeded to follow the slow moving elderly man.

The old man was particularly tired. He’d brought his cane and was even using it to lean on occasionally as he was slowly walking. He sat down on a bench alone, in a remote area of the somewhat empty park, watching other older people and couples as they walked. He often did this to pass the time, but on this particular day, he needed some time to regain some energy and catch his breath. As he looked up and heard some children playing off in the distance, he lost himself in thought. It brought back memories to him of a popular Lou Rawls song called “Memory Lane” he listened to as a young man. Times like this were always surprising to him in these later years of life. He seemed to spend more time reflecting about his past than thinking about his future. He started reminscing about his days as a football and baseball player, and how easily he outran his opponents.

He had played both sports at Manual Training High School in Muscogee, Oklahoma and had gotten a football scholarship to Jackson State University, a well known Historically Black University. However, the university today is more popular for its band, “*The Sonic Boom of the South*”, than for its football team. He’d also gotten a baseball scholarship to Alcorn State, which he accepted. Eventually it had helped get him into the Negro Baseball League, where he became a star player for the Kansas City Monarchs.

Today, rather than think about baseball, he was thinking about how he wished he’d taken advantage of the football scholarship instead. He started to reflect on his glory days in high school, when as a corner back, teams feared his speed and would often avoid throwing or running to his side of the field. His mind began to drift aimlessly about his past.

Suddenly, Victor approached him, brandished a gun and demanded his money. Obviously somewhat startled, but sizing up the situation very quickly, the old man carefully reached into his pocket and promptly proceeded to give Victor all he had, which amounted to eight hundred something odd dollars. He was silently wishing he still had the agility of his youth, because he wouldn’t be giving this thief anything except a butt whooping.

As he handed over his last dollar to Victor, he said to him, “Son, here, take all that I have, but this money ain’t gonna do you no good.”

Victor sneered, smirked, and replied, “Shut up old man, I got your money and it’s gonna do me plenty good!” As he looked around to see if anyone was aware of what he’d done, he tucked the gun back under his shirt and moved away.

But the old man did not back down, “Oh, that may be true, but I’ve worked hard all my life for that money and you just took it. Nothin’ good’s gonna come from that money. It’s only gonna bring you mo’ trouble.”

Victor laughed and as he continued to move away, “Didn’t I clearly tell you to shut up? Now, you stay there and sit on that bench til I’m gone before you get yourself hurt.”

The old man sat back down and, while smiling to himself, as Victor looked back at him over his shoulder, he replied, “Take care son, I won’t move, seein’ as I ain’t got no need to be in a rush and you done gone with all my money. You’ll see me again, but I won’t have no mo’ fer ya to take.”

To which Victor replied, “Whatever, old man.” He calmly walked off and proceeded to exit the park.

The old man watched until he could see the young man no more. Anger sat in. I*f only I’d been younger I’d have…..I’d have what? Heck the man did have a gun. I’d have given my money exactly like I did, only I couldn’t have afforded to then.* He then sighed, relaxed again and continued with his thoughts. He briefly thought about how he’d luckily escaped possible harm, but thanked God he’d been robbed instead of another one of the old people that frequented the park. He understood how fortunate he was, because he really didn’t need the money. The old man’s name was Mr. Byron Johnson. He’d been so blessed. He’d saved and invested well after his days playing in the Negro Leagues and usually spent his social security money on his family.

He made a mental note that he’d have to call the police; get them to patrol the park, at least during the first few days of the month when the old folks may be walking through carrying large sums of money. Rather than let the robbery ruin the beautiful spring day, he consciously decided to be truly thankful he wasn’t hurt and go on with his business. The old man resumed his interrupted thoughts about life. After an hour, he got up and proceeded to walk home. For a second, as he continued home, he thought about what he’d said to the thief. He also thought about maybe not coming back to the park to sit on his favorite bench anymore. But that only lasted briefly; *surely the thief wouldn’t be back any time soon. Robbers don’t return to the scene of a crime*, he thought.

# CHAPTER ONE

As Victor exited the park with the old man’s money, he began to think about the drugs he would buy and how long this little bit of money would last, before he’d need to steal some more. He also thought he should have punched the old man, maybe got in his face a little more for trying to talk back to him about taking the money. He then decided going forward, he’d get tougher with the old folks since they liked to be mouthy. *The nerve of some of them*. The only reason he let the old man off, was because he was in a good mood from the great week he’d had. Otherwise, yet another beat-down would have been in order.

He had a passing thought of saving some of the money he’d stolen to buy and resale some drugs, maybe become his own drug dealer so he’d make a little money off of what he’d stolen. But he decided to wait and do that within the next few months or so. He was going to enjoy this money. In earnest, he’d stopped jacking folks for a while several months earlier and had gotten a janitorial job. But the only reason he did that was because his conscious was bothering him at the time.

He had that all under control now. He’d gotten his conscience in check. It was really quite easy, too. His conscious belonged to him, he didn’t belong to it. Once he’d gotten that straight in his mind, he quit his janitorial gig and went back to stealing. Besides, he wasn’t making any money doing janitorial work; at least not any real money. Not like he was when he’d been stealing before. *Why people would struggle to make ends meet by trying to work some low paying eight hour a day job is beyond me. In fact, that is plain stupid. Those folks have no respect for themselves. That and they are unimaginative. Why work for someone else like a dog when you can let someone else work like a dog and then take what they have? That’s the easiest thing to do.*

He’d watched his mother struggle for years, bless her heart, and what had it gotten her? *Nothin’, not a damn thing. They lived in an apartment. A freakin’ apartment after all her hard work. All that workin’ and she didn’t own a home! Not anymore anyway.* He’d made up his mind after seeing her struggle and watching men treat her like dirt because she didn’t have anything, that he wasn’t going to depend on anyone but himself. He now understood what some old folks used to mean when they said, “God bless the child that’s got his own.” And he was damn sure going to get his!

As he passed a convenience store, he realized he was thirsty and stopped in to grab a drink. After selecting a Coke, he chuckled to himself as he exited the store, continuing to reflect his good fortune. He undid the cap as he walked down the street, heading to the bus that would take him back to his neighborhood. W*hat I should be doing with this money is saving it and continue to steal enough until I can purchase a phat ride. I’ve had about enough of this catching the bus crap. A man of my stature needs wheels. Not any wheels, but nice wheels!*

The only wheels he currently had were those lent to him by his honeys’, which was working out fine because most of the time they’d let him borrow their rides without him needed to contribute for the gas. This was hilarious to him because he’d often go pick up other women with their cars. His boys’ always fell out laughing when he did this. They thought he was too smooth; always wantin’ to know how he got away with this stuff. He’d only smile and play it off. That’s one thing he’d learned, never let other brotha’s cop your game. You always have to stay one up on them.

He’d taken about half a dozen swigs of his drink, heading past a house with kids playing, when a misguided football came in his direction. He ducked in the knick of time to keep it from hitting his face, but in doing so, the ball careened off his forearm and hand, which caused his bottle of Coke to spill all over the place. He was furious. He shouted out and cursed at the kids. He was wet and most of his pop was gone. But, remembering his gun and the money he had on him, as well as his close proximity to the park, he decided not to make any more of a scene. He quickened his pace to catch the bus back over to his neighborhood.

As he arrived at the bus stop, it suddenly occurred to him that he had better be careful himself or he could easily become a victim of the same type of crime he’d just committed. This meant making a brief side trip to get rid of most of the stolen money at his mom’s apartment for safe keeping, before going to hang out with his boys. By the time the bus arrived, he’d determined he would keep about two hundred bucks on him to purchase some drugs. As he stepped onto the bus, a jagged piece of metal tore his jeans and grazed his leg, causing a brief sharp pain. He let out a brief sound of anguish, as he moved away from the intruding piece of metal and silently cursed to himself. *Dammit, I just bought these things!* He paid the fare, sat down and then looked at the tear. It couldn’t be repaired so now he’d need to by another pair of jeans. Good thing he’d gotten that money.

He was still trying to recover from some hard financial times he’d gone through by working that janitorial gig for several months. He’d had to borrow some money from a few of his boys while working that job and had recently finished paying them back. That really hurt him financially. Now he was spending a majority of the money he was stealing trying to keep his lifestyle up. *All because of his stupid conscience*. *Man, that thing can really get out of control*.

The bus ride was quick. He hopped off the bus, looked around and headed west toward Vine. That’s where the action was and where he should be able to connect with Crook, his drug dealing friend. If he wasn’t there, most likely someone would know where he would be.

This was Vine City, one of the roughest sections of town and where his mom’s apartment was. Pimps, hookers, hustlers, gangs, gamblers, this was the spot where the action was. Shiny phat rides with spinning rims and the fluorescent black lights under the car were all over the place. The Mexicans hung down here too with their Salsa music blending in-and-out with the Rap music and Hip-Hop beats. They had their Low­-Riders going on too in full effect. Not too much racial stuff went on anymore like it used to. Now, it was strictly about the paper. Besides, there were so many Mexicans around, it no longer made sense to try to fight them. From his point of view, they were starting to take over.

# CHAPTER TWO

As he walked the litter-strewn streets headed to his mama’s apartment, he bumped into one of his best friend, Flava. His real name was Zeke Washington but he got his nickname playin’ ball, cause he was always silky-smooth on the court. He never really showboated. His style was more of the kind that would quietly embarrass an opponent. Flava was the talk of the city back in high school. He’d gotten a full scholarship ride to Kentucky and started as a freshman, which was unheard. What else was unheard of was anyone from his neighborhood going to any school of that caliber.

Flava had put a senior guard on the bench by the end of the first week of practice. He was that good and at six feet, five inches in height, no one in high school had shut him down either. Those in college had it the worst as his game continued to develop. He was fast, had eyes in the back of his head and averaged a double-double about every game.

Pro basketball teams were already scouting him near the end of his freshman year. They’d contacted the coaches, sent players to meet and introduce themselves to him, and even invited him to play in one of the pro basketball summer leagues, which he did after his freshman year.

Season injuries sidelined him from playing in the summer leagues after his sophomore and junior years, so Flava took interest in a summer office manager position, offered to him by two gentlemen, Shawn Kincade and Peter Gibson, whom he’d met back in high school. They owned a real estate company called Southern Realty, a rather prestigious, well-known company located in Buckhead. Flava had promised to work for them during those summers he’d gotten injured since he couldn’t play ball.

He had the numbers in his school games to support being one of the top draft picks for the NBA. However, being young and facing some minor financial problems, which he incorrectly interpreted as major ones, he decided to make some extra quick money selling a little crack. He wound up getting caught in a police sting operation with over five grand of the stuff on him. Instead of working his summer job, playing basketball at Kentucky his senior year, or going into the NBA, he spent two-years in prison.

His two year sentence was considered light but being popular and a potential NBA basketball star has its advantages. Yet still, this cooled the NBA’s interest in him significantly and they adopted more of a “let’s wait and see” attitude. It was amazing to Flava how one little thing could cause people to look at him so differently.

After he got out of prison, something about him changed. He didn’t even want to play ball anymore. He hung out; sold drugs and tried to run the same girls he did back in high school. He was about to become a pitiful story, when Shawn and Peter approached him and asked if he’d work at their firm as an executive assistance, which would pay around thirty-thousand dollars a year to start. Mostly his job would consist of running errands and making bank deposits. They told him they were doing it because they genuinely liked him and he was wasting away. Flava, realizing this very well may be his last opportunity to be successful, jumped at the chance.

 He was coming home from work this particular evening, when Victor saw him and flagged him down. Flava had a Cadillac Escalade. Black with a white interior and all the trimmings; a 100 disc cd player, sub-woofers, gold spinning rims, a TV for the backseat, On-star emergency and navigation system, built-in handless mobile phone, built-in radar detection system, under car neon green and red lighting and, of course, personalized plates with his name. Victor and he had exchanged a few letters and phone calls when Flava had been initially locked up, but those stopped as time moved on.

No one ever figured out how Flava was able get out of prison and establish himself so fast, including the police, but they left him alone. He had a job, but not an “Escalade” affordable paying job that would include the penthouse apartment he was now living in. No one could figure it out and Flava wasn’t talking. The quickest way never to get a ride in his car was to ask him how he got it. Further, rumor had it that one of the neighborhood kid’s who wouldn’t leave it alone, wound up dead a few months back.

 Although Flava admitted he was glad the nosey neighborhood kid was gone, he always gave the impression that while he was saddened by his death, he had nothing to do with it. Many felt he actually did, but the murder remained unsolved. Everyone did figure out not to mess with Flava after that or ask too many questions.

In truth, the kid who died was a mouthy, nosey, general screw up. He was one of the people the police viewed as a “city nuisance”. Neighbors always called and complained about some minor offense he was committing and the cops were always chasing him away or locking him up for misdemeanors. When that wasn’t going on, he was getting into arguments and fights with anyone he came in contact with. If there was a picture in the dictionary for the word “nuisance”, it would have been one of him.

When he wound up dead, no one was torn up about it. Everyone knew the police department wasn’t going to spend any time investigating it. The only thing they kept saying was that it was under investigation. The only people who did care about the kids death was his family, but even they couldn’t say they were too surprised.

Victor and Flava gave each other the familiar greeting and then got caught up on the latest stuff going on around the hood. Ever since he’d spent time away in prison, they’d both gotten into their own things, but the bond was still there. Flava had “moved up” in a criminal sort of way and Victor, well, frankly, he’d plain “moved in” to the criminal world.

“Damn, Dawg, So how long has it been since I seen you?” Flava asked.

“Over two years, bro.”

“Man, that’s crazy, yo. I mean I can’t believe it’s been that long!”

“Yeah, man, me neither. In fact, the last time I saw you was at Courtney’s party, Dawg. Remember, she’d had her cousin livin’ with her, with her fine self!”

“Snaps, oh *hell* yeah. I remember. You and I was jokin’ ‘bout how fine we thought Courtney was until we saw her cousin.”

They both fell into easy laughter. Then they were quiet for a second before Flava spoke up, “Yeah, man, them was good times. The old days’ was good times. Playin’ ball with you all the time and shit. Straight chillin’. You and me on the same team, the other schools never even have a chance.

“Man, I remember that night against….who was it….Grady? Yeah, you came off the bench and dropped thirty-five. I was like, now this is the brotha I know, not the one who comes in and role plays. Man, you went freakin’ off that night, dawg! What the hell got into you?”

“I was in a zone and pissed at coach,” Victor replied laughing.

Although he was on the same high school team with Flava, he rarely started even though he was very good and got a significant amount of playing time. Matter of fact, he’d have been a starter on any other inner city school team, but his team was loaded. He still managed to get a pretty good reputation around the city though, despite not starting. He’d even had a few colleges look at him, but he didn’t want to waste his youth, locked up spending time taking classes in college, so he decided to get a job after graduation. He bounced around from job to job, never really finding a place to stick. He wasn’t pleased with the nickel and dime jobs and since he never stayed at any of them very long, he never got the opportunity to move up.

He’d watched from the sidelines as his partner Flava started wearing nicer and nicer clothes, moved into his own apartment and bought nice rides before he got locked up. Victor was tired of scrapping and saving pennies. Although he lived with his mother, he wanted to be nothing like her. He had no intention of bustin’ his ass and having nothing to show for it, so he changed his philosophy and decided to work part-time and steal part-time. Then he figured the heck with it and started to steal full time. The rewards were better.

“Yo, man,” Flava said, “hop in, let’s check out some honeys and catch up”.

Victor nodded and jumped in. He asked Flava to swing by his mom’s apartment real quick so he could change out of his torn pants and drop off his stolen money, which Flava gladly did. But once inside, instead of dropping off all but two hundred dollars it as he’d committed to himself, he decided to change his pants and keep all of his money on him. After all, he had to have some cash so he could hang out with his boy, Flava. He decided he’d make up for the money he was about to spend by making a few extra robberies next week to get it back. He re-pocketed the eight hundred dollars into fresh pair of jeans and headed back out to Flava’s ride. Any thoughts of possibly getting jacked had been dismissed from his mind.

Flava and he were going no place in particular so they spent the entire afternoon and early evening cruisin’ the hood, partially looking for Crook and partially looking at all the honeys around the way that were giving them and the Escalade all of the attention one could want. That’s one thing Victor could say about Flava, he always had the honeys’ attention. Not that the Escalade didn’t help, of course.

They talked very little about Flava’sprison stint, but did talk about everything else. They even decided to go peak out a strip joint. Usually their boys would go up north to Stroker’s, but tonight, they felt like hangin’ around the hood, so they went by the usual spot, Magic City. It was nothing special tonight, the usual attractive women, scantly dressed in lingerie, walking by tables, speaking, dancing nude at tables or up on stage, or draped all over guys spending money on them.

Flava and Victor were regulars. They knew all the honeys, Nikki, Cinnamon, Cocoa, and the rest of the girls were always glad to see them because they knew they always dropped several hundred dollars when they came in. Tonight would be no different. The honey consistently dripped off the walls in this place and because of this, Flava and Victor loved to bring guys in from out of town and watch them trip. They’d tell them they don’t call Atlanta “Hotlanta” for nothing. Brown eyes and chocolate thighs were everywhere.

They squeezed in at a table with two other guys who they knew strictly from the strip joint circuit, pulled out their cash and proceeded to start having about three or four of the girls come over and dance for them, all at the same time. This was their normal routine.

Tonight, like every other night, they’d half pay attention to the women as they shook their breasts and butts at them and gave lap dances. They spent most of their time talking to dudes at other tables, drinking and discussing nothing in particular. They were mostly bored, but coming into the joints and having women make them feel like they were the man was in style. Doing this in front of all the other guys gave them a sense of importance.

As for Flava, it also gave him some place to spend all of that money he was making. He couldn’t keep it all at home and putting in the bank wouldn’t work either because it might turn the IRS or some law enforcement group on to him. Besides, he’d been able to pick up some of the dancers for some extended activity every now and then. He loved what the power of money would do. Women he’d never be able to talk to or sleep with would go out of their way to make themselves available to him because of the type of SUV he drove and the money he had. He liked that power and so did Victor because he was often the beneficiary of attracting women simply by virtue of hangin’ out with Flava.

“So, Dawg, what’s on your mind? You mentioned you wanted to talk to me about a lil’ sumpin’?

“Yeah, Flave, look, we go back a ways, man. You done blown up and stuff, got the crazy phat crib, the ride, you the man now, Dawg.

“Appreciate that, bro”. The two men gave each other some dap.

“So, man, I wanted to know if you could find anything for me to get into, you know? I mean, I want to stand up on my own two feet, get out and make some serious moves like you been doin’.”

”Dawg, you definitely my boy, but this stuff don’t work quite like you think it does, bro. I mean hell, Crook’s got everything locked up around here and you do not even wanna think about workin’ for that dude. Then, as for me, man, you know these real estate dudes got me. I mean, I could talk with ‘em and all, but you gots to trust me on this one, one slip up on your part and they will not hesitate to take you and me both out. They ain’t no joke.”

“It’s that serious, Flave?”

“Dawg, c’mon, who are you talking too?”

“Awite, awite, man, I feel you. A brotha gotta find somethin’ to get into, though, that’s all. Appreciate the tip, bro.”

Victor leaned over and gave Flava some more dap. He was hurt, though. He knew Flava meant well and must be into something very deep, but he wished Flava wasn’t so protective of him. They weren’t kids any more and he didn’t need it.

Business complete, they returned to peaking out the scenery. After an hour and a half and several hundred dollars were gone, they decided to leave. A “C” note fell out of Victor’s pocket as they left, but he didn’t notice it.

Flava dropped him off a few hours later at his Mom’s. They said their goodbyes and Victor watched proudly as Flava rolled away. Some day he’d have a car like that. Be able to roll like that.

# CHAPTER THREE

Victor never did catch up with Crook that day, which pissed him off. Here he was, with a pocket full of money and couldn’t find his main man to buy some damn drugs. *Man, ain’t life a real bitch sometimes*. He thought about going by the pool hall, but instead, decided to go by the liquor store. After that, he figured he’d call Karen, one of his steady ladies, and stop in for some drinking…..and a little sex.

The liquor store man and Victor exchanged greetings as he cruised over to his normal refrigerated section and grabbed a six pack of Coors. He went over to the other side of the store and picked up some Hennessey and snacks.

As he stood in line to get his purchases rang up, he suddenly decided to go back and add a little something to celebrate his good fortune. He purchased a bottle of Courvoisier. Yeah, that would definitely get those panties off. He walked back toward the counter, paid for it, and left. He called Karen, who was more than happy to have him come by with the drinks. Something she was always down for, since it increased her sex drive.

Anticipating what would occur once he got there; he quickened his pace to her apartment, which was about six blocks away. He’d been thinking about her for over a week. As he took the stairs up, he passed another brother coming down fast, but didn’t pay him any attention. Didn’t even notice the hint of Karen’s perfume on his shirt and face as they passed briefly; the result of some earlier activity.

When he reached her door, Karen anxiously answered his knock and gave him a hug and a nice long kiss, “Hi, baby. Oh, wow, you brought us some Courvoisier, aren’t you the sweetest man in the world,” she gave him another hug and kiss for that.

“Anything for you, baby.”

As he held her in his arms, he began to feel himself stir. He handed her a drink and they sat down to catch up and sip on liquor. As the liquor loosened up his tongue, he told Karen about his successful morning with the old man. Karen, not one to miss taking advantage of an opportunity, gently coaxed him for some help with her rent. For her efforts, she received two hundred dollars. Not bad for a few properly placed strokes, some nice smiles and some soon to be great sex. She felt this was almost like having a job, as she allowed herself a brief smile. She’d already gotten three hundred dollars today from a couple of other guys who’d pleased her well and whom she had pleased back. Soon the clothes were off and the sex party was on.

As he was leaving her apartment, he was reflecting on what a great day he’d had and the fact it wasn’t even over yet. He’d gotten money, a ride in a layed out vehicle, great sex with a woman who had a drop-dead gorgeous figure, and some extra alcohol to set the night off right. He chuckled to himself. He really couldn’t count the alcohol cause he remembered he’d accidentally left the Courvoisier at Karen’s. They hadn’t even gotten around to opening it. *Oh well, that will give me an excuse to go back*.

After hangin’ out in the streets until the wee hours of the morning, he headed home to his Mama’s, undressed and went to bed. When he woke up the next morning, he realized he needed to go to the bathroom with a quickness. *Must be all that alcohol*. He raced into the bathroom to relieve himself. That’s when he felt a little burn in his urination. It subsided a little as he continued to empty himself, so he didn’t pay it any attention.

He glanced over at the pair of pants of he’d torn the previous day and threw them in the trash. Later today, he’d get a new pair. He then sat down and began to count the money he’d saved from his previous robberies as well as the money he had left from yesterday’s activities. *Forty-five hundred dollars. Not bad for a few robberies, especially since I dropped five hundred of the old man’s money by dropping close to three hundred at the strip joint, buying drinks and peeling off Karen a few hundred. Not bad at all.*

As he got ready to go out for the day, his cell phone rang.

“Hello?”

“Vic, it’s Crook, I heard you were lookin’ for me?”

“Yeah, yeah, man. Where you at? I need to talk some business with you.”

“That’s what I heard, man. I’m down the street at the liquor store. I had to come over this way. Come on down.”

“Bet. I’m down in a few minutes.”

Victor was happy he’d called. He jumped into some clothes. Before he ran out of the room, he swept all the money up he’d taken out of his drawer and put it back, with the exception of about four hundred dollars, which he put his pocket. He quietly exited the house and ran down the stairs to the street. In his rush to get out, he failed to notice the one hundred dollar bill that fell out of his pocket and gently floated to the ground as he bounded down the stairs.

Crook was decked out in his all white SeanJohn wear. He was standing in front of his new black 500 Series Mercedes Sedan, talkin’ to a short, lean red bone. Crook looked up, saw Victor, moved the red bone to the side and exchanged greetings with him. The attractive young lady waited patiently, leaning against the car, while Crook conducted his business. Crook always had to have some showpiece with him to make the point that he was a real player.

After some discussion, which only took about five minutes, the deal was done and Victor peeled off three hundred dollars to Crook. He’d really only planned on spending about two hundred to two hundred fifty dollars, but with the break Crook offered, he decided to double it. He’d do half and sell half. He realized he was missing a hundred dollars but figured he must have accidentally left it on the bed as he was rushing out. He’d have to check on that when he got back to his room.

Crook gave him his product and he walked back home. He got undressed, turned on the latest Fifty Cent CD and fell off to asleep. No rush to do anything now that he’d connected with Crook. It wasn’t until he woke and got ready to get dressed later that he remembered he’d forgotten to look for the misplaced hundred dollars. But when he did, he couldn’t find it.

He wondered how he’d lost it. He searched throughout the house, retracing the pattern he’d taken last night when he ran out after Crook. This was to no avail of course. He’d even thought about asking his Mother if she’d picked it up or seen it, but thought better of it. She’d want to know how he could be so careless, and why he didn’t mention he had some money and offer her any. She didn’t know exactly what he was doing but he knew she had a strong suspicion that whatever it was, it wasn’t any good.

He suddenly realized his bladder was full again and went to the bathroom. This time, as he relieved himself, the burning was worse and he noticed a discharge. Now he was pissed. Really pissed. *If Karen has been messin’ around on me, oh what I’m gonna do to her*. And obviously, he’d gotten some bad stuff, because he’d been down this road before and it normally took a few days. Barely twenty hours had gone by this time. He hadn’t been with anyone else either.

He picked up his phone and dialed her number, ready to explode. No answer. She didn’t have voice mail so he couldn’t leave a message. He wouldn’t have left one any way. No, he was gonna talk with her. He wondered where she could be.

Next point of business, he wanted to call his doctor and make an appointment, but since it was the weekend, he wouldn’t be able to do that until Monday. But there was no way he could wait that long. He’d have to go to the emergency room. *Great*, he thought, *freakin’ great. This is exactly what I need. Instead of a doctor’s visit costing me sixty dollars, now it’s going to cost me around a hundred. Damn, her! Wait til I get my hands on her. And I’m still going to have to come out of pocket another twenty-five dollars for the damn prescription!* This essentially amounted to another hundred dollars lost.

He then did the math and got infuriated! He’d had eight hundred dollars and some change yesterday. Then, he tried to be nice and celebrate by sharing some with Karen. He got some alcohol, gave her some rent money and what did he get for his kindness, a venereal disease. *Wonderful!* So, after giving three hundred to Crook, losing another hundred, spending another five hundred at the booty-club, needing to spend another hundred or so more for the doctor, all of a sudden he realized he was really in the hole. All of the money he’d stolen yesterday was gone today. Now he would have to go into the rest of his stash to make ends meet and he still was supposed to buy some new pants, which would set him back over another hundred. He’d gone through all the trouble of robbing a guy, risking going to prison, and he had nothing left. *Hell*, *I’d be better of if I started living on welfare*.

Yeah, he knew if things went well, he’d make about six hundred bucks off the product he was gonna sell, but he wanted to do that over the next few weeks, not have to hustle after it. He knew he’d better get started.

The problem though was he couldn’t sell in his own neighborhood because Crook had that locked down. Well, Crook and Flava together, really. It was obvious Flava and Crook had to have some type of arrangement because every now and then he’d heard stuff about Flava, and Crook would have had him killed if he even thought some of what he’d heard was true.

On the other side, Flava knew Crook was dealing and never would say a bad word about it; which he could have because he also had his own resources to disable Crook.

The two never spoke of each other. When they would see each other, they were cordial but things would get quiet; too quiet for Victor. A kind of quiet uncomfortableness existed for everyone, except those two. They seemed very comfortable, but even their entourages seemed uncomfortable. It was quite weird.

In order for Victor to unload his product, he had to get out of Vine City, which meant a nice bus ride. He liked the AU Center, where Morehouse, Spelman and Clark University were, because they had a lot of rich black kids that went there. The competition was stiff, but plenty of product moved. It was only that you couldn’t always make the profit you wanted.

He stopped there for a while, made a few dollars then headed over to Bankhead, another favorite hang out spot. He’d thought about trying to work for Crook. Working for Flava, crossed his mind again too, but only in passing since Flava had warned against it at the strip club. He wished he knew exactly what that was since everyone knows no one goes away to the pen for two years and comes out with a new Caddy, new clothes and a nicely furnished loft apartment. Flava came out spending money too, exactly like he’d done before he’d left for prison. Something always happened to those who repeatedly asked about it, but yet it could never be directly traced back to to Flava. Things had definitely changed about his boy since he’d gotten back from the pen.

Therefore, Crook was the logical choice for Victor to work for. They had a good relationship and Crook had asked him to do some work for him numerous times in the past. The only problem was Victor would then be “owned” and the way Crook did some things could be a problem for him. So, although Crook was the logical choice, it was an illogical option.

Victor remembered Crook once had a young lady with a 6-month old baby killed because she couldn’t pay him five dollars within the 2-day window he’d given her. He made sure everyone knew he’d done it too. Crook was heartless; a very charismatic, sharply dressed, personable, good looking brother, without any values but money. He even had his own brother shot; not killed, but shot, for not paying him rent on time. His brother soon left town after that and would remain not being on speaking terms.

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Crook had a sad childhood growing up. He and his mother had a bad relationship and had never gotten a long. She was emotionally immature and he was a needy kid. Not a good match for parent and son. His mother, Norma Jean, was a rather large woman with a nice, full figure, well proportioned and attractive.

To her, Crook looked and acted too much like his father and was a painful reminder of a failed relationship with a sorry man. Crook’s real name was Curtis Mitchell, but he got the nickname of Crook by some of his mean spirited elementary schoolmates because he was missing a small portion of the top of his left thumb. At first, they called him Crook Fing, for having what looked like a crooked finger, but as he grew older, it had shortened to “Crook”. Curtis loved the name since it made him sound like he was a bad dude.

His half-missing finger was the result of a fight between his mother and one of her numerous live-in boyfriends. On this particular occasion, she and a boyfriend had been drinking heavily and began fighting. Curtis had been in the kitchen finishing his Kentucky Fried Chicken dinner, when the argument moved into the kitchen and she pulled a knife out of one of the kitchen drawers and started waving it around. As the boyfriend reached for the knife, she pulled her arm away from him so he couldn’t get it. Curtis was trying to sneak by them when the knife severed a piece of his finger. He was six at the time.

A normal parental action would have been to immediately apologize profusely and cuddle the child, but Miss Mitchell wasn’t a normal parent. Her reaction was to slap him in the face for getting in the way and screaming with pain. She then threw a towel at him and told him to wrap it on his finger. At this point the police arrived and separated his mother and boyfriend who had continued to argue. One officer noticed the blood on the towel wrapped around Curtis’s finger and hastily called an ambulance for medical attention. Was it not for their intervention, Crook may have lost his whole because she’d have never taken him to see a doctor.

The police called social services and issued her a citation for child endangerment. In court, it was determined she was “too mentally incapacitated to have known what was going on at the time.” She’d gotten a good attorney, which was provided courtesy of another boyfriend who was a big time drug dealer. She even retained custody of Curtis because she’d agreed to take some parenting classes. After her last day of classes, she came home and gave Curtis a whipping to be remembered and blamed him for her having to go to the classes in the first place.

She never had time for him, so the streets and neighborhood kids raised him. He did have some positive influences, but was more interested in the negative ones. At age seven, he practically lived with one of his schoolmates. The parents were nice and treated Crook like a son, always pushing him to study, but he never would. Eventually, when he’d tired of them nagging him about it, he went home and lied to his mother about how they treated him, stating they were yelling at him for not studying.

Like Norma Jean usually did when anyone tried to correct her son, she accusingly confronted them, marching up to their apartment and cursed them out. Crook was no longer welcomed back. This was what he did as he grew up. He either avoided positive situations or sabotaged the ones he had.

Crook got his start selling drugs when he was in elementary school. Some of the older kids would use him to help move some of their product; nothing like getting a head start on building their own pyramid. He rode the bus to school as a fourth grader and would watch as a few sixth graders would sell drugs to each other. Usually it was weed. He’d ride the bus to school and sit in the back because the older kids liked him.

By the time Crook was half way through fourth grade, he knew what he wanted to be when he grew up; a drug dealer. Crook was a quick study and would watch the older guys in his neighborhood sling. Then he’d go home and sometimes watch his mom roll joints and get high. If Norma Jean noticed him watching, the few times she bothered to care, she’d tell him he’d better not ever touch her weed or she’d whoop his behind.
 When his school teachers would ask the students what they wanted to be when they grew up, Crook would tell them he wanted to be a drug dealer. This drew plenty of laughs from his other classmates. The teachers, although finding it somewhat disconcerting, would commonly ignore him. Not one of them ever asked him why or kept him after class to talk about his comments. Most of them figured he was either being a smart mouth or that given his poor grades and growing up in the inner city; it was probably what he was bound to be any way.

Crook sold joints during the rest of his elementary school days, which paid for candy, McDonald’s food, and other little tidbits that kids normally purchase. By Junior high, he’d moved up to selling bags of weed and made good money doing it. He started buying tennis shoes and even some of his clothes.

His mother never asked where he got his money or how he purchased new clothes she hadn’t bought. All she knew was, she didn’t have to do it. Whenever he did something bad, Norma Jean told him that he was going to be sorry, just like his daddy. Crook’s father had left her for another woman when he was a baby. Every time he’d ask about his dad, his mother would always give him the same answer, “Why you wanna know? The man was a worthless, sorry, broke-ass loser and you don’t need to know anything else about him, so quit asking.”

Some of her boyfriends that stayed around for a few months, tried to form a relationship with Crook, but he rarely reciprocated. When he did, his mother would interfere by creating arguments with the guys, asking why they were paying so much attention to Crook and not to her.

When Crook was fiftenn, he met one of her boyfriend’s he liked more than any others. This particular guy would stand up to his mother and also gave him lots of attention. But Norma Jean’s antics wore him down and he eventually moved on.

This infuriated Crook and he confronted his mother about it, but she laughed and told him it was her house and she would do whatever she damn well pleased. From that day forward he completely emotionally detached from her. A few weeks later, he picked an argument with.

After finishing his meal, he decided to press the issue about his father with her. He got up from the table, walked over to the sink where his mother was standing, rinsed his plate off and put it in the sink with the rest of the piled up dishes. “So, Momma, for real, what’s my dad’s name?”
 “Boy, I done told you to quit askin’ me ‘bout that fool.”

“C’mon, Momma, I’m tired of hearin’ that same ole line all these years. I’m older now, I want to know the truth. Besides, I have a right to know.”

“You don’t have no rights in this house. Now quit askin’ me about that.”

“I’m serious this time, Momma, I want an answer. I ain’t no little kid no more, you ain’t gonna keep blowin’ me off like this.”

She turned to him, got in his face, “Who the hell you think you talkin’ too?! This is my house, boy! Don’t you get that tone with me! If I’ve told your black ass once, I’ve told you a thousand times and I’ll continue to tell you the same story. The nigga wasn’t shit and I ain’t got a damn thing to say to you about his sorry ass and that’s the end of it.”

He stood his ground, “No, that’s not the end of it this time. I’m sick of playin’ this game with you all of these years.”

Being fifteen, a drug dealer, and now taller and bigger than she was, he felt he was a man now and didn’t have to put up with her attitude anymore. Stunned, his mother leaned and cocked her head back and her eyes got big. She couldn’t believe she was hearing this or seeing him holding his ground. He took her expression as a sign of fear.

“Excuse me?” was all she could say at the moment.

“You heard me. This is bullshit! Why you always gotta trip about this. Freakin’ answer my question!”

His mother smiled a fake smile, “Boy, you better get outta my face with this mess. Standin’ over me like you bad or somethin’. I’ll kick your black ass all over this house. Now get the hell outta my damn face, nigga and clean this damn kitchen up,” she waved her hand at the dishes all over the kitchen.

“*Hell* naw, you clean it up. You always high and shit, layin’ around and drinkin’, treatin’ me like I’m your slave, I’m sick of cleanin’ this apartment up and cleanin’ the kitchen when I ain’t even never here!”

She stood their looking at him, absolutely dumbfounded.

So he continue on, “Hell, dad probably left you cause you keep a junkie ass house. Look at this place. You always run men off cause you don’t know how to treat us.”

Before he knew it, all hell had broken lose. Somehow, while he’d been “feeling himself”, he’d missed his mother’s hand latching on to the two quart pot on the side of the sink. The blow was quick and caught him on the side of his head, before slipping out of her and and rattling down on the floor. As he staggered back from that blow, her fist caught him on the side of the chin, almost knocking him out. She was cursing him fiercely now, but the ringing in his head afforded him the opportunity to miss everything she was spewing at him. When his head cleared, he was lying on the kitchen floor, looking up at nothing in particular.

The next day he moved out. Perhaps kicked out is the appropriate phrase, although he denied that to his friends who lived in the apartment building and had heard echoes of the previous evening’s fight.

Now, out on his own, he never looked back. He had stashed over four grand, which wasn’t bad for a fifteen year old kid, who was never taught about how to take care of money, invest, save or anything related to financial management issues. For the next six months, he increased his sales volume. After being recognized by his supplier for his strong sales increase, he got to meet the next guy up on the food chain.
 On his sixteenth birthday, he was rewarded with his own little crew. He and his old supplier were now peers in an ever growing market. He expanded his drug products and committed his first murder, taking the life of someone who owed him money but didn’t pay on time.

He was previously only selling weed. Now he was selling weed, crack, cocaine, and ecstasy, and the money was pouring in. He went from making about five hundred a week, to making over ten thousand a week by his seventeenth birthday. Crazy money for most people but even crazier for a seventeen year old with a zest for living, no boundaries, and no real moral character.

Unbeknown to Crook or his mother at this time, he had expanded so much; Norma Jean was actually buying from him. Because of his expansion, he’d unknowingly helped her get strung out on crack. Norma Jean was a party girl, who always liked to and had to be “in the mix”. So when all of her friends started doing crack, she started doing it too and most of them got hooked.

For two years, Crook never saw his mother nor did she try to contact him. He’d moved across town over to West End, away from Bankhead and away from her. This was where the college crowd was and he could sell more drugs to kids who had even more money to pay for them.

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As Victor arrived in Bankhead, amongst the hustling crowd, some recognized him, others shouted out to him and kept moving, some even came over and gave him the usual greetings, and still others approached him for product. All in all, it was a good four hours. He’d made about two hundred fifty before having to leave for his doctor’s appointment and he was very pleased about that.

As he sat on the bus, he decided to buzz Karen again. This time one of her girlfriend’s answered the phone, but she wasn’t there, so he left her a message to call him. He sounded calm but he wasn’t. *He’d teach her not to play around on him. And with some hoodrat too*! He was too pissed.

His doctor’s appointment turned out like he suspected it would. He got some pills, paid the bill and left. He was going to head over to Karen’s, but decided against it because he needed to go sell the rest of his product.

He went back over in Bankhead til 2am. *My how things can change quickly*. He only made a c-note this time, which meant he’d have to come back over here tomorrow. He was not looking forward to it. This was why he didn’t want to deal full-time. Too much work. His thoughts turned back to Karen.

It’s not like he was in love with her or nothin’ like that. But the girl was fine, could cook and sex him down real good. His real concern was that everyone else was gettin’ what he was gettin’. He hoped she wasn’t breakin’ them off all proper and stuff. The thought of some other man, all up inside his woman…..and other thoughts, he had to push out of his mind.

Walking home after exiting the bus, he noticed a car that had been behind him a little too long. It was a few blocks back, headlights off, parking lights on, driving real slow. *Was he being followed*? Most folks knew him, so certainly they wouldn’t….

He got more nervous as he turned down an empty street a few blocks from home and a minute later saw the car turn down the same street. He decided to freak the cool stuff. He broke running to his left; hopped over a distance neighbor’s front yard fence, ran through their front yard into their backyard, hopped over that fence, hopped over another neighbor’s fence, ran across the alley and through their backyard to their front yard.

That’s when he saw the car heading around the corner, moving faster now, heading in his direction. *So, his instincts had been right, they were definitely clocking him.* But since he didn’t think they’d seen him yet, he decided to reverse his course, and ran back the same way he’d come.

As he hopped the fence on the way back, he tripped over some unknown object, then slipped and fell. The sound of barking dogs motivated him to return to his feet and press on. Luckily, he hadn’t twisted anything or hurt himself. As he made it back to the same street he’d originally left, he hid himself as best he could behind a convenient tree, and started trying to silence his breathing, and hopefully his heartbeat so he could listen for the sound of a car. *He had no piece on him, nothing, except about three hundred fifty dollars cash and another two hundred in product.* *He knew better than to be this stupid. Darn that Karen!! Had his mind all messed up, all out of whack. And now that he thought about it, homegirl didn’t even call back. He should go over there right now.* But first, he had to get his mind focused back on his current situation.

*Where was the car*? After waiting about fifteen minutes and not seeing or hearing a thing, he started moving again. He had two problems now, though; the car and possibly the police, which someone may have called if they saw him standing there or heard him running through their yard. The police never moved fast around this neighborhood, so he wasn’t too concerned about hangin’ out for a minute. But he had to get moving because they would come if they’d been called. They undoubtedly wouldn’t rush.

That’s when he noticed the foul odor. As he sniffed and looked around, the adrenaline stopped pumping and his senses started to return to normal. He comprehended the fact that the origin of the “foul smell” was now clearly him. *Man!* Yeah, as he looked around underneath some available dense light, he realized he had fallen in some dog mess and it had gotten on his shirt sleeve, from his elbow down to his wrist watch.

*Just his luck*! He took his shirt off, threw it on the ground and kept walkin’. He couldn’t walk around smellin’ like shit. Besides, the shirt was ruined and he knew he couldn’t walk in the house smellin’ like that, let alone rinse that crap out in one of his mother’s bathroom sinks. She’d have a cow.

*There goes another two hundred bucks*. *Damn*! He was starting to wish he’d never even bothered to steal that money. It seemed to be going so fast any way. Plus he’d spent some of it on a darn doctor and still had a pair of pants and now a shirt to buy. What a waste!

And that’s when it suddenly hit him like a ton of bricks. In fact, it hit him so hard he stopped walking. *What was it the old man said to him? Something about not being able to enjoy the money. And wasn’t that old fart even smiling? Yeah. In fact he was smiling.*

He was thinking he should have shot that smirk off his face. But he was also wondering if perhaps that old man had somehow cursed the money? First there was the football that knocked that Coke out of his hand, and then there was the brand new, barely two week old pair of pants that got torn getting on the bus. After that was the expensive liquor left at Karen’s, who now wouldn’t return his call or hadn’t been home, not to mention the little infection she gave him, the lost of a hundred dollars running down to see Crook, and now the ruined shirt.

*What else could go wrong?* But before he could barely tell himself not to even ask that question, he unconsciously reached down to his pants pockets and his chest sunk and heart began to race again. They were too light. He ran to a street light, pulled out everything to look at it and realized he’d lost some product. *Probably when he fell*. He still had all of the two hundred fifty, *thank God…..or should he be saying that*? But he’d lost, from a quick calculation, about one hundred fifty in product. *Unfreakin’ believable!* *What had he gotten himself into?*

What he decided to do was relax. He wasn’t superstitious. Why trip? He took a deep breath, realized that he was trippin’ and that he needed to stop.

# As he was coming out of his deep thoughts, he realized he was standing underneath a bright street light at three o’clock in the morning, counting his money and drugs, while supposedly running from a car. At that same moment, he also recognized the sound of a car. Close. He heard a single gunshot, then silence.