

SURVIVAL OF THE
TRENCHES

MICHAEL BASKERVILLE II

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	v
1. The Darkside	1
2. Self- Preservation	17
3. Influence	27
4. Stand Tall, Never Fold	49
5. The Weight	61
6. The Competition	75
7. Addressing All Problems	91
8. Buy Back the Block	117
9. Applying Pressure	137
10. Things Fall Apart	161
11. Back Against the Wall	191
12. Wins & Lessons	209

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Coming from a small city; York, Pennsylvania, my peers, and I have buried too many loved ones from the inner workings of the streets. Too many childhood friends and family members have lost their lives too soon, leaving children

behind. We tend to forget the domino effect that happens and our children who are the future are the ones who ultimately lose in the end. With that being said, I'd like to give a special rest in peace to all the ones who unfortunately transitioned too soon, on EVERY side of town. I was inspired to write this book and to reach the ones that it would resonate to the most and possibly change their perspective, God willing. I have love for every side of town, Southside, Parkway, Westside & the Eastside. We're all we got, and thank you from the bottom of my heart, enjoy. This by no means, depicts anyone's real life.

*In Loving Memory of
Quinton Jamal "Mugga" Jacobs
June 28, 1989 – July 30, 2020*

It's devastating to write this, it's already troubling to have to except the fact that you're no longer here, so for now, I won't. I wish you could see the undeniable love that you're receiving with the untimely and senseless demise of you. This is bullshit, this will never make sense, but I know better than to question God's plan. I'll just chalk it up and believe that me and along with many others, didn't deserve you in the physical form. The energy is just not the same without your presence. I will never be ashamed to admit that I looked up to you and you were only 2 years older than me. You were one of the smartest dudes outside of the street. You wanted to see everybody eat, your heart was full of laughter and joy. Whatever your endeavors were, you were inspirational, you were the life of the party, you were one of the flyest niggas in the game and I felt honored that I was able to have known you for 7 years. We formed a bond even though we disagreed on certain things, we were able to patch it up and get passed our potential squabble.

I love you forever and will eternally respect you for watching over my son and making sure he was straight when I sent myself into an anxiety attack at the gym back in 2018. Thank you for handling what needed to be handled. I

thought my asthma was about to take me out for good, and that was such a scary moment. You're an angel of god now and there's nothing greater than that. You're away from all the madness that this world has to offer, the rest of us must endure it in the meantime. You're at peace, sleeping with a good conscious, unbothered and I truly believe that. Life may be unfair but we all must perish, meet our maker and this is the sad reality of the circle of life. Your kids are beautiful and through them you live forever. Your legacy is stamped and dipped in gold. You deserve the highest grade of HONORING and not an absolute SOUL will dare to take that from you. You were a blessing in different ways and if you didn't know how much you've impacted people's lives, trust me when I say, YOU'VE IMPACTED MANY LIVES. You didn't even reach your pinnacle yet and I think that's the reason many of us are frustrated and pissed off because your work wasn't done yet, but God said that you've had enough, and he knows best.

It'll never sit well in my stomach to know that people can really dictate when your soul is no longer needed here, it's fucked up. You were cut from a different cloth, and I'll forever rep your name. Q, sleep well and save me a spot up there when it's time for those gates to open for me. I'm tired of losing Kings that became victims of crumb shit in this vicious world. I never take life for granted especially while I'm still walking on God's earth. I Pray whole heartedly that

God has forgiven you for all your shortcomings and granted you eternal life. To be absent from the body is to be present with the lord, rest in POWER, you deserve the highest honor in paradise. This book is for you.

THE DARKSIDE

W elcome to the City of Philadelphia, where it is hard out here in these gritty streets. A place on earth that most won't make it out of. It is cold knowing that the streets never loved a soul. It is either kill or be killed. Coming out of North Philly, it is never a surprise for anyone to die young or get life in prison. It is dangerous when you are unaware of your destination, your luck can run out at any time. Many men that jump off the porch at an early age ends up paying the price in the end.

Rashad Banks, also known as "Lil Shad", was being raised in a two-parent household which is rare in the African American community. The current climate today was proof of that. He was 16 years old, in high school and his dream was to play college basketball after graduation. He was a smart

student who always applied himself and was on the right path to greatness by playing his cards right. His mother, Juanita, was a nurse at Temple University Hospital, she worked over there almost a decade. She was intelligent, which is where Rashad got his intelligence from. His father, Rashad Sr. also known as “Big Shad”, had a different type of lifestyle which he knew how to hide from his son, for the most part, without any questions being asked. Big Shad was the typical drug dealer, but he was big time, which a lot of people feared if you would ever dare to cross him. He wasn’t the one to be fucked with. The cycle of drugs, money and violence was vicious, but most would never knock the hustle regardless. Some people looked at it as doing what you had to do to provide for your family. Big Shad sadly was another statistic that was a product of his environment as a kid.

When Big Shad was growing up, whether he’d be with his dad or in the house, he was always observant. As a child he would watch his father from the window making plays. Big Shad was as nosey as can be, he was just so curious. They didn’t understand, they weren’t supposed to understand at all. Often, his father never noticed that he was being watched by his son when he was doing his dealings. He thought he did a good job being discrete. Big Shad’s father wasn’t as knee deep in the trap as Big Shad eventually grew up to be. He was a hustler, but he wasn’t big time. Big Shad noticed every time his father made a play, he always checked the

amount of money before stashing it in his pocket. Sometimes the fiends would come up short, but there were times that he took whatever they gave him because he wanted to keep loyal customers.

When Big Shad became of age to start semi-understanding, he asked his father what drugs were, and his father explained to him that he gave people something to make them feel better because they were sick, and he fed their necessary need. He explained that he gave them a cure to their disease. Big Shad looked up to his dad.

Kids started to learn about drugs all throughout school. When he was 12 years old, he wanted to hold the fort down just like his father did for him and his mom. Eventually, Big Shad's father gave him the blueprint on how to sell drugs, he rarely showed him anything positive, just how to sell work and how to get to a dollar.

Big Shad's father was killed when a drug deal went bad and to this day his murder remained unsolved, it devastated him. As he got more established and became the brains of the operation, local Philly police were involved in busting local dealers. Big Shad himself was busted before and a fellow officer took a cut from him, as far as paper was concerned, as well as his competition getting a cut. His father had been raided before passing and was never charged.

It was hard for Big Shad to leave the streets behind him, it was in his bloodline to get to the paper by any means

necessary. His life has been at stake a few times, barely escaping death in some cases from the countless shootouts with different oppositions. He sold all kinds of weight around the city.

Big Shad wasn't the best role model to his own son, but his son thought he was. As a 16-year-old kid living in North Philly, Big Shad made sure to hammer in his son's head to know how to maneuver in life on his own, outside of school. Whatever his endeavors would be, he wanted to teach Rashad how to survive and the most important lesson was staying out of sight and out of mind, that was a major key. It was a lot worse for Big Shad when he was coming up. He was a high school dropout and resorted to the drug game at 15 years young. The objective was to rep green in Philly, it wasn't about throwing up red, blue or purple flags like it was popularized and trended in the early 2000's. This was organized chaos, every man for himself was the mentality, you had to keep your eyes peeled and watch your back. It was too easy to get lined up and a lot of Big Shad's friends were gunned down or got letters.

Big Shad was from 28th & Allegheny, the rough of the rough. He got accustomed to seeing people get murdered in broad day light, junkies shooting up or looking for that next rock, arrests being made, and civilians getting hit by stray bullets. On almost every block there were police raids.

On the flip side, Rashad's mother, Juanita, graduated

from Olney High School and grew up in Hunting Park of North. She stayed levelheaded although being with Big Shad since they were teenagers. Her parents didn't approve of Big Shad and she was rebellious during their teenage days, still finding ways to sneak and see him. By her adult years it didn't matter anymore, she had to make her own decisions and she indeed did so. Her dad hated the element that she chose to deal with, although he accepted it before he passed away. Juanita loved Big Shad so much, even with the decisions that he chose to make in his life. It was a blessing to know that she didn't end up being a dope fiend, strung out and not attending to their child. Rashad was never neglected as a child, even with being raised in the trap. Juanita and Big Shad lived in the jungle, there were plenty of nights when food wasn't in the fridge, lights got cut off, but Big Shad found a way to better the situation. The late nights on the corners started to pay off, he had to do what he had to do.



It was 12:00 Friday afternoon and it was in the middle of summertime. Rashad was in his room still sleeping. Technically, he should've gotten a summertime job, but it wasn't a big deal, he would often sleep half his day away before going out later at night. In the other room laid Big Shad and Juanita, and moments later, Big Shad woke up while Juanita

was sleeping hard because she worked a double the night before and she was exhausted. He sat up on his side of the bed with his head down, and scratching his head. He got up and headed towards the bathroom after stretching. After brushing his teeth and gargling his mouthwash, he did his daily pushups and sit-ups. Big Shad was husky and was used to doing his workouts from being locked up when he was younger. He got into the shower putting a calm lay on. After doing his daily hygiene, Big Shad put on his \$30,000 Audemar Piguet and his black Hugo Boss shirt. He loaded his .38 special and put it in the back of his hip. Rashad was still sleep as Big Shad cracked his door open. He walked into his room slowly and kissed his son on the forehead. Big Shad always had to make sure his head was on a swivel; he could never afford to be caught lacking. He was always on go, no room for error. He went downstairs and made sure that his driver was outside and he kept another guard in the passenger side. Big Shad was a boss. People often wondered why he didn't move from his block, but nobody ever tried him, even when being in the slums his respect was intact. He took care of his people, all while having blatant haters, cops also watching him too, but they couldn't prove anything.

Eventually, Rashad woke up and took a big yawn. He went downstairs and saw his mom in the kitchen sitting at the table on her laptop, working from home. "Hey sleepy-head, good afternoon. Are you hungry?" she asked. She was still typing as Rashad came over for a hug. She gave him a

big hug, pulled his head down and kissed him on the cheek. He went to the refrigerator and grabbed the gallon of milk and his favorite cereal from top. He sat across from Juanita and began to eat. He spent most of his time on the weekend playing basketball, and that's what he was contemplating on doing as he ate. Juanita put her laptop down and looked in Rashad's direction. "So, what do you want to do today?" Rashad shrugged before he answered, unsure besides the usual. "I don't know, I haven't decided yet. It's still super early," he replied. "Well, shit, you slept all day. But, if you change your mind, let me know, it's the weekend and it's nice out." Rashad finished his cereal and drank the milk from the bowl. He was wondering where his dad was. "Yo, mom, where's dad at?" Juanita always resorted to being politically correct when it came to explaining his father's whereabouts. "He's out handling some business right now, he had to take care of some things, he should be back soon," she replied. Rashad sucked his teeth. "What kind of business?" he was curious, but Juanita quickly changed the subject. "Hey, you just make sure you brush those teeth, you're 16, you better take your ass upstairs and brush them teeth." Rashad shook his head and chuckled as he walked up the steps slowly.

Rashad was heavy into music. He had the Echo Dot in his room. "Alexa! Play Meek Mill!" he yelled. Alexa shuffled the Meek Mill playlist. He cleaned up his room and got dressed so that he could work out. He was thinking about what Park or Gym he wanted to go to as he got his gym bag together.

The summertime was when Rashad flourished the most when it came to practicing his skills as a basketball player. The more he practiced, the better he would be when the season started in October. Rashad walked back down the steps. "Where do you think you're going?" asked Juanita. "I'm going to hoop, mom." Juanita got a little upset for the moment. "I wanted to hang with my baby, am I that boring?" she was being sarcastic. "What? You don't like your mom suddenly? You too old for me now?" Rashad started to laugh, but at first, he thought she was really upset. "It's not personal, mom," he reassured. "But it's the middle of the summer, I need to have fun with my bros."

"So what park are you headed to? And who are you going with?" Juanita had to make sure that she knew Rashad's whereabouts even though he was older and responsible. She was a parent at all cost, he was her baby. "Reem, he's about to slide through and scoop me, I don't know what park we going to yet, wherever the best competition is I guess." Juanita wasn't that much reassured, but she trusted Rashad. "Just make sure you're safe and if you need anything, I mean, ANYTHING, you call me".

Rashad walked over to the living room and gave his mom a kiss on the cheek. "Don't worry about me, mom, I got you. I'll hit you if need be, you know I'm not out here doing nothing wrong." Juanita smiled and was still going to worry regardless. Rashad's phone started to ring. It was his best friend, Reem. He was outside waiting for Rashad to come

out. Rashad walked out the door. “Yo! What’s the deal, bro?” Reem was always excited to see his boy. That was his right-hand man, since the sandbox, they grew up together half their lives. “Shit, I can’t call it bro, I’m ready to get this hoop session in, who ass we bussin’ on the court? I need a good run today.” Reem grew up in the Norman Blumberg Projects, one of the most notorious housing projects in the city. He was raised by his mother and was an only child. His dad was doing life for a homicide when Reem was little. Reem used basketball as an outlet which he taught himself growing up while watching his peers. It was real in the Blum because drugs were an epidemic. It was nonstop traps, living in poverty, wondering where that next meal was coming from, so it was a struggle to survive. When Reem was 10 years old and being from the Blum it was programmed in his mind to not trust a lot, if not ANY soul that’s outside of their habitat because a lot of goofy shit was happening in the streets.

In addition, the crack distribution network in the Blum was fucked up for almost every resident that lived there at the time, most if not all were affected because it reeled in not only addicts but single mothers, such as Reem’s mom. Unfortunately, Reem lost his mother to a drug overdose and he was forced to move in with his Aunt. The conditions that kids were living under were unpleasant and dangerous, and there was no way during those times that Reem could survive by himself in that area. It was easy to be influenced. Years later, The Blumberg projects were imploded and there were mixed

feelings behind it; Some for the worse and some for the better.

Rashad was getting amped, especially with the music playing inside the wheel. “You fuckin’ with that new Meek?” asked Reem. “Man, I was just whamming that jawn in the crib before you pulled up! That nigga been in his bag severely as of lately, he really got his foot on niggas necks, you already know this that type of season!” The boys decided to go get some runs in at the “James Allen Shuler Playground. It wasn’t exactly a haven but that’s where the runs were at.

Rashad and Reem had a good workout at the park. They played ball for about two hours and almost went undefeated, only losing one game all day. They were sore as hell. The rest of the hoopers wanted to switch up teams because they were tired of losing, however, Rashad and Reem weren’t feeling it. They sat down for a breather by getting a swig of water. “Bro, I can’t wait until school start, I’m hype for the season to start up,” said Rashad, Reem agreed. “For sure bro, me too, I don’t wanna lose one game.” As the boys were getting ready to leave, one of their associates, who was like a big brother to them, was pulling up. He was a papi by the name of Hector, a Puerto Rican neighborhood trapper who looked out for his people, he wasn’t an old head but closer to Rashad and Reem’s age.

Hector was 25 years old and a high school dropout. To him there was nothing that a teacher could teach him about

shit that happens in the streets or how to get money. He was another North Philly resident with street dreams. He was from Dauphin & Delhi street. Reem lived a couple houses down from Double D block. Reem noticed Hector first and tapped Rashad on the shoulder. Hector pulled up to the court and had a bad bitch inside the wheel with him. Hector's forte was weed and he recruited the younger niggas to help him move his work while also putting money in their pockets. He beeped his horn as he pulled up slowly, they walked to the other side of the wheel. "What's up, lil' niggas?" asked Hector. They dapped him up. He always flossed, his drip was definitely on point. Along with that sat a Rolex Datejust, two tone diamond watch with the sky-blue dial and diamond hour marks. "We chillin' big bro," said Reem.

"How you lil' niggas living'?" asked Hector.

"We just got done whippin' these niggas asses on the court, they ain't want no smoke for real." Hector started laughing. "I'm feelin' that rollie on your wrist, kin!" Reem was fascinated. "Good lookin', lil' bro, one day ya'll niggas gonna have one too, I promise you that."

"I'm saying though, how much that cost?" curiously asked Rashad. "Ha, over \$5,000 on my wrist, lite shit!" Hector flossed major chips; he was rapped out. "What ya'll getting into tonight. I have a loft party I'm hosting later tonight, ya'll should swing through and come fuck with some real niggas," suggested Hector. The boys looked at each other and both

shook their heads agreeing to be down with the litation. Hector told the boys that the party would be at the Thomas Lofts. “Bet, this should be live, we with that,” said Reem. “You already know, you know it’s up when I throw some shit, ya’ll gonna be straight.”

“Shit, say less then bro, shoot us the address and we’ll be there,” said Rashad. “Yup, I’ll send the addy to Reem phone and come slide out. If you need scooped, then I got you, I’ll hit Reem with the time frame too, I’ll get up with ya’ll niggas, cool?” Hector pulled off. “Come on bro, we out,” said Reem. The two hopped back in Reem’s wheel and pulled off.

“Yo, you know we need to hit the mall and get a fresh lay so we can hit that party with Hector,” suggested Rashad. “Real rap, I need to look like money especially around the bitches and you know Hector be bringing all the bad jawns out too, I’m showing up and showing out!”

“No cap, shit, I need to slide up in something too, you feel me?” Niggas were going to be niggas at the end of the day, one thing that women gravitated towards was niggas that were getting a bag. As they were driving, the boys were talking about how live Hector was in the trap and how much paper he was making pushing shit. Reem had the idea that sparked his mind, that he might see if Hector was interested in putting niggas in a position to get some extra paper. “You know that all we have to do is talk to the nigga and we can hop in the mix,” suggested Reem.

“That’s real, I’m not sure about hopping in the game

though.” Rashad didn’t know if he was built for that because of wanting to focus on basketball and not risking getting into any trouble. Reem didn’t mind the idea of being in the trap and still focusing on basketball.

“Why not? Niggas need to get it on their own out here, fuck you mean?”

“You not lying, shit, the trap shit come with a lot of fuck shit though. If we want some work, we need to make sure we cover each other’s backs out here so niggas don’t get jammed up,” explained Rashad. “All I have to do is learn the hustle and I’m good.” Reem nodded his head agreeing. “Real rap, I could always use that extra paper, I’m not looking for hand-outs no more, I’m ready to get on my grind, especially seeing how niggas benefit from it, you lit afterwards.” Reem pulled back up to Rashad’s block. “It’s something to think about, bro we can get to this paper.” Rashad was thinking hard about it while he sat in the passenger side. “Just think about it, bro. We for sure are gonna hit that party, you know we live.”

“Facts, I’ll hit you in a lil’ bit bro, ‘bout to hop in the shower, lamp for the rest of the day until later on tonight when we slide out, cool?” Reem and Rashad did their special handshake as Rashad hopped out the wheel. “Be safe back to the pad, bro, watch your body.”

“You already know, bro, I’m out, love you, my guy,”

“Love you more,” replied Rashad.

Rashad opened the door, sweaty as hell and he took his kicks off at the door. Juanita could smell him through the

door. “Sheesh, boy, your ass stinks!” she laughed. “Put those clothes in that laundry ASAP.” Rashad laughed. “Wow, Mom, you coming for me? Ha-ha, this is what happens when you’re cuttin’ ass on the court. But listen though, I’m heading to a party tonight with Reem.” Juanita wanted to know where the party was. “It’s in the cut, low key vibes, nothing crazy, just a bunch of the bros.”

“That’s fine with me if you’re safe and you keep your phone on, and let me know when you’re coming back, go head. But, before you go, I want to talk about your future as far as schooling.” Juanita wanted to make sure that Rashad was looking at colleges whether it be a university or a local community college, regardless, she just wanted him to further his education. She wasn’t putting him down as far as playing college basketball but there had to be an alternative to figure out what he wanted to do with his life. “What about it?” Rashad sounded annoyed because he wanted to head upstairs and get washed up before heading out. “You’re in the middle of high school, I just wanted to know what you wanted to do post-graduation. Obviously, I know that when you’re in mid-teens, you’ll be indecisive on what you want, but it’s just something to think about, whether it’s college or a trade school, I want you out of here, your future is bright, and your father feels the same.” Rashad listened and soaked it up. “For sure, mom, I’m focused, I got you, we’ll talk about it.”

“As long as we talk about it, then we’re good, have fun

and don't get in trouble. Your dad will be home soon from his business trip in about 3-4 days." Rashad went up the stairs and got washed up. He changed his mind about going out to get some drip, he had lays in the closet that haven't been touched yet. The night was about to be on and poppin'.

SELF- PRESERVATION

It was the night of the party that the homie Hector was throwing, it was lit. Rashad and Reem pulled up about an hour after the party started, they wanted to make their own entrance on some cool shit, even though they weren't known, they didn't wanna be the ones to get there too early. When they opened the door, they seen females dancing everywhere, music bumping, everybody was living their best life. Hector was on top of the counter bobbing his head to the music, rocking his cartier frames and blowing the loud pack in the air, smiling as soon as he seen the boys. "Ayo! My lil' niggas made it!" Hector put his arms out to give the boys a standing ovation. "Glad ya'll decided to come through, you see how we live?" Reem massaged his hands together. "I definitely see how you carry it, big bro, this

shit is live right here.” Rashad smiled and agreed. “Facts,” he added. “What ya’ll want? You wanna dance with these bitches in here? Got all flavors in this jawn, you feel me? What’s mines is yours.” Hector’s hospitality was top notch, he wanted to see everybody win and have a piece of his pie. “Make sure ya’ll have a good time, I’ll be around,” reassured Hector. Rashad and Reem started to walk around and peeped out the scenery, they decided to go over to the bar and grab a drink, Reem wanted to get high. He looked over to his right and seen someone blowing and they passed it to him.

“You smoke, bro or you just drink?” asked Reem.

“I’mma grab me just a drink for now,” Rashad responded.

“Bro, you better not be on no uptight shit either, get loose so we can start fuckin’ with these jawns in here, you feel me? It’s too live to just be up in the cut like we ready for smoke or something.” Rashad laughed. “Relax, my nigga, you know I’m not an extra joe type of nigga, sometimes you gotta ease into shit, we here though, let’s vibe out.” Some of the females that were at the party Rashad recognized from school, some already had a thing for him, but he was mostly focused on school at the time and tried to avoid any type of distractions. He dabbled occasionally, but it was never anything exclusive. He tried to have as much fun as possible. He had the juice, so baggin’ a female wasn’t a problem for him. He let them flock to him.

Hector’s parties often got wild, but this was Rashad’s

first experience at Hector's party, and it was nothing like the sets that he was used to going to. It was to the point that people were snorting coke. Rashad looked over and saw someone rolling a dollar up, snorted some coke that was on the table and the coke snorter jumped up hype afterwards. Rashad just shook his head, as he looked around, others were taking belly shots off female's stomachs. Reem was dancing with two females and signaled for Rashad to come over and be his wingman, Rashad slid over. After dancing for a couple of songs, Rashad consumed enough liquor to where he had to hit the bathroom. After he used the bathroom, he washed his hands, as he was closing the door he looked up and saw Hector walking up. "Let me holla at you real quick, come in here, homie."

"What's up?" asked Rashad. Hector put his arm around Rashad's shoulder as he guided him in the room. "You have a good time?" asked Hector. "No doubt, what's going on though?" Rashad antennas went up even though he knew Hector from the neighborhood. "What are you doing for paper? You need anything? I was thinking about adding you and Reem to the team, have you on your grind, how does that sound?" Rashad was thinking to himself and brushed his thumb across his mouth. "You been thinking for a while, huh?" asked Hector as he assumed that Reem probably brought it to his attention already, in which he did. Reem was ready to get down with the hustle. Rashad looked at Hector,

“I’m in”, he simply said and gave Hector a pound. “That’s what I like to hear.”

“Now, I’ll show you the ropes on how you sell this shit and get paid.”

“Weed? Pills?” asked Rashad.

“Whatever it is that I want you to sale.” Most of my workers never get caught and they move how they’re supposed to. I’ll show you the territories and what corners to work. I can already see my plans for you, no cap.” Hector explained to Rashad that he needed to act as normal as possible, and a good idea would be is to front as if he had a job so when it was time for him to work, his parents wouldn’t question what he was doing. “Now, listen, let’s link up within a couple days when you’re free, and oh yeah, I’ll make sure that your spot will be handled so you can make it back in the crib at a good time, so you’ll be good. You think this is something that you can handle?”

“I think so, I mean, yeah, I can handle it,” replied Rashad.

“Cool, I’ll let Reem know the same shit.”

Hector’s operation ran smooth, he had players/smokers all over the city of Philly and he had the trap boomin’ on the outskirts as well. He was the direct supplier. Whites were his clients, if not the biggest clientele especially during the holidays. College kids were always looking to cop weed, pills or even heroin. The suburbs had a lot of paper, and customers were important so they were never to be fucked with or the business was fucked if word would get around that your

credibility was at stake. Hector also explained to Rashad that under no circumstances were customers supposed to be robbed or there would be repercussions. There were niggas that he had to cut off or had to be dealt with violently when customers were robbed, that was law to him, nor did he want his reputation tampered with. “Don’t forget this shit, you understand me? This is important shit that you need to make a mental note of you feel me?”

“I got you,” said Rashad. Hector gave Rashad a burner phone that he would use. “You about to come up, I promise you that!” Rashad smirked. “But listen, I shouldn’t have to let you know what would happen if there was any telling goin’ on, right?” Hector’s face immediately changed to super serious. “I’m sure you know the policies on snitches, right? We don’t do that rat shit, so if you get pinched....” Rashad put his hand up. “Listen, I’m no bitch, and I’m no snitch.” Hector knew how big time Rashad’s pop was, even though he knew Big Shad’s reputation, he still recruited Rashad without thinking about how Big Shad would feel about it, he wasn’t sure if he wanted Rashad in that line of work. It just goes to show how influence can play a factor in everyday decisions. Weed heads were no different than crackheads because of the timeframe of when the phone would ring for tree, but sometimes, it wouldn’t be worth picking up the phone depending on what the smoker wanted. Some dealers wouldn’t move for nothing less than a quarter. “Come on, we out, it’s too many bitches in this jawn and we in this room

looking like some suckas, just wanted to holla at you quick since I wanted to put you on, we'll finish this shit another day and put you in the mix, you heard me?" Rashad nodded his head and gave Hector a pound.

The party was starting to whine down. Reem was looking for Rashad and spotted him after he saw him with Hector. "Where you been at? Nigga, I bagged mad jawns tonight," Reem was hype. "It's about time, usually them bitches be keeping you friend zoned," laughed Hector. "You sound crazy," he replied. "You see that bad chocolate thang right there?" Both Rashad and Hector looked over to where Reem was pointing and saw the girl was telling Reem to come over and meet her in the bathroom. They were impressed. "Oh yeah?" asked Rashad. "You feel me? I'm about to catch this top real quick before we get up out of here, I suggest you do the same, bro."

"Hec, good look on the invite and putting me on, I appreciate it."

"It ain't nothing, you always been a cool, young sturdy individual."



Rashad and Reem started getting money, the summertime wasn't what it used to be, so there was nothing else to do besides get money. After a couple of weeks on the job, Rashad realized how laid back it was, it wasn't as stressful as

he first thought. He had no idea about any other drug besides weed at the time, and he wasn't even a smoker. Hector didn't introduce him to any hard drugs. Reem was selling pills and pills were so popular his phone popped every 5 to 10 minutes. You would've thought he was running a restaurant the way he was rushing around meeting the players. Rashad's personality was serious, his demeanor to most would've been looked at as uptight and stuck up, but he knew there was a time and place for everything and when working, he was focused so there weren't any errors, or shortages on money. Rashad kept a low profile and didn't leave any traces to where he could be caught by Juanita, he was careful. She looked at him as her golden boy that wouldn't do anything wrong or would never disappoint her because she looked at him as her baby, but he was making illegal plays and she had no inclination.

Reem on the other hand, would almost get himself into drama because he was focused on having fun, which led to Hector having to scold him for being reckless. Often, he wouldn't even keep track of his money, not knowing how much he made but he was lucky enough to make enough to where he was able to reup with Hector for the work. It was important to make sure that the clients wouldn't flee, which would happen if another dealer would undercut prices.

Hector was in the game for about 5 years, he was a professional money getter. The profits that were made; he opened a Papi store with one of his long-term girlfriends who was

down with him since day one. She was known to bust her gun if need be but for the most part, she stayed out of the life. She held down the store for the last 5 years and it was also in her name. He played the cut but popped out occasionally. The unit of storages that Hector had wasn't in his name either, he always had a wheel, he made sure that his family was straight when it came to paying rent or mortgage. Later in the evening, Hector pulled up on Reem and made sure everything was straight.

"What's goin' on, everything straight?" asked Hector. Reem tossed the bread that he made and shook Hector's hand. "Everything is everything, shit moving, you feel me? Shit be a little spooky, I can't even lie," replied Reem. "Yeah? Why you say that?"

"Seeing some of the people that I went to school with, dude they look all strung out. I served a few bitches that I use to fuck with too, looking like zombies, young too. It just fucked me up when I first saw it." Hector shook his head and scoffed. "Can't stop addiction, but when that paper come through, it'll make you forget about it. I used to feel the same way you did, there was times that I teared up, no cap." Hector kept it all the way real. "Bitches mouths get wet over that piece of green, them dick sucks hit different." Reem started laughing his ass off. "You ain't never lied about that shit, them bitches be around here calling me handsome."

"I feel you, stay on point, alright? Be safe and watch your body. You never know. Now here, I wanna give you this."

Reem looked down and Hector passed him a strap. "Oh shit, for real? This me right here?" Hector smirked. "Yeah, lil' nigga, this you right here. Fresh too, no bodies on it, can't be out here naked with no protection. As quiet as it's kept, stick up niggas is who you need to worry about. The stick up niggas more than cops, you feel me?" Hector gave him a fresh Smith & Wesson M&45. "This shit is tough right here." Hector explained to Reem to only use it if necessary. "I'm about to get up out of here, I just had to check on the business and make sure everything is straight out here, keep making that paper."

"I got you, good lookin' on the lookout," said Reem as he placed the strap in his back and covered it completely with his shirt and got back to working. Hector hopped in the passenger side of the wheel. He came in as one of his shooters drove off.



Rashad was used to waking up early, the trap was still sleep but Rashad woke up between 6:30-7:00 each morning. Juanita would sleep in from working long shifts with her nursing. When you were a certified smoker, the first thing you needed is to get high, first thing in the morning. Rashad was always straight to it. He'd check his trap phone to make sure that it had no missed calls or texts. Another one of Hector's workers would scoop Rashad up to make deliveries,

meet with whoever needed to be met. He would also occasionally go to the trap and bag up work after using the scale. From Rashad getting his feet wet in this line of work, his reputation for not playing no games was starting to bubble, he didn't want to be looked at as soft either.

INFLUENCE

It was near the end of the summer, late in August, and Rashad was still going strong with the business. It was to the point that he would rarely see Hector until it was time to pay up. It was so far so good, no undercovers were served, and no stick ups.

Big Shad was on his way back from his trip out of state. It was in the middle of the afternoon and Juanita was doing some cleaning. She was such a clean freak that most of her time was dedicated to making sure the crib was on point, she even did that as soon as she walked in the door after a long day at work. She thought for years that she had terrible OCD, but she couldn't stand the feeling of a dirty ass crib. She went upstairs and ran the vacuum and started in Rashad's room first. He was taught since a kid about cleanliness so much. As Juanita was sweeping, she could smell an

odor. She sniffed a few times in the air making sure that she wasn't trippin'. She turned off the vacuum cleaner and started looking around for where that smell was coming from and it was clear that it was the smell of weed. He was walking inside. "Mom, where are you at?" He walked up the steps.

Juanita was pissed off at Rashad. "What the fuck are you doing with this in your room?" Rashad was hesitant at first before speaking, even choking on his spit trying to get a word out. "Hello? Do you want to explain to me why you have weed and a scale in your room?" Rashad had the nerve to ask his mom why she was in his room being sneaky. "Mom, why are you in my personal space? This is my room." Rashad was bold at that point, she walked up closer to him as she scoffed. "Answer my question, Rashad. Does your father know about this shit? Whose shit is this?" Rashad told Juanita that his father had no idea about his endeavors, and it made her angry. She felt in that moment that she was failing as a mother and started to get teary eyed. "I can't believe you right now. I can't even stand to look at your ass right now, I'm disgusted that you feel the need to be a follower." Juanita was furious and Rashad still stood silent as he was feeling guilty.

"Rashad, you better tell me something if you wanna remain living in this house because I don't have time for this shit! Tell me where did you get this product and scale from? Is it Reem's?" asked Juanita. "No, it's not Reem's and he has nothing to do with nothing, why are you trippin', mom?"

Juanita couldn't believe in that moment how Rashad was talking to her as if she was a regular person on the street. For a split second, she forgot he was her son, she wanted to smack fire out of him for the audacity. "You know what? I'm going let your father deal with your ass, because you must have lost your mind. I don't know who you're trying to portray or who you're letting influence you, but that won't be tolerated in my house!" hollered Juanita. "You're lucky that I don't kick your ass out." Rashad put his head down. "But it's cool for Dad to do what he wants to do though, right? And you don't say nothing about that, do you?" Rashad was bold, it bothered Juanita because he was indeed correct.

Big Shad was walking inside the door and noticed his son and Juanita in the kitchen standing in a faceoff position, and it confused him. "What's going on? Everything good?" Juanita viciously looked at Big Shad. "Hell no! Nothing is good!" she screamed and Big Shad immediately got defensive. "Juanita, lower your voice girl, what are you talking about? Stop raising your voice to me like that, what's wrong with you?"

"Ask your son, your son seems to think that it's a good idea to be a follower and have dope boy dreams, is this the type of son that we are raising?" asked Juanita curiously. Big Shad moved over to Rashad and he began to stare him down which made Rashad uncomfortable. He felt that his father was about to snatch his ass up and he couldn't move. "Is this

true?" asked Big Shad. Juanita interrupted and confirmed that it was true. "What are you doing?" he confronted.

"I found weed and a scale in his room!" She hollered.

"Oh yeah?" asked Big Shad.

"Yes, I was cleaning and found this shit in his room, look at this shit."

Big Shad asked Rashad why he had the weed and a scale and where he copped it from. Rashad was scared to answer at first. "Answer the question, boy! Who the fuck gave you this shit and who the fuck are you hustlin' for?" Rashad knew the repercussions of what could happen when ratting out a source, hence the reason he was reluctant to tell his father where his weed and scale came from. Big Shad admired that but didn't show it because he was in front of Juanita. Big Shad was surprised about Rashad's actions but not much. "Please, handle your son before he heads down a path that he's not ready for. I've worked too hard to keep him out of that life and he has the audacity to have this inside my home, handle him, please before I decide to kick his ass out." Juanita walked off in disgust as she folded her arms and went to her room. Rashad looked at his mother. He felt a way that he upset her. He looked back at his father as he was about to speak but was immediately interrupted by his father.

"Shut up, lil' nigga, don't even say nothing, I don't want to hear it." Rashad sat down on the chair and started scratching his head in a nervous form. "I know what you're about to say," said Rashad as he tried to beat his father to the point.

“My bad.” Big Shad laughed as he walked away from the table a little and then turned back around. “Look, before you say something...” Big Shad stopped him in his tracks.

“So, this is really the life that you want to live, huh? Is that what you’re telling me right now?” Big Shad was looking at Rashad with a serious ass face, he wasn’t even blinking, and Rashad nodded his head. “I want to be a man just like you, I want to get things on my own, I don’t need to ask for nothing. You’re my dad, I’m supposed to follow in your footsteps and make you proud of me,” replied Rashad. “I hear you,” said Big Shad. “You know what? Man, come take this ride with me right quick, since you say you want to be a man, let’s take this ride, come on, let’s go.” Big Shad turned Rashad around and guided him towards the door while strong arming him and pushing the door open. Big Shad wanted to take Rashad down Kensington, a notorious spot for drug addicts. The energy was just toxic as fuck and disgusting, it was terrible down there. As they drove down, Rashad was looking out the window of his pop’s wheel. They parked up. “Who gave you that shit?” asked Big Shad. “My man Hector from around the way, he a good dude, he takes care of a lot of the locals and puts bread in their pocket, he’s like a big brother,” explained Rashad. “I know lil’ hector, he’s honorable.” Rashad was surprised that Big Shad said that as he looked at him. “So, now what?” asked Rashad.

“Come on, get your ass out, big man.” Rashad looked back at him and slowly exited the truck. “Come take this

walk with me over here. Come smell this and taste this. Since you think you're grown and want this lifestyle." Rashad complied, and the two began to walk. Big Shad nodded to Rashad in the direction of a strung-out fiend. There were multiple fiends outside. The girl that Big Shad spotted was young, she looked to have been in her earlier twenties, but the drugs made her ass look twice that age, you could obviously still see the youth in her face, but the drugs took a big ass toll on her. It bugged Rashad out, he looked to the other side of him, and he seen another addict fall over in the middle of the street. Big Shad scoffed while Rashad's eyebrows arched.

"Look, look! You see that dirty ass fiend right there, you see that shit, right? This is what happens in our streets, walking zombies. This is what you call Zombieland." Rashad repeated what Big Shad said in questioning, "Zombieland?" Big Shad gave an evil look and smiled. "Yup, the land of the zombies out here, son." Big Shad put his arms out. "Embrace this reality, kid." Rashad looked uneasy in the face and his father just smirked, knowing he would have that look on his face, it was anticipated. But this was the harsh reality of the world that they lived in. "Damn, dad, this city makes money off this? Like, off the drug addicts? As smart as Rashad was, he wasn't street smart for as long as he was being raised in Philly. His mom did a good job with making sure he wasn't in the streets and being influenced by others, but here was Big Shad corrupting his mind instead of teaching him to be

better. Big Shad walked his son over to the direction of an area off to the side and laying there on the ground were a bunch of used syringes and several other paraphernalia, it was sickening. “You motherfuckin’ right they do, this shit out here was planted. And this is what happens when you have people out here who are forced to govern for themselves. They want to keep our people oppressed out this bitch because they want population control.” Rashad was speechless as he shook his head in disbelief.

“These Kensington streets are a bitch! Shit isn’t a joke out here. And to be honest with you, I tried to keep this from you for a long ass time because I didn’t want to involve you in this shit. I didn’t think that you would be carrying weed and a scale from somebody else, let alone the nigga Hector, so you’ve been slightly introduced to it already on your own. I admire you being a friend to one of your homies and wanting some extra chicken. I’m a Gangster, son. I lived in poverty when I was younger than you. I was crack broke, down to my dick! This was a family business for me when your grandfather passed away. I chose my path. I busted my first trap and never looked back. It’s just the way it is.”

That was a lot for Rashad to intake. “Wow, that’s all I can say is wow, dad.” Rashad bit his bottom lip and looked back up to his dad. “I did what I had to do to survive. You read up about the drug epidemic in the 80s, and you’ll feel where I’m coming from. You’re graduating from a boy to a man and I honor that.” Big Shad’s viewpoints were inconsistent, shal-

low, vindictive, and manipulative. He was the very disease that he was talking about and spoon feeding that lifestyle to his son was proof of that. Drugs in the city of Philadelphia and in America, period, were strong and the game was full of blatant greedy motherfuckers. They didn't stop at any cost to sell it. Drugs were bought by the criminals and Big Shad was just that, a criminal. The demand was more important than the supply. Most people that didn't know the game fully, had the impression that you needed a permit to sell drugs, not taking in account that even the cops were in on the paper flow, potentially armed tax collectors, nothing less and nothing more.

Big Shad had multiple incomes and properties and could've easily left the streets alone a long time ago, but still chose to do dirt and make the situation worse anyway. "It's a wicked game, look, look how they're all bending over," said Rashad, he was confused, and Big Shad just smiled. "Yup, the city is fine with the drug use, that's real shit, get familiar with it. It's like an old ass country in the 3rd world, dead as a motherfucker, on some Resident Evil type shit. I have no choice but to give it to you straight like that. No time for that PC shit." Big Shad was super blunt and open. His purpose was to show his son the misery in the city, and it made Rashad nervous as hell. "Come on, let's get up out of here." The two got back inside the truck and drove around the city. Rashad still had the look of shock on his face. "So, do you ever feel bad about what you choose to do? Any remorse at all?"

Rashad questioned Big Shad. He respected his father, it was a lot to intake especially being the first time seeing some shit like that, up close and personal. “I’ll ask you again, you sure you want this life, son?” Rashad looked over slowly. “Yeah, dad, I do.” Big Shad lit a cigarette. “You’re a man, understand that this is for real men. Understand? Are you a man?”

“I’m a man, and I understand.” Rashad dapped his father up. “Money will always be the motivator out here. It’s what makes this world go around. A lot will say that money is the root of all evil, but it’s all about how you handle that money. “You gotta be a pure hustla. This is what I do. You won’t even be in the mood for pussy sometimes, you’re too busy thinking about that paper, that’s where all your energy is going to, understand? If the money ain’t right, your soul ain’t right.” Big Shad was 25/8 when it came to the game, he was devoted to it. He didn’t give a fuck about the fucked up mindset he had when divulging this trade to his son. He looked at Rashad as his protégé. “I’m going to teach you everything you need to know, so listen up.” The two were still riding through Philly and were driving down south street. “One thing you have to know firsthand is you can’t just jump into the drug trade; it’ll never be that simple.” Big Shad wanted Rashad to understand the power of the dollar and that the trade wasn’t to prove shit to a broke bitch, but to make as much money as you can, the grind was forever.

Rashad saw a lot around North that he couldn’t hide from, the drug game or seeing dealers chasing fast money. It

was constantly in the air to see fast money being chased. Before even talking to his father, he had the idea already that he wanted to hustle but just kept it to himself. Basing decisions from surroundings was a high probability. A lot of kids had similar street dreams because they saw what it attracted. It attracted the hoes, the fly whips, the new clothes. Big Shad did a lot of fucked up shit and it wasn't hard to manipulate addicts, but once a fiend went into rehab and then tried to go back to drugs, they wouldn't be served by his workers anymore, it was too hot. "What about mom? You know how mad she was, she was furious. I mean, like, what if she finds out what I'm doing?"

"She knows what I do, she doesn't agree but she doesn't complain at all at this point. You ain't got nothing to worry about, this is your life and you can run it however the fuck you want to. She's gonna have to accept the fact of whatever it is that you decide to do with your life." Rashad knew that Juanita would be damned to approve him selling drugs, and would most likely resent him, knowing that he could be killed or jailed for life. She would be more heartbroken if anything. Rashad wanted to get it out the soil, but the thought in the back of his mind was how stressed and angry his mother would be at him.

Big Shad was powerful in the city, but he did have enemies, and that was undeniable. As much good he did for the city by giving back, he did more negative than positive. He thrived from negativity and bloodshed. He was the Philly

version of Nino Brown and didn't use his power to help people to get healthier and more prosperous. He shrugged off a lot of shit and basically threw stones at the jails as if he wasn't taking penitentiary chances daily, and no man was exempt from getting booked. He moved in an untouchable manor, not realizing that every dog has its day, and the devil rewards you and curses you at the same damn time. How soon he'd realize this. Not every drug dealer had malice in their heart, but Big Shad was just lucifer in a physical form.

Big Shad and Rashad pulled up to a warehouse that was in the cut. He turned the car off and told Rashad to get out, which he did right away. He followed behind Big Shad. "What's this spot right here? Where we at, dad?" Big Shad stayed silent for a second. "Just follow me, I wanna show you something, so come on. Big Shad had a card that buzzed him into the door. Rashad was mystified. Soon as the door made a noise, he saw that Big Shad's workers were in there.

There was plenty of places to cop drugs, the fiends flocked everywhere. Big Shad was responsible for a lot the drugs that were on the Kensington corners in recent years. It was sickening and at the same time it was scary. From drug corners to all the different heroin spots, Kensington & Allegheny was the main turf, but plans had to switch up because police started to patrol a lot better than before. Even with the consistent arrests that were made on that corner, it surely didn't matter, it was still clockwork regardless. The key to running a smooth operation was never let the shit be

known, hiding and staying low key was essential. You would have less of a chance of getting caught. Big Shad had Rashad follow him back to the office to talk alone. “Close the door behind you and have a seat,” said Big Shad.

“Listen, there’s a lot of guidelines to this business. You must always display your intelligence and be on your toes. I must stress that shit to you.” Rashad was focused on his father. “You only deal with a limited number of motherfuckers out there. Never fuck with loud motherfuckers either, they’ll get you caught up and locked the fuck up in a New York minute, you heard me?” Big Shad barely even used technology for that matter. “It’s always money to be made out here, son, you understand me? We run the businesses out here, we’re organized. Even down to officers and politicians, I know them.” Big Shad had to break it down on how deep it was to Rashad. “There’s no full way to ever eliminate demand or supply.”

”So, how do you keep addicts satisfied? Like, are you friendly to them? How do you keep them coming back?” asked Rashad.

“Well, that all depends on what kind of dealer that you are, son. Look at it like this, it’s things that you don’t want to tolerate as a dealer and one of those things is NEVER tolerate small talk or bargaining, make them respect your terms. Don’t be a dickhead about it but make sure you stand firm on your prices when you sell. Stand solid on your beliefs, be respectful and polite, keep your distance and

never accept a decrease in prices,” explained Big Shad. Rashad was taking everything in. “Are you hearing me?” asked Big Shad. “I’m hearing you, dad.”

“You allow the customers to know what the fuck you want them to know about you, never sell to a fiend that will turn on you, keep them satisfied. Fiends only want top notch quality, be fast and be reliable.”

“So, what do you do about competition?” asked Rashad. “I mean, if there is competition out there.”

“There’s a couple things that you can do, even though it’s frowned upon. You have other dealers that rat the competition out and the other option is you can network with other dealers and find a way to co-exist.” Rashad felt that was interesting. “Blood money, son, blood money. Shit is no different than Mafias,” said Big Shad. “Networking is the best option because sitting down with your competition can establish a form of understanding. When I was your age and I was soaking up game, I was taught to connect with different suppliers to where we can all maximize profit so we don’t tip toe on other’s turfs unless you’re prepared for war and preparation is key, your money has to be right.”

“I guess this’ll be a good time to let you know that I had a front,” added Rashad.

“What you mean by that?”

“I mean that I don’t have a job, that was my cover up when I was bussin’ traps.” Big Shad was surprised, and it caught him off guard. The parents had no idea about

Rashad's real endeavors, he explained how the times where he claimed he was working later, picking up hours at his 9-5 that he was in the trap. "Well played, boy," said Big Shad. Big Shad realized how disconnected he was with his son, he made him feel a way in his fucked up mind, he felt that his bond with his son could potentially become better if he was in the business with him. "The young nigga Hector really has you on some shit, huh?" Rashad looked at Big Shad and shrugged his shoulders. "I mean, he gave me an opportunity. I've only been dealing with the tree, you're giving me more insight on the other weight, this is crazy," said Rashad. "I thought I was handling things as good as I could." Rashad was being completely transparent about how he was operating when he sold. "I have a driver that takes me to where I need to go when my phone goes off."

"Has the burner ever rang more times than usual? And how many minutes has it rang for you?" asked Big Shad.

"One time, but then I swapped out the phone that Hector gave," replied Rashad. "Did police every follow you or anybody start following you at all?" Big Shad heard all that he needed to hear. Unbeknownst to Rashad, Big Shad was going to talk to Hector about him bringing his son in the mix without his permission. Rashad had his feet wet; he was going to tell Hector that Rashad was going to quit working for him. Big Shad was unaware that Reem was working too. Rashad kept that bit of information to himself, he felt that it was irrelevant.

“I imagine that there’s been cases of competitors killing off their rival just to be on the safe side of things, am I right?” Big Shad was impressed with Rashad’s good questioning and articulation. “No doubt, but it’s much more affective to warn your competitors when it comes to other enemies and being aware of police. It’s a lot of ups and a lot of downs, for sure,” replied Big Shad. Prices around Philly could takeoff rapidly when supply was on a slant and demand was unadjusted, which caused fiends to have to resort to crimes themselves in order to feed their need. They barely had any paper as it was to feed that addiction which destroyed their lives from the beginning.

Rashad planned on studying numbers and educating himself on different pharmaceuticals on his leisure time. “Listen, I have to make a run so I’m going to drop you back off, I’m going to talk to your mother later, I’m sure she’ll calm down soon, I’ll deal with her.”

Rashad’s phone went off. “Yeah, that’s cool, I have to make this play anyway, shit, I can’t even lie, a lot of old folks be wanting this tree.” Big Shad laughed. “You surprised? Depending on how you operate, the older folks are your true bread and butter,” replied Big Shad. “Shit, when I started with tree, I had a lot of army veterans that was coppin’ off of me, even the ones who had pensions.” Big Shad rubbed his thumb against his fingers to signify a money indication. “You feel me, them motherfuckers had PTSD, the weed would calm them down, they look for that shot.” Big Shad gave

Rashad a kiss on his forehead, they both hopped back in the wheel and left.

Later that evening Rashad called Reem's phone. "Bro, everything cool with you?" asked Rashad. "What's up, bro? Yeah, everything is good, how are you looking over on your end?" The conversation lasted for about 10 minutes. "Just wanted to check on you nigga, I know we low key with our shit but we need to keep in contact with each other so we're making sure each other is alive and well."

"My bad, I drawled, I'm cool. I'm watching my body out here and I got the heat on me in case somebody tries me." Reem started laughing over the phone. "What's so funny?" asked Rashad. "Just trippin' how our summer went, man. We really started gettin' to it, told you that Hector was the man." Rashad agreed but he wasn't going to sit on the phone and act like it didn't get stressful for him. "You're having fun but shit, this is a lot of work, I can't even fraud. These players be wanting you to drive dam near 30 to 45 minutes, that shit be pissing me off and it's just about some stupid shit," he expressed. "They be wanting favors, wanting to grab right then and there and then pay later, shit don't work like that, fuck they thought?"

"It's all good, we reap the benefits. But listen, let me get back to this shit, I'm soon done for the night, I'll hit you back, love you, bro."

"Love you more, nigga," replied Rashad as he hung up the phone and went back to work. As he hung up, the same

thing he was complaining about just happened again when his phone rang. One of the players was calling because they wanted a blunt and wanted to pay for it later, and it immediately changed Rashad's mood. As much as he was low key and nonchalant, it was one of the very first times that he had to snap on a customer. You had to be aggressive and let them know what it was before they started talking to you crazy. From now on, he wasn't going anywhere to make a play for anything less than a certain price and he kept it that way.

Rashad went home safe and sound. He was about to talk to Juanita but noticed how she looked at him, so he decided to just go upstairs. As furious as she was, she wasn't going to turn her back on her only son. She just watched him walked upstairs to take a shower. Rashad went to sleep but not before turning his phone off. Big Shad came inside about 30 minutes after Rashad came in. Big Shad gave Juanita a kiss as she worked on her laptop as always. "Did you talk to your son?" she wasted no time. "Of course I talked to him, I said I was going to talk to him," replied Big Shad. "Well? How did it go? Is he going to get his act together and stop doing shit that could get him locked up or shot?" Big Shad was stalling and was hugging up on Juanita and kissing her around her neck. "Come on baby, let's just go upstairs, put your work away for the night, you have my undivided attention."

Juanita folded her arms as she backed up. "No! Rashad I want to know how the conversation went, this isn't a joke to me, I'm serious. I want to know what happened and why the

hell OUR SON has chosen to start selling, apparently I'm the only concerned parent, it's bad enough that you do it." Big Shad shook his head. "Never heard you complain before, especially for as long as we've been together. Always kept you in the latest, made a good life for the family." Juanita couldn't believe that Big Shad had the audacity to use that as a rebuttal. "We were kids, and the resources weren't the same as they are now! We grew up harder and we had a kid at a young age! That's how we had to survive, that's not the case anymore."

"So, I'm the only logical parent, the only parent that has a legitimate career, the only one with family responsibilities, how's that sound?" Juanita was getting worked all over again. "We have too much to lose, is that not computing?" Big Shad was getting uneasy, and Juanita could tell by his body language, he came off as annoyed and nonchalant and she didn't appreciate it and she realized what he was thinking before he said another word. "Wow, so you approve of this behavior?" Big Shad looked at her, "Did I say that?"

"No, ASSHOLE, your face says it all, you approve of this, you want him to be you, am I right? Just a chip off the old block. Like father, like son? Do I have it right?" Big Shad was getting anxious and jittery. "What do you want me to say, Juanita? He's his own man, he's making his own decisions, what are you trippin' for? Let him be who the hell he wants to be!" Juanita didn't raise her son to be that type of guy. "I can't believe you; we're supposed to be BETTER, SHAD! And

you're throwing him to the wolves, because in your sick mind you want him to follow in your footsteps, and you're too set in your ways to realize the negative affects you're having on him. You're being selfish." Juanita hadn't smoked a cigarette in years, but she was getting to the point that she was getting stressed, she wanted to open those cancer sticks.

"I can't even stand to look at your ass right now, you're stressing me!" hollered Juanita. "Keep your voice down, you're trying to cause a scene, calm that shit the fuck down," replied Big Shad. "Why? You're embarrassed? What? You didn't think I was going to chew you out about the nerve you have encouraging our son to be a street nigga? I let this go for as long as I could and let you do your thing, you're never home, and when you are home, you're still not here, I don't feel it." Juanita was feeling alone. Big Shad was heavily invested in the drug trade and it was taking a major toll on her mental and emotional health. Juanita was tired of feeling like the only parent that cared about their son's wellbeing and making sure that he was on the right track to be successful by staying out of trouble and staying focused. Juanita and Big Shad weren't getting anywhere, it was dead for the night. "You know what? I'll let you relax, this conversation is over, Juanita." Big Shad heard enough for the rest of the night.

As the two still began to argue, because both were trying to get the last word and Juanita overpowered Big Shad while yelling, he got distracted by looking at one of the cameras

that was in the house. He paused, put his hands up to indicate for her to stop talking. His eyes got big as he hurried up and turned the lights off in the living room and screamed for Juanita to go upstairs, leaving her confused in the moment. “What? What are you doing?” she asked. The Philly Narcotics Unit were about to issue a raid along with the Feds. Big Shad grabbed his gun and ran up the steps behind Juanita. “Go, go!” he hollered as he pushed Juanita up. “Get Rashad and hide in one of the rooms!” The unit was banging on the door with force. Juanita got Rashad up while explaining the severity. Big Shad was confused and didn’t know what was going on. He thought the worse, that someone may have snitched on him. The rest of the house was dark, the Feds banged the door open and they swarmed the inside. The three were being as quiet as possible. They had a warrant to search the whole crib. They had their guns drawn, one of them walked up the steps.

Juanita and Rashad were hiding in a good spot so they wouldn’t be seen, not knowing how long they were going to be in this situation. The crib supposedly had drugs inside of it. One of the Feds was at the top of the steps. One of them thought they saw an object move and shot a single shot out of a small amount of fear. Juanita yelped and Rashad ducked as he covered his mom. Big Shad returned fire. Shot after shot rang out between the two parties, they engaged in a shootout back and forth for about 20 minutes. “What the fuck are you doing in my house!?” screamed Big Shad as he

let off 2 more shots. “My girl and kid are in here!” Big Shad might as well have been a marksman because his aim was on point. He hit two officers, one in the hip and another in the ribs as they fell down the steps. “You should know better than to fuck with me,” Big Shad taunted. After realizing eventually that there were too many, Big Shad finally surrendered. He took the clip out of his gun, dropped his clip, kicked it in the hallway and put his hands up. “Let me see your hands, right now!” screamed one of the Narcotic officers. “Right now, asshole before I shoot you!”

“Do what you feel,” Big Shad taunted as he slowly walked down the steps. “My girl and my son are upstairs, leave them alone, they have nothing to do with anything.” Rashad was yelling for his dad; he was confused, he didn’t know what his dad did to be arrested. As far as the line of work, he wasn’t surprised but didn’t know precisely why they came for his dad. Juanita was crying and tried to keep her son contained because he was angry. “Yo, Dad! Dad! Let my dad go!” he screamed. A crowd was outside because of the shooting and the ambulance. But as soon as the ambulance was putting two Narcotic members in the truck, he put it all together. He drew his neck back and covered his face. “No, man!” This wasn’t a good situation and wasn’t going to end well. They began to go back in and check the crib, warranted of course. Juanita was scared for her family; she didn’t know what to do. The officers found nothing inside the house but the unregistered gun that was used in the shooting.

A couple days after the shootout with the Narcotic officers, Big Shad was charged with first degree attempted murder for the alleged shooting of two Philly officers; both were recovering from their injuries. Big Shad was with his lawyer and the officer who was talking with them explained that they knew who he was from his resume. In the past, he had behavioral issues. He had an assault charge as a teenager and an animal cruelty charge when he was fighting dogs in the past. He was informed about the amount of time that he was facing. A .40 Caliber handgun was used in the crime.

STAND TALL, NEVER FOLD

The word was around the city about Big Shad's case. Rashad was lucky that Juanita was able to get rid of the stuff that she found before everything went down last week. Juanita was stressing but it wasn't anything abnormal, or that she wasn't used to because Big Shad was always out making moves in and out of town. She was already reaching her breaking point because she was feeling like she was living in the past as if they were teenagers. Big Shad was an adult but didn't act his age, as if he didn't have a 16-year-old son. If convicted, Big Shad was looking at 30 years. Rashad and Juanita weren't on speaking terms and when they were, it was short. She was still upset with him, but he was considered an adult.

Rashad was home alone watching tv and Juanita was just walking in the house from work. She walked past him

towards the steps. "Mom?" he asked. She still was silent as she dropped her bag and took her shoes off. She looked at him with disappointment. "You not saying nothing to me?" She looked at him again. "What do you expect me to say? My house was a crime scene, I was humiliated! What can you possibly say to me right now?" Rashad was silent. "You know what? I think you need to go. I don't want you staying here right now. I know what you're doing out there and I don't want you in this house."

"You're really gonna kick me out? I'm your son! I'm sorry if you don't approve of what I'm doing, I'm a man!" Rashad had the nerve to say. She walked up closer to him. "Then be a man outside on those streets, because as long as you're a drug dealer, you will no longer remain in this house, do you understand me?" Juanita put her foot down. "I suggest you go upstairs and pack."

"Where do you expect me to go?" asked Rashad. "You're a man, figure it out," she replied. Rashad scoffed and ran up the steps. Juanita was doing the opposite of what she was supposed to be doing as a mother because no matter how much a child is doing wrong, sitting down with him or her was better than the alternative of kicking them out. Rashad was slamming clothes into his gym bag. He grabbed his toothbrush, mouthwash, all his essential needs. He texted Reem about him getting kicked out. "Come by and scoop me, bro," he texted.

"Say less, I'll be there in like 15 mins, bro." Rashad walked

down the steps. "I can't believe you're kickin' me out, you're supposed to be my homie." Juanita slowly turned over. "I love you, but unless you change your ways, you can't live here. Your father has destroyed this family and clearly you want to be like him, I can't stand to even look at you." Rashad felt crazy. "Fine, I'm out of here, I love you. I'll be out of your hair." Rashad grabbed his gym bag, opened the door, and left. Reem was just pulling up. "What happened, man?" asked Reem. "Don't worry about it, man. I don't wanna talk about it right now, just drive man. This is what she wanted so now she don't need to worry about me no more."

Juanita was crying, but she felt like this was the best decision. She felt as if there was no hope, and she was furious with Big Shad because he could've got them all killed. Rashad stayed with Reem for a couple days, his mom said it was cool. "Keep your head up, bro. Me and you will rock out. Let's get this money, let's run this shit up."

The next day, Rashad was outside early afternoon working a little overtime for Hector, he was about to be done for a few and Reem pulled up on him. Reem hopped out the wheel, checking up on Rashad because he didn't fully know the details of what was going on between he and Juanita, although telling Rashad to keep his head up. "Your mom hit you yet?" asked Reem as the two gave each other a pound. I mean, you know, this is how shit go," replied Rashad. "It's fucked up that me and mom aren't on good terms, but I can make my own decisions, I'm grown." Reem scrunched his

face up. “She kicked you out randomly or was it just an argument?”

“Found out that I was trappin’. I was drawn and left some shit and she saw it, scolded me out, turned into a big ass argument with her and my pops, they’re goin’ at it, next thing you know, the boys banged down my door on some nut shit.” Reem explained that he heard about the shooting too. “Big Shad was rapped out, started clappin’ at them, huh?”

“Yeah, now he’s looking at like 30 years for attempted murder, plus the ratchet and you know he’s no stranger to the system, with everything he’s been doing. I credit him though; I can’t lie because he kept a lot from me to protect me as a young kid, you feel me? But even still, I was oblivious to a lot.” The state prison was different than the federal prison and that was because the level of security was different. Federal prison was different because it was less dangerous from violent behavior inside, rape, etc. As dangerous and shot out that Big Shad was, he helped a lot of people and he had pull so he would be good inside while he was jailing, though he had enemies that would possibly be inside as well, he would have enough clout and protection to where it wouldn’t matter because it wouldn’t have been smart to try to make a move on him. This wasn’t his first rodeo as far as being booked. But this one hit different because it was for a much longer time.

It was heavy on Rashad’s mind and he could barely focus. “What about the operation? How is that supposed to keep

moving when he was the main distributor, he's the link. What if you're next in line to finish what he was doing?" Rashad hadn't really thought about it because his mind was focused more on the length of time that Big Shad was going to do, and he hadn't spoken to him in a couple days as he waited trial.

In the meantime, Rashad was working with stress on his brain, his paranoia started to kick in. One day when he trapped, one of his customers was caught with drugs and was immediately arrested. Rashad felt that it was going to expose him to risks. Luckily and honorably, the customer never gave up his source and he was in the clear. He was intelligent enough to not make friends with any of his customers. Rashad never once chilled with them on some cool shit, and never gave any of them information of his constant whereabouts, daily routines, or anything that could be used against him about insight on his life.

Hector informed Rashad that the customers that came to him daily were the ones that he needed to stay serving instead of any new faces, because it was entirely too easy for them to turn informant. This would happen if suddenly, they ask for a couple of ounces, then to follow that up in a couple span of weeks asking for pounds, that was the first indication of something fishy going on. He never sent out text messages that would be detrimental and get him locked up from potential traffic stops. There were so many trap niggas that acted smart but moved the total opposite of smart. Nothing

was ever supposed to be inside of the house and swapping out burners was essential as well. Hector also supplied Rashad with a good ass lawyer just in case he was in a bind.

Reem stayed on point too and he always kept the strap on him, he'd make his deliveries on a regular pedal bike. He had his license but never drove himself to a location with a load of tree inside of his wheel. People could drive recklessly and not follow the rules of the roads and get pulled over and then be ass out.

Rashad and Reem were getting food from Max's on Germantown Ave. "You're being fat as hell right now, bro," laughed Rashad. "Nigga, why you worried about my food, I'm about to destroy this shit," he replied. Rashad shook his head as he leaned up against the wheel. Reem was worried about him since his father was booked. It's been almost a month since Big Shad's arrest and he is awaiting trial. "How you been holdin' up? I know this shit is crazy; what's the update on Big Shad's situation?" Rashad covered his face and put his head down. "Man, I didn't even know that two cops caught a shell that night from pops," he replied. "You for real? Wow, he hit more than one cop that night?" Reem couldn't believe it. "No cap, we found out later the officers were rushed to the hospital, they were already gone by the time my pops was arrested." Rashad knew that Big Shad was lucky that he wasn't killed on the spot. "I already know how the fuck this is playin' out, man. I'm expecting the worse because I know the worse is gonna come."

Reem took a bite of his cheesesteak. "That's aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, that's a serious crime right there," he added. "Tell me about it," replied Rashad as he spit on the ground in frustration. "The reason that I'm fucked up about it the most is cause it's so much shit that me and my pops didn't even get to touch on. It felt like me and him were definitely bonding a lot more, and I know most of that is because I decided to hop in the game. He looked at me as his protégé, and all I think about now is he's looking at so much time."

"They didn't run in ya'll crib for no reason, so that means that somebody was talking but hopefully nothing got leaked back and he'll spank whatever tip they thought they might've had. He drawled, hittin' a cop though, Big Shad's a wild card." Reem asked Rashad when he was going to talk to his father, that's if he could. "Your mom still on some shit?" asked Reem.

"You already know she is and she's traumatized off the strength of how fast everything happened. She knew what field he was in and he tried to keep it on the low as much as possible. Mom damn near got caught in the crossfire with bullets flying everywhere, shit was spooky, even I could've been killed in the process, it was wild," replied Rashad. "She works constantly so I know that it stresses her on top of her worrying about me and what I'm doing out here, you feel me? The summer been bittersweet." Big Shad's trial was coming up in a few weeks and Rashad didn't know what the

outcome was going to be officially, but one thing for sure was that Big Shad was looking at a lot of time regardless and that was going to cause a major diversion on everything. Rashad was smart, but it still bothered him how hard life would be as a teenager without having his father there, even when as of late it felt like part-time.

“I must be the worse son in the world.”

“How are you the worse son in the world?” asked Reem confusingly. “Your mom doesn’t resent you.” Rashad spit on the ground out of frustration again. “Maybe you’re right, I’m just saying that I wouldn’t be surprise if she did, especially depending on the verdict and let’s not forget that I look just like that man, she’d probably can’t stand looking at me at this point, you feel me?” Rashad explained that he was going to try to visit his father in a couple days. “Keep your head up, man, Pops’ a brave dude, a real nigga too,” Reem added. “He’s done a lot for a lot of people, fed a lot of niggas out here.”

“That’s a Fendi. I’ll visit him and we’ll chop it up. I’ll let him know that you asked about him and told me to tell him to keep his head up while he’s in this jam,” replied Rashad as he noticed Reem’s gun in the back of his pants. “Since we’ve been in the mix, has anybody tried you yet?”

“What you mean?” asked Reem. “Anybody tried to rob you for your shit yet?” Reem laughed at the question. “Nope, not at all.” When you were in the trap, it was a gamble each night. “You think you’d be ready to use it if it came to it?” Reem thought hard before answering Rashad’s question.

“Hmm,” replied Reem as he took a swig of water. “I think so, I haven’t thought it about it for real, for real.”

“You better, shit, niggas get licked all the time. We’ve heard and saw firsthand of niggas who wasn’t strapped and they either caught a slug or got robbed. How you know if somebody isn’t going to set you up to get robbed?” Reem thought about it again and tried to switch the subject up. “Anyway, I’m ready to link up with one of my bitches that I bagged down South street and you bringing up hypothetical questions. Come on, we out.”



Today was the day of Big Shad’s court date. All Rashad kept doing in his head was thinking about how much this was going to affect his home life, he was older, and Juanita didn’t have to worry about taking care of him per se, except for worrying about his wellbeing. It was evident that she felt like she failed as a mother being that her son became a drug dealer. To deal with some of the frustrations, she began to consume alcohol but not too excessively; it was her gateway to get rid of the stress temporarily and escape from reality. There were a couple times where she left work early from being stressed out, unable to focus without randomly crying.

Big Shad had a lot of supporters at his trial even though he was painted as an evil individual with malicious ways. There were people there speaking positive on his behalf. But

it didn't matter much because it seemed as if the Judge already had her mind made up. The trial lasted for a while. Rashad was biting his nails in suspense the whole time. "All Rise" said the bailiff as she was about to read the verdict. The verdict was in and Big Shad was found guilty on all charges, it was unanimous.

The Judge was talking to Big Shad as he stood there silent while looking at the judge while occasionally looking back at Juanita and Rashad. After the Judge was done and before banging her gavel, you could cut the tension with a knife, it was intense inside the courtroom.

Big Shad was hit with 25 years. Rashad's head went down completely, and he continuously kept shaking his head and Juanita began to cry profusely as the cuffs got put back on Big Shad slowly. Big Shad looked up at his family and he silently said that he loved Juanita and Rashad and winked at Rashad. The judge left immediately. The first thing he did as he got up was hug his mother and told her that everything was going to be okay. "We got this, mom, I'm sorry," he said. She caressed Rashad's head as she kissed his forehead. Juanita told Big Shad she loved him back as he was walking back out. Big Shad stayed sturdy and show his poker face because he was holding himself accountable. He held himself to a higher standard, so he accepted and respected the verdict. Reem was at trial to show support as well. He walked over and touched Rashad's shoulder as the jury began to walk out too.

The news stations were outside trying to talk to Juanita and Rashad, and they were ignoring everybody and everything. It was a lot to grasp and process in the moment, even Reem had to tell them to back up along with the rest of the family. “Move the fuck out of the way!” hollered Reem. “Show some respect.” The Federal Detention Center was where Big Shad was going to be located at in Center city, which held men and female prisoners. “I’ll get up with you in a little bit, bro. Hit my phone, have a good day, Ms. Juanita, I love you.” said Reem as he pounded Rashad and gave Juanita a hug and got into a separate wheel. Rashad just knew that things would never be the same, he’d be missing that structure.

THE WEIGHT

*I*t's been 10 years since Big Shad was found guilty of all his charges and was sentenced to 25 years. Rashad was now 26 years old. There are 5 years and forever left to go and Rashad has graduated from college but didn't pursue his college hoop dreams. He kept his focus on his schooling even when in the trap, he also kept a cool head. It was a good experience for Rashad dealing with quantities of marijuana. He graduated from selling small amounts to larger quantities. If he had to look at it from a society standpoint, he was supposed to have his own apartment, pushing his own wheels, and fresh lays of clothes and money, which he had since he saved a lot. He bought 10-30 pounds at different times. As he got older his paranoia level skyrocketed, but he made the shit work.

Rashad and Reem were still as inseparable as ever. Reem

wasn't as smart when it came down to the profits though. He did his thing, but Rashad was more of the brains and still had to school him on things so he could be profiting better. He explained to him along their journey from when they were late teens until adults, that's when they were buying smaller amounts to sell for a slightly higher amount. Reem would only be profiting about 10 % but when that percentage was no longer the usual amount that he was used to and it was tens of thousands of dollars, the greed and fear factor increased. They were now deep in. Years ago, Rashad already asked Reem if he had to use his pistol would he and back then Reem wasn't sure if he would, but when potential robberies outweighed penalties, it would get dark out here.

Rashad was fully prepared and studied the business and followed his father's footsteps. His biggest thing was to make sure he was good even though Big Shad was doing his time like a real nigga was supposed to, he didn't bitch up at all. After the verdict, he still held his head high. Hector only had Rashad moving marijuana, but Hector was the plug for the kilos as well. Rashad alongside Reem, had other childhood friends that were going to become workers, niggas that he could trust to not fuck business up, no new niggas. Rashad would keep working with Hector, however, the money wasn't going to be that much. Big Shad had plenty money saved for the family, and he had a separate amount of money for Rashad. Big Shad had the thought in the back of his mind that one day he was probably going to be doing hard time,

but he was in position to make sure his people were still financially stable. Rashad was going to use the money to make more money.

The main workers that were down with Rashad and Reem were Bleek, Preem, Stafh, and Slim. Preem and Stafh were cousins. The rest were young ones that came up under Bleek & Stafh, but for them to be young they were able to be contained and kept aligned, loyalty was everything and they were just that. Each crew member from the North were from different walks of life but became cool in their earlier years in their twenties. Bleek ran his block which was on 8th and Diamond. Bleek was relentless when it came to his block. He would trap in front of kids; it didn't matter to him. He would serve fiends right at the 8th and Diamond playground. He could be unpredictable. Bleek survived a shooting during a dice game a couple years ago. Preem was from East Mt. Airy, but always came to North Philly. He met Reem and Rashad at a bar a couple years back. Stafh and Slim were from Strawberry Mansion, one of the worst neighborhoods in the city, they were on the eastside of Fairmount Park.

The Crew were posted at the Tioga Apartments, 18th and Tioga. They were all bidding. Wild street niggas were on the block, all good vibes. Hector came through as well and dapped everybody up. "What you got for us?" asked Rashad. "We got some shit coming, we definitely will flood the block

with this shit. “Yeah?” asked Rashad. “Well, whatever it is you need us to move, we can move it with no problem.” Everybody agreed. Money was the motive, North had loyal soldiers who were down for whatever if they were getting compensated. “We’ll link up in a couple days. I’ll get back to ya’ll once I make this trip down south. I’ll need you to come with me on one of those trips too, you heard me?”

“I’m with you,” replied Rashad. “What part of down south?” Rashad was curious. “Mississippi.” Rashad was unaware that Hector had a connection with a Mexican drug cartel. “Keep your phone by you, ya’ll niggas watch ya’ll body out here, streets can get ugly really quick,” said Hector. He and his driver pulled off. “I’m ready to get to work,” said Preem. “Real shit, I’m ready to get to this money for real for real,” added Slim. “I mean that real paper.”

“We pushed mad pounds of weed and the Percocets, but this is some whole other shit now,” said Rashad. “So, once we get the work, we apply pressure to the blocks. We already have a crew that holds shit down from different areas and we have solid niggas that are on go and we have business minded members that we can trust.”

“What blocks you talkin’ about?” asked Reem. “As much as possible, from Frankford Ave, Armingo Ave, Richard Allen, and parts of west oak lane, etc.” said Rashad. “Erie & Allegheny, uptown, no picks.”

In North Philly, it was narrow, they didn’t have to worry about any surveillance cameras because they only had to

keep their eyes peeled for undercovers who were trying to directly buy from them. The crew all made up a noise to use when they spotted or had a hunch about a possible cop in the area looking to score for a drug bust, making them check each end of the block. Shit ran smooth and fluctuated; everybody was happy since they were making money. There were never any complaints from Hector because he always got paid too. Their operation ran smoothly, it was satisfaction at its finest.

Rashad and Hector met at a local deli out North as Hector sat on the hood of his wheel while he and Rashad reminisced. "You've come a long way, you're not the same youngin' you use to be. I appreciate how your crew moves too, your pops would be proud of you, for sure," said Hector. "Yeah," replied Rashad as he looked down in the face. "What's up with you?"

"Just wish the nigga was out here, been a dime already,"

"Time bites you in ass and comes fast like that, he's strong." Hector put his arm over Rashad's shoulder. "He got plenty on his books, he's knockin' that time out like the sturdy old head he is, you heard me?" Rashad smirked. "He will see how I'm living when he gets out too."

Hector told Rashad that he was going to send Big Shad a kite and he was going to take care of him. "I appreciate that, you know it's all love. I'm about to head up out of here, I need to get a few things to down South Street and I need to get some sleep, I'm tired as hell."

“No doubt, get with me in a few days when it’s time to reup.”

“You already know, watch your body.”

Rashad went walking down to Center City, then he was going to go down South Street to go shopping for some new fits and to cop some sea-moss at Black and Nobel, a popular urban bookstore, and one of the best bookstores in Philly. He always wanted to make sure that his health was on point, and that his body had the right minerals, he was on his solo tip of course. He also migrated over to Ishkabibble’s to get a cheesesteak; he was a greedy nigga. He walked over to the streetwear store called “Lit & Company.” It was fire ass wardrobes over there when it came to getting top notch drip. After he came out of the store to put his stuff back inside his wheel, he locked his door, and once he looked up, he saw a couple of women walking towards him and one of them stood out to him. It made him take a double look. It was five of them, and Rashad felt that it was only right to stop this one right in her tracks.

“Excuse me, excuse me,” said Rashad as they all stopped in unison. “How are you doing today, gorgeous? Can I have a word with you or two?” Rashad grabbed her hand gently. “Do you have a name for me? Rashad’s aura was smooth and she looked at her girls in a surprising way. She was speechless and shocked that he’d stopped her. “Forgive me If I come off too strong but you caught my attention right away, what’s your

name and where you headed to?" The other women stood there in the background while Rashad was talking. "I'm fine and my name is Carla." Rashad gave her a smooth head nod and pulled her hand up to his lips as he kissed the back of her hand. "Nice to meet you Carla, you're beautiful Mami and my name is Rashad." He let it be known that he was grateful to be in her presence. Carla had long black hair, perfect lips that were voluptuous, a flat stomach with a tattoo on it, she was short with big juicy breasts, brown eyes that were perfect and eyebrows that were perfect as well. She was dime. At that point, Rashad was examining her from her face to her shoe game. She had on Jordan Concorde, a white designer T-Shirt with a blue jean jacket. "Thank you, I appreciate it."

Rashad could tell that Carla wasn't the average chick. He'd never seen her in his life but she definitely had the North Philly aura, she had an edge to her and wasn't easily impressed by anything, and he assumed that she had her own which was sexy in itself. "Hey ladies, I have a question for you, how would you feel if I took your homegirl off ya'll hands for the rest of the day and bring her back to you later?" Rashad knew what he wanted and wasn't about to back down from a challenge just in case Carla wasn't an easy catch. "What makes you think that I wanna go with you?" she asked, and Rashad smiled. "Let's ask your girls and see what they say, well, Ladies? What you think?" One of her friends which happened to be Carla's best friend, walked up close

and examined Rashad. “Girl, he’s fine, let’s not be dumb now.”

“Yup, listen to your friend, clearly she has your best interest,” said Rashad as he rubbed his chin. He rubbed his hands with confidence as he slouched up against his wheel and smirked. “I won’t hurt you; I promise you that whatever you wanna do we’ll do and then we out, straight like that. The ball is in your court, baby.” Carla informed Rashad that she pushed her own wheel and followed up by telling him that she was tempted but didn’t have the time and would rather stay with her homegirls. “I dig your energy though,” she said. “I see, I see. That’s cool. At least let me get your number, I promise that I won’t stalk you, but I like how you carry it. Especially the way you strutted down the sidewalk. I’m observant, my love.” Carla rubbed her lips together; her lip gloss made her lips look tasteful. “Hand me your phone,” said Carla as she put her hand out. Rashad gave it to her and she put her math in. “Thank you, I’ll be in touch real soon,” said Rashad as he smirked again. “Enjoy the rest of your day, Mami, and God bless you.” The women walked away and Rashad watched as they got farther down the street. Carla looked back and saw him watching. He nodded his head and he waved as she smiled. She shook her head as if he was already annoying her, but she respected the resolute, waved back and smiled. When Rashad told Carla that he would be in touch real soon, he didn’t waste no time and wanted to meet up with her as

soon as possible. He set up a date with her at Del Frisco's, he wanted to make sure it was the best vibe possible, also giving him more time to get to know her. He was glad that she was entertaining him.

It was 8:00 on a Saturday night and he reserved a spot for them, Carla was impressed. She chose to meet him there. "Check you out, I see you running game on me," said Carla and Rashad chuckled. "Naw, it's not even like that, I told you I was hittin' you real soon, that soon couldn't wait that long, how are you tonight?"

"I'm blessed, I can't complain, a little tired but I also am hungry. Thank you for inviting me out," replied Carla. "No need to thank me, I wanted to see you and catch a vibe with you and talk." Carla smiled. "Your makeup and outfit are on point, you looking gorgeous." Rashad was gassing Carla up, but she loved it and soaked it all up. Rashad ordered the Filet Mignon and Carla had the roasted chicken with the Russet Potatoes.

"It was something about you that I had to run down on you, I'm still surprised that I never ran into you before now," said Rashad. "I'm low key, I work a lot, I rarely like to be seen, only if I'm with my girls when we occasionally shop," said Carla. "I feel that, what is it that you do for a living? You have a career?" Rashad was curious. "I work at Illuminations Hair Salon, but I'll be leaving and opening up my own shop."

"Wow, I fuck with that, that's dope, where you transferring to? Your own hair salon?"

“No, my own fashion boutique, but it won’t be in Philly, I’ll be in Delaware.”

Rashad had a long face for a second. “Hmm, I see,” he replied as he seemed disappointed. “What’s wrong? Are you good?” Rashad looked up. “I’m good, I guess I’m on borrowed time with you, huh?” Carla shook her head. “No, not necessarily, it’ll be a couple months before that happens, it’s just nothing here anymore. I want to change up my pitch and see something else, been here too long and I feel stagnant, you feel me?”

“No doubt,” replied Rashad. They got their food and began to dig in. They still conversed as they ate. “You seem like you have a lot of paper, you’re not super flashy but I can tell by the aura on you.” Rashad wiped his mouth with his napkin. “Oh yeah?” Carla nodded her head. “Yes, tell me what you do and don’t lie to me either, keep it a bean with me.” Rashad took another bite of his food before answering. “I mean, I think you have the right idea about me. But yeah, pharmaceuticals.” Carla appreciated the honesty from Rashad. “I get it, so you wanna be that typical rich drug dealer, huh?”

“I wouldn’t say that. I won’t fraud like I was always dead pop and had no food on the table. I grew up in a two parent household out North, finished schooling, and did community college. I just fell in love with it, nothing drove me to what I do besides my friends and surrounding. It was a rush and I didn’t want to ask for things anymore, you feel me?”

Carla kept listening. “How did your parents feel about your decisions that you made?”

“My pops was one of the biggest street niggas in the city of Philly. He’s booked right now, he actually put me on game to a lot of shit when it came to the streets. I started out on some low-level shit before I graduated higher, but you’re right as far as me not being a flaunter, that’s the easiest way to get in a jam. Me and mom have a rocky relationship, it’s been a while since me and her talked because of my actions and what I do. I can tell this type of shit doesn’t impress you and I respect that.” For 10 years, Rashad and Juanita went back and forth a lot when they used to be inseparable.

“That’s real shit, I’m a North Philly chick through and through.” Carla grew up on Lehigh, but she moved over to West Oak Lane. “I could’ve chosen that path, but I aspire, I never let that materialistic shit phase me after a while. I’ve been there and done that when dealing with street niggas, there was never no positive result and I had to switch it up. I have entrepreneurship dreams and I’m gonna manifest those dreams.”

The two enjoyed their food and both were stuffed. “This isn’t the end game for me, I don’t want to do this forever, I enjoy life and rather live my life that way. I love dope ass music, Art, poetry, etc.” Carla explained how she got into fashion and how she was multitalented by knowing how to do hair and being one of the best hair stylists in North Philly. She built up a large clientele, and also had a clothing line on

the side she was working on. Many people in the neighborhood loved it, which encouraged and hyped her up enough to save money and open her own shop. “What’s the name of your brand?” asked Rashad. “It’s called “Diva Society”, it’ll have jumpsuits, earrings, the whole nine, I can’t wait, man, it’s gonna pop.”

“I’m happy for you, I like how you carry it, for real.”

“I appreciate that a lot, it’s only up from here. I can’t work under anybody for the rest of my life.” Rashad admired the mindset that Carla had. “For sure, I feel like you can tell who enjoys what they do for a living from the ones who are miserable. I know can’t nobody tell you nothing, you’re gonna get it by any means necessary, boss chick vibes, I like that. This might be real forward and maybe too forward, but I want to be around for all that you want to accomplish.” Carla’s eyebrows rose in surprise. “Is that right? But you don’t even know me like, how can you be so sure about something that quick?”

“I know what I want, and since the day that I ran into you, you’re the only one that has been on my mind, it was a certain energy that I couldn’t resist, and when a man wants something, he goes after it and doesn’t waste time. Now, I know many men probably bid on you because of how you carry it, but I’m interested and for the simple fact that you even entertained dinner, I know I’m doing something right, right?” Carla started to blush. “You’re right about that, you’re real sweet.”

“I want to see more of you if it’s possible. I’m not an average joe type of nigga, done a lot of shit at a young age, I’m not impressed by dumb shit, I don’t have a whole bunch of women that I’m juggling, and I be on tunnel vision and taking care of business,” expressed Rashad. Carla didn’t judge Rashad for being a street nigga, but it did alarm her, and she had a decision to make whether she wanted to keep it pushing or to give him the benefit of the doubt that he wasn’t going to be a drug dealer forever and that being legit was in his future. “I’m just not the type of woman at this stage in my life that plays games. I’ve dealt with too many young-minded niggas that thought I was impressed with a bag and they either got booked or got killed. Me and you both are from North; we know how this goes.” Rashad unfortunately had to agree.

“No cap, its looks like we’re finished. I won’t twist your arm, we’re fresh. I don’t know what this is or what it will be, but I have your number and you have mine, and whatever is meant to happen will happen, how does that sound?” asked Rashad. “That sounds perfect, thank you for treating me to dinner and I’ll talk to you when I talk to you, you have a good night,” replied Carla. Rashad watched as Carla walked out of the restaurant and he sat in a daze.

He was thinking to himself that he wanted her to be his and he was going to put in the work to put her under his arm. It was easy if Rashad wanted to bag every chick that he ran into because he had the natural suave, but he knew that most

were just money hungry and he wasn't feeling a chick who had ulterior motives or wanted clout from him. He had the "these hoes are for everybody" mentality, but he could recognize a real one when he saw one and Carla was just that. There was nothing that Rashad had that Carla couldn't get on her own; she never went without because she was a pure hustler who was inspired to succeed with or without a man.

THE COMPETITION

Successful drug dealing wasn't as difficult as most people made it out to be. The North Philly crew had a solid stamp on their side and their blocks were doing numbers, they had all the keys to running a solid business. There was another crew that set up shop in South Philly, known as "SP". Geez was the head honcho on that side of town, a true ruthless son of a bitch and he was about to have shit on lock. He was SP through and through. He had the same story as the next nigga growing up crack ass broke, barely had nothing, and had to fend for himself. South Philly was known for the Italian market. For the racism back in the early 60s and 70s. Geez's family was involved in the race riots and the mistrust was still intact around that area. Geez was from 23rd & Pierce Street and his crew that he came up with

were down Passyunk, and some were located down Tasker. Geez knew the drug trade and dabbled in different varieties. As a teenager he started with kilos of tree and graduated to coke. As early as he came off the porch, it was a surprise to him that he was never arrested and never got robbed. A motherfucker knew better than to try him like that without ultimately paying the price for it. Geez was fierce with how he operated, nothing else mattered beside the price that he could live with, making sure the product he fucked with was nothing less than quality.

Little did the city of Philly know, turf wars would become an epidemic between North and South criminal organizations, any way possible to eliminate the competition. Geez's main crew members were Feezy, Sha, Buck, Relly and Dot. As far as Sha and Dot, they played on 22nd & Moore Street and 27th & Dickinson. Geez was at Point Breeze Deli, the owners were used to the loitering, but SP brought a lot of business to the store.

Geez was sitting outside of his wheel blowing a loud pack as Feezy sat in the passenger side. Geez blew the pack in the air. "What's up, my nigga, you good? You seem like you in deep thought," said Feezy. Geez smirked, "It's about that time to expand over to the other side," he said. Geez wanted to have everything on lock, he wanted the city to himself and flush the others out. He hated a threat, and the North side were flourishing the streets and SP's money flow wasn't as great as it used to be.

“You sure about that, bro? You think we ready for that?”

“Yeah, nigga, it’s time to expand.”

Geez knew the risk of expanding to specific locations but he didn’t care, nonetheless. He was the type of nigga that didn’t feel guilty about any of his actions about profiting from addicts and their miseries. He went to the furthest extent possible to get what he wanted. “Where was you thinking of expanding at?” asked Feezy. “You know niggas could get licked or smoked, right?” Geez looked at Feezy as if he was acting like a punk with 21 questions and it annoyed him instantly. Feezy’s angle was about the state of awareness and territory takeover isn’t as easy as it sounded. Geez was known to rob other dealers and buyers and as he got older, he made sure he surrounded himself with the same day one’s he grew up with. The wolves always had to eat even though he sometimes would treat his crew like shit, but greed was a for sure thing and that could change you.

The North side crew that Rashad ran disregarded violence as much as possible, he didn’t want to set the tone with that, however SP did the opposite, whether it was minor or major situation, Geez was rapped out. SP was loyal regardless.

“Why are you asking me a million questions, nigga? I want to take over this fuckin’ city, this city is supposed to be ours,” replied Geez. Feezy shrugged his shoulders before answering. “I thought it would be easier and logical to link up with other dealers, better resources and especially on the

north side.” Even though Geez was a boss, he soaked up what Feezy said but stood firm on what he wanted. “Nah, fuck that we’ll figure it out, we’ll figure out the activity as far as where the jakes be at, and we’ll figure out the rats as well.” SP caught wind of North Philly running it up and fiends flocked with the coke and heroin that was being sold. Feezy knew that Geez was a hot head when he felt challenged within authority, but he was his main shooter, so he was respected. Rats were toxic but that strategy was thrown out the window because power structure was important and it was basically looked at as destruction, although it was part of the game. Violence was essential to apply, and SP couldn’t risk the competition to rat on the main supplier. Cutting off the supply made no sense, no money meant no business, but it was something that he thought of anyway, though.

“When do you want to expand onto their side?”

“As soon as possible. We’ll introduce ourselves the best way possible, it’ll be biblical. We’ll make it fun for them, they have no choice in the matter, anyway,” smirked Geez. Feezy looked at Geez. “We’ll run this whole shit, for sure that. Mark my words, nigga.”

SP dealt with cocaine. They cut their coke with baking soda or sugar. Even though that raised eyebrows, they gave out a decent number of samples to create the demand for it.

The product was still good either way but cutting it with sugar wasn’t the smartest idea because of being able to

discern the difference between baking soda from the cocaine product. In most cases, beef was handled internally but SP hoped to give the North side a run for their money. SP was no stranger to when it came to spending money, they made good clean profit. The problem with them was they were too focused on flashing paper instead of worrying about putting it to good use, and they were too nonchalant sometimes, they always partied. They went to clubs, tricked on strippers and hoes, etc.

Once Hector's plan with the new shit came on board, it was going to get dark for SP. Geez' plan was to play dirty, but it was all fair game in the field. Geez was going to have it where he would make anonymous tips about illegal drug activities on the other side. He would send over some of his workers to peep the hours of operation and where their stashes were, and the times that they did it. The North side began getting confused because they had no idea where this was coming from but didn't panic because they weren't messy to the point where Cops would find anything. At first, the cops took the information and acted on it, but began to start being more cautious after tips ended up failing. SP had the mindset of creating the monopoly when calling them. SP was sloppy and dope junkies were different types of people. They would get their high, but SP also came off as not reliable when answering calls that went against format of the hustle. It would piss Geez off when his workers were on some

bullshit. The worse thing that could happen was losing your credibility on the street and once that happens, you were in bad shape. The key to the operation was also staying steps ahead.

A couple of SP members drove to Hunting Park that following week. Hunting Park was another notorious drug block that North was on top of. A lot of addicts came from beautiful neighborhoods who ended up getting hooked. It didn't matter to the point where they shot up as soon as they copped their drug in Hunting Park, it was horrendous. Even leaving their needles right on the ground and kept their asses moving. A couple workers were serving their product when one of Geez's workers pulled up to the corner in a black Chevy Tahoe, five came out of the wheel.

Geez was the first one out from the passenger side. He got out slowly and looked around as he noticed a few members from North and one of the workers noticed him watching him. He walked across the street slowly because of the vibe he got. "What you niggas doing over here?" the worker boldly asked. Geez looked at him and gave a psychopathic look. "Do you know who you're talking to?" Rashad's worker was thrown off and he looked back at one of his friends who was slowly migrating over as well. "I suggest you and your man get up out of here before I get pissed off," said Geez very nonchalantly. "This ain't what you want." The worker had a defeated look on his face especially when they were outnum-

bered on the corner. SP drew all their hammers simultaneously. Geez winked at the worker as he slowly walked away but before doing so, Feezy grabbed his hammer from his waist. "Go on, nigga, be out, this our block now. We runnin' shit. Go tell your boss, nigga, we SP."

Rashad's worker went to inform him about what happened down at Hunting Park. He told him that it was members from the Southside. Rashad was angry from jump street but respected and commended them for not going out on a suicidal mission while being outnumbered.

Rashad sent a group message out to everybody and they met up on 11th and Master Street in the parking lot near the Renaissance Garden leasing office. They all got out. "Yo, what the fuck is going on?" asked Reem. The worker explained what happened as he stuttered being nervous. "These niggas came out of nowhere and made us get off the block," he said. "I was ready to draw but it was only me and my man on the block and it was five of them. What was I supposed to do?"

"Stand up for yourself against them niggas, what you think?!" yelled Reem. Rashad had to relax Reem. "You're too emotional right now, chill out. I need to figure who he is. Anybody got any information on who this nigga is?" asked Rashad. "Nah," said the worker. "All I know is they're from

the Southside.” Everybody tried hard to wrap their brain around this situation. “Let me make this call quick, hold tight.” Rashad called Hector to see if he knew anything about a rival crew on the other side. “We’ll get to the bottom of this shit. Hector knows everything.” After a few rings, Hector picked up. “Yo, what’s the deal?” asked Hector as he answered. “I can’t call it. But look, I have a situation and I need some answers.” replied Rashad. Rashad swapped out prepaid cellphones for his young workers and had them go back to another one of their spots while the rest figured this out. “One of my workers had a run in with another crew from the southside, you know anything about a crew on that side?” Hector thought about it for a minute. “Now that I think about it, I did hear about nigga that be on Point Breeze on that side, a nigga named Geez, I don’t know too much about it him though, he’s the only one I know that has shit going on. He has some clout for being a ruthless type of nigga, never done business with him,” explained Hector.

From that piece of information, Rashad was thinking about the possibility of maybe being able to chop it up with Geez and be reasonable. It was hard to bargain with some rival dealers who wanted to make a name for themselves because they were to set in their ways and wanted everything for the taking.

Dealers looked at themselves as “Alpha Males” as if they were the head honcho of their unit. If you were looked at as a

pawn then there was nothing to talk about face to face. “What’s the move bro? I’m on go.” Said Preem. Rashad knew that he could potentially talk to Geez because of his street status. Geez wouldn’t have no problem being diplomatic for everybody to flourish without stepping on each other’s toes, at least that was Rashad’s assumption, but not knowing Geez at all made the risk of it going the opposite of how he saw it even greater. Rashad was underestimating Geez’s evil purity and egotism even before meeting him. As he finished the conversation with Hector on the phone, he made sure his crew was calm. “I’ll hit you back,” said Rashad to Hector.

“I should’ve whipped those lil’ nigga’s asses for making us look like we bitches!” screamed Reem. “How they let them stroll them like that?” Rashad couldn’t believe what was coming out of Reem’s mouth. “And then what? How logical would that have been if they were outnumbered?! We would’ve lost two soldiers right there in the street. You can’t really say they folded; they did what they were supposed to in that moment.”

“I agree,” added Slim. “It wasn’t beneficial. We not risking our lives for nothing, for having too much pride, you sound crazy right now. They would’ve got dropped and we wouldn’t know where it came from. Shit, at least we got the name of the main man.”

“Listen up, I’ll come up with a plan where we can meet up on mutual grounds to try and sort this shit out before it

gets ugly and it's warfare," suggested Rashad. Reem still seemed confused. "You positive?" he asked. "You think he'll comply when you find out who he is?" Stafh followed up. "I mean, it's only one way to find out." Reem felt Rashad was being too friendly when it came to rivalry and it kept annoying him, his face broke up and Rashad noticed. "What now? Speak up."

"We just have to make sure we're runnin' shit correctly; we've based our reputation from RESPECT FIRST and never will we break the code of the streets. I just hate when a knucklehead nigga tries to hop in the mix and takeover on some nut ass shit. These be the type of niggas that disrespect the customers they're serving, then risk them snitchin' from not being treated right, and the other crew might even snitch on us to get rid of the competition."

Reem had a point and he didn't want to be alongside that. "And you won't, trust me," said Rashad. "Business is money and money is business," explained Rashad. "As long as we do right by OUR customers, keep shit leveled, we'll be good. If they decide to be our competition then that's on THEM, they'll dig a deeper hole for themselves. A fiend will turn on their asses in a heartbeat, let it blow over, bro." Even with Rashad's way of thinking and trying to keep peace and humanity, he still was wrong because a satisfied customer could turn on you too because all they cared about was their next high. "You're being too naïve, bro," said Reem. "But I trust your judgement."

Meanwhile, SP were inside one of their dope houses discussing business. “Man, even when we set up on Hunting, shit didn’t even make a difference, whatever it is that they have, is fuckin’ up our business,” said Relly. “I feel like we have to eliminate those niggas one by one!” Geez didn’t care about anything but being the king of the whole city, he had no morals or principles, and his mindset was affecting business. SP made money but didn’t move disciplinary like the North side. They were scaring business away, and bodies were dropping. “I agree, this shit is goofy,” said Shizz. Bloodbaths was drawing too much heat but Geez was living off fear.

Later that evening on Tioga St, the crew were talking about how hot shit was in the city, a game plan had to be set in motion soon so business could continue to thrive. “Shit, we have enough paper that we could possibly higher a few snipers, what you think about that?” suggested Bleek. “Pick them niggas right off. Once Again, Rashad had to bring them back to reality. “Do we have any military connections? No. Do we have any connections to Greeks? No. Do we have any connections to any mafia motherfuckas? NO.” Rashad had to be willing to possibly negotiate or worst scenario would be going to war over territory if Geez didn’t oblige. There were two types of people in the world. It was the ones who cared

about reputation and respect, and the ones who cared about power and fear.

Hector had ties down the west of Mississippi. So Rashad, Hector and two young soldiers flew to Mississippi. The Black Tar heroin that was going to be brought back to Philly wasn't going to be pure, but it was just as potent. And it didn't matter to the fiends how they were going to get their hands on it and how they ingested it, but they for sure were going to come back like clockwork. It wasn't mixed with Fentanyl, which meant it was harder to mix and there were less causes of death and overdoses which was always a good thing. It was already tested before it was copped so it would be ready to sell. Hector had to make sure that Rashad was on board and he was. North was smart about their dealings because they didn't make it overly expensive to the point where fiends wouldn't buy it, they made the price cheaper. They came back from Mississippi and it was about to be UP.

The samples were given out to see how it would do on the streets. SP on the other hand wasn't as successful because their product was too high, they were bitter in the process, and their connect wasn't as solid as Hector's. Rashad trained his soldiers to never give the fiends a hard time, to be nice to them and they will capitalize. It was to the point where fiends were satisfied, and they gave their source to other fiends to bring more business to them which was appreciated. One of the soldiers even rented out a house of a fiend to buss traps. Violence was the resort for SP so they could keep

a form of power, but not taking heed it could result in being told on by thinking they're above their customers. Hector eventually was able to connect the two parties because though he didn't know Geez personally, he was plugged in with certain people and had the clout to make it happen. Hector knew someone who was affiliated with the other side.

Rashad and Geez met up at a spot in Roxborough that wasn't hot. They had a mutual associate who was solid and was able to link them both up with no strings attached. Both crews were deep because neither one knew where it could lead. The only two that walked towards each other was Rashad and Geez and they did it slowly. "I wanted to know why you gave the go to mess with a couple of my young soldiers like that. That's not how business is ran, homie. You sure you want to go to war over corners/blocks? If you're driving customers away, how is that good for business? That's ultimately a loss and especially if cops get suspicious, shit has to be ran smoothly." Rashad wanted to be as clear as possible. "I don't want your actions scaring my players on these here streets. You feel where I'm coming from?" Geez sized Rashad up and looked away. "I hear what you're saying, but I'm not listening, for real." Geez had the nerve to say. Rashad could hear and smell the blatant arrogance.

"You're not listening?" Rashad asked as he was baffled.

“We need to come to a common ground so something like this doesn’t happen again. I’m not interested in war, homie. We can all eat together without railroading each other. I did my research; I know you got shit moving on the southside. You need to realize that there’s boundaries, you can’t just do what you want.” Geez shook his head. “I have different plans.” Geez kept it short with his responses and it didn’t take long for Rashad to realize that the conversation wasn’t going anywhere. He had to chalk it up that Geez had his agenda and he was sticking to it, and North had to be ready for whatever was going to come. Rashad was smart enough to know that when you played stupid games that you would win stupid prizes at the same time. “Listen, I won’t say it again, your actions can make matters worse, just fall back from the nut shit, this won’t end well for either of us, understand me?” Geez got closer to Rashad and looked him in his eye. “Whatever you say.” Geez was dismissive. Rashad’s soldiers thought for themselves and knew when to step up and stay level-headed and waited for the stamp if handling shit in the street was the last option. Both crews walked away. “How did it go?” asked Reem. “Just know, a hard head will make a soft behind, as the old heads would say,” replied Rashad as he winked at Reem. All parties pulled off. Geez’s monotone was bone chilling and super detached when speaking to Rashad. He came off psychopathic even based off face value. North was going to continue to do what they were doing because Rashad had the mindset that being successful was based off

keeping your cool, not much friendly, he thought it was an advantage to the competition, which also resulted in reaching higher levels of the food chain. When you were knee deep in the trenches, you couldn't have feelings or show any remorse and holding yourself accountable for your actions was essential, standing on what you did.

ADDRESSING ALL PROBLEMS

Detective Marcus Hayes has been a Lieutenant for fifteen years. He was determined and dedicated to his job and gave his all to it. He wanted to be the change in the city, especially coming from the slums himself. He felt that he owed it to the city of Philly. He loved his people and wanted to rid the streets as much as possible of the poison that polluted the streets. It wasn't about a paycheck for him. As a teenager he was troubled, he did a lot of dumb shit but got chances on top of chances after being a hardheaded lil' nigga. He got tired of breaking his mom's heart and fuckin' off all the time. He eventually got his act together. He suffered from a lot of peer pressure that made him earn in school suspensions and almost got expelled from high school. He was active even when being provoked but making that 180 in life post-graduation was the best thing he could've

done. As he got older and went through his metamorphosis he would be chastised and called a sellout for being a cop, but to Marcus, his life needed structure and there was nothing wrong with making change for the better. Even though some days would be better than other days, he wanted to be known as a protector, the man that people could count on, a neighborhood hero in a sense, even when wearing that shield.

Hayes grew up in the Richard Allen Public Housing Projects. The same place where Bill Cosby was from. At one point, it was the most famous project in Philly and one of the hardest high rises and toughest projects in America. Since then, it has since been updated, but it would never be recommended to go down there if you have no business or if you don't know anybody. There was no point in venturing off or it could potentially cost you to be robbed or killed.

Even with the updated buildings, the environment was as dangerous as it always was. Hayes had it rough growing up. He saw a lot as a kid that he had no choice but to see because of that hostile environment. Even cops were afraid to drive through Richard Allen because of trying to avoid being shot or shot at. The disregard of human life was scary and he lost a childhood friend from a accidental shooting, what made it worse was that it was a mistaken identity case, still the case was never solved. His friend lived down the street from him on 5th & Poplar, his friend wasn't into trouble at all. That was major eye opener and deal breaker for him, and it crushed

his spirit to the core. Some people were fortunate to get out while they could, and some were less fortunate. Richard Allen was most definitely the definition of “the trap.” From drugs, thieves, murderers, prostitutes, the whole nine yards. You had to sleep with one eye open, so it was important to stay on your p’s & q’s.

Haye’s parents had the same typical story. It was a struggle to rise out of the slums. Even still, they were determined to leave Richard Allen. During a time when it wasn’t easy to rely on retirement money, Hayes’ parents were used to living paycheck to paycheck. Eventually, they saved up enough money to buy a home and put Richard Allen in the past. They never once forgot where they came from. A lot of years living there were their best years and Hayes was able to go to college after graduation.

Their father was currently incarcerated in his early 20s for capital murder which caused the family so much pain. Hayes’ mother had to jump through many hurdles to put food on the table, even putting a price on herself to the point she had to prostitute to eat and keep the electric and water on. She felt like the trash from the trash. Hayes had two siblings, Keisha and Calvin. He and his siblings were too young to understand how it divided the family and put a setback on things.

Cops had a bad rap because of all the injustice around the world, but there were plenty of cops that served and protected the RIGHT way. Sometimes he would hop out and

play basketball with the kids, it made them happy and he felt good about it. It were the little things that counted, especially when getting that stigma of all cops being the same. After a while, Hayes didn't care anymore about how people felt about him being with the FBI. Hayes was working extremely hard to keep the city of Philly a safe environment. He kept his hopes up that the Philly drug market would change and he was going to fight back and utilize the crime in the city as much as possible. It seemed like a farfetched task; however, he was trying his hardest to build a solid unit to take down major dealers in town. It was evident that it was difficult for drug trafficking to be eradicated because of having to deal with some of the most powerful men in the world.

The dating scene for Hayes was superficial because most women were afraid to get close to him. They lived in fear of him ending up in a body bag while in the line of duty. It was scary at night being on call while a woman lay there at night by the phone praying that the worse didn't happen. His goal was to make the city's percentage higher, making sure the cops get back to their families each day and put the people in jail that needed to be there. He worked to live, but sometimes it would be the other way around because he would feel lonely. He wanted a woman to come home to daily. He wanted his queen to have dinner waiting on him when he was on his way home from a long ass day, a woman that would listen to his gripes about work on the latest action or

arrest that he had or the bath water being ready for him after he ate dinner.

The residents in the city were at war with the local drug dealers too, it was an uphill battle that they continued to lose. They started to lose hope of gaining control over their blocks without confrontation, especially the ones that have been living on certain blocks for over a decade or longer. Even though people had a certain expectation that they felt was reasonable when moving to North Philly, some would argue that they brought that problem on themselves by moving there in the first place. They didn't assume that it was going to be an open drug market, especially if they were new to that area. The dealers would often use intimidation tactics on certain residents that lived on certain blocks, and at the same time, they respected some of the neighbors. Some dealers would threaten to call the authority if they saw dealers that would trap, even still, they operated on the corners anyway. The best thing to do was make friends with them to keep them off your ass. Some residents couldn't take the madness anymore and moved away. Taking over the block was overwhelming. It was to the point where some residents were forced out because of constant run ins with trappers who would be on their steps or in their backyards. Normally, they would scatter once the cops were called, but they would always come right back later. Sometimes it was a lose-lose situation for the residents.

Buck, one of the rival crew members from the Southside, was bussin' a trap. He was one of Geez's top workers. He was a headcase, another one who wasn't too business savvy but was always on go. Buck was on 23rd and Tasker. A neighbor was outside while Buck was serving a fiend. The neighbor yelled as Buck sold to the fiend. "Hey! Get off my property with that shit!" The fiend ran away after grabbing his work and Buck looked up, aggravated at the neighbor. "I'm calling the cops right now if you don't leave!" The neighbor pointed to his phone to indicate that he was seriously calling in that moment. He had some balls to threaten a dealer because a dealer's reaction to anything could be unpredictable and you could possibly be signing your death certificate. Buck grabbed his Glock 26 from the back of his jeans and slowly started to walk towards the neighbor. The neighbor had lived on the block for a long time and didn't budge when seeing Buck approaching. "What the fuck is your problem, old head?"

"You selling on my block! That's my fuckin' problem. I've been living on this block before you were even born, and I won't tolerate this foolishness. You young punks think you're tough, selling drugs to this community." The neighbor spit to the side of Buck as he stood in front of him. Buck smirked at the man and sized him up and had his finger slightly on the trigger of his Glock. "Well, old head, I suggest you move, we

ain't going nowhere and I suggest you watch your tone unless you want some issues out here that you won't be able to come back from."

"So, you're threatening me? I'll call the cops for that too! I don't want none of this gangster shit interfering with my residence and peace of mind ." Buck started to laugh and shook his head in the process. Quickly, his face became serious and straight. He was giving the neighbor a cold ass look. "Old head, let me bring you up to speed right quick. Maybe you don't know how this shit works. You can TRY it if you want, call whoever the fuck you want. But just remember that I know what you look like, you feel what I'm saying? Do you wanna go through something?" Buck cocked his gun back and the neighbor cleared his throat before answering, "Listen, I don't want to interfere with your business or even come at you in a disrespectful way. I just wanna live comfortably. I don't want trouble. So, maybe we can establish some type of reasonable hours for you to work over here?" Buck took his finger off the trigger and sniffed. "Hmm, sounds more like it," he replied. "What do you have in mind?" The neighbor suggested that Buck enforce that his fiends come at a certain time so the neighbor and the rest of the block can be safe and at peace, at least for the most part.

The money that was being made on the street was important to be calculated. Rashad knew that if he wanted to spend drug money, he had to put the money to good use and invest in businesses around the city. He wanted to have several bank accounts that carried the money in a legal way. Rashad wanted to set up a meeting with his workers to come up with a solid plan on where to stash money to avoid being investigated, especially in their specific line of work. He had his eyes on putting money into a couple laundromats. It was the perfect idea. Rashad put in a call to Bleek. “Yo, Bleek, we need to set up a private meeting with the crew, we got some shit to discuss, ASAP.”

“Bet, what time and where we slidin’ to?” asked Bleek.

“In about an hour. Make sure everybody is at the spot and on time, I ain’t wit that late bullshit. Handle that for me.”

“Bet, say less,” said Bleek, as the two hung up.

It was a little after 7:00 PM and a fiend was walking down W. Erie Avenue. It was a woman addict, and she was walking slow; it was basically dark out. She stopped, looked at the ground, played with her hair, she was high as a kite. She was also talking to herself. Hayes was driving down the street and slowed down when he saw her, it alarmed him. “Shit,” he said to himself. This was regular shit, but she was high to the point where he was fearful that if she even

crossed the street at the wrong time, she would get splattered before she would even know what happened. He pulled over to the side and made his way over across the street. "Excuse me, Miss, are you ok?" Hayes asked as he slowly approached the woman. He approached the curb, stopping her in her tracks. She looked at him and moaned, her eyes were squinted. She was slurring her words so it was hard to understand what she was saying. She didn't show any qualities of having a drug overdose. The professional thing in that moment would've been to arrest her immediately for drug use. She looked up again as she stood there and realized he was a cop and she turned around quickly and started to run.

"Wait! STOP!" yelled Hayes. She hauled ass and he ran after her. She wasn't that fast and him jogging was faster than she was running. She was about to cross the street, she stopped in her tracks when a car beeped, she was about to be hit by the car but Hayes dived and was able to grab her just in time. They both panted heavily after the near-death experience. One of the drivers stopped, got out upset. "Crazy bitches!" The driver said as he pulled off. "You could've been killed!" screamed Hayes. He picked her up, put her inside the cop car. "You're coming with me, let's go." He sent the woman to the hospital and explained to the staff what kind of patient it was and that she needed help. As they guided her inside to help her, he stood by the wall with his head down. Moments ago, his life flashed before him for being a good Samaritan.

Hayes wasn't judgmental at all, the field he was in wouldn't allow him to be. His integrity is what mattered most to him.

It was the following morning and he went back to the hospital to follow up. He stood at the door while the waiting for the woman wake up. She was moving around looking extremely uncomfortable. He slowly opened the door; she didn't even hear him come through the door. "Where the hell am I? How did I get here?" asked the woman. "Hey, relax," replied Hayes. "I brought you here last night. You were almost hit by a car. Luckily, I got to you in time." The woman was at a loss for words, her mouth moved, and nothing came out. She laid there confused as she looked around the room. She scratched her eye and yawned, not even understanding the events that transpired the night before. "Who are you?" she asked. "I'm Lieutenant Hayes, Marcus Hayes." Her eyes grew big and she thought she was about to be arrested. "Great, I guess this is it, huh? Now what? Am I going to jail now?" Hayes walked closer to the bed, slowly but not too close to potentially scare her or make her uncomfortable. "No, that's not my twist, I want to help you." Her face scrunched up. "Help me? For what reason? Why would you need to do that?" Hayes shook his head. "It's my job, and if I could save someone, that'll do my heart good, period. There's good people out here and you're looking at one right now." The woman looked up at the ceiling as she sighed. "I've been so far gone at this point, I have nowhere to stay but on these dirty ass streets. It's hard to find food unless I'm begging or

eating out of the trash. I've been kicked, I've begged for change and I get disregarded, don't even waste your time." She started to cry.

"I'm not wasting my time. Like I said, if I can save a life, I will follow through with it." Tears slowly ran down her face. "I've tried so hard to kick my addiction, and it's so hard for me to do. It hurts me, I have nobody. My parents disowned me years ago. One day it'll be all over and I feel like I'd be doing the world a favor to be honest." Hayes felt he made her comfortable enough to sit on the chair right next to the bed.

At this point he wanted to have a deep discussion with her. "What's your name?" asked Hayes. He wanted to make sure he eased into the conversation. "That's if you don't mind me asking," as he cleared his throat. "My name is Riley." Hayes looked away for a moment. "Hmm, Riley. You're from North Philly?" Riley shook her head no. "I'm from Norristown," she replied. "I had a boyfriend that was from North Philly." Norristown was basically 30 minutes away from Philly. "Had? What do you mean had? What happened to him? "He overdosed a couple years ago. I don't feel like talking about it in depth but that's one of the reasons why I wish it was all over so I can be with him, I should've been dead already." Hayes grabbed some tissues and gave them to her and disagreed with her last comment. "That's not a good mindset to have. The mindset you should have is wanting to finally reach a point where you don't need drugs, so you don't end up like your boyfriend," said Hayes. Riley sniffed

and dried up her tears. “You will kick this; I will help you by any means necessary. My apologies for your loss, you’re here though and that’s ultimately what matters the most. It’s not the end yet.” Hayes insisted and wasn’t going to take no for an answer. From the conversation, Riley could tell that Hayes was a good guy. Riley still couldn’t fathom why he was doing this and to Hayes it was irrelevant. “Listen, I’ll be here to check on you tomorrow too. How are you feeling though?” Riley took a deep breathe. “I feel fine, a little uncomfortable but I’m relaxed, thank you for asking.” Hayes was glad to hear that. “This is what we’re going to do when you leave here, I’m going to get you fresh clothes, a place to stay, etc.” Riley’s eyes grew big. “Well, where do you have in mind? Because I don’t want to impose on anybody. “That’s nonsense. I have a specific location where you’re going to go. It’s a recovery residence on Mountain street. Trust me.” Riley looked nervous. “It’s a safe and respectful environment and they care about the wellbeing of the people that stay there,” added Hayes as Riley still looked unsure by her facial expressions. “I’m not sure how to feel about that Mr. Hayes.” Riley didn’t have much of a choice besides going back to the streets looking for the next fix while risking an overdose. What was currently being sold on the streets was lethal. “The road to recovery is what you need to look forward to. I have a friend who is there and he’s supportive and knows how to make you feel right at home and comfortable.” Hayes was persuasive. “You’re not the first and you won’t be the last,

trust me. I don't want to risk finding you stretched out somewhere."

"Fine, I will take your word for it, It's better than my current situation anyway." Hayes got up from the seat. "Good, glad you didn't fight me about this. Listen, get some more rest, I will be back, and oh yeah, make sure you eat and drink plenty of fluids, whatever they're feeding you, make sure you eat. Sound good?" asked Hayes. Riley nodded her head. "Yes, thank you again. You're not like the typical officers who would've just booked me and charged me." Hayes smirked. "Sometimes, arresting someone doesn't solve the problem but just makes it worse. Just be grateful and take advantage of this opportunity. No time like the present time." Hayes winked at Riley. "See you tomorrow, rest up." He tapped on the door as he walked out. Riley sighed again as she looked up at the ceiling for a second and then closed her eyes. Her battle with fighting this was going to be a challenge and she was unsure if she was going to be able to beat this addiction.



It was Saturday evening and Rashad was visiting his mother. Juanita moved about 20 minutes away from Philly about six months ago. She moved to Conshohocken and started working at "Tower Health Urgent Care." Though it was a tug-a-war emotionally and mentally, she had to finally accept her son for who he was. There was nothing she could do about it

in the present time besides voicing her opinion, but she couldn't stand not to be on speaking terms anymore, it had gone on long enough. They had a deep talk and even though Rashad was sounding crazy with his opinions and viewpoints, he was a grown ass man. Conshocken's crime rate was lower than average and that's where Rashad wanted to move her at. Rashad always made time to see Juanita and kept in touch almost every day or at least twice a week. He was just overly joyous that they were back on speaking terms.

Juanita got a new puppy and it was just her and the puppy. Rashad sat in the kitchen with the puppy on his lap. "I wanted you to meet a woman that I've met," said Rashad. "She's real down to earth and I know that you'd like her, for real." Juanita was surprised. "Oh, really? She's made a difference in your life?!" Rashad laughed. "Something like that, I can admit. We met down on South Street, never seen her before and that surprised me. Mom, she was looking so fine, I would've felt guilty if I didn't take a chance on it. Shit, I'm glad I did." Juanita was happy. "I'm glad to know that baby. So, when can I meet her? She has you smiling so much," Juanita pointed out.

"Funny that you asked and I'm glad you did. I made us dinner reservations at Ruth Chris later tonight. Me and her already spoke about it and she's just as excited to meet you too, how does that sound?" He asked. "I'm thrilled, what time?" "Reservations are at 8:30 so we have a couple hours before we head over. Thank you, mom. She's legit, you'll

approve, trust me,” Rashad assured. “Oh, I’m sure I will.” Rashad looked at his mom for a few seconds and his mind wondered. “What’s wrong?” Juanita asked her son. Rashad’s face slowly frowned. “I’m just worried about you. I know you’re not that far, but I worry about your happiness, that’s all. I mean, with dad being locked up and you’re always working, finding time for yourself I know is stressful. I don’t want you to feel lonely or that you don’t have a life.” Rashad was never going to lose his “Momma’s Boy” mentality. Juanita was headstrong and always held it down and was tough given the circumstances. “I love my career, I love my son, I’m in a good space, and I assure you of that, alright?”

“Mom, you don’t have to lie to me. It’s all good, I’m your son.”

“Boy, this is who I am. I’m your mom. Now, some days are worse than others, but it’s life. Don’t worry about me, I’m blessed, and matters could always be worse. You understand? I miss your father, but he made his choice, and I can’t drown in misery and insanity, or I’ll fade out. You want me to grow gray hair?” The two both laughed. “I need to hit the grocery store before I put it off and end up going tomorrow. Call me in a couple hours so I can meet you two at the restaurant.”

“Sounds good,” Rashad told his mom. The two grabbed each other’s hands. “I love you, you’re my baby boy, keep being a good man. Keep that good spirit that I know you have. You’re destined for greatness; do you hear me?” asked Juanita. “Yup, loud and clear. I appreciate you, mom,” replied

Rashad. She kissed him on the forehead. Rashad text Carla to let her know that it was still a go for dinner, and she was excited. He drove off so he could get ready.

Two hours later, they were seated, waiting for Juanita to come. After a few minutes the couple saw her talking to the waitress as she told her that she had reservations with her son, and she was guided to where they were sitting. Rashad got up as he pulled out Juanita's seat. "Here you go, mom. Mom, this is Carla. Carla, this is my mom, Juanita." The two hugged each other as she kissed Carla on her cheek. The three sat down and got acquainted. Carla and Juanita wasted no time filling each other out and having a casual conversation as Juanita took the typical route by telling Carla embarrassing stories of Rashad, but he didn't mind as he laughed along with them. They all had a good time as Juanita winked at Rashad, indicating that she approved of Carla and her innocent and shy personality.

Hayes got Riley multiple fresh pairs of shoes and clothes. He cleaned her up as well as he could and got her linked up with the recovery residence. His phone didn't ring about anything criminal related while he was with her though he was always on standby. They got out of the wheel at the same time and she followed behind him as he knocked on the door. A man

opened the door. This was the man Hayes spoke to Riley about. His name was Keith and as soon as he opened the door, the two embraced. “Ha-ha, my man Marcus, come on in, and I see you brought company with you.” Keith was delightful. “Who might this be right here?” Hayes turned around and introduced Riley to Keith. “This is Riley, Riley, this is my man Keith. I told Riley that she would be in good hands here,” in which Keith agreed as he smiled. “Nice to meet you, Riley.” Riley had a sarcastic smile on her face as the two shook hands. “Welcome, sit your bags right in the living room, make yourself at home.” Riley didn’t have much family, they had moved away to Pittsburgh and had custody of her son that she had with her ex and they did nothing to help her situation. She was 35 years old, although she didn’t disclose any personal information to Hayes other than her boyfriend passing away from the overdose. She sat on the sofa in the living room while Keith and Hayes talked in the kitchen.

“So, how did you find this one?” Keith was curious. “I was down Erie, I noticed her walking, she needs help. She thought I was ready to arrest her, so she tried to make a run for it, I chased her down, had to jump in front of a damn car to save her and my own ass. In a split second, we both almost got hit,” explained Hayes. “Jesus, that sounds chaotic man. Glad you’re still here, fuck.” Hayes scoffed. “Tell me about it, the shit happened so fast. I don’t know what possessed her to run in the middle of the street and then stop,” explained

Hayes. “Well, I mean I know why, but I didn’t think she was going to do that in that moment.”

“She’ll be fine over here, you know how this operation moves, she’ll be good, don’t worry yourself.” Keith reached his arm out for a handshake.

“I’m about to head out of here, of course I know that you can take it from here. I’m hoping she’ll stay in for a month or so,” said Hayes. “Absolutely,” replied Keith. “You know the drugs out there are wicked, maybe she knows about what’s been going on out there between the North and the South.” Hayes didn’t plan on talking to Riley about that, his sole purpose was to get her clean, just doing a good deed, but Keith did make a good point. Riley was on the streets and knew how to score and she could possibly bring down dealers in town. He looked back at Riley as she sat in the living room quiet. “Hey, Riley, I’ll be in touch, and don’t worry, this is the best place for you right now. First step was walking through the door, now you have a goal to reach.” She looked at Hayes as if she wanted to leave already but her road to sobriety was important or her days could’ve been numbered by feeding that habit. “Don’t make me feel bad, fix your face young lady,” Hayes demanded but he made her laugh. “Keep your head up, I’ll check on you real soon.” Riley waved as Hayes shut the door and as he shut the door, he looked back at the door, telling himself that he made the right move.

When Riley was high, it felt like paradise to her and she

was rid of all her current problems. She divulged this to Keith. It was like a coping mechanism. Though she was already struggling with addiction when she had a kid, she didn't stop even when her son was born. She felt absolutely nothing after a while. It was to the point where she felt untouchable and her pain was put to the side instead of dealing with it.

During her process to become clean, she was dealing with her withdrawals because her body was so used to having the drug in her system while trying to quit. Her mind was going stir crazy. She was jumpy, shaky, and she wasn't ready for how intense it was going to be. This was a long rocky road that was going to test her mental and her willpower. Keith was going to guide her every step of the way.



Riley was going on her 30th day and she was doing outstanding. Hayes went back to check on her. Her progression was smooth, and it was at a rapid pace. As Keith opened the door, she was happy to see him. "Mr. Hayes!" she hollered with a big smile on her face. "Wow, nice to see you too, this is the happiest I've seen you so far, that's great," replied Hayes. "I told you that I would be back around, I'm proud of you, I knew it would turn out this way." Riley had to admit that

Hayes was right and looked out for her best interest. “You saved me from pain and temptation from the devil, I don’t trust people and especially not the police, and I admit that I judged you too quickly,” she expressed honestly. “It’s all good, it’s beauty in the journey,” replied Hayes. Riley never thought she would see this day of actual sober living; it wasn’t in her mind that she would reach this point of being on track again.

Keith grabbed Hayes’ shoulder and co-signed how great of a man he was. “He’s always been ahead of his time and a smart man, but the biggest thing is that you were able to show accountability and accept that help, you did that on your own. It took courage to do it, he’s not only proud but I am too.” Riley walked over for a hug from both Hayes and Keith. “My pleasure,” Keith added. Riley was refreshed, rejuvenated, happy-go-lucky, it was a pleasant feeling. “I have to repay you somehow,” she said. “It’s only right that I do so.” Hayes was baffled by the gesture. “That’s not why I did it, not for a payback, really, I didn’t.”

“Come on, I insist. I know what your aim is out there, and I think I can help or at least try to. I know what you’re fighting for in the streets.” Hayes was eager, but he also didn’t want it to come off as he was using Riley as a pawn to seize drug dealers, even with her sincerity to help, especially having her around any type of temptation that will get her hooked again. Hayes sighed.

“I’m flattered and I respect that you want to play your part and help, Riley. I can’t wrap you into anything and potentially get you killed, not on my watch,” said Hayes aggressively. “Very few addicts especially heroin addicts make it out and God blessed you to be one of those individuals. If anything, the help that you can do is to influence others who are heading down the same path you did, those who are currently struggling and help them get out of that hole.” Riley put her head down in disappointment. She wanted to feel that she had a purpose. “Maybe this is my calling, though.” Hayes scratched his beard and looked at Keith for a possible cosign, but he stayed quiet and shrugged his shoulders. He didn’t know how to respond but he already suggested this earlier. “I just think it might backfire, and it’s bad enough how many plagues have descended because of this out here. The despair and hopelessness, I hate it. Your recovery is a testimony and that needs to be commended,” said Hayes.

Riley was thin, her appearance was a lot better than it was over a month ago, from her skin complexion and her weight, she gained about 10 pounds and her appetite improved. “Well, please at least think about it,” she replied. “And think about this too, keep in mind that there’s pockets that I can go in that you can’t get close to. Do you understand? I’ve seen a lot of things. I know dealers that have been selling Fentanyl and aren’t telling people.” Hayes eyebrows rose in that instant. “Wow,” he simply said. “I’ll consider it

but it's not a promise. I'll talk to my captain and we'll go from there."

"I don't know too much about the police force and how it operates, but what I do know is they will solve shit by any means necessary, even if they have to get their hands dirty. That's something that you don't have to confirm because I already know." Riley had a point; Hayes could use her tremendously.

The Black Tar Heroin was in the form of smoking it but could also be injected. The pure heroin had other ways it could be ingested without a syringe. It was originally from Mexico and the way it was processed made it sticky, that was the differential of the powder form of heroin. Since North was dealing with Black Tar, their customers smoked it instead of shooting it up. The customers loved it, especially the customers who needed something to keep their mind flowing at ease. Black Tar was an epidemic and essential because it helped to focus on observation and concentration or needed energy. North capitalized because they made sure their people were getting the full on effect and experience of the drug down to the taste and the high. Money flowed like water. Everybody ate and the soldiers were satisfied. You had to be careful not to let it go to waste. The best way to smoke was out of foil and an indication that it was cut right was the

transparency of the “trail.” Customers “chased the dragon” when melted slightly, it was tilted as it slid across the foil, then the heat was applied to it.

Though it was being used West of Mississippi and Canada, Philly got their hands on it. Reem often checked on the drug blocks that were ran, making sure everything was smooth. The tar reduced a lot of anxiety for customers and calmed down any type of intensity and tension. As months went by, no overdoses happened but as there was always negative side effects to every drug depending on how long they were used. Another side effect of Black Tar was drowsiness.



One of Rashad’s workers were posted down on the corner of Indiana Avenue and “D” Street, it was down Kensington. Not only were they tapped in with the Black Tar, but they had the Percs and Cocaine on lock too.

Another one of the workers was placing money in his pocket as he looked at his co-worker, they gave each other a head nod indicating they were runnin’ it up. One of the workers supplied another addict and as soon as they were served, a cop pulled up and was ready to arrest him. “Bro! Five-O!” he hollered a warning as they both ran. One got away and the other tripped over his own feet and the cop was able to catch up with him. “Put your hands behind your

back, right now!” He was resisting and ended up getting tased in the process. “Ahh! Shit! You ain’t got shit better to do than to fuck with me? Huh?!” It was alarming, and it raised a red flag right away because of all these months with no arrests made. The Officers found the Percs that he was selling for \$10.00-\$20.00 and an unregistered .380 pistol. Most times it was difficult for the cops to get an arrest because of how easy it was for dealers to disappear through the night. In Rashad’s camp, 9 out of 10 was smart enough to know unmarked cars. When one of the soldiers were apprehended, it didn’t take long, maybe a couple hours, for him to be replaced and be up running again. It was the luck of the draw in that instant. One of Geez’s men were in the area when it happened and as they loaded the worker inside the car, he noticed Geez.

He automatically assumed that there was a tip that was called in for illegal drug activity and SP was behind it since they wanted parts of the territory on Kensington to takeover. They kept doing things to twist the blade and cause friction between both parties, and it was working. Turns out, it was Relly who was behind it. He was spotted because he had two tatted tears on his face and a tattoo on his neck. He then began to spray graffiti on the wall as the cops pulled off. The other worker that escaped called Reem and told him what happened. Reem was at a dice game on Wishart St with a couple of the crew members. “I’m takin’ nigga’s money,” laughed Reem. His phone was ringing. “I’m

out,” he said as he walked down the street a bit. “Yo, what’s up?”

“Lil cuz just got booked,” he said.

“What? How that happen?” asked Reem. The young soldier explained about it being possible snitch activity from the other side.

“One of our people was able to flee before he got booked, he told me about the whole situation. Now we need to wait on lil cuz’s call so we can know what the deal is and what he got booked with,” explained Reem. “So, when is it time to be on go and say enough is enough? I’m sick of this fallback shit, that’s not how we supposed to carry it, man. I’m ready to draw!” screamed Reem as he slammed his hand on the table at the warehouse. “Now, what if these niggas keep rattin’ on the corners we on? Then what? You still wanna stay in that safe space of yours or are we gonna strike back and keep our reputation on the streets?” Reem was curious. Rashad sat on his chair as he rocked back and forth, his strap laid on the table. “You plan on using that?” Rashad looked up slowly. “We have a business to run, regardless. You can’t move off emotions, this is a business even with the haters in the game. They’re tweakin’ off the shit we’re doing. Them niggas ain’t stop shit, calm down.” Even still, Reem felt like his team was going out like chumps, he didn’t like Rashad’s response, his face screamed vengeance as he walked out of the warehouse.

As Reem was walking out, Rashad stopped him in his tracks. “Reem,” he said. Reem never turned around but

turned his head a little. “Don’t lose your cool and don’t do nothing stupid.” Reem smirked to himself as he walked out without responding back. Rashad wasn’t a fan of the energy that Reem presented. He called Slim and told Slim to keep an eye on Reem in the meantime, because of how erratic and maniacal he could be if things didn’t go his way. It could be a problem in the future if he didn’t calm his nerves and keep playing his position.

BUY BACK THE BLOCK

The crew was meeting up at the secondary warehouse in West Philly, and Rashad was there waiting as the rest of the members came in. Rashad was ready to get straight to the point, no time for dragging the conversation. “Come on niggas, listen up,” he said as he clapped his hands together. “I called this meeting because we have important shit we have to get straight. It’s about the paper, too.” The crew was all ears. “So, peep game, we need to have a front.” The crew looked confused at first. “What I mean is, we need to fake our profits. Our paper trail must stay CLEAN, you feel me. We need to buy some businesses, we need to fake our profits, but listen closely though, it ain’t even that simple. I’m suggesting we either do restaurants, beauty salons, and laundromats. To expand more on what I

mean, we need to think about how many customers come inside each establishment a day.”

“Explain further,” said Slim. “Ok, let’s say we claim that between 30 to 50 customers come inside the laundromat a day but really only 10 come inside a day, we’ll be fucked. When the tax agents come around, they’ll end up raising an eyebrow because they’re expecting a certain usage even with laundry products, etc. You understand? We must make our money LOOK CLEAN. Our paper is illegal.” Reem nodded his head in agreement. “Facts, customers pay in cash anyway, we take the drug money that is made and mix it with the clean and make it look like it came from the customers, boom,” said Reem as he dapped up Rashad. “Another idea that we could do, obviously since we deal with money over \$10,000, we can wash the money and trade it in for the chips at the casino. Either Rivers Casino, Sugarhouse or Parx Casino. We don’t wanna get their attention so we can trade those chips the following day. We’ll make the paper legit and tell them that we won by the gambles, and just pay those taxes, just a suggestion,” added Bleek.”

“I feel you, it won’t be a good idea to have a whole bunch of bread laying around, niggas need to make bank accounts and deposit a certain amount each week or hire someone that deals with finances that knows how to maneuver paper in a way that the state won’t know about it.” The crew were going to be top on of things. They also began to rave over the work they’ve been putting in. “I need a vacation, if I do say so

myself,” said Preem. “All the grindin’ we’ve been doing, niggas are tired.”

“Fuck what you’re talkin’ about, I can trap forever, for real, for real” said Slim. “We’re out here.” As the money talk progressed, it was brought to Rashad’s attention by Bleek the unnecessary spending. “Why we’re on the subject, niggas need to stop being extra with spending. I hope niggas ain’t trickin’ off on bitches either and drawing too much attention to yourselves. We don’t want the “po” to be on our ass, you heard me?” Rashad looked at each one of his workers when addressing the topic at hand. “We got you,” said Slim. After hearing that, Rashad got pissed because some of the crew members were ignorant to not know the severities of being too flashy, you’d become an instant target to the police and that’s bad for business.

“Yo, I mean it. Are niggas not hearing what I’m saying? I’m enforcing these rules, or we have no business and niggas won’t eat. BOTTOM LINE. Try me if you think I’m bluffing.” Everybody agreed. “We got you, bro, relax,” said Preem. Being investigated by the cops was the worse. “Make sure no new faces are being served either. Tighten up. That’s one of the biggest things that my pop told me, you know some of these motherfuckers be undercover.” The team had to make sure they knew how to spot undercovers. They would often come off as “too street” and their prices were off the wall too. Cops would rob a dealer faster than a street nigga would in some cases. “Ok, cool, meeting

over, head back to your spots, enough of this shit.” Most soldiers would feel disrespected or belittled if their General was speaking to them a certain kind of way, but they respected Rashad and appreciated the opportunity to make some money. They had to be reliable and trustworthy, they had to clean their act up. “What’s the latest on lil cuz?” asked Staffh. “He good, that shit won’t stick,” said Reem. Lil cuz had a good attorney and was able to prove that the amount that he had on him was for his own personal usage. Lil cuz was hooked up with probation and filed a complaint for getting tased. He received drug counseling as well.

Rashad wanted to make sure that the money that was made from the trap was put in important places. He wasn’t living in the moment just to impress others, but he wanted to own as much as he could. When he had some down time; his thought patterns were far from the norm. The biggest thing on his mind was investing. He wasn’t going to have to worry about faking a regular job, he wasn’t fazed about any red flags because his motive would have been that he had an under the table job that paid him. He was interested in real estate but was unsure of how to go about it. Rashad didn’t know much about that process. However, he did know he could make a killing with the Philly real estate market. He looked on his phone for help. The most that he knew off the top of his head was that he needed to get in contact with a local real estate agent to help him with buying properties. He

was able to find a local agency who was recommended by a lot of people.

Jack Williamson was the name of the real estate agent. He was intelligent and always steered his clients in the right direction, put them in the best position possible, and he never disappointed. He had the statistics down packed. He was passionate about his line of work in Philly. Jack lived in King of Prussia and did a lot of work in Philly. He was respected for his positive outlook on life and was respected for his positive personality which made him successful in his field. Rashad sent an email and left a voicemail on Jack's phone. Within minutes Jack called him right back. "Hello?" asked Rashad. "How are you doing, Rashad? This is Jack returning your phone call, how can I help you?"

"I'm good, sir, wow, that was fast as shit," said Rashad. "Absolutely, so, you're interested in buying some property?" Rashad expressed in detail about wanting to do business. He wanted to be walked through the process. He knew the most logical thing to do was get a proper inspection of whatever property he was willing to purchase. A lot of people made the mistake of jumping too fast without doing their due diligence. Of course, the properties needed a tremendous amount of work done and it could often become stressful. "If you don't mind me asking, where are you from? And how did you hear about us over here?" Jack was curious. Rashad explained that he did his research on the internet for local agents, he shared with him that he was from North Philly.

After he told him about being from North Philly he regretted it, thinking that it would throw Jack off because North Philly was a rough part.

“I’m ready to make some changes around my way. A lot of things need structure in this neighborhood, it’s time to takeover and buy back the block, one day at a time.” Jack could hear the passion and sincerity in Rashad’s voice. “It’s too many boarded up houses and apartments,” he added. “This is the hood that I grew up in and it looks crazy, it’s about that time, you feel what I’m saying?” Jack agreed with Rashad about everything he stressed. “That’s totally on the money right there. So how about this, let’s set up a date to where we can meet up and discuss this more. I want a better understanding of your plans,” Jack added. “Say less, we can chop it up tomorrow. I’m available around 3:00-4:00. We can hit a restaurant in Center City, I’ll hit you tomorrow close to that time with the exact location. That straight with you?” Jack smiled on the other side of the phone. “Absolutely,” Jack replied. The two hung up and Rashad was amped on building and networking, it was always about branding, expanding and forming relationships with legitimate businesses.

That following evening, Jack received a call from Rashad and he told him to meet him at Devon Seafood Grill. Jack got there before Rashad and sat down immediately. He waited for Rashad for a while and He was starting to get hungry; he changed his mind quickly and caught one of the waiter’s

attention to order. Within 30 seconds after ordering, Rashad walked up. Jack didn't see him right away and he somewhat startled him. "Are you Rashad?"

"Yup, that's me," he replied. The two gave each other a professional handshake. "What's up?" They both sat down at the same time. "How are you doing today?" asked Jack and Rashad shrugged his shoulders before answering, "I'm blessed. Never been here before, is the food good here? I assumed that you came here before." Jack suggested that Rashad try the scalloped potatoes. "Those scalloped potatoes are to die for, you should try those." Jack put his thumb up. "Ok, I'll take your word for it," Rashad replied. "Perfect." It didn't take long for the food to arrive. Rashad's eyes were big; the plate was smoking hot and it smelled good as hell. Rashad didn't touch the food right away while Jack already was digging in.

"Fuck it, let's get right to the chase, how did you become a real estate agent? Like, how did you get to where you are now? I need to know what I'm getting myself into and if I can trust you. I don't need to be sold no bullshit either, with all due respect." Jack appreciated Rashad's rawness, he fucked with straight forward attituded people. He chuckled to himself. "I like your style, my man. You're straight to the point. You remind me of myself in that regard." Rashad wasn't trying to impress Jack either, he was who he was, he meant business. He could care less about a compliment. "Man, listen, give me the real, how can I trust you? Do you

really have my best interest?” Jack cleared his throat before answering. “I went to Georgetown College after graduating high school. I then went to a local real estate school so I could get training in that field.” Rashad was attentive.

“Obviously, I took my exam in real estate and then became an intern and eventually received my license. I would like to think I have great skills when it comes to land, different properties, etc. I guarantee that I WILL EARN YOUR RESPECT.” Jack was serious while Rashad nodded his head slowly. “My job is to read your mind and know EXACTLY what the hell it is that you want as my customer. And, quite frankly, I don’t fuck around either.”

“Hmm,” said Rashad. “I feel you on that. You can’t fuck around, especially when it comes to that green piece of paper, which I bleed that.” Time was money and both Jack and Rashad operated on that tip. It was evident that they’d never bullshit. “Look, I’ll help you with whatever it is that you’re interested in,” said Jack. “Are there any specifics that you have that might be the most important to you?”

“As far as what? Elaborate on that,” replied Rashad.

“Well, you know, like your safety, transportation, whatever you’d like your transportation to be, I’m not sure of your tolerance level. It’s so many intangibles that go into this.” Jack was getting into the nitty gritty of things. “Man, bottom line is, I’m from North Philly, from the gutter, safety may be an issue to some, but that’s my hood. I need to work on this area. That’s my goal, to BUY BACK THE BLOCK.” Rashad

had an objective that he wanted to reach. "I'll be in touch with you, just let me know when you're ready," said Jack. "Ok, cool, you sure you ain't going to feel scared coming around where I grew up? I don't wanna scare your ass away or nothing, Rashad chortled." Jack wasn't sure if Rashad had a sense of humor. "I'll be fine, man, I appreciate your concern though. It was nice to meet you man and I look forward to being a part of whatever it is that you're building," he reached his hand out for another handshake from Rashad in which Rashad gave him. "No doubt." Rashad and Jack's meeting was a success and he felt good about how it went, and he was ready to get things set in motion and start giving back.

Reem often went out on the weekend. He was always about the bitches by any means necessary. It wasn't a day that went by that he wasn't out fishing for some new pussy. On the weekends, he was always on one. He always made sure that he threw that shit on and was outside. He never wasted a day to be lit. He decided to go out to the V.I.P. night club on a Saturday night. He came with a few of his young goons just in case shit ended up poppin' off. He was walking in after getting padded down and showing his ID. He immediately started walking around as the club was already packed to where they barely had any room to walk.

He was annoyed but made his way to the bar to get a drink. He wanted some Hennessy and Vodka, and he was lit within 10 minutes. His goons were on standby, they were just on go.

After drinking, he felt that he reached his limit and started dancing with the women inside the club. There were all types of flavors that were on the dance floor. Reem, much like Rashad, was a natural with the words and his aura was top notch. He had a gravitational pull because of the way he carried himself, the bitches always flocked. He grabbed a couple numbers and after getting a couple more dances in, he noticed from a far one of the SP members. At first, he didn't know for sure if it was one of them, but he squinted and was able to get a closer view and it indeed was one of them. "Ain't this about a bitch!" hollered Reem but didn't come off that loud because of how loud the music was. He tapped one of his goons so he could also see and he gave a slight nod with his chin. Reem tried to be as discrete as possible so nothing was obvious.

"Peep, that's one of them niggas right over there to your left, he's a part of the SP unit that tried to infiltrate on our corner and marked graffiti over there too. That's the ultimate violation," explained Reem. One of the goons didn't want Reem to violate inside the club because of the innocent bystanders and it just wasn't the right time. "I won't drawl in here, but best believe we need to handle that situation, it's time for some payback, I could give a dam what Rashad

talkin' 'bout. They think shit is sweet by making us look like bitches, you heard?"

"We won't kill the nigga, but we'll follow to wherever his location is, hopefully it'll lead us to a stash house so we can get the get back, you heard?" The goons shook their head in agreement. Reem wanted to be looked at as the anchor and defend the honor of the North crew. He hated feeling like somebody had one up on them, he was a nigga that was full of a lot of pride, but he was also one of the muscles and if it came down to it, he was for the pistol play. It didn't look like Rely was with anybody but as they blended in and kept clubbin', Reem slowly plotted, unbeknownst to Rashad and the rest of the crew. One of the goons even asked Reem if it was a good idea to make a move on SP without his say so, and Reem shrugged it off. "Let me worry about that. For now, we need to handle that situation, we have 30 minutes until the bar closes."

Rely was talking to a few people and then he went to the bathroom. Reem was so excited that he was about to rob Rely, that it felt like time stopped. Even with it being the last half hour before closing, he was getting anxious. "God always answering my prayers," he laughed. "Couldn't wait to get the drop on one of them, I can't let this slip up." Reem mumbled to himself. Reputation meant everything to Reem. "We ain't sweet," Reem said amped as he migrated over closer. The last song was playing and it happened to be a slow song.

Rely was exchanging his number with a chick. The

crowd began to form outside as security was telling people to leave and guiding them out. Reem signaled for his niggas to follow him. When they walked out they followed Relly to where he was parked. It just so happened that he wasn't parked too far away from Reem. He was in an old all black Chevy Impala. However, they couldn't make it obvious to where Relly would grow a brain and realize that he was being followed. They hurried up and hopped in the wheel and made sure there was distance between both wheels. "Let's see where this nigga is going, but don't go too fast."

Relly was intoxicated a little bit, he was driving slow as well, he had Sha with him on the passenger side. "We gotta slide back to the spot quick," said Relly. "Hurry up, nigga, I'm tired as shit, it's 2:30 in the morning, I'm drunk as shit, I don't trust your driving skills when you're fucked up, either," laughed Sha. As the two drove a couple blocks, Reem and his goons were trailing them. Sha could barely keep his eyes open. The two pulled up on the corner of Oregon Avenue and 11th street, at one of their main spots. The car stopped by the corner of the block. Reem stopped a few feet up. "Get the strap," said Reem. Reem had no mask, no nothing to cover his face; he was about to run down on SP. "Come on, let's go," he whispered. All three of them grabbed their hammers and jogged as slow and quiet as possible so they could creep up on them.

As Relly and Sha were walking slowly across the street, Reem and his two goons were on the side of a parked car.

“What the fuck?” said Relly as he thought he seen a shadow moving so he stopped in his tracks. “What’s wrong with you?” asked Sha as he was walking slowly, damn near dozing off. He was saucy. Reem jumped out quickly, startling Relly as he was grabbing his hammer. “Nah, nigga, drop that shit.”

Relly tossed the hammer to the side of the street as Reem’s goon picked it up and the other goon was able to creep behind Sha as he pistol whipped him but not hard enough to knock him out, but he was leaking in the back of his head. “What the fuck you want? Do you even know who you’re fuckin’ with? You ready to die, huh?” asked Relly as he smirked but was annoyed. “Let’s go nigga, show me to the spot right now or I’ll push your shit back right now,” replied Reem. He strong armed Relly as he pushed him to the direction of where he wanted to go. “And don’t try no funny shit unless you want a VIP section in Heaven, bitch ass nigga.” They all walked up the steps slowly and Reem kept the barrel of the gun in his back. As they got to the door, Relly kept his hands up to his side and stopped in his tracks as he looked at Reem. “So, now what?” he asked as he was taunting Reem. The gun moved to his head, Relly’s face changed as he complied and knocked on the door. “Who is it?” asked Buck. “It’s Rell, open the door.”

Buck had one of the other workers open the door quick. As soon as the door opened, Reem and his goons rushed inside while pushing Reem and Sha inside as well. “Oh shit, look what we have here!” hollered Reem as he pointed his

gun at Buck. "This shit is out of pocket, DAMN!" Reem laughed, give me a black trash bag, and toss that money on the table over here and the work you have. The energy hit different when the shoe is on the other foot, huh?" Relly grinded his teeth as he grabbed a black bag from the kitchen and so did another worker. Relly stood in the corner as Reem's goon kept the guns on him. Shizz held the back of his head as he grunted, "Your niggas ain't even standing up for your dope house, what type of shit is this? Ya'll different," Reem was annoyed by the lack of pride they had, but they were at gunpoint and vulnerable. "Toss it over here." Buck angrily tossed the bag as Reem grabbed it with one hand and taunted them. It was bags of cash and they came up on some cocaine.

"This shit ain't over, I'm lettin' you know that shit right now, we'll see you soon," said Buck as he angrily looked at Relly and Sha as if they were pitiful individuals that disgusted him. Reem and his two goons backed up slowly and Buck wasn't going to be stupid enough to reach for his hammer. "Good lookin' out, I'm glad ya'll value your life, we're up out this bitch," laughed Reem as they shut the door. They pulled off slowly as one of the goons grabbed the bag from Reem. "Now that's how you handle shit, fuck them niggas, fuck they thought this was? Never go against North!"

Buck was pissed. "You ain't see yourself being followed? Huh?" Relly didn't know what to say now. "I ain't see nobody behind me, what you want me to say?"

“Where were you coming from?” asked Buck. “We were coming from the bar, they must’ve spotted us at the bar and trailed us. I never saw them though, it was a crowd full of people, what was I supposed to do?” Buck wasn’t trying to hear jack shit, and he shrugged Relly. “Geez is about to snap about this shit, man, FUCK!” Obviously, they had to comply, or they were going to get robbed and killed. “He’s bold, though, at least we know what he looks like, stupid ass, we’ll get his ass back, trust me, we need to make this right. They wanna play, we can play harder.” Sha needed medical attention, his alcohol blood level was compromised on top of being hit in the head with the gun, he was dizzy. “Sha, you good?” Buck tapped one of his workers to grab Sha. “Take Sha to the hospital so he can get some treatment, nigga fuck around and have a concussion. I’ll call Feezy and Geez about what happened, ya’ll niggas relax.”

Hayes’s Captain met up with him at a location that was in the cut. Hayes’ captain’s name was Darrell. He was pulling up as Hayes got out of his car. “You have something for me?” asked Darrell. “Yeah, I do. I was thinking about something and I wanted to pitch it to you before I went ahead and used my resource,” replied Hayes as his voice cracked. “What’s that?”

“Listen, I may have someone that we can use to get information about the drug supply, the dealers, the pushers, etc.”

Darrell folded his arms as he sat up against his cruiser. “How did you manage to pull this off?”

“I was driving down Erie Ave and saw one of the addicts. She’s a former addict now, but I ended up grabbing her. I put her inside a recovery home and she’s completely sober now. She offered to help take down some shops. I wasn’t sure because I don’t want her to get killed in the process or put her in any kind of harm’s way, you know?” explained Hayes. “What is her name?” asked Darrell.

“Her name is Riley; she wants to be an informant. She knows a lot and saw a lot. Why not take advantage of that? I mean if we do it the right way. This is our big shot to accomplish something big!” Darrell paced himself. “You’re telling me this now? How long ago did you put her in the recovery residence? Why am I just finding this out so late?” Hayes thought before answering. “It was a judgement call, Cap. We must get out of the mindset of not helping the unfortunate or innocent people to give rationalization to our existence as cops. With all due respect, it’s a fucked up mentality that we have.” Darrell respected it. “Let’s just hope that you know what you’re doing, because it can backfire especially if she gets made. If she can give us information on what zones and who specifically runs them, then I’m all for it, absolutely,” said Darrell.

“No fuck ups, do you understand me, lieutenant?”

“Understand completely, sir,” replied Hayes. Darrell pulled off as Hayes took a sip of his drink.

Hayes had given Riley a phone so she could reach him. He called her while he was in the parking lot. “Hey, Riley, I’m going to pick you up, let me know your location.” She told him where she was located.

Hayes pulled up to where Riley said she would be, at Juniata’s, a relative’s house. Hayes was in the cut, so when she walked out on the porch, Hayes blinked his lights. Riley looked from left to right as she walked down and got inside, she was nervous, but not for long. “Who stays over here?” asked Hayes. “One of my cousins, they know I’m clean now,” she replied. They pulled off as they drove down E. Luzerne St. “So, I’m curious, what is it like to be a cop? Do you like it?”

“I do, it does get nerve racking but when you’re making a difference or at least trying to, it’s a good feeling,” replied Hayes. “Drugs destroy everything and what makes it more fucked up is the special charm that our city has as a whole, and this is how it’s represented.” Riley stayed silent as Hayes explained. “But listen, back to what I said, is it a go?” she asked. “It is. I’m going to follow through with this for you to be my eyes and ears.” Riley didn’t expect yes for an answer. “Oh. Wow. Great!” she replied. “Calm down, don’t get too excited because this is serious, and it could be dangerous. So, tell me what you know, you told me the other week that you know about the Fentanyl?”

“Of course, it’s wicked, it’s fucked up, and it’s prevalent. The dealers mix it and the junkies have no idea of how fast it could become fatal when it’s laced.” Riley obviously knew

that from experience. It's a miracle that she wasn't dead already. "Where do you go?" asked Hayes.

"As you may also know, the overdoses were at an all-time high. Now, it's almost in everything from Kensington to South Philly. I was getting served in the South Philly area. The Fentanyl epidemic is killing a lot of addicts, but who knows whether it's been tainted on purpose or by accident."

"Ok, go on," said Hayes.

"As I'm sure you're aware, it's a painkiller that's been around for ages and it was used for patients that had cancer, and it's easy for it to be unnoticed. I'm not sure who the manufacturer is. It can be in heroin or it can be in cocaine. I've seen addicts snort cocaine that was laced and die. It's one of the worse things that happened to this state and if it wasn't for you..." Riley paused. "Let's just say that I don't know what would've happened to me at this point or what route I would've taken. But like I said, I've seen addicts overdose and must be revived as well, and it's amazing how it never happened to me but happened to the one that I loved, shit will bother me forever."

"How the hell does it get that far? How does it happen?" Hayes just couldn't fathom. "Because it's cheaper to make, it's cheaper than heroin. You'll make a larger profit," she replied. Hayes knew it made sense. "Wow, I'm used to the regular heroin supply that floated around the city." Addicts were in pockets that obviously cops couldn't be without being

noticed. "I know the spots and I know people on the North and the South side."

"Good, I want those names," said Hayes as he and Riley looked at each other with serious faces. "North and South have been going back and forth lately." Riley was around the scene the last few weeks to see what she could scoop up, she blended with how addicts looked even when completely sober, although she'd did a whole 180, but she was believable. "I'll give you a couple corners that you can hit for activity." Riley gave Hayes the block of Wolf Street and Moyamensing Avenue, which was heavy on prostitution as well, that meant nothing because he was after the dealers even though prostitution was a big ass deal. "Right, where else and what are the times of operation?" asked Hayes.

"It's all hours of the night, it really doesn't matter. Just watch it over there. I'm not sure how you're going to go about doing it but it's disgusting. It's even as bad as actual feces everywhere, it's truly sickening. But dealers are over there, be prepared." Riley also divulged the territories of 5th & McKean, 23rd & Tasker, and 7th & Cantrell. "I have a few ideas that I'm going to run by my captain on how we can handle that. Do you know who the head honchos are behind both crews on the North and South side?" Hayes was hoping Riley knew.

"Sadly, I don't. I know a few of the workers only by their street names but I don't know the bosses, either of them," she replied. "That's better than nothing." Hayes gave Riley a pen

and a paper to write down the names that she knew. “I appreciate this, a lot. I hope to regulate this as much as I can. It fucks me up that our city has the audacity to pay for this and enables it.” Riley was writing names down while listening. “Tell me about it,” she said. “I mean, think about it, kids can’t even play in the area because of those syringes, I’m guilty of it myself.” Riley also gave car descriptions.

“I’m putting my all into this, bet that,” said Hayes. “You gave me key information on well-known drug corners. Do any of them suspect you of being an informant?” Riley thought before answering. “Honestly, I don’t think so, for all they know, I’m just another addict waiting on my next score. I’m fairly sure they’ve never suspected a thing,” replied Riley. “Trust me on that. “Ok good.”

APPLYING PRESSURE

It's been a couple months since Rashad visited his father. It was always a bittersweet feeling because he missed him on the outside, he honestly didn't visit his father every month. They both sat down as they gave each other a fist pound. "You look good, man," said Big Shad. "I mean, you know, I learned from the best," Rashad replied. "How's life been treating you in here? How are you surviving the madness?" Big Shad looked at his surroundings and watched the guards walking around staring at him. "It has its up and it has its down but it's all good, I'm a man. People can say what they want, it's a lot of brave men in here, we always stand on what we do, no matter the cost." Rashad nodded his head. "I hear that, mom is doing decent, we've gotten better through the years." All Big Shad had was time to reflect on his actions

while he was in his cell. Though he had no regrets, he did miss it on the outside and especially his family, but those visitations were critical just to look at his face. “I’m proud of the man that you’ve become, son, I mean that. Your mom was right on a lot of shit, and I know now that I was selfish.”

“I know, but I have no regrets, I’m careful out here.”

“How’s business going? You holding shit down, right?” Rashad smirked. “You already know, no worries. I met a girl too, we’ve been kickin’ it a lot lately, she thurl too. She’s an Entrepreneur, has a nice edge to her, she fly as hell.” Big Shad did a nod with his chin. “Oh yeah? That’s what it is. You not lettin’ her overcloud your vision though, right? You sure she down for you completely? It’s easy for that juicebox to make you disregard shit, you sure she not sleezy?”

“Nah, I don’t get those type of vibes from her. She’s on tunnel vision pops, she not the typical North Philly chick. She got plans and she really stays to herself, she not in the mix at all and I respect that.”

“I’ll take your word for it. Proud of you again, son, make sure the next time that you come up your mom is with you. I want my girl and my son up here at the same time.” Before Rashad could get another word in, lockdown was about to happen because there was an incident that just happened. The guards were screaming lockdown and for the inmates to move accordingly. There was a stabbing that involved two inmates. “It’s wild in here, get up out of here, I love you, son,

come back in a couple weeks.” The two embraced. “I love you too, I got you.”

Rashad wished that he could get back a lot of time that was missed, sometimes he felt lost in the sauce. Financially he was good, but having the bond torn between he and Big Shad, because of his father’s actions, put a dent on that. Juanita was feeling like her life was being put on hold. Big Shad had many years left before he was released and Juanita felt that it was soon time to move on, she’d held his ass down for too long. At one point, she was a ride or die but that was when they were kids, however at the current stage in her life it was meaningless. Juanita would soon have a talk with her son; she was already casually dating, unbeknownst to Rashad, but nothing was exclusive.

Stafh had a blunt in his mouth, he took a puff and was working on the count and putting the money in rubber bands as it came out the money machine. He loved the sound of the money flipping and the beeping noise. He clapped his hands together every time the money came out. His strap laid on the table right next to him. Stafh kept the Tre Pound, a cold ass piece to carry on deck, for any potential static that could go down. Reem walked in, “Yo, what’s the deal?” The two embraced as Stafh put his blunt down. “What’s up, kin? Talk to me, what it look like?”

“Shit, I can’t call it, just got done fuckin’ with one of those bitches that I bagged from the other night. Shorty was bad as shit, pussy was tight as shit too, I damn near was about to go sushi in that shit,” laughed Reem as Stafh just looked at the nigga like he was crazy and scoffed. “Nigga, you love the bitches, you got the top? If you did, how was it? And, nigga, you better not have gone sushi in that bitch, you know these bitches are trifling, fuck around and get something that you can’t get rid of, Eazy- E ass nigga, ha-ha.” Stafh didn’t joke often but when he did, he would go for the lowest blows ever and didn’t give no fucks.

“Nigga, did I get the top? That bitch was the throat GOAT, you know she got to stay in the rotation now. That bitch got some skills on her, make a nigga fall in love with her ass.” Reem was animated when he was describing his night with the female he bagged up. “Nigga, you gotta chill, quick ass nigga. Anyway, we made a lot of bread, and the fiends are going crazy over this shit. We ain’t playing’ out here. Dope like the 80s, you heard me?” Stafh took a hit of the blunt and gave it to Reem and he puffed it as well, coughing. “Shit you ain’t lying, cuz. What’s the next move though for tonight? What are you getting into?”

“Man, I’m busy, I’m up countin’ this bread, you already know.”

“That’s what it is, then. But, shit, I’m about to run to the Papi store real quick, a nigga hungry as shit. When I come back, I’ll help you out with the count.” Stafh made sure that

Reem was strapped up. “You got your jaw on you, right?” Reem lifted his shirt to show that he wasn’t lacking. “Come on man, you know what it is.” The two dapped each other. You know the block is hot, watch your body.”

“I got you, I’m on point, don’t worry about it. I’ll hit you when I’m on my way back. I need to get some backwoods, and a platter,” replied Reem. The two dapped each other up once more before Reem left. Staffh was finishing up with the count. “Oh yeah, make sure you lock the door behind you nigga, and make sure nobody is watching the house.” The crew had shooters outside of the door for security. They saw Reem coming back and let him out. Reem was checking his surroundings before walking across the street back to his wheel. Paranoia could be a motherfucker sometimes but came with the territory and necessary when you’re living the fast life. As Reem got settled inside the wheel, he put on Meek Mill’s “Dream Chasers” CD and played “Tony Story” as he drove.

Reem decided to drive up to Madera Grocery Deli on Montgomery Avenue and 27th Street. He looked around before putting the wheel in park. He made sure his gun was on his hip; he had the extended clip poking. The ladder clip wasn’t a joke, fully loaded too. One of the important rules in the game was to bomb first before giving the opposition a chance to beat you to it. He didn’t peep any enemies in sight, so he opened the door, asking the papi at the store to get him a pack of backwoods, a platter, and a bottle of water, Reem

loved Fiji water. He changed his mind about getting a platter and decided to get a couple snacks instead. He was the only one inside the store at the time, a couple guys were leaving seconds before he entered. The block was kind of deserted but there were a few people sitting on their porches, nothing too crazy. It was about 7:30 in the evening.

Reem had no idea that things were about to take a turn for the worse. Even though Reem thought he was in the clear, Feezy, who happened to be on that side of town visiting a female, recognized him by the whip he pushed. As he left the female's crib, he saw Reem's wheel. He squinted and was unsure at first. He walked up closer to it and quickly realized this was the same wheel that pulled off from the scene the night of the robbery. Feezy's mouth damn near salivated.

Feezy cocked his gun back, put on the hood of his hoodie, pulled the strings down, but not too tight and he got low behind another wheel. Reem was making his way out of the store but didn't go to his wheel right away, which bought Feezy more time to get ready to drill him. Reem recognized somebody outside and chopped it up with him for a moment. Although he only busted the hammer when he truly had to, Feezy usually never missed his mark. He had black gloves inside his hoodie pockets and put them on. He called Geez and he whispered. "Yo, I got eyes on that bitch ass nigga that robbed our stash the other night. I got the drop on his ass as we speak." This was necessary divulgence. "he's outside talkin' to some nigga right now. I saw his wheel after

I got done fuckin' with this lil' bitch, what are the odds of that?" Feezy was getting a rush to catch this body.

"Good. Make sure you hit that nigga, and don't miss that nigga," said Geez. Feezy looked up and Reem was still talking. On the other line Geez had a serious face. "Yo, nigga, you hear me? We can't afford to fuck up, never underestimate your enemy." Feezy agreed. "Make a move on that nigga, hurry up before he leaves and ditch the ratchet ASAP and get the fuck low!"

"Bet, say less," Feezy ended the call. Reem went back inside the store and that puzzled Feezy. He assumed that Rashad was buying more things. In the meantime, Feezy lit a Newport cigarette. He finished it quickly and flicked it on the ground. Reem came back and was on his phone as he put his bag of food on the ground, it was wrapped up in a bag. He took a swig of his water and put his backwoods in his pocket. His head was ground leveled as he put his phone in his pocket. That following second, he looked up, Feezy's gun was drawn and Reem took cover fast as shit. In that moment, he was like flash. A couple shots rang out and hit the sidewalk and a few cars. As Reem began to run, one of the shots hit him in his leg. "Aah! Shit! Fuck!" He began to stagger.

Reem dropped his water, as he was hit and tried to run as fast as he could with a gunshot wound to the leg. Feezy shot again but it hit a car tire that was close to Reem, barely missing him. Reem, equipped his Gun desperately trying to find cover as fast as possible. "Fuck!" he yelled again. He

turned around to see if Feezy was still behind him and he was, Reem shot back twice, making Feezy take cover to avoid being shot his damn self. Reem could feel the blood going down his leg, his hand was filled with blood. Feezy trailed him again, bucking off more shots, hitting other cars as he reloaded. He broke a car window with one of his stray shots and made the alarm go off. Reem desperately dove in someone's backyard, yelling out in agony from the pain. He took his shirt off immediately to put it on his mouth to bite on. He then took his tank top off to wrap it around his wound, he was applying pressure to it. The pain was becoming more excruciating. Reem inhaled sharply.

It was a surprise even to himself that he was able to run as fast as he did. He outran Feezy. Reem didn't want to make too much noise although he was in pain, so he was fighting through it, he was fighting to live. His adrenaline level skyrocketed. Feezy was walking slow and looking for Reem but there was nobody in sight. "What the fuck? Where the fuck did he go?" Feezy asked himself confusingly. He clutched his hammer tightly and firmly. Reem did everything in his will to stay alive and stayed silent so he could get away. Feezy called Geez back, Geez answered right away thinking that the job was done. "Yo, did you smoke that bitch ass nigga?" Feezy didn't respond right away and that quickly angered Geez. "Yo, answer the question, nigga, did you smoke him?"

"Nah, man, I missed him. I caught his ass in the leg, but

he was able to lose me! He's not in plain sight right now, I can't find this nigga! I know, I know, I fucked up. What do you want me to do? I know this nigga has to be close and bleeding out somewhere, he can't be that far. I'm on this nigga's heels, let me stay on him until I find him, let me know!" Feezy was anxious.

"FUCK!" screamed Geez over the phone. Feezy pulled the phone away from his ear. "Nigga, you had one fuckin' job to do and you fucked it up. We're looking like bitches right now. You let these niggas lick our shit and you acting like shit is sweet? How the fuck did you miss?" Feezy had to eat that shit, he had no answer because there was nothing he could say in that moment. "Fuck it, listen, hurry up and get back to the spot, you know the police are going to be on their way over there, get the fuck out of there, toss the strap too." Feezy ended the call, he kicked a few rocks that were on the ground out of frustration. Reem wasn't that far away from Feezy when he was on the phone with Geez, he heard the conversation in full and luckily, he was able to stay out of sight. Reem began to start feeling woozy and the burning sensation was getting more intense. Reem knew that he had to get his wounded leg taken care of.

Feezy peeled off and all Reem heard was his footsteps running. Reem waited until the coast was clear before making his move to the hospital. He started to hear the sirens from afar. The police sirens sounded far away, they weren't close enough to where the shooting began, but someone

tipped them off hearing shots. That gave Reem enough time to get back in his wheel and get the fuck out of sight. On his way to the hospital, he called Bleek, who didn't live too far away. "Come on Bleek, answer your fuckin' phone, nigga," said Reem to himself.

"Yo, what's goin' on, bro?"

"I've been hit! I'm about to pull up to your crib, I need you to drive me to the hospital and take the wheel so the police won't get to my wheel wanting to use it for evidence." Reem was hyperventilating and blood was on the floor and the seat, it was seeping through the pants. He was exhausted just talking to Bleek. "You know the hospital has to report gunshot victims, I can't leave blood in my whip and keep it there all night, I'm not with that."

"Bet, hurry your ass up, let's get it!" yelled Bleek as he raced out the door waiting for Reem to pull up. Reem beeped the horn profusely. Bleek ran down the steps of the porch as fast as he could, and he helped Reem get over to the passenger side. "Shit nigga, that shit look crazy." Reem grunted. "This pain is crazy, pull off nigga!" The tires screeched. "What the fuck did you get yourself into that you got clapped?" Bleek was trying to make sense of the situation at hand.

Reem didn't divulge the important information that he hit a lick on the SP crew. Reem knew how bad he fucked up and how pissed Bleek was, let alone how Rashad would be after they found out what really happened. Bleek was trying

hard to wrap his brain around why Reem got shot. Reem decided to keep it real. “Fuck it, I hit a lick on those SP niggas, I ran up in their stash house.”

“What?! How the fuck did them niggas make you?” asked Bleek.

“I didn’t ski up,” replied Reem. Bleek smacked himself on the forehead in disgust. “How the fuck are you going to hit a lick and not make sure you mask up?! Now the niggas know your face, nigga! This is bad. You drawled.” Bleek pulled up to the entrance of the hospital and raced over to the other side of the wheel to help Reem get out. As he put Reem’s arm over his shoulder, they were quickly mapping out their plan. “My strap is in the wheel, clean my whip out, bro and park it up,” Reem instructed. “I got you, don’t worry about it, it’s done.” Bleek hurried and spotted an employee who was outside on their break and Bleek signaled him for help. “Yo! I have a gunshot victim over here, hurry the fuck up! We need a medic, ASAP!” Reem grunted again. “Peel off, bro, I’m good, get the fuck up out of here and watch your body.” Bleek ran back to the wheel and the tires screeched as he left. The doctor’s brought out the gurney for Reem and placed him on it.

Reem was starting to have a slight anxiety attack from getting too excited and the pain was shooting even more down his leg. The medics began to talk. “We have a gunshot victim, he’s lost a pretty good amount of blood, we have to act fast!” They started to examine the wound as they went to the

trauma unit as fast as they could. The bullet that hit Reem was just below his knee. Right on the bend and lodged into his leg.

Meanwhile, Rashad was with Carla, they were eating at Ruth Chris Steak House, enjoying their date. They both were dressed well for the occasion and Carla loved being romanced. "How's your food, baby? Are you enjoying yourself?" Carla smiled at Rashad. "Yes, I am, thank you so much for making this a memorable night for me, you treat me so well," she said. "It was only right, you deserve the best treatment, all the finer things in life and I'll give it to you." Before Carla could get another word in, his phone started ringing. "Hold on, baby, let me grab this quick." Carla huffed and puffed as Rashad was taking the call, she didn't like the feeling of being interrupted.

"Yo, talk to me, what's goin on?" Rashad asked while Bleek was on the line. "We have a problem, where you at right now?!" screamed Bleek. "I'm with my girl," answered Rashad as he looked at Carla from across the table. Her eyes were dead on him. Rashad got up for a minute. "I'll be right back, just hold tight for me," said Rashad as Carla's arms folded across her chest. He went outside of the restaurant. "Spit the shit out, what problem do we have?"

"I just had to drop off Reem at the hospital, he got hit!" Bleek was screaming over the phone as Rashad's jaws locked up, he was angry, pissed off to the max. He pulled the phone away from his ear, he wanted to throw his phone. "How the

fuck did that happen?! Who did it? Where the fuck did he get hit at?!” Bleek couldn’t get a word in as he was bombarded with questions of Reem’s condition. “He caught a slug in the leg from one of those SP niggas. He said hit a lick on one of those niggas, obviously it was a retaliation hit. You know that nigga is reckless, always doing some nut ass shit.” Bleek explained to Rashad how he got the call from Reem, who happened to not be too far away from where the shootout took place. “I pulled off when the doctors got him on the gurney and took him in.”

“We need to get to the bottom of this shit and find out which one of those niggas from SP is the one that shot him. I’ll finish up over here and we’ll meet up. Right now, we can’t go to war without a plan, don’t make any sudden moves without me either!” screamed Rashad. “Stay by your jack, I’ll hit you back in a min.” Rashad hung up and went back inside. When he got back to the table, he noticed that Carla was annoyed. “What took you so long? And why did you have to leave the table for your call? Is everything good? Should I be worried? Rashad ignored her but not intentionally, he had a certain fire in his eyes that read vengeance. His eyes were dancing around. He closed his hands as he placed them on the table. “I need to take you home. I have an emergency that I have to take care of. Are you finished eating?”

“Yes, I’m done, we can go,” replied Carla. She was concerned.

“Baby, can you tell me what’s going on? You’re scaring me right now.”

Rashad kept a dark glow on his face, and Carla couldn’t keep her eyes off Rashad as they walked to the car. Rashad wasn’t listening to Carla. He opened the door for her to get in. As he waked to his side, he got in and his face was cold. The car turned on and she caressed his cheek. Rashad was on demon time. “Let’s go, I need to get you home.” The couple pulled up to Carla’s house. She gave Rashad a kiss on the cheek, she opened the door and got out. Rashad made sure that she got inside safely and pulled off.

Rashad knew that he couldn’t go to the hospital because with gunshot victims, the hospital had to be on temporary lockdown. Rashad expected police to be there soon, if they weren’t already. Reem was in surgery. No matter how tough the streets were, nobody was ever too tough to pray. Rashad prayed while he sat in the wheel that his best friend would be fine. He sat back and contemplated in his head what the outcome would be when it came to retaliation. Moving off emotions was never a good idea. He looked over in the direction of the glove compartment, reached over and opened it. There sat his Desert Eagle pistol, stainless steel with Integral Muzzle Brake. Strong enough to tear a motherfucker’s entire brain out. He punched into his hand, he had to release that anger out. His father taught him that an angry mind was a narrow mind. He texted Bleek back and told him to round up the rest of the crew and meet him back at the warehouse.

Currently, Reem was still in surgery. The doctors were working to make sure he had the fastest recovery possible. Sadly, they had to work a little harder than initially thought. It wasn't going to be an easy fix. It wasn't going to be a simple isolation of the bullet by stopping the bleeding of Reem and patch him up so he can leave. The doctors had to check for shock, shattered bones, and the exit wound which would be bigger than the entry wound. The most important thing was to make sure he was stabilized. They also had to do an ultrasound to trace the path of the bullet, that was the fun part for him. Reem was lucky that it didn't hit any main arteries and that it just hit muscle tissue. Reem was hit with a .9MM, which was a smaller caliber weapon.

Rashad and the crew went to the hospital the following morning when they got the word that he would be fine. They knocked before they went in. "Yo, yo, what's the deal, cousin?" said Stafh. They dapped up Reem as he scooted up in his bed slowly. "How you feelin', nigga? That shit hurt like a bitch, ain't?" asked Slim. Rashad stood by the door silently. "What are the doctors saying about your recovery?" asked Bleek. "It's good to see you niggas too," Reem said sarcastically.

"We were worried about you, man, what the doctors saying?" Rashad grew frustrated. "Full recovery," replied Reem. "I should be out tomorrow or the next day. It'll take me a month to walk normal without a limp. I don't know all that other medical bullshit that the doctors told me last

night.” Before Rashad could get another word in the nurse walked in. “Excuse me, nurse, is he going to be good? Like, is there anything else that he has to worry about?” Rashad was acting like a concerned parent. “Yes, absolutely. Luckily, your friend doesn’t have any other complications such as diabetes. His blood supply is good and his wound will heal properly,” replied the nurse. “That’s what I’m talking’ about,” Slim remarked. “Yup, real shit, we don’t bitch, that’s how we carry it.” The nurse left the room.

Enough of the small talk, it was time to talk about the issue at hand. Rashad looked at the door as it shut. “Why the fuck did you make a stupid ass move like that? What the fuck was you thinkin’?” Reem looked down for a second. “Dawg, you know those SP niggas are going to be on some shit now, they’re about to drawl every chance they get, and these niggas know your face,” said Bleek. “Wait, huh? What you mean they know his face?” Rashad was confused, he looked back over at Reem. “So not only did you rob these niggas, you did it with no mask? So, you like doing suicide missions now?” Rashad said sarcastically. “Did you see the nigga face that did it?” asked Slim. “Nah, as soon as bullets started flying, I got the fuck low, fuck you mean?” Reem had single handily put the crew in danger because he went and did his own thing.

“So, how do you know it was one of those SP niggas then?” asked Rashad. “Fam, who else is our competition out here? Who else is our opposition? It only makes sense,” said

Reem. Rashad paced around in front of the hospital bed as the crew watched him. “You don’t fuckin’ listen, this isn’t how you operate a business, now we look like dumb asses. It was a poor choice regardless. THINK nigga, and you went about the shit completely wrong and it’s bad enough that you went by yourself,” Reem was getting chewed out, rightfully so. “Wait, hold up, ain’t this what these niggas wanted, though? Business is business and money is money. What the fuck is the problem? I mean, shit, the way that I see it, I made a statement that we ain’t fuckin’ around and not to be fucked with. So, if we take over more territories, we get MORE business. Our business doesn’t exist WITHOUT the MONEY.”

“It ain’t no more rap, it doesn’t even matter, you already set the tone so it ain’t nothing to talk about,” said Stafh. Rashad was silent again and grinded his teeth as he stood by the window in the room. Reem should’ve known better because he was the co-lieutenant of the operation and he made a stupid move on SP that was far from strategic. The wrong message was sent, even though he survived the attempt on his life. SP wasn’t going to stop until they got even, which means more corners and other territories were about to be violated, they were going to come back full throttle. “Listen, when your ass gets up out of here, stay your ass low key until you’re 100%. You hear me? No more streets for you right now, you heard me?” The crew had to lookout for each other’s best

interest. “We have to make sure that we hit these niggas where it hurts and at the right time,” said Slim. Rashad gave them the greenlight. “Make sure you do it and do it right, fast and easy.”

“It’s the only way we know how to do,” said Stafh. “We got you.”

The crew dealt with heavy artillery when necessary, not just regular pistols. They had plenty of weapons when it was time to mash out and air the block out, enough artillery for Baghdad. It was late in the evening; it wasn’t quite sunset but close to it. They all loaded up their weapons. A couple of the crew members had dirt bikes in the back. They were purchased at the Philadelphia Cycle Center; they were about to make shit ugly. It was about to be on. Stafh strapped up with two Glock 43x, all black.

It was an art to shooting at an enemy at the right time because you had to be disciplined when using your ammo. Shooters who just shot recklessly without thinking, resulted in being unsuccessful in the end. The main goal was to hit your target, protect your crew and have a successful plan of escape or it was lights out. There was no time to scare away your target. If it wasn’t done right, you were as good as dead, it was just that simple. There would be instances in the streets where someone’s clip was empty and your protection was supposed to be there to cover you, in which they themselves were risking their own ammo to save you.

The Dirt bikes drove down SP’s block on 24th and Dickin-

son. They saw a few members that stood on the corner in front of “Fresh Choice Food Market.” Slim and Bleek looked at each other and gave a head nod. “Let’s do it!” hollered Slim. One of the SP members were ready to fire. BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! Two of them dropped right in front of the store, hitting the store door as the cashier ducked down behind the cash register screaming. Slim and Bleek pulled off as they wheeled down the street.

The shooting continued at 18th and Moore St. The shots kept going off, many cars got hit with bullets, from tires to windows, to the windows in people’s houses. There were screams and cries from down the block. “Yo!” yelled Preem, cover me, bro!” Stafh got behind one of the cars that were in front of the house. Preem shot recklessly without hitting anybody. It felt like he wanted the glory too fast and it overclouded his better judgement when shooting at the enemies. Logic from him went straight out the window. His adrenaline was heightened to the point where his finger didn’t let off the trigger, he just kept squeezing until realizing he was out. He’d fucked up by not preserving his ammo even with having an extra clip. “Stay low, bro!” hollered Stafh as bullets kept spraying from the other side of the street. Shots hit another window and the glass flew down on Stafh and Preem. “Nigga, why the fuck you ain’t count your rounds?!” screamed Stafh. “Nigga, just shoot!” yelled Preem. Stafh looked up and caught Sha, one of the shooters from SP, right in the chest, wounding him. Buck was able to get to safety as

he dove to a nearby house. Stafh hurried up and ducked back down. Ammo and shooting disciplined went hand in hand. Stafh's clip dropped and he quickly replaced it with another one. He practiced at the shooting range all the time, he knew when to observe his hit or miss and he knew how to move accordingly, that's when you knew how to do the job. "Come on, nigga, let's go. The two were able to run to safety, they were running back to the wheel that was at the scene. Stafh ran as fast as he could to the driver's side. Preem tried to jump in the passenger side but Sha caught him on the other side with one to the head and the blood splattered on Stafh as he pulled off. The tires screeched as Preem laid slumped. Stafh crouched his body down as low as possible to avoid more gunfire as he flew down the street.

The shooting was on all the news stations, being covered all day and all night. The crew hid out and stayed low. It was devastating that the city was in the middle of the war; an innocent child lost his life from a stray bullet. He was struck in the thigh and the bullet hit the femoral artery. A child's leg was only but so big, the biggest artery was reported as ruptured, he died painfully, leading to a mother with permanent pain. The worse part about it is not knowing who was indeed responsible for it. The game was supposed to be no women and no children but when bloodshed is in the air and bad planning got in the way, it was bound to be a complete disaster and clusterfuck.

Geez lost key men during the shooting that took place in

South Philly, and it came a time during the war that his crew was lacking discipline as did Rashad's crew in some instances; but SP was running the unit into the ground, putting Geez's business and reputation in a bad place. It was a good thing to be ruthless, but it had to be for the right reasons, not unnecessary bloodshed, there was no gain from bad actions. His crew was getting thinner and the most logical thing would have been to lay low in the meantime, but he was hardheaded. He had to come up with a plan to hit Rashad where it hurt. He sat in the building where SP handled all their business and was talking to Feezy. "This shit is wicked out here, and they're getting more suspicious," said Feezy. "It's too many bodies dropping, I'm hoping that this shit doesn't lead back to us."

"What you afraid, now?" asked Geez.

"Afraid? Afraid? Come on, dawg, I'm just saying though, we've been too messy, it's too many fuckin' bodies dropping. Drug territories shouldn't be that serious, especially since we keep losing soldiers. Our crew is slimmer, we're acting nutty."

"So, what do you suggest? You don't think this was a retaliation hit? Nigga, we just tried to smoke one of them niggas. You remember? The nigga that you were supposed to make sure was dead for runnin' up in our shit?" Geez had it all figured out, he knew exactly why that hit came the way it did. One of the SP members came inside the building. "Guess what I found out?" asked Rell, leaving them in suspicion. "What, nigga? We don't got time for that mystery shit."

“One of the bitches that I fucked, knows that nigga’s bitch that he deals with, the thick Puerto Rican jawn from out the badlands but she lives out in West Oak Lane. I have the address for her too, she told me right where shorty live at. If we really want to get back at him, why don’t we grab his broad up, make that nigga give up that paper and that Black Tar connect, so we can get the blocks moving on our side.” All the members looked at each other. Geez rubbed his chin, “that’s not a bad idea.”

“When should we slide and make that move though?” wondered Feezy. “In about a week or two, we’ll let shit blow over in the city, right now the operation is on a standstill until I say we open up shop again.” SP all agreed. “This about to be crazy,” laughed Relly as he rubbed his hands together in excitement. “Yeah, this shit will hit different, mark my words on that,” said Geez.



Rashad was in Newark, New Jersey at a spot he bought with the help of Jack. Some of the crew members went up there too and some stayed in Philly to hide out from the heat. They got rid of the guns and hid throughout the outskirts of the city. Stafh didn’t answer his phone when Rashad called him, and it had him worried. Reem was in a secret location laying low as he healed up from his gunshot wound. Rashad called Stafh again, not knowing that Preem had been killed in the

shootout and Stafh didn't know what to do with the body. He was feeling crazy now and started to panic. It was getting dark around 5:45, Stafh drove through an alley where it wasn't busy and turned the lights off quick. He looked at Preem's lifeless body as his eyes watered. "I'm sorry, cuz." Preem's eyes were still open, Stafh had gloves on as he closed Preem's eyes and exited the wheel. After he left the wheel, he noticed that he had a lot of missed calls.

He reassured the crew that he was good and told them about what happened and that Preem didn't make it. Instantly, everybody's hearts dropped in sadness then in anger. He then went on to tell them where Preem's body was located and that it wouldn't be long before someone called the police about finding his body.

Carla thought that Rashad was on a business trip as far as real estate and looking at properties when she found out that he was in Newark. She called him about the massive shooting that took place and he played it off as if he didn't stamp the greenlight for North to hit SP. He told her that he'd be coming back in a few days. Her stress level went down knowing that he wasn't in Philly at the time and waited until he came back. He also called Juanita to let her know that he was good as well.

Stafh took an UBER to the same spot where Reem was, no enemies knew the location, plus it was a property that Rashad bought. He knocked on the door, it took a couple seconds for Reem to get there because he still had a limp.

“I’m coming, bro,” said Reem as he slowly walked over. Stafh was antsy and upset. “What’s wrong?” Stafh didn’t answer right way. “We lost Preem, man.”

“What?! Hell no?!” said Reem. “Fuck!”

“Shit was hectic out there, bullets flying everywhere, we were both running to the wheel, and he just... he just...” Stafh was distraught, and he couldn’t talk anymore as he relived the incident that took his cousin’s life.

THINGS FALL APART

The streets were hot. Preem was a loyal soldier and it was an unfortunate and senseless chain of events that took his life. Rashad had to make sure that he did what he was supposed to do as far as Stafh getting rid of his dirty clothes. The rest of the crew ditched the dirt bikes, and so far there were no suspects at large according to the news stations covering the events, and there wasn't much information being told and there was also no cooperation from the ones who were in the area when the shootout happened.

After a week passed, Rashad came back to Philly. It was raining and dark outside as he headed over to Asia's crib on Lehigh Avenue & North 5th street to go check Carla out. He had Bleek drive him over there. Carla was waiting for him to fall through. As Bleek pulled up to the crib, Rashad told him that he would hit him when he needed him to swing back.

“Keep your eyes peeled and watch your body, cops are on the prowl and SP may be around lurkin’.” Bleek nodded his head as his gun was on his lap, he reassured him that he would be on standby. He waited for Rashad to get inside the crib and he left. Rashad knocked on the door and Asia answered.

“What’s up Asia,” Rashad said to Asia as she opened the door wider for Rashad to come in and Carla was standing behind her in the living room. “Your man is here for you, girl.” She walked up and gave Rashad a hug and a kiss when they embraced. “Can we be alone, please?” Rashad asked. “Yes, of course, let’s go upstairs.” Asia stayed downstairs watching tv. The couple walked up the steps and into a spare bedroom. As soon as they were about to sit down on the bed, gunfire began to erupt outside from a distance. CRACK! CRACK! CRACK! CRACK! It sounded like a goon was outside shooting a Tech-9 or an UZI. The couple ducked to the floor instantly as shot after shot rang out. Rashad covered Carla and he gripped her tightly as she buried her face into his chest, and he squeezed her tightly. Downstairs, Asia was hiding under the table, but she was safe. Eventually, the shots stopped and the couple got up slowly after they felt the coast was clear from potential stray bullets. Carla was shaken up; she stayed jittery for a few minutes. “You good?” asked Rashad. “I’m fine, I’m so sick of this shit, I’m over it, and it’s never going to end until somebody loses a loved one and then it’s already too late.” Carla was drained from the madness that seemed to surround the city of Philly. She also

had no idea that it was Rashad's crew that was involved in the shooting in South Philly.

"It's horrible that a mother and the rest of her family have to bury a child. A child! A little ass boy." Carla was moved to tears. Rashad gulped but she didn't hear him, and he felt uncomfortable and shameful. That wasn't part of the plan, and nobody knew what crew was responsible for shooting the little boy. Those chain of events was far from expected and it caused an outrage on every news platform. Carla had the idea of wanting to move when she got her business in order. "What are your future plans outside of Philly?" she asked. Rashad looked up at her. "One thing for sure is that I want to change things around the city, give the city hope, a lot of kids need something good to look forward to," said Rashad. The city had over 500 deaths in the previous year, more than 2,000 people were shot, especially with women and children, which was documented on the news when reporting about the shootings in South Philly. The city leaders were confused and continued to try and put their heads together to figure out a solution. They had to invest in areas that were working and do away with strategies that weren't working to keep the crime rate down.

Carla looked over at Rashad. "You know, I never once judged you for what you do, and I know since you've chosen a certain path that it made your relationship with your mom estranged. I'm glad that you were able to mend it. I also want you to be strictly legit," Carla said as she dropped a tear. "I

love you, Rashad. I want to move and I want you to come along with me.” Rashad gave a surprising look. “For real? I don’t want to be a burden or get in the way of your ascension, I’m trouble. I know deep down that my ass isn’t good for you, anyway, I’d be selfish to put you in harm’s way, it’s not worth it.”

“No, I’m serious, Rashad. I feel that you’re worth it, TO ME, are you shittin’ me? We’re inseparable together and I haven’t felt this way in a long ass time. The way you make me feel is unquestionable. I’ve lived my life in fear for far too long with the passing of my ex-years ago from being in the streets and I can’t afford to go down that road again. I want to avoid that reality. I’m down for you but you have to scratch my back as well for this to work.” Carla wasn’t playing. “I don’t want you to be staying in the midst of the jungle and get chewed up out here, anybody is capable of being food out here. You have so much potential, make this power move with me. My boutique will be set up in one of those locations.”

Carla had a lot of money saved up and she wanted to move on. “I’ll never turn my back on North, I’m from here, straight up, but I want to change for myself and it’s time to elevate and level up.” She was unyielding, she stuck to her game plan and frankly, that was with or without Rashad in the picture. “I will strongly consider that. I’m not mad at that plan and I love and wanna be with you too.” Rashad knew that love was sacrificing, and he was there for it. Rashad was

getting emotional. "What's wrong with you, baby? Talk to me," Carla caressed Rashad's ear and was concerned. Rashad realized now as an adult, his decisions as a teenager to be in the street was a rebellious choice, as most teenagers make.

The couple watched a movie for a while, after about 30 minutes into the film, Carla was rubbing her hands around his chest and was touching on his abs. Once again, she told him that she loved him while gazing into each other's eyes, and he smiled. Slowly, they began to become intimate with one another. She slowly got on top of him as she helped him get his clothes off. They kissed passionately as he unhooked her bra and massaged her breasts. She was getting wetter by the second as he placed his hands all over her body. The bedroom got steamy with raw sex in the air. Rashad stroked Carla roughly and deeply and she was deeply satisfied. After they finished up they both went and got in the shower. Their conversation resumed inside the shower. "Trust me, this wasn't my ceiling. I feel where you're coming from and of course I can't lose you. I don't want to overstay my welcome in these streets. She gripped him tightly, he closed his eyes as he placed his chin on top of her head and slowly rocked back and forth.

The following morning Rashad was in his condo by himself, he was in deep thought as he poured himself a drink. Even though he had his reasonings, he wanted out of the business and Carla further enhanced those reasonings. One of the best things that stood out about Rashad was that

he never wanted to display power in a negative light, he never flaunted his gains or position in the game. He was the one pulling the strings in the background, he moved like a shadow, his workers were like the pawns that were on the corners, although their business mindset wasn't as sharp as his. He knew that they were living in the moment, and not seeing the future past street shit. It was only about the paper for them. It was never about the lifestyle. Rashad was a smart drug dealer as horrible as that sounds.

It was a definite, the nonsense was over with. Rashad was inside of his head too much. He finally started to realize, even if it was too late, that there's been so much damage done, losing friends to streets, shootings, run ins with the law, etc. Never did it matter how much was done good or bad out here, what was evident was that the streets never showed love back. In the grand scheme of things, all it did was take good people away from their close friends and family. Rashad wanted to put the drama and streets behind him. He grew tired of waking up and going to bed paranoid, or possibly having to look over his shoulder to see if an op may have caught him slipping. Rashad called Bleek to link up with him. Bleek didn't answer right away but called back. "Yeah?" said Bleek. "Meet me over at Beaux Arts Lofts, link up with me, it's time to rap," replied Rashad, and he hung up.

While Rashad waited for Bleek to arrive, he stood staring at the city line from the roof top of his condominium. Bleek was walking out, as Rashad heard his footsteps he slowly

turned his head around. "What's goin' on? You made it sound like it was urgent, what's up, Kin?"

"I'm out of this shit," said Rashad, and Bleek rolled his eyes and began to walk around in circles with his hands on his hips, Rashad just looked at him pacing. "Where the fuck is this shit coming from now? Nigga, we basically signed an oath to be doin' what we're doin and now you going to flee on us?" Bleek was heated. "A little boy is DEAD! You don't find nothin' wrong with that equation?" Rashad poked himself in the temple as if to indicated that Bleek was not computing what he was saying. A little ass boy who had nothing to do with anything, BRAINS BLOWN all over the street. You ain't feel how evil that was? Now, just imagine that mental toll, agony and pain that one of us or whoever it was just put that family through!" Rashad was screaming and was livid, damn near spitting on Bleek as he screamed.

"Causalities are part of the game, whether it be women or children," said Bleek. That was foul to Rashad. "It's not something you can prevent, nigga, now all of a sudden you're getting soft, you're bitchin." Bleek had a repulsive personality when it came to having compassion. It reminded Rashad of his father. "Look at the niggas that we lost; you nut!" yelled Rashad. "Why do you have the audacity to make me seem like I'm crazy?" "You can't tell me that this shit doesn't cross your mind." Bleek shrugged as he put his hands in his pockets. "For all we know, the lil' nigga that caught a shell could've been looking outside of the window and got hit."

Bleek wasn't trying to understand. "It's a dirty ass game but somebody has to play it," he yelled back. "We from the trenches, nigga, where it's either YOU or it's THEM! You knew EXACTLY what the fuck you got yourself into from the rip! The money, the bitches, the cars and the clothes. I have no time to feel remorse." Bleek had ice inside his veins. "I'm not hearing it, you can't turn your back now, not on us." Bleek stood firm on his beliefs. "Stand on what the fuck it is that you do out here. Your pops was a street nigga too, it's embedded in you. How the fuck you think he would feel hearing this shit coming from you right now? Bleek sucked his teeth and looked Rashad up and down. He walked up closer to Rashad, digging his finger into his chest as he gave him dead on eye contact. "Huh?! Tell me that I'm lying. I know you better than you know yo motherfuckin' self." Rashad licked his lips. "It's a sad reality of life that we're going to lose niggas in the battlefield like we did Preem," Bleek added. "I understand, but I didn't think it was going to go this far and so fast." Shit has me all the way fucked up," said Rashad.

"We got niggas jailing right now, fighting cases, fighting for their lives and them niggas ain't complaining, but you are, why?" Bleek was fed up with Rashad but deep down he knew that he had a point. It was only two places you would end up as cliché as it was, jail or deep in the graveyard, first class trip to Heaven's gate. "We're all waiting to be food out here," said Rashad." The same trenches that a lot of niggas bragged

about, were the same ones that were checking out of here. “None of this puts a fracture in your heart? Where’s the space for intellectual growth? We trappin’ for just a name or are we looking at the bigger picture that’s at hand?”

Bleek took a step back, “This shit is numb to me at this point,” he responded. “This is all I know, all that I’m good at. We’ve been deprived and trapped in poverty and we found a way to finally run it up and make our circumstances better, what else do you want, nigga? The way that I see it, I’m staying ten toes down, and this is my reality. I’m starting to feel like you’re fuckin’ with my head.”

Rashad sighed. “I’m not losing my life, dawg, period. You can’t fault me for seeing shit clearly now. I rather do it now than later and risk getting pinched. I let a lot of shit influence me, I let my pops influence me, I’m not living my life with a heavy ass heart behind nut shit. At the end of the day, homie, life still goes on without us, eventually we’re forgotten. As much as my mom sacrificed and let slide off the strength of loving my pop’s, I understand more clearly now on why she was keeping limitations on shit, regardless of the self-discovery that I needed to grow from a boy to a man.” Bleek’s face scrunched up. “Nah, nigga you can DIE as a KING, I’m living my life to the fullest, I’m a continue to drive these foreign wheels, you feel me? I’ll continue to stunt on these niggas, I’m out here. We came too far; I’m not turning back.” Bleek put his hand out for a dap and Rashad just looked at his hand. “Wow, it’s like

that?” Rashad just couldn’t rock with that specific mind frame.

“I’m not cosigning, I want more for myself and Carla is who I care about. What type of nigga would I be if I allow her to get thrown in the mix?” Bleek was becoming more erratic. “Man, fuck that bitch, you too busy taken’ a bitch personal and you letting it overcloud your better judgement, it’s no wonder you’re drawn.” Rashad’s facial expression changed, and his eyes got lower. “What the fuck did you just say to me?” Bleek was reluctant to repeat himself, especially to a boss like Rashad who put him in position to flourish. “You know what? I’ll let you slide with that shit because clearly, you’re still wet behind your stupid ass ears. Bottomline, I don’t give a fuck how you feel or what you’re mad about, just know that if you were anybody else, your ass would be dead right now. Watch your tongue. You drinkin’ Hi-Tech?” Bleek knew better but he was emotional, barely ever logical. He was out of line, he didn’t like change, he loved what the crew was doing. “My fault, I drawled, my fault.”

“You ready to die I see, or are you ready to do football numbers? I guess that’s your destiny.” Rashad’s mind was corrupted and manipulated from a late teen. Even as teenager, he knew he had the right to form his own opinion. Big Shad played a factor of steering him in the wrong direction for his own selfish gain. “I’ll forever be sturdy even if I bow out gracefully. Don’t get me wrong, you’re one of my strongest soldiers, our names are stamped regardless, it

comes down to a time where you have to walk away.” Bleek wasn’t trying to hear it. “I’m in this game for life, so go head and walk your new path and leave me out of that equation. I’m rapped out at this point. I’ll keep doing my thing. Reem is still down, he can take over the business and handle what needs to be handled and what not.” Bleek waived Rashad off as he walked away but Rashad stopped him in his tracks. “Hold up, Bleek! One more thing.” Bleek turned around slowly. “You sure that you built for the graveyard? There’s no turning back from that.” Bleek looked Rashad up and down. “No doubt! I know that I’ll go out on my feet and on my own terms, for sure, for sure.” It was a lost cause. All Rashad wanted to do was convey the message that dealing with spineless motherfuckers with no honor to the game wasn’t the way to go, you’ll be pinched. Bleek wanted to die a legend and he was comfortable, because to him he was living his life to the fullest. He wanted State Road to remember him, he wanted his name to be platinum in them jails forever and in the streets. Rashad had to realize and come to the point where cutting losses is the only option. He had plenty money saved up, his pops taught him well. The loudest motherfuckers in the room were the ones who were most likely the true suckers and the ones on the streets were usually going to end up broke, if they weren’t already.

Neither one of them were beefin’ but it was evident that they were on two different pages. He tried everything in his power in those moments to persuade him to give up the

game before he became food. Streets could turn anybody into a monster. It was time to transition lifestyles, but most importantly, the mind frame and being at peace. Rashad turned back around when Bleek finally left and just stared outside and looked at the city.

Carla was with Asia as they were leaving the movie theater after having a much-needed girl's night out. Asia pulled up to Carla's crib and turned the car off. "Thanks for treating me to a good time tonight, girl, that shit was much needed, for sure," said Carla. "Girl, you already know how we rock, if you say we out then we out. Anytime you look like you're in a slump, we fuckin' the city up." Both women started laughing. Carla slowly transitioned from a laugh to feeling nauseous. "Oh, shit, you don't look so good, what's wrong, girl?" Carla exhaled slowly. "Yeah, that threw me off. I've been feeling crazy the last couple weeks, and I've been tired, at work and when I'm home. This isn't the first time that I've been feeling nausea," she explained. Asia's eyebrows rose up. "You just said a lot just now, do you know what that sounds like?" Carla's lips quivered. It didn't dawn on her until Asia pointed out what she was insinuating. "Well, now I do," said Carla. "Hmm, have you missed your period at all?"

"No," said Carla.

"Oh, alright, well I think the most logical thing to do

would be to take a test,” said Asia. “When should I take it?” asked Carla. “Bitch, as soon as possible, what are you waiting on? Let’s go grab it.” Asia rubbed Carla’s left shoulder. “We can hit the pharmacy right now and see what the deal is, how’s that sound?” Carla smiled and the women headed over to the CVS Pharmacy on Broad Street. When they pulled up, Asia waited in the wheel while Carla went inside and grabbed a test. When she walked in the aisle where the tests were, she kept wondering in the back of her head how she would tell Rashad if it was indeed positive. She didn’t want to get too excited even though she was showing all the symptoms. She picked up the test and rang it up with the cashier.

The two pulled back up to the crib, as she sat on the passenger side, she was stuck, she couldn’t move because she sat in a daze “What’s wrong?” asked Asia. Carla dropped a tear, “I can’t believe that there’s a chance that I might be pregnant with Rashad’s baby. I’m so nervous to take this shit, I’m scared, what if I am and he doesn’t want it?” Carla was letting her nerves get the best of her in the moment and Asia had to calm her nerves for her.”

“You have to find out, baby. And besides, you have all the symptoms of pregnancy, so let’s just find out what the deal is and whatever the result is, we’ll handle it. I’m your best friend and your biggest supporter, so let’s get it,” reassured Asia. The two headed upstairs and Asia stayed in the hallway as Carla took the pregnancy test. She waited a couple minutes and laid it on the sink. She closed her eyes and tried

to breathe as slowly as possible to prepare herself for this moment. Her palms began to sweat as she picked it back up, she opened her eyes.

POSITIVE it read! Carla's jaw dropped. "Oh, my God!" she screamed. "What? What? Is everything ok? Talk to me!" Asia knocked on the door but no longer heard a peep. She looked down and seen the doorknob turning slowly and her face was straight, no face of any emotions.

"Are you or aren't you?" asked Asia, she was getting too excited and antsy.

"Yes, girl, I'm pregnant!" yelled Carla.

"I am so happy for you!"

The women kept jumping up and down and Asia grabbed Carla, hugging her tightly as Carla covered her mouth, being overwhelmed with emotions. This was such a blessing to her, that she made another life with someone that she loved so much. The two sat down as Carla was gathering her thoughts. "When are you going to tell Rashad?" asked Asia. Carla exhaled before answering, "I'll call him or send him a text to tell him to come back over tomorrow. I want to go see my parents tomorrow and tell them the big news!" Both began to cry. "Well, you already know that I'm the baby's God mother, you know that, right? Just so we're clear. We have a while until this baby gets here but just know that he or she will be spoiled like shit!" Carla

laughed. "Relax, whew, this is a lot to grasp right now," she said.

"Trust me, I'm sure that Rashad will be excited, there's no doubt in my mind."

"You're right, I'm not worried, he's been talking about being legit. We have plenty of money saved up, my boutique will be taking off, we're moving, all the wrinkles will be ironed out, this should be more motivation for him. He will be happy."

"Speak it into existence, girl. Rashad is sturdy, in my opinion just from face value, I think he takes pride in family values. He wouldn't turn his back on you, and this'll be a battle test on how strong ya'll relationship is, you feel me?"

"You already know, sis," replied Carla.

"Well, listen, I'm going to head out. I will check you out tomorrow and see how you're doing, hopefully in that time-frame Rashad will know about the baby and he'll be hype. I'm dead ass tired, baby, so I'm gonna hit the pad and take my ass to sleep. Give me a hug." The two kissed and hugged each other goodnight. As Asia went out the door, Carla watched her get inside her wheel and drive off, making sure she got in safe. Carla pulled her phone out from her back pocket as she stood on her porch for a few moments, it was dark out, she could barely see. She had no idea that someone was watching her, and it happened to be one of Geez's men that

knew that Rashad was dealing with Carla. Geez knew how bad this would hurt Rashad to have his most valuable resource. Geez orchestrated the plan to kidnap her for ransom and drug work. Carla was still on her phone, scrolling through her social media timeline when she heard a noise, it made her look up, but she saw nobody. She dropped her face backdown in her phone and as soon as she was distracted again, she heard a gun cocking back. She jumped up and screamed but couldn't move in the moment.

“Let's go bitch, you're coming with me, so get the fuck inside,” said Feezy as he pointed to the truck that sat in the cut. Carla was frozen solid not knowing in that instant if she was going to be murdered. She was stiff. “Bitch! Did you not hear what the fuck I just told you? Get the fuck in the truck!” Feezy strong armed Carla, he was rough with her. “Take your hands off me! Let me go!” she screamed. He had the gun pointed at her head as he grew frustrated. “You better shut the fuck up before I blow your brains out! I don't give a fuck if you're a bitch or not.” Carla remained silent as tears flowed down her face. He put the gun in the back of his pocket and put her over his shoulders. She began to smack him on his back trying to fight him off, but he was too strong for her hits to affect him in any way. Geez sat in the back of the truck and Dot was driving. Feezy opened the truck door and pushed her inside of the truck and sat her down. She was still crying as she covered her face. She was confused and upset and had no idea what the

hell was going on. Geez was silent as he just sized her up. “Carla, Carla, Carla,” said Geez as he laughed. Buck and Relly were up the street from where Geez, Dot & Feezy were. They were posted up inside of a 2016 Black Honda Civic.

“I know your mind is all over the place like what the fuck is goin’ on, ain’t it?” Geez scoffed. “Who the fuck are you?” asked Carla as she kept her face covered. “You don’t need to know that right now. I suggest you shut your mouth in the meantime, though, for your sake. We’re about to take a ride, we’ll be in touch with your man in a little bit.” Carla was alarmed at that point. “Let’s go,” said Geez as they pulled off. Carla couldn’t stop shaking, Feezy kept his gun in his hand and grinded his teeth. Geez had to remind him about the main objective because Feezy could be a loose cannon even though most times he was the main voice of reasoning before doing something. She sat in the middle of the two. Geez kept looking at Carla with disgust. “Please, don’t kill me,” she said as he just gave a sinister laugh, looked away from her and looked out the window. “Just shut up, bitch, I don’t want to hear your mouth or you’re dying,” said Feezy.

The truck stopped at the graffiti pier. Everybody got out, with Feezy grabbing Carla but not before taping her mouth shut, covering her face so she couldn’t see where she was at, and taking her clothes off down to her panties and bra. Carla was feeling humiliated and felt she was about to be raped but that wasn’t the case. “Come on, let’s go.” said Geez. Feezy

put her over his shoulders, at this point, she was silent, telling herself just to comply so she can keep her life.

There was a chair that was sitting in the middle of the pier. The pier had been abandoned, as much as it was private property, nobody cared, so it was deemed as a public park. Feezy sat Carla down on the chair and removed the tape from her mouth and took her phone. Feezy gave Dot the rope to start tying her up. "What's the code to your phone?" asked Geez. Carla was trying to contain herself before answering. Geez was poised and he slowly looked at Feezy, resulting in Feezy putting the gun to her temple, and she complied. Dot tied Carla up as good as possible so she couldn't try to run, but she wouldn't be able to outrun the three regardless. Geez scrolled through the phone to look for Rashad's number. "You have nothing to worry about, don't worry your sweet little heart, relax, don't get your blood pressure up," laughed Dot.

"Please, please, I'm pregnant!" said Carla. "Whatever you want, whatever you need, I'll give it to you, just don't kill me or my unborn child, please! I have nothing to do with whatever is going on." Carla kept pleading. Geez stood in front of Carla and didn't say a word. "What is it that you want from me? How do you know my man?" Geez stayed silence to build up suspense as he found Rashad's phone number and called it. The phone rang a few times before he picked up. Carla telling Geez that she was pregnant, she thought that would alarm them and convince them to let her go but that

just made it more entertaining, and Rashad had no idea that she was pregnant.

“Hey, what’s up baby, is everything okay?” As Rashad was on the phone, he heard nothing on the other side, and it made him confused. “Hello? Babe, babe, you good? Hello?” Feezy had the tape back over her mouth so she wouldn’t scream. “Come on, stop playing with me,” Rashad was annoyed as he sat up on the side of his bed. “What’s up with you, homie?” said Geez. Rashad’s heart dropped and he got closer to the phone. “WHO THE FUCK IS THIS?”

“Nigga, who the fuck do you think it is? You know EXACTLY who the FUCK this is, nigga.”

“Yo, on everything that I love, you better not put your hands on her, or it’s forever lit for all of you niggas! Mark my fuckin’ words!” yelled Rashad as he grew angrier. “I’ll smoke every last one of you, one by one! On God! What the fuck do you want?”

“You still talkin’ heavy? Nigga, clearly I’m with your precious bitch, you better act like your stupid ass has some sense before she gets smoked! You not in a position to be making threats, you touch mine and I touch yours, that’s how the game go,” said Geez.

“Nah, fuck no, that’s exactly how the game DOESN’T go, it’s no women or children, and this the type of time you on? That’s how you carry it?” Rashad was furious and began to stomp on the floor. Geez could hear the commotion on the other side of the phone. He looked over at his crew and

started laughing. “Ha, this nigga bitchin’.” Feezy & Dot started to laugh.

“Oh yeah, I wanna say congratulations to you ahead of time.” Rashad bit his bottom lip in anger, he put the phone on speaker and tossed it in the middle of the bed, grabbed his gun from inside the drawer. “Huh? Congratulations for what? What are you talking about?” Rashad was getting anxious. “Let me talk to my girl, I need to know that she good, this shit is between me and you, nigga, none of this extra shit is necessary.”

“Ha-ha, you don’t even dig it do you? You ain’t know? You about to be a father, my guy your shorty over here is pregnant, this makes this even more exciting for me. I figured I’d be the first to tell you, you know? Letting the cat out the bag and all that. Ha-ha, I guess I wanted to twist the blade a little deeper for you to get the picture that I’m not playing with you, nigga. You hear me tough guy?” Rashad started running his fingers through his hair and grabbing his face as it scrunched up. He was trying to hold it together as best as he could, he had to keep himself sane for the time being. Buck and Relly stood there while they listened to the conversation between Geez and Rashad, as it was on speaker.

“Yeah, nigga, loud and clear, name your price and don’t touch my girl, PERIOD. What is it that you want? Weight? Paper?” Rashad had to bargain with Geez as fast as he could and give him whatever it was that he wanted to get Carla back so he wouldn’t kill her.”

“Now, you’re talking my type of language, now how hard was that?” asked Geez. “I know you’re a smart guy, and I know you can’t afford to lose your prize possession. I’m a reasonable type of nigga, so this is what I want, I want \$300,000 and I want the connect that you have. I want that weight, don’t play me for a fool either, I’m on your ass if you fuck with me.” Rashad agreed to the demands at hand and immediately hung up to get over to the pier.

Rashad called in reinforcements to be safe, he didn’t know if it was going to be a diversion or a set up. Some people, when they planned out a kidnap for ransom or drugs, they never planned for the intended victim to live. Reem was still down recovering from his bullet wound, it wouldn’t have been smart to call him when he could hurt himself even more. The moment that Geez gave his price to get Carla back, Rashad called Slim and told him about the circumstances that were going on. He immediately answered the phone. “Yo, what’s the deal? You need something, bro?” asked Slim. “Emergency, man, these niggas kidnapped Carla for ransom!”

“Nigga, what!? Hell no, nigga. What you need me to do? What do they want in exchange?”

“They want the Black Tar connect and \$300,000 or she’s dead!” Rashad still couldn’t fathom that women could get involved in something that they were innocent of, all because who you were associated with and them going for the juggler. “Grab that shit and meet up with me, I’ll send you

the location of where we can meet up, call a couple more of our youngins' just in case shit get goofy, I don't trust those motherfuckers." Rashad was livid. "Where do they have her at?"

"They have her over at the graffiti pier, she's scared, man. I tried for her not to be involved in this nut ass shit and I still got her in it anyway. Grab your vest, too, bro." Slim told Rashad not to sweat it and grabbed the Franchi SPAS-12 Shotgun from his wall of guns, he was ready to make a bloody mess. He grabbed his vest, luckily that Rashad warned him. "We're meeting up ASAP, we bout to get her back, they don't know who they fuckin' wit, I'm ready to drop some shit if shit gets real." The two hung up and Rashad finished getting ready and even put his bulletproof vest on. Slim went inside the safe and got the money that SP wanted, he grinded his teeth as he threw the money inside a black duffle bag. Rashad's youngins' were business savvy but they were enforcers as well and loved the smell of smoke in the air. Slim called them and scooped them.

Rashad was waiting for the rest of his crew while he kept looking at his watch. He was jumpy and nervous, he looked up as they pulled up. "Follow behind me," said Rashad. One of the youngin's rolled down their window. "We on go, big bro. Say no more."

SP were waiting and they were starting to get impatient. "Where is these niggas at, man? Evidently, he doesn't care that much about this broad if he ain't here yet, and she

carrying this man seed? Man listen..." said Dot. "Them niggas will be here. The trucks pulled up about 10 minutes after Geez and Dot's conversation and Feezy was standing next to Carla as she was sniffing and crying silently as can be. "Bitch shut your ass up," whispered Dot. The lights from both trucks stayed on as everybody inside stayed put. Slim told the youngins' to keep the truck running. Slim hopped out the passenger side and Rashad hopped out next, slowly.

One of the youngins' tossed the bag of work to Slim through the window, the other one gave the money to Rashad. They slowly started to approach. "Easy, easy, I'd dread carefully," said Geez. Dot still had the gun pointed at Carla. Rashad put his hand up, "It's not even necessary, we here, you got what you wanted, right?" Dot smiled; he was loving this shit.

Rashad gave the vilest glare at Geez as Geez mirrored his glare, both looking horrific in the face. "All of this could've been avoided, you know that?" said Geez. "Yup, you're right about that, you wanted to be greedy and have everything instead everybody having a slice of the pie. It'll never be my fault that the next man is too foolish for his own good, homie, you drawled too many times." Geez shook his head in disappointment. "Drop the bags over to the side and you can have your bitch."

Rashad and slim looked at each other and both dropped the bags. Geez looked over at Dot, and Feezy walked over and started to untie her. Rashad had to keep his cool espe-

cially after seeing Carla half naked, tied up on the chair with men around her. “It’s gonna be ok, babe, I’m here,” yelled Rashad. “You sensitive now, huh?” joked Geez. “Tell your man to take the strap away from my girl,” urged Rashad. Geez just looked at Rashad and proceeded to look at Dot, Buck and Relly as they all cocked their guns back at the same time. “Yo, yo! What the fuck are you doin’, nigga?!” screamed Rashad. Slim reached behind his back but stopped as Feezy and Dot pointed their guns. “Wait, wait,” said Rashad. “This wasn’t the plan, you got your money, and you got your weight, Carla come on.” Carla whimpered as she got up from the chair slowly. Geez was trying to get a rise in which he was succeeding in. Rashad bit his bottom lip in nervousness and his heart felt like it was about to jump out of his chest. This was basically a standoff and he had to make sure that there was no funny business about to happen. Carla peeped her surroundings as she walked in Rashad’s direction slowly. Carla began to start jogging over to Rashad, his eyes were fixated on her making sure she ran right into his arms.

As soon as she was halfway, Geez gave a head signal for SP to open fire. The plan was to take the weight and money after executing them. “Gun!” screamed Slim, and Carla dove to the side for cover just before the first shot. Dot shot first as everybody ducked for cover, the youngins' inside the truck ducked as a couple shots hit the glass, but not strong enough to shatter it completely. POW! POW! POW! POW! Geez started to shoot as both crews exchanged gunfire. “Cover me,

bro!” hollered Rashad as he made his way over to Carla who was hiding behind the wall, covering her ears from the shooting. “Baby!” hollered Rashad. “Go head! We’re good! SP was outnumbered and it was foolish for them to only have a few reinforcements. They should’ve known that North was going to be deep in case of static, it was a bad move on their part. So many shots were ringing off. Slim hit Feezy in the arm as Feezy dropped the gun but tried to pick it up with his other hand, Slim shot again while striking him in his chest, dropping him, killing him. Geez opened fire back. Geez cowardly tried to hide behind Buck, Dot & Relly while two of the youngins’ kept shooting simultaneously.

“Are you ok!?” asked Rashad as he grabbed her cheeks in comfort and kissed her fast on her forehead. “Did they touch you? Did they hurt you?” Rashad was irate. “No, no, nothing happened,” replied Carla as she cried. “Come on, be quiet, let’s go.” Rashad picked her up and put her over his shoulder as he raced to the side of the truck to put her in. “Get down and don’t move!” said Rashad. He placed a blanket over Carla’s body and the youngin pulled off to get her to safety. The rest of the SP members were about to run out of ammo as they shot back. “I’m about to run out, and these niggas keep going! How the fuck we gonna get out of here?” Buck and Relly got hit by the youngins’. Only Geez and Dot were left. They were about to make a run for the wheel. As they were running to get inside the wheel, Rashad bucked two shots at Dot, one hitting him in the shoulder, but he dove

inside the driver side, rushing to put the keys inside the ignition and Geez hopped inside the passenger side, they started to pull off. Dot was in pain, barely being able to control the truck. Rashad, Slim and the youngin' sprayed the truck, riddling Dot and grazing Geez, the wheel crashed into the wall. Geez was seriously injured as he was coughing, he had a head injury from hitting the glove compartment and was bleeding. He began to grunt. Dot was dead. "Hold up," said Rashad, "Stay here." Geez's gun dropped to the floor and he was in too bad of a shape to pick it up, it was useless. He grunted as Rashad walked to his side. He opened the door and put the gun to Geez's temple. "Say something now, faggot ass nigga, you fucked up! See what you made me do?"

Geez was dizzy and was chuckling. "Do it, do it!" Rashad placed both hands around his strap and grinded his teeth. "I said do it or are you too much of a pussy!?" Rashad slowly lowered his arm. "Just like I thought, you a soft nigga trying to be tough, I knew you wasn't cut like that." Slim ran over to Rashad. "Fuck this nigga, he's a waste, ain't nobody gonna miss his ass anyway, look at his man, slumped over here." Rashad walked away slowly so he could get back to Carla. It was a thought in the back of his mind that she was about to be suffering from long-term post-traumatic stress disorder after this confrontation that happened. "Go head, bro, I'll be over there," said Slim. "Don't even worry about this mess right here." Slim called for the youngin' to finish Geez off as he grabbed the money and put the drugs back inside the

wheel. The youngin' splattered Geez's brains all over the dashboard, ran back to the wheel and they pulled off. Small amounts of blood hit his face after he finished him, and he wiped it off. "Bitch ass nigga," he said. After the events transpired, the entire time on the way back, Rashad beat himself in the head. Once again, he didn't want it to have to go that far but his hand was forced. Leading down to a waste, a classic example of more bloodshed that was useless. Nobody makes it out safe when you seek out revenge.

After they got back from the Graffiti pier, everybody made sure that they burned their clothes, washed up and got rid of any evidence that could trace back to them. The youngins' got paid and headed back to the block, they knew how to move accordingly. Rashad went to one of his hideouts where Carla was and stayed with her, comforting her, and surprisingly she wasn't as mad as he thought she would be at him, just more shaken up over the incident at hand. She knew this wasn't entirely his fault that she got put in the middle. As far as Rashad knew at that point, he had nothing to worry about as far as enemies because the main issue at hand was taken care of tonight. "We HAVE to move, I have to get out of this city, this is the last straw, I was almost killed, Rashad!" she started hitting him in his chest and grew more impatient and panicky. "I know and we will, I promise you that and I'm done with all this! I know that I almost lost you."

"Fuck this rich drug dealer shit, Rashad! YOU ARE NOT YOUR FATHER! Do you hear me!?" Carla had enough. "You

can die, it's no picks out here, and you have envious mother-fucker's that want what you have and are jealous of how you move! Don't you understand that?"

"I know, but listen to me, you're pregnant, you're pregnant with my child and that is the biggest wakeup call out of all wake up calls. I'm through with the nut shit, you hear me? I'm DONE. I have a quarter of a million dollars that's stashed away and we're getting the fuck up out of here, plus you have your bread that's stashed, it ain't no rap, we out!" Carla hugged Rashad. "Strictly legit shit, I'm counting my blessings, baby." Rashad wiped the tears from Carla's eyes. We're up out of this motherfucker, I promise you that. We'll move!" Rashad was so happy to be becoming a father. He moved his hands down from Carla's cheeks to her belly and gently put both of his hands on her stomach and started caressing it and kissing it. "You just gave me the biggest and most priceless gift, a mini-me!" Carla started to laugh. "I'll never leave you, I'll never put you in harm's way, I'll never leave your side, it's us and only us!" Rashad kissed Carla's forehead.

Juanita's day was long. She was having hunches about all the static that was around the city, while she was talking to her coworkers on her break. She was explaining how she's been paranoid and fearful for her son's wellbeing, especially in a city where the death toll was on the rise. She realized that

there was not much she could do besides pray because he was a grown man that had to take control of his own destiny. Rashad was on the move and barely spoke to Juanita about his other endeavors, besides her just finding out that she was going to be a grandmother, that was more of a reason she hoped, for him to get out of dodge to live his life with Carla.

When Juanita got off, she checked her mail and saw that she had a letter from Big Shad. She was going to throw it out to close that chapter officially in her life but that was still her son's father. The letter was heartfelt. Big Shad explained how he came to the realization that Juanita was right about his decisions and that he was wrong for introducing Rashad into a death trap. He explained that he had nothing but time to reflect on his bad decisions, even if it was too late to correct them. It brought tears to her eyes as a teardrop fell on the letter.

BACK AGAINST THE WALL

*B*ack at the station, after a few months of proper planning, Hayes was knocking on his Captain's door. "What else do you have for me?" asked the Captain. "I have the blocks that the dealers are on from the informant, Riley, that I've been working with. I also have car descriptions, on top of names of the members of SP," replied Hayes. She's been credible this whole time.

Hayes had to make sure everything was efficient or this was going nowhere, and probable cause was important to get a warrant. Riley was able to be under the radar enough to get pictures and plate numbers. It got out of hand and more neighbors became frustrated with the lack of control. Everything was sent over to the District Attorney's office. Hayes did excellent work as everything was detailed, not bogus information, that wasn't actionable that would only result in a

patrol officer coming by. There were arrests made on the South.

Bleek and Stafh had weight inside of a white van. They were about to make a delivery. As Stafh locked the door behind the two, he tossed Bleek the keys in which he caught with one hand. "You drive, nigga" said Stafh. "got you," replied Bleek. The men had a spot down in the lower Northeast neighborhood down Frankford. One of their stash houses sat in the cut of the rest of the rowhomes. The two were inside the white van and were driving slowly, to be safe. Niggas never conversed when they were transporting in fear of wire taps and conversations being recorded. Frankford in a nutshell was where the Northeast and North Philly met. The two were about to turn on the 4700 block of Griscom Street. Bleek in that moment, made the ultimate mistake by forgetting to signal that he was about to turn on the next street, and there sat a Philly cop who immediately saw Bleek did not signal. They were driving about to hit the lights, Bleek looked in his rearview and saw the cop behind them. He didn't panic at first, he was a little startled. Stafh was looking down at his phone but his leg was tapped by Bleek to alarm him. The light was still red. "Look behind us," said Bleek.

"Stop trippin', we good, bro, just drive the wheel," said Stafh. As the light turned green, the cop was still behind

them. Bleek made sure he was driving the exact speed limit, but in minutes, it wouldn't even matter. The cop put his lights on. In unison they both said, "oh shit." Both of their hearts dropped and began to race. They looked at each other. It wouldn't have been smart to try and go on a high-speed chase either. "Man, pull this motherfucker over!" yelled Stafh. The men pulled in close to a gas station as the cop pulled up behind them. Bleek kept his hands on the steering wheel and gripped it tight. The cop hadn't gotten out yet. "Why the fuck you think we are getting pulled over?" asked Stafh. "Man, I don't know, I wasn't speeding or nothing. Clearly, I didn't drawl. These crackers just like to fuck with niggas, reaching their quota any way possible," replied Bleek. The cop opened his door slowly and approached the van slowly.

"These bitches are lucky that I don't just crack their melon, that jail shit. Man, I ain't with that," Stafh said angrily. "Nigga, it smells like tree in here, man this situation ain't looking good," said Bleek. "What the fuck, nigga?" The windows were up, and the cop hit the window with the bottom of the flashlight. Bleek rolled the window down slowly. "Hi gentleman, license and registration, please." Bleek reached over to the glove compartment. "Go slow, please," said the cop. Bleek was instantly annoyed because he was already going slow as it is, but he said nothing. Stafh just sat there looking at the cop with a serious face. Before going back, he told the men why they were being stopped. "I

stopped the van because you didn't put your turn signal on when you were on the street." Bleek closed his eyes, Stafh shook his head as he whispered, "stupid ass nigga," to Bleek. "Also, I smell the aroma of marijuana inside your vehicle," said the cop. Neither Bleek nor Stafh said anything. Traffic stops were a bitch to deal with, the chain of events were a case of bad luck. The officer flashed his bright lights around the floor. There by Stafh's feet was a large object. It looked to be a substantial amount of cash and at that point, there was a case of probable cause.

The part of the game that street niggas had to be reminded of was that it was always the smallest things that'll get you in a jam. Now the van was about to be searched and the officer was calling for back up. The men were in some shit at this point, shit was about to be all bad. Never did they expect to be in this predicament, they had too much shit inside the van. "Fuck," said Bleek silently. Not soon after, another cop pulled over. Stafh had his gun in his coat, he had his hand on it and was about to cock it back. "Yo, what the fuck are you doing?" asked Bleek. "What the fuck do you think I'm doing, nigga? Stafh was offended for a moment. "You know how much shit we have in this van, we better off shooting our way out if anything."

Bleek thought that was the dumbest idea ever to come up with. They both looked and saw the cops were talking. "So, getting us both killed is a better decision? Fuck that! You're not about to get me shot the fuck up!" Stafh put the gun away

and put it back in the glove compartment. “You’re right, fuck it, let’s see how this plays out.” Even though the cops didn’t have to ask to search the van with probable cause, the cop did anyway. “Sirs, you mind stepping out of the vehicle? Bleek nodded his head in compliance but in hopes of the cops not finding nothing. “Are there any illegal substances that me and my fellow officers need to know about before we search?”

“Nah, I mean, no, officer, not at all,” answered Bleek.

The men exited the van slowly, they stood on the side of the van and were keeping their self-control. The officers began their search, while Bleek and Stafh didn’t say a word as one of the other cops briefly looked over in their direction. As they continued their search, one of them noticed and found Stafh’s Glock 40 that was in the compartment and it was loaded with a full magazine, it was immediately confiscated by another officer and placed inside of a plastic bag. After the passenger side door was closed, they all migrated to the back of the van to open it. The men looked at each other and began to both shake their heads in unison. They were asked once again about illegal substances being inside and both men replied “no.” They wanted to know because they could’ve been more lenient possibly but Bleek didn’t give a fuck, he wanted to stay sturdy. Neither one of them took into consideration about the harming of one of the cops. When it came to illegal substances, if a cop inhaled, digested, or got pricked by

something, that was a felony. The van door was opened, there was black bags all over as if they were covering something. Bleek and Stafh couldn't see what they were doing. Inside, the cops found heavy drug substances of 5 pounds of crystal methamphetamines. "Jesus" said one of the cops, look at this, guys. We have something over here, come check this out, right now."

Two officers came over and put cuffs on Bleek and Stafh. "FUCK!" hollered Bleek and Stafh looked at him crazy. Another fellow cop walked over. "You're in quite a predicament here, fellas." The cop was diplomatic and gave them a chance in the beginning to tell the truth. Bleek's attitude was nonchalant, while Stafh looked down at the ground. Another cop brought the bag over with the gun inside. "Is this your gun?" It's fully loaded, is it registered?" Stafh said nothing. The cop asked again. Stafh smirked. "Nope, you planted that shit in there, I never saw that gun in my life," The cop smirked back. "Looks like we have a wise ass over here, get their asses out of here." The men were loaded up into the cop cars. The drugs were confiscated, and they sent Bleek and Stafh away. Bleek and Stafh were put in a holding cell before they got a call. The officer went to go put the drugs inside evidence lock up. There were a few others inside the cell. "Yo, what the fuck are we going to do?" asked Stafh. They were both angry. "I don't know right now, we got busted with mad shit," replied Bleek. The probability of a potential indictment could've been on the table. "First thing, we'll be

held without bail but hopefully it's not the case." A drug trafficking charge was a BIG offense.

The Feds and the local police would work together, they'd rush to get them involved in a drug case even though it was depicted that the Feds were demoralizing to the lower-level enforcements. There were never any cases where raids happened just from hunches and hearsay, they needed to have solid evidence, which Hayes had plenty of evidence needed for the judge to sign as well as drug warrants that needed to be addressed.

Hayes and his team were getting everything together, they had the description of the dope houses and knew the exact location. They had pictures of the houses and knew the name of some of the suspects that were dealing. Hayes was in the room and was painting the picture of how everything was going down. Hayes had informants that were solid. It was in cop's best interest to use fiends to point out the dope houses and any other local informants and even street niggas that were snitches. They needed to use every resource possible that would help with drug busts. The operation was going to have a big surprise on its hands. This was the downfall of drug dealing, you never knew when the PPD had the drop on you, cases that were being built for a while and you were unaware of when they planned on sweeping you.

“Ok guys, I need you to listen up, right now,” said Hayes as he clapped his hands to get everyone’s attention. “These gentlemen are dangerous, and we need to get them off the streets as soon as possible, understand? There are never any children that are in these houses, there’s weapons that may be in there, and there’s said to be a few dogs that might be inside of there too.” There were seven PPD officers that were going to head over North and bust the dope house along with Hayes.

The body cam was running as Hayes approached the house. Some of the members of the North crew were in there bagging up work, a few of them were upstairs as they played the PlayStation. None of them looked out the window or were outside to know that they were about to be raided. There were two dogs that were chained up in the back of the house, one of officers headed to the back as Hayes signaled for him to go back there. The officer had a few dog treats that he was about to take from his pockets to distract the dogs from barking to alert some of the crew members. As he got back there, he had to draw his weapon just in case there was a shooter in the back. He drew it out as he opened the back gate and saw one of the dogs. Surprisingly, neither one of the dogs barked, but they growled. “Here boy, here boy, keep calm, keep calm,” said the officer. “You want a treat?” He tossed the treats in the air as the dogs caught them in the air, he used his walkie talkie to tell his fellow officer to assist him with the dogs to take them off the chains and get them out of

the backyard. The agent saw where the camera was at in the back and tried to stay away from it. The agents were everywhere as Hayes was leading the pack as he approached the door of the dope house. He knocked on the door and announced who it was.

“This is Lieutenant Hayes with the PPD, I have a warrant to search this house!” he yelled. The North crew began to panic and started trying to hide the drugs and the weapons inside the house. One of the members looked at the camera to see how many officers were outside in the back, and that’s when he noticed that the dogs weren’t out there anymore. “Shit!” One of the workers yelled. They started flushing drugs down the toilet. He knocked again. “This is Lieutenant Hayes with the PPD, we have a warrant to search this house, I’m only going to say it one more time, and we’re going to force our way in! Don’t make this harder than it needs to be.” Hayes waited another 30 seconds as he could hear the commotion inside. He looked at one of his fellow officers. “No answer. Why do they have to make shit harder?” Hayes signaled for one of the agents to get the ram to knock the door completely down. He moved to the side so two officers could bash it. They counted to 3... BOOM! The North crew members began to scatter and tried to take cover. Surprisingly, none of them fired at any of the officers, they didn’t have enough time. “Get the fuck down!” Yelled multiple officers. “DOWN, DOWN, get the fuck on the floor right the fuck now!” hollered the agents. They started to look around and

Hayes was the last one in. One of the North crew members tried to jump out the window to make a run for it but was immediately caught.

“Ahh! Shit!” he yelled. “Where do you think you’re going buddy?” said one of the officers. “Get your ass up,” he started to handcuff him as he told him not to move or he would blow his back out. “Don’t resist, I don’t want to shoot you, but I will, don’t give me a reason.” Hayes grabbed latex gloves because he knew the ratio was high that evidence needed to be rescued from the bathroom. Each officer secured the spots around the house. Mattresses were flipped, mirrors were broken “What is it looking like guys?” asked Hayes.

One of the crew members was in the bathroom hiding and had a Glock with a 30 clip, he heard the commotion but laid low. He was about to go on a suicide mission as the door was cracked and he could see one of the officers. He busted open the door and opened fire, hitting one of the officers, tearing him up as blood immediately squirted from his mouth, hitting the floor instantly. The minute one of the shooters tried to hit another officer, he was neutralized, getting hit in the throat by Hayes who toted the standardize beretta.

“Officer down, need immediate assistance!” hollered Hayes. More officers ran back up the stairs to the dope house. “Jesus, fuck!” There was nothing that they could do to save the officer, he was dead right away. “We need a medic! Right now,” ordered Hayes.

Each member of the North was outside sitting on the curb and handcuffed as they were read their rights and the recording was still being rolled. The house was being secured for more evidence and there were pictures being taken. The Finder was also at the scene to seize important evidence that they would be able to use to testify in court. The drugs that were inside was there for sale, nothing was for personal use at all, it was all possession. "Sir, I see scales, baggies, and a couple guns are over here."

"What kind of guns?" asked Hayes.

"Glock 40, a German Ruger, a double barrel shotgun, and there's cash on this table right here and some cash that's on the floor." Hayes smirked. "Looks like our lucky day, these guys really fucked themselves. Congratulations to them!" The crew trashed the house themselves while trying to hide shit, but there just wasn't enough time. They did more damage to their own dope house than the Feds did. They got what they needed and then left and took every one of them in. The police were calculated and built a case on the North side of Philly for months. Riley also gave the drop on things; the members had some explaining to do.

One of the workers that were inside of the house at the time of the raid informed the cops of the connection with Bleek & Stafh and gave them their full handle. Coincidentally, Bleek & Stafh were already in custody. Once the worker found out how much time he was looking at, he folded right away. At first, the worker was lying that he had no idea why

he was being arrested and claimed that he had nothing to do with any illegal activity, but they knew from the jump that it was bullshit.

Bleek was in the interrogation room, angry but sitting quietly . He started to look around the room, totally forgetting about keeping his composure, even tapping on the table with his fingers slightly, not breaking a sweat. Detective Hayes walked in. Bleek looked up at him, and they both began to stare at each other. "I finally have the pleasure of meeting you, Mr. Davis." Bleek said nothing in response. Hayes walked closer to the table, adjusting his tie and sat down on the seat across from Bleek. "Welp, you know why I'm here right?" Once again, Bleek said nothing, he smirked a little bit and covered his mouth. "You're going to be charged with controlled substances, possession with intent to deliver and illegal gun possession, doing HARD time!" yelled Hayes. Are you and your man built for that?" Bleek & Stafh had 7.6 kg of Cocaine, that was a big load of drugs. That was about \$25,000 to \$30,000 a kilo, big felony charges. Bleek & Stafh both had prior arrest from a couple years ago with marijuana possession, that's what sucked about criminal history, it'll fuck you over later, you're risking the penalties being a lot more severe. "Listen, Mr. Davis, I'm willing to help you out but for me to do that, you have to help me as well."

“Help you do what? Rat? Nigga, you got me all the way fucked up,” laughed Bleek. “So, you think we should do things the hard way, I’m assuming?” asked Hayes. “Come on, you’re better than this, don’t force my hand, you sure you’re ready for 25 to life in prison?” Bleek laughed again as he shrugged Hayes off. He couldn’t believe that Hayes had the audacity to want him to flip on Stafh and the rest of the North Philly crew.

“Man, listen. You do what you do, PIG. At the end of the day, you know it doesn’t matter how many niggas you arrest or how many niggas get killed out here over your objective. We both know the sad reality. Only more motherfuckers are gonna fill that void.” Bleek sighed as he folded his arms. Bleek was running his mouth and he shouldn’t have said anything because anything could be used against him, the first thing that he should’ve done was call his lawyer. Regardless, Bleek was going to stand on his accountability because he was a man. When you’re in that specific line of work, getting caught comes with those tribulations. He was being tough instead of keeping his mouth closed until he had a lawyer or public defender. Bleek got his discovery laid in front of him a few moments after. He began to read everything that was against him and his next step was to figure out what his defense was going to be when his lawyer came in the mix.

“Let me tell you something as well and this is off the record,” said Hayes as he took off his glasses. “I believe that a

lot of you have hearts that are in the right place, I believe a lot of you have made certain decisions that you felt was bettering your situation and the environment.” Bleek cleared his throat as he tried not to listen to Hayes. “Come on, dawg, go on with your little speech that you tryna give me.”

“I’m from this city, too.” Bleek laughed. “What is that supposed to mean to me? You want a medal?” Hayes disregarded Bleek’s sarcasm. “Young man, I’ve seen it all, and you have no idea. I’m from Richard Allen, the slums.” Hayes caught Bleek off guard. “I hate to see my young brothers like yourself getting involved in nonsense. You guys have so much potential in the world. Why do you waste your potential?” Bleek shook his head out of frustration. “I just pray that you become more conscious and that you rid yourself of this evil mentality.” Hayes had to find a way to break Bleek and Stafh, he was going to try to get one of them to flip.

Hayes was talking to Stafh and his demeanor was the same as Bleek’s. “You know what type of time that you and your crew members are looking at?” asked Hayes. Stafh remained silent. “Well, let me see if I can help you find your tongue, you and your crew are all looking at 25 to life in prison and some are looking at more time than that, you better start talking.”

“Give me my lawyer, I’m rapped out, I want my lawyer right now.” Stafh folded his arms, he said nothing more. “You got it,” replied Hayes. “Your call.”

Signaling a changing lane would’ve been all that Stafh

and Bleek needed to do to avoid this, but it was a common mistake that always led to an arrest, traffic stops were one of those bonehead things that lead dealers into some shit. Cops always did a thorough search as usual and had probable cause to search them. Intent to distribute was a heavy offense, small things always lead to big shit. Stafh had a good lawyer, as did Bleek, who were both going to get them the best possible deal if they were willing to cooperate.

Word got back to the trap that they both were booked. Reem got the call about what was going on, he was upset and informed Rashad that they might be in the mix depending on how the rest of the crew held it down. They met up in Mt. Airy. They greeted each other with a handshake and a hug. “What’s the word?” asked Rashad. Reem scoffed before answering.

“It’s not looking good, Stafh and Bleek, all the shit they got caught with, our freedom is in their hands, I trust them though,” said Reem. “I do too,” said Rashad. “Shit is hot, somebody been telling, and we don’t know where it’s coming from, no information was being leaked on the inside besides the niggas that were on the south side and them niggas caught shells, that’s a done deal.”

Rashad rubbed his chin. “I think once the raid happened at one of the spots, one of the young niggas told, I believe that. You know how niggas get once they receive that number they’re being threatened with, they fold, bro.” Rashad interlocked his fingers behind his head and paced. He knew this

was critical because it was his crew and if he got pinched, he could kiss his future with Carla and his unborn kid goodbye, along with putting more stress on Juanita with Big Shad being locked up.

None of the members from North gave Rashad up and he was able to smooth his way out without any drug or murder convictions along with his honor staying intact. They knew what he wanted to do outside of the crime wave, and he put them into position to still rock out, but he had to let it go. Rashad rarely got his hands dirty, kept family out of his dirty business, apart from the kidnapping, kept his nose clean, without anything tracing back to him. He had a lot of respect because his crew was treated with respect.

After a three month wait, the trial for Bleek & Stafh and the other members of the North crew was starting. The jury was given all the evidence that they needed about the trap house which was raided, and Bleek & Stafh being linked to the same crew that was raided. It was sufficient. Rashad and Reem went to the trial and nobody knew their faces. They had the source that was affiliated to Bleek and Stafh, a co-defendant, told the cops about everything after being arrested. He explained how the operation went, how they would distribute their drugs, using burner phones and swapping them out, that was their way of keeping in contact with

customers. It didn't work out in their favor being caught with a substantial amount of weight and an unregistered gun inside the van. They were looking at the maximum of life imprisonment if found guilty. Bleek and Stafh were found guilty of first-degree trafficking of a controlled substance and since both had prior offenses they received a maximum period of 20 years in prison.

The investigation on the trap house yielded 300 bags of heroin which was valued over \$3,000 along with \$50,000 in cash, 5 pounds of marijuana which was valued at \$15,000. Rashad and Reem couldn't believe that the co-defendant told. There were different prescription drugs that were valued at \$8,000 and \$2,000 worth of Promethazine and \$50,000 cash along with weapons too. The defendants from the trap house were found guilty of multiple counts of possession with intent to deliver, possession of a firearm and other related charges.

While being at the trial it also proved Rashad's point that he no longer wanted to live this life anymore and it bothered him, but he kept his composure. Reem had an angry look on his face as Rashad noticed. Everybody walked out slowly as Bleek and Stafh gave a head nod to Rashad and Reem, they nodded back.

WINS & LESSONS

With Rashad retiring from the game, he had all that he wanted to gain and in that time frame. Reem was trained and groomed by Rashad, even though Rashad looked at his best friend as more than just a wing man. Reem's destiny wasn't the same as Rashad's and it had to be respected that everybody had their own destiny and couldn't be saved. Reem already survived a shooting of his own before, but he wanted to stay in the field anyway. Reem made enough aside of Rashad that eventually he wanted to be his own man and takeover, since he was next in charge he expressed this to Rashad. He was next in line to run the streets.

The two were in Carla's backyard. "I just wanna say that I'm proud of you, bro, and that I love you, man." Reem got a little sentimental and Rashad smiled. "Good look, bro, I

appreciate that a lot, I love you too, dawg, ‘til the world blow the fuck up.” The two hugged each other. They discussed that Reem was going to continue to do business with Hector and keep moving weight. “I trust you, bro. I trust you because you’ve always been loyal and I’m thankful that all my niggas are still with me, you feel me?” Reem nodded his head in agreement.

“Facts, bro. We cut from a different cloth. We’ll make sure that Bleek and Stafh will be good too while they are doing their bid, this comes with it.”

“I’m just glad that we all stayed sturdy through the bull-shit, and niggas wasn’t only loyal based off opportunity. You know how easy it is for niggas to jump ship when you’re no longer being fed? None of ya’ll ever turned your back on me and made me question where we stood,” expressed Rashad. “You don’t find stand up niggas like that every day, you heard me?”

“Man, stop being soft, nigga,” laughed Reem. “Nah, no cap, I feel where you’re coming from and just know that we fully support this transition. I felt a way myself as well but you’re my man, you got a solid one with you too, I can tell that she’s super down for you. She has a solid hustle, makes her own chicken, she’s bad, entrepreneur, the whole nine yards, I salute that, bro.” After they finished up their conversation, they hugged each other once more. “Let’s get this moving shit done, the longer we wait, the longer this shit will take,” said Rashad.

It was moving day for the couple. Carla stayed off her feet even though she offered to help Rashad and the rest of the friends. It was funny how women had too much pride when wanting things done a certain way, never knowing when to calm their asses down. Wilmington was a nice neighborhood, and it was a good setting for Carla to set up her boutique and raise a family. She already had her location for her boutique, she just had to get all her things up there and finalized the living situation. The nice thing about Delaware is that it wasn't too far away from Philly, so commuting to see family wouldn't be an issue for Rashad or Carla. It was only about a 40-minute drive. Rashad had Reem and a couple of associates around the neighborhood helping put things inside the truck. Reem was healed up and was able to walk normal. Rashad was bringing boxes outside to load inside the U-Haul vans.

“Babe, I can help, I'm not that big, plus, ya'll are putting shit inside the van wrong.”

“Nah, no you're not, you stay your fat ass right inside the crib and let us handle this shit, you heard me?” Rashad wasn't trying to hear it. “Ugh, I swear your ass gets on my nerves, sometimes. You love to irk my soul, don't you?” Rashad put the box down that he had in his hand and gave Carla a kiss. “Trust me, we'll be done soon and we up out of here? Bear with me.” Rashad winked at Carla. “You're the king,” she said. “Yo! Asia!” hollered Rashad. “Keep her ass

occupied while we handle all of this, cool?” Asia complied as they stayed inside.

The crew was breaking bread with some of the younger kids that were helping put stuff inside the vans and sorting out boxes so everything would fit. Slim gave a couple hundred-dollar bills to the youngins’ because that’s what you were supposed to do.

Rashad became a household name in North Philly because of his business endeavors for kids to be constructive and productive instead of in the streets. Not every soul could be saved, but trying was the main objective and most important, and if he could save a life his heart was fulfilled. He invested a lot and gave back, he never let the money consume him to the point where he didn’t know who he was. Rashad was giving out handshakes to the kids as did Slim and Reem. “Here youngin’ go use that for something, buy a new bike or something, if your mom asks where you got that money from, let them know where you got it.”

“I ain’t even gone hold you, bro, niggas are gone miss you,” said Reem.

“I’m not that far away bro, but I gotta make this move for my family. I have a major purpose. But you know I’m always going to be around, and it ain’t nothing for ya’ll niggas to come visit me and see the baby. You know this ain’t the end game,” replied Rashad. “Just make sure when you and Slim takeover, you take care of the youth, you feel me? Never have the workers selling to these young ass kids out here, no

teenagers. The youth is the future, nah mean?" Reem nodded his head. "Why does that bother you so much, dawg?" laughed Reem, since he knew how sincere and serious Rashad was about it. Rashad placed his hand on Reem's shoulder. "You're my brother for life bro and you know as well as anybody the shit we saw as kids. Crackhead mothers that didn't care if they're child ate; always reassure the kids out there that they can depend on you for some money and occasionally for some food."

"One of the biggest reasons why I respected you so much is your kind heart, that alone lets me know how good of a father you're gonna be, bro, I mean that too. Even with the foul shit that we did, this is our neighborhood, I got you," assured Reem.

Rashad's connect was given to Reem and Slim to takeover since he was retiring from the game. It just made sense because of the traumatic events and being responsible, it wasn't about him anymore but the best interest of his family. Reem and Slim were all in. Bleek and Stafh took charges but the circle was damn near divided by paranoia and violence. They made sure that Bleek and Stafh would be taken care of financially along with their family, that was the honorable thing to do.

As there were more boxes being put inside the U-Haul, a car drove by very slowly on the block. Slim was the only one that saw it at first, then the car ended up speeding up. Slim was confused and thought to himself. *What the hell?* Slim

shrugged it off but continued to think to himself if he was bugged out. Everybody took a break for about 30 minutes to catch a breather, they were moving in and out of the house, moving large stuff could tire you out fast. Rashad walked back into the house. “Bro, you have your strap on you?” asked Slim. “Of course, bro, why you ask me that?” Slim explained that he had a hunch from the car that drove by and had a weird feeling. Moments later, the same car was circling the block again. “Yo, peep bro, that same wheel came around the first time, slowed up and sped up.”

“What you think? You think somebody ready to spray the block?”

“It’s a possibility that some shit is about to pop off.” Slim’s adrenaline was up and when you had a hunch, you were taught to follow it even if it wasn’t what you thought it was, the possibility was still there to stay on your toes. “Let’s warn bro then, before some shit gets goffy out here.”

“I’ll be out here to watch out.” As soon as Reem was turning around to go talk to Rashad about Slim’s hunch, Rashad was walking out the door and down the steps to finish packing up. Before Rashad was able to get a word in to ask if everybody was ready to finish packing, Reem stopped him in his tracks. “Yo, bro, we should move everybody inside quick, it’s a funny vibe out here.” Rashad was confused. “What? Why you think that? We about to finish up bro and I’m out of here, stop trippin’, ya’ll niggas drawn.” Reem grabbed Rashad by the arms to bring him back to reality.

“Bro, I’m for real, I’m glad that you’re moving on to bigger and better endeavors but that doesn’t mean you automatically get tricked off your square right away.”

“Bro let’s just hurry up and get this done. My girls in the house with Asia, hasn’t been nothing less than good vibes all day, why are you stressed? We’re good, bro.” Rashad patted Reem on the back to ease his mind of any worries. Slim walked up closer to the porch and behind the U-Haul truck. The car he saw wasn’t in sight now. It was a 2007 black Nissan Maxima. Reem looked back and Slim and shrugged his shoulders. Rashad was trapped in a delusion, as if there weren’t enemies out or who had unnecessary hatred for people out here making a difference in the community, even when doing it the wrong way first before taking a higher path in life. Rashad smiled at Reem, “We’re good, bro, relax, lets finish up.” Reem shook his head but Slim was still unsure and it showed in his face. “Alright man, whatever you say, man.”

“By the way, you gave paper to Preem’s family?” asked Rashad.

“Of course, you know that was mandatory,” replied Reem. “Bet, say less.”

The black Maxima drove down for the third time but wasn’t fully down the street yet, one of the mask shooters rolled down the window to see if the target was in sight. Nobody inside said a word, just ready to tear shit up. Rashad was on the porch again with two bags in his hand. He tossed

them inside the truck. The shooter in the passenger side made a signal with his fingers to drive closer to Carla's crib. They loaded their clips, looked at each other. There were three of them inside the wheel. At that moment, the Maxima paused right in the front of the crib. Nobody was in sight, so they sat there. The driver beeped the horn a couple of times. Rashad disregarded the beeping horn, Reem and Slim came outside behind him. The moment Rashad came out, he looked up. The passenger side window rolled down and the right back window rolled down too.

The shooters had masks on and were about to open fire. Reem's eyes bulged out as if they were about to pop out of his face! "Get the fuck down!" screamed Reem as Rashad yelled Carla's name. Rashad pushed Slim back inside the house, and he pulled out his heat from his waist. The shooters opened fire simultaneously. Multiple shots rang out. Crackle sounds were heard all throughout the block. Other residents got down for cover, not knowing the direction the shots were going. Rashad ducked down. He dove for cover while almost landing on his face but landed on his side. Bullets went through the windows instantaneously, shattering them completely. Carla and Asia screamed for their lives. "Down, down, down!" screamed Slim.

Reem covered Rashad and returned fire back at the shooters. Slim returned fire through the window as well but went to cover Carla and Asia to make sure they were safe. The shooters both had Glock's, both had standard G17's,

thirty-four shots total. As they kept shooting, the women were screaming, Slim took cover. Reem was able to hit the shooter that was in the back, but it wasn't a fatal shot. The Maxima pulled off immediately, tires were screeching in the process as Reem hurried and ran down the steps, still letting his clip go. He dropped his clip, picking it up and running back to the steps. Slim still covered Asia and Carla, but felt a wet spot around the area, Asia was unaware that she had caught a stray that bounced off her ribs and Carla wasn't hit at all, thank God. Smoke lingered in the area as Rashad panted heavily, his heart was racing. "Babel!? You ok?" asked Rashad frantically as he looked over to Asia. Rashad grabbed Carla's arm gently as he picked her up off the ground. "Yo, somebody grab Asia!" hollered Rashad.

Asia needed medical attention, but she was stable as she kept her hand by the side of her right ribs and scooted up by Carla's chair. Slim and Reem were still outside making sure nobody else was in sight that could potentially be a threat. They looked at each other confused but angry at the same time, they had to collect themselves. Once they heard Rashad yell, they ran in the house immediately. Carla was almost having a panic attack. "Breathe, relax, baby. Everything is okay, we're good," said Rashad. Slim ran back into the house to check on Asia. "You good?! We need to get you medical attention as well."

"Ugh, I'm good, at least I think so." Asia was wheezing a bit and coughed. As Slim was helping her get up, she felt the

sensation, not sure of what it was at first. She groaned. “Oh shit, you’re hit,” said Slim. Asia began to panic when she realized that she was hit slightly below the ribs.”

“Ouch! Ugh! It hurts!” yelled Asia as she was crying from the pain. Slim grabbed Asia but was careful that he didn’t cause any more damage to make her injury worse. He guided her outside and placed her on the concrete. Slim stayed by her side but ran over and grabbed Reem’s gun from him. “You think those niggas are going to spin the block again?” asked Slim. “Too many neighbors outside now. Bro is who they wanted to hit! Stash the hammers somewhere, cops will soon be here to investigate this shit!”

Sirens were heard as well as the ambulance. They pulled up as fast as they could and after a while, the news anchors were on the scene as well. They hurried and got the gurney out for Asia. “She may have a punctured lung,” said one of the ambulance members. Reem’s shirt was filled with blood and so was Carla’s. Carla had to make sure she didn’t have a nervous breakdown, with being pregnant that kind of stress on the body was not healthy and could cause her to lose her baby. She couldn’t panic knowing her best friend was injured. “I need to make sure that my friend is ok!” hollered Carla. “Come on, let’s go!” replied Rashad. This was the type of situation that Carla was trying to avoid. She was shaken up, pacing herself, crying, wanting to rip her hair from her scalp, this was a lot to digest. The ambulance denied her access while Asia was heading to the hospital, they told her

to hurry and go to the hospital. She was in no condition to drive herself with potentially getting into an accident with not having a clear head. The couple hopped in the wheel and pulled off.

The cops examined all the shell casings that were at the scene, as the news began to report about the shooting. This wasn't abnormal because of the area it was in, Northwestern; West Oak Lane. This was typical, a lot of the neighborhood wasn't surprised about the drive by that took place. Witnesses told the reporters that there were unknown assailants, and they were masked. Obviously, with Reem and Slim being street niggas, of course they weren't going to cooperate, they really didn't have any idea who it could've been, for all they knew, it could've been a random shooting or maybe a retaliation hit from SP, it was anybody's guess in that moment.

Slim and Reem got a taste of what it felt like when it came to potential pain and sorrow, potentially losing a friend that was near and dear to them in front of their eyes and risking their own lives too. "We need to be out," said Slim. Slim tapped Reem on his shoulder. "Bro, let's go, we'll get back to bro in a min, it's too hot over here."

Reem and Slim left the scene and made sure that there was nothing at the scene that was going to trace back to them. Slim stashed their hammers in a storm drain, wiped them off before doing so. The crowd on the block began to get bigger as people were scared and crying. Speculation

began to rise on what happened. Asia arrived at the hospital and the paramedics grabbed her and began to ask her if she knew who shot her. She told them that she knew nothing and did nothing that warranted her getting shot, she was a victim of a stray bullet. Asia made a full recovery from her gunshot injury.

Rashad and Carla finally were done moving and had everything settled inside of their new home. He grabbed a drink out of the refrigerator and smiled, Carla noticed. "What are you grinning for?" she asked. "I'm just glad that I made it, baby, that's all." Carla walked up closer to Rashad and wrapped her arms around him and kissed him. "Me too. You made a sacrifice for your family and most importantly, yourself. Now we just have to wait for our little one to get here." Rashad kissed Carla's hand as he looked around their house and drank a bottle of water. "Been through a lot, you gave me hope, I love you for life." Rashad winked at Carla.

Carla's Boutique was up and running, she was settled in and that kept her sane and busy. She had many clients and hired good employees; she was glowing as her pregnancy went farther along. The trenches will swallow you whole and spit you out, it was venomous.

Hayes helped Riley financially and helped her move out of the city of Philly as he encouraged the bit of family she still had to move out of the area to avoid any temptation. She did great but it only took one time. He kept in touch with her for a while after she moved until it was no reason for anymore contact. He felt good that she was able to help as much as she did and stopped activity, even a little was better than none. Hayes also made it his duty to try and spin the wheel on making a facility for homeless people to help them. Though him and Rashad never had any interaction, he had the same frame of mind Rashad did with what he was setting out to do with giving back to the community, the objective was the same. Being from a city of poverty was one of the most hurtful things that people dealt with, along with a bad school system.



The choices that you make when living your life are important because you're in control of your destiny. Rashad was able to break a barrier to live life outside of the hustle. He was blessed even with breaking a cardinal rule that street niggas made the mistake of, which was letting your guard down, getting too comfortable. Sometimes you don't even realize that you're doing so. You can't move as if you're untouchable. People grow envious and don't appreciate growth and opportunist will want you dead because you're

where they want to be, or they're chasing your clout because you're popular and they feel entitled. There was never any winning, only losses, and losses that others will have to be taught the hard way. Embracing your life was the best decision. Life keeps moving and you must live it to the fullest. But, when it's done right, once is enough. It took the shooting of a child and a near death experience for Rashad to realize that it was perfectly fine to grow old. Reem getting shot should've been the wakeup call initially.

When you step foot inside the trap, is when you're possibly trapped forever. Rashad's name and reputation were stamped, his legacy was unrivaled regardless of leaving the street life and kept his respect. The difference between he and his father was Rashad's lamentations when it came to enemies. Big Shad was cold and lacked remorse, but his son's heart was never stripped because he had compassion, he wasn't cold blooded even being in a cold-blooded arena.

Life was supposed to be adored and death was inevitable, but it was a major reality check. Rashad had much more to live for and had plans he wanted to accomplish, and he was going to do so. He thought outside of his comfort zone. When you're from the trenches and worry about being lit, it's important to note that you're never born to be a menace to society with evil intentions from the womb, but it's a calculated decision. The environment that you live in tends to create who you are, and it's a shame that many others in Rashad's position didn't have the same time to turn over a

new leaf before the inevitable would happen. But when your number is up, your number is up, and sometimes you won't get a happy ending. When God tries to help you and give you the proper steps, take advantage of it and accept those blessings before it comes with a price to pay. The streets were venomous, but you had to be held accountable for whatever path you chose, this is life, this is reality.

Survival of the trenches....

