



J.CERRONE

illegal

Life

A NORTH PHILLY STORY

[RE-LOADED]

BONUS
CONTENT
TWO NEW
CHAPTERS!!!



ILLEGAL LIFE:

A NORTH PHILLY STORY

[RE-LOADED]

J. CERRONE

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Book Design & Cover by Kyn Mixson

ISBN 978-0-9898111-9-4

Paper-Chase Publications LLC

Philadelphia, PA

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Dedications: To everybody doing what they have to do to survive in the city where I was born: Philly a.k.a Killadelphia, Pistolvania! Keep your heads up. We're gonna make it!

INTRO: (SUMMER 2014)

“I’m so glad to be out that bitch for the summer!” Carl exclaimed with a smile as he approached the front porch of his family’s residence on Ninth Street in the Hunting Park section of North Philadelphia. His brother, Will and Will’s best friend, Pop, had been sitting on the stoop since they arrived home from school, smoking marijuana and enjoying the warm weather.

“You better stop cursing before Mommy hears you and puts you on punishment, young-boy,” Will chastised his younger brother.

“That ain’t even cool,” Carl groaned. “You don’t get punished when you slip up and curse around her!”

“Yeah, well, I’m not thirteen years old either,” Will chuckled as he exhaled weed smoke and passed the blunt to his closest friend, Pop.

“So, what? You’ve been cursing and hustling since you were my age,” Carl replied. “That’s not fair, yo! Hey, Pop. Pass me the blunt, bro.”

“Aw, *hell* no!” Will roared. “What happened at school today? You came home tripping!”

“Yeah, my nigga,” Pop chimed in, chuckling. “You’re in your bag today!”

“Naw, I’m not in my bag,” Carl objected. “It’s just that today was the last day of school and I’m going into high school next year, so I’m kind of an old-head now. I figured I might as well start doing what old-heads do. Besides... y’all been smoking weed since you were younger than me!”

“What we did when we were thirteen ain’t got nothing to do with this right here, bro,” Will shook his head. “You’re supposed to do better than me, not try to do the same shit as me! Ain’t no point in me being out in these streets, getting money to help Mom, so she can focus on her health and you can focus on school if you’re gonna be out here trying to be a G! Just stay in your lane, little bro!”

“Whatever, Will! Why you always tryna play somebody?”

“I’m not tryna play you,” Will tried to console his annoyed younger brother. “I’m trying to help you. Matter-of-fact... I got something way better than tree for you. Wait right here for a minute.” Will quickly ran up the steps, onto the front porch and disappeared into the house.

“Yo, hurry up and smoke this shit, young-boy,” Pop quietly instructed Carl as he passed the small remainder of the lit marijuana cigar to the young teen.

“My nigga, Pop! Good looking out,” Carl quietly exclaimed as he carefully attempted to retrieve the remnant of the cigar without burning his fingers. “That’s why I fucks with you!”

“It ain’t about nothing,” Pop replied nonchalantly. “Stop drawing, though. Smoke that shit then toss it before your brother comes back out!”

“Say no more,” Carl replied with a smile as he pursed his lips, placed the blunt to his mouth and inhaled before choking while attempting to stifle his urge to cough.

Carl quickly regained his composure and repeated the process. However, the second time, he inhaled too deeply and accidentally sucked the small, heated paper-wrapped marijuana roach directly into his mouth, burning the back of his throat. Carl immediately began to cough violently, his eyes tearing profusely.

“Oh shit! You good?” Pop asked with nervous concern.

“Yeah...,” Carl gagged. “That shit burned the back of my throat! Fuck that!”

Pop burst into laughter as Carl’s coughing spell died down. Carl finally stopped gagging and began to spit repeatedly onto the sidewalk in front of his home.

“Damn, C! I guess you should have listened to your brother,” Pop chuckled as quietly as possible, trying not to be heard by Will so as to avoid being reprimanded for sharing the marijuana with Carl.

“Whatever, nigga,” Carl smiled as he wiped tears from his cheeks. “Anyway... what’s up with Cannon? I only saw him once since he got out.

That's my old-head!"

"Cannon's chilling," Pop casually informed Carl. "He's getting at a dollar and still crazy as shit! You know how my cousin gets down!"

"True. Cannon's a straight-up G," Carl hesitated before changing the subject. "Um... Pop... can I get fucked up off accidentally swallowing that blunt?"

"Ha-ha," Pop laughed, amused. as he turned to examine Carl's facial expression more closely. "You look high as shit off those little two puffs! Damn, virgin lungs!"

"Chill, Pop," Carl quietly objected as his older brother exited the residence with a large bag in hand. "You drawing..."

"So, I figured I'd give you an eighth-grade graduation gift as an incentive to keep up the good work in school," Will began as he walked down the steps of the porch carrying an expensive designer backpack and approached his younger brother.

"Oh snap, Will!" Carl slowly exclaimed. "That's for me? That jawn is tough."

"You already know," Will replied as he extended his arm to hand Carl the backpack, but then drew it back when he noticed his younger brother's red, watering eyes. "You alright, nigga?"

"Yeah, I'm cool," Carl hesitated. "Why, what's up?"

"I'm just asking 'cause your eyes are red and glassy all of a sudden."

"Yeah, um," Carl stuttered. "My allergies been acting up off-and-on all day today."

"Yeah, alright," Will replied suspiciously as he reluctantly handed the bag to Carl and inquiringly glanced over at Pop, who seemed to be preoccupied with his cell phone and was ignoring Will's gaze. "Open the bag and see what's inside."

Will rolled his eyes as he noticed Carl fumble with the zipper of the designer leather backpack for roughly a minute. After growing frustrated

enough with his own sudden lack of coordination, Carl sat down on the stoop, placed the bookbag between his legs and unzipped it.

“Oh shit! What’s all this?” Carl’s bloodshot eyes grew large and his face beamed in excitement, even though his speech was slightly slurred and his reaction time was much slower than usual. “A watch, a gold chain, cologne and a hundred-dollar gift-card from Game Stop? Good looking bro-bro!” Carl slowly stood up and gave his older brother a sloppy, but strong hug to show his gratitude.

“It ain’t about nothing, C,” Will nonchalantly replied as he hugged his brother back. “Congratulations on finishing eighth grade! I gotta send you off to high school looking fresh and I figured you might as well have some extra shit to help enjoy your last summer-break as a young-boy!”

“That’s love, big bro,” Carl slowly placed the chain around his neck and struggled to clasp the watch closed around his wrist due to his blurred vision from being under the influence of a small amount of marijuana for the first time. “How you work this jawn, bro? It won’t close.”

“Here... I got you,” Will huffed as he grabbed his younger brother’s wrist and quickly fastened the watch’s wristband. “Look man... you’ve been doing real good in school, staying out the way, making me and Mom proud. Don’t start fucking up just ‘cause you think you’re grown now that you’re going into high school! I got you all this stuff ‘cause I wanted to give you some motivation to keep doing good in school and to stay away from the street shit. You know I’ll hook you up, so you shouldn’t feel the need to go get it yourself and you can focus on school until you’re old enough to get a real job and get legal bread. You feel me?”

“Yeah, Will,” Carl agreed as he reached out and grasped his brother’s extended hand for a handshake. “I got you, bro. I’ll stay out the streets and in the books as long as you have my back!”

“Okay, cool. So that means no more sneaking and blowing tree behind my back, right?” Will tightened his grip on Carl’s hand as he stared him squarely in his eyes.

“Ouch! Yeah, my fault bro,” Carl acquiesced. “I promise. No more smoking!”

“Alright, bet. Now get your ass inside so you can brush your teeth and shower before Mom gets home for your graduation dinner.”

“Ok, I will,” Carl agreed. “Thanks again for everything, Will! Talk to you later, Pop. Tell Cannon I said what’s up.”

“Alright C-Murder! I got you,” Pop chuckled as he shook Carl’s hand.

Will glared at his friend upon hearing the comment Pop made to Carl. He waited for Carl to finish entering the house before addressing his trusted associate.

“Yo, Pop,” Will began. “I know you mean well and all that, but I’m gonna need you to respect my word when I tell Carl something, especially about not blowing tree. I understand he’s your young-boy, but he’s my little brother. I’m not tryna corrupt him. I don’t want him getting caught up in the streets like us.”

“I feel you bro, but smoking a little weed ain’t never hurt nobody,” Pop protested.

“He’s thirteen, my nigga,” Will quickly snapped. “Plus, I had just said I didn’t want him blowing and then you give him the shit as soon as I go in the house? That was disrespectful. Then you called him ‘C-Murder?’ I don’t want Carl thinking being in the streets is thorough and trying to be like us.”

“It was just a little-ass roach by the time I passed it to him, though..”

“It doesn’t matter, Pop,” Will firmly replied. “He doesn’t need to fuck with none of that shit. He just needs to worry about school! I understand you don’t have any siblings but I damn-near gotta act like Carl’s dad half the time. I don’t need you fucking up what I’m trying to do to make sure he stays out of trouble.”

“Aw, shit,” Pop sighed. “Here you go, hopping in your ‘I’m so mature and got so many responsibilities’ bag again! Look, my nigga... my fault. I was just tryna let my young-boy see what it was hitting for. You know he was gonna find a way to get high sooner or later. I figured it would be better for him to smoke this shit than to get some fucked up weed or some shit that’s laced with some other shit from his dumb-ass friends at school. I got you, though. It won’t happen again.”

“Alright, bet.”

“I’ma get up out of here, though,” Pop informed his friend as he rose from Will’s stoop and shook his associate’s hand. “Enjoy the dinner with the fam. I’ll see you at the spot in the morning.”

“Alright, my nigga. I’ll get with you. Be safe.”

CHAPTER 1

Will was a tall, light-skinned, good-looking, Black teenager – seventeen years old to be exact, with a low, Caesar haircut and three-hundred and sixty degree waves in his hair. He had a mustache and a goatee, which were thick for his age, and he kept them meticulously trimmed. Will was well-dressed, too – he did not wear t-shirts very often. He preferred to wear Polo shirts, always ironed and starched, of course, with designer jeans and some expensive sneakers or Timberland boots. And of course, he didn't leave the house without donning his long, Herringbone white-gold necklace along with its matching watch and bracelet.

Will's friends often teased him, calling him a “pretty-boy” for how particular he was about his appearance.

“Y'all niggas can talk that shit all day, but the girls love me though,” Will would laugh.

It was true – he was a favorite among the females at the school he attended, Simon Gratz High School, in North Philadelphia, as well as with the females in his own neighborhood. Will lived in the Hunting Park section of the city on Ninth Street, right near the park, but he went to school on the other side of Broad Street in Nicetown. Will was very athletic and was a star player on his high school's basketball team, which is why he was able to attend Gratz in Nicetown, instead of a school on the Hunting Park side of Broad Street.

Will had a girlfriend, Stacy, whom he had been dating since the beginning of eleventh grade. However, being a star athlete brought a multitude of groupies with it, and the temptation, Will found, was impossible to resist. In actuality, Will didn't have much time for his girlfriend, the groupies, or even basketball. He was too busy making money. You see, Will had his clothing, jewelry and women addictions to support. Not to mention the fact that his mother, who had raised him and his thirteen-year-old brother, Carl, by herself, needed help with the bills. So, at the tender age of thirteen, Will had decided to do what so many others before him had done – sell drugs. There was no shortage of coke-heads in his predominantly Puerto-Rican

neighborhood, and he decided to capitalize on it.

An older Puerto-Rican man named Rick introduced Will to his connect, a guy named Tiny who owned a few bars in the area. At first, Tiny fronted Will just an eight-ball (three and a half grams) of cocaine, under Rick's supervision, and with strict instructions to make sure Will "didn't fuck up!" Will did just fine. Now, at age seventeen, he was flipping an ounce of coke every two days.

Will was doing well for himself – he was earning about two-thousand, five-hundred dollars' profit each week – and he was saving up most of his money to buy his first car. He also planned to move out of his mother's home when he turned eighteen in January. Pop was his partner-in-crime. They were buying an ounce of cocaine every two days for eleven-hundred dollars, breaking it down to points (.1 gram) and selling them for ten-dollars each. They were making one-hundred dollars per gram.

Will had a dilemma, though. A few college basketball scouts had attended his high school games and rumor had it they were interested in recruiting him. However, Will had no interest in attending college. If he was going to play basketball, he wanted to go straight to the NBA. He already did not like school, and the thought of going to college just made him sick.

"Don't nothing move me but the money," Will would state quite seriously. "I need that NBA bread! The only way I'm going to college is if they give me a full scholarship – then I *might* go! But on some real shit... fuck that! I'm either tryna go straight to the league or stay out here hustling! I know I could be a boss one day, if things keep going the way they are with this coke."

"You ain't lying," Will's closest friend, Pop, a short, dark-skinned teenager, replied as they sat in Rick's stash-house, meticulously bagging the ounce of coke into points. "Pretty soon we'll be able to cop some bricks, and then we'll really be paid!" Pop was not only Will's closest friend, but also his business partner in the cocaine business. They had grown up together and were the only two Black guys on their block, other than Will's younger brother, Carl. It was the summer before their senior year in high school and they were both excited to graduate, although Pop cut class a lot to sell drugs.

"Yo, dog, I would've dropped out already if it wasn't for playing ball," Will continued. "I'ma just see how this basketball shit works out. I ain't

sweating it, though, ‘cause I think the streets is what I’ma be doing for life!”

“You gonna have a short life then, young-boy,” Rick interjected as he walked into the room.

“What you mean, old-head?” Will asked as he turned around in his chair to face Rick. “You’re twice my age and you said you’ve been hustling since you were my age. You’re still alive and you’re good...”

“Man, you have no idea! Watching your back every day for stick-up kids or the cops is no way to live,” Rick replied. “I’ve been doing this shit for years and it gets old. I’m only still hustling ‘cause I dropped outta school when I had my oldest daughter and I had to support her somehow. I’ve done five years in jail behind selling drugs, too. If you’re smart, you’ll go to college even if they don’t give you a full scholarship. I know you have enough money saved to pay for it by now!”

“Well I ain’t tryna talk about how much bread I got stashed,” Will chuckled. “But I’m good. I definitely ain’t wasting it on tuition though!”

“Will, you sound stupid, nigga,” Rick said with disappointment as he shook his head. “Don’t let these streets run you...”

“Anyway,” Pop interjected, “let’s finish bagging up so we can make this money, Will!”

“No doubt, enough talk,” Will agreed. “We’ve been bagging up for hours!”

“Alright, my fault, I’ll let y’all do what you do,” Rick replied. “I just overheard y’all while I was in the other room getting wetted and I was tryna drop some knowledge on my young-boys!” Rick then left the room and went about his business of finishing his PCP-laced cigarette.

After about another hour of bagging up the coke into ten dollar bags, Will and Pop finally finished. They loaded up their book bags with the approximately two-hundred and seventy-five bags and left Rick’s stash-spot.

“That’s my old-head and everything, but that nigga be tripping sometimes! That’s why we need to get our own stash-spot when you turn eighteen,” Will vented. “I can’t deal with him all the time like that. Shit... I’ve been dealing

with him since I was thirteen and I've already proved myself. I don't need him over my shoulder anymore."

"Yeah, I feel you," Pop agreed. "How the nigga gonna be in the other room smoking wet and then come out talking about how you need to stop hustling and go to college? Ha-ha! That shit is more hypocritical than a motherfucker!"

"Yeah, I know, right?" Will pulled out his pre-paid cell phone as it began to ring. "Yo. What up?"

"Hey baby... why you answer the phone like that?" Stacy asked. Stacy was a shapely, brown-skinned girl who was also seventeen and had healthy black hair with gorgeous burgundy highlights that fell to her shoulders. She was very much in love with Will and had lost her virginity to him. She called and text-messed him all the time, which irritated him – especially when he was busy handling business. He told her he "needed to focus on getting this money," but she kept at it anyway.

"No reason, ma. I'm just busy handling shit," Will replied nonchalantly. "What's up?"

"I was hoping I could see you today since I haven't seen you in a few days..."

"I can't right now, Stace," Will replied matter-of-factly. "I gotta get on the block and get this money. You know how it is."

"Aw, damn baby! I miss you! And I need some! It's been three days," Stacy whined.

"Maybe later when I get off the block I can come over and bless you! But I just bagged up and I gotta get half these jawns off before I quit for the night."

"Okay... but you better not be dissing me for those groupie hoes I see following you around at school and at your games," Stacy teased, although she was quite serious.

"Now, you know I don't fuck with none of those bitches," Will lied. In fact, he just had two of them over at Pop's house the previous night – one for

himself and one for Pop. “I only want you, ma! I’ll be over there later.”

“Okay baby, that’s what’s up! What time?”

“By the time I catch the bus over there, probably twelve or twelve-thirty. Will your mom be home?” Stacy lived in Nicetown, on Twentieth Street and Hunting Park Avenue. It was a short bus ride for Will.

“Now you know her crack-smoking-ass will be out trying to get some rock,” Stacy replied, dejected. “We’ll have the crib to ourselves.”

“Okay cool. See your sexy-ass then. Peace baby.”

“Bye, baby.”

“Nigga, you crack me up,” Pop chuckled as Will hung up.

“Why’s that?” Will asked, puzzled.

“You playing Stacy like a fiddle,” Pop replied. “You treat her like one of these groupie bitches but you been with her for almost a year! She’s head-over-heels, my nigga!”

“Yeah I know, right? She be hitting me up like crazy! It’s too much! She called me like five times while we were bagging up,” Will sighed. “She’s a good girl, though. I know she’s loyal; that’s why I’mma keep her. But I’mma still do my thing. I’mma just let her think I’m not doing nothing else ‘cause she would flip!”

“Yeah, like if she knew about those bad-ass Puerto-Rican jawns we had last night!”

“Exactly!” The two teenagers laughed in unison. “The jawn I had had the craziest head-game,” Will boasted.

“Not better than the jawn I had,” Pop protested as they walked to the corner of Ninth Street and Lycoming Street where they usually sold their coke. All the coke users in the neighborhood knew the duo were always on that corner and knew they could find them there. And when they weren’t there, their customers would call them.

“So, dog, anyway, back to what I was saying about getting our own stash-spot,” Will started. “My birthday ain’t until January, so I was thinking we

could put our bread together and rent a room and keep the weight there and bag up there after you turn eighteen in October. That is, unless you wanna get an apartment...”

“I ain’t got enough bread for an apartment,” Pop confessed.

“You got money saved, though, right?”

“Yeah, but honestly, I be blowing that bread – *literally*! I smoke a lot of weed! And then buying clothes and sneakers all the time, paying all my mom’s bills ‘cause she don’t work; I don’t have a lot of money left by the time we need to re-up.”

“I feel you on helping your mom out and all that, but maybe you need to slow down with copping all that gear. We need a stash-spot where we can handle our business so we don’t have to do the shit outta Rick’s crib anymore. We still gotta pay him a piece ‘cause he goes to Tiny for us to cop, but if we get our own spot we can go straight to Tiny ourselves,” Will advised.

“Yeah, no doubt,” Pop agreed. “I’m just tryna keep up with your pretty-boy ass and get the bitches! That’s why a nigga needs the gear and the kicks... a nigga wasn’t blessed with the ‘good’ hair,” Pop joked.

“Here you go with that shit again, nigga! Naw, but for real, I was looking online at rooms for rent in Nicetown near Stacy, and I saw a couple jawns for like four-hundred a month and we just gotta put down one month deposit. Do you have enough money saved for that?” Will asked.

“Oh, no doubt... I could do that a few times.”

“Alright, bet! We’re gonna make moves and do that shit in October when your birthday comes, right?”

“No doubt, my nigga,” Pop affirmed.

“We can get a table in the room, a TV and maybe even a sofa if it’s big enough so we can have bitches over there when we’re not handling business.”

Their first customer of the day walked up and bought three bags. He was a regular customer, as all their customers were at this point. Will had been selling coke for almost five years and Pop joined him two years in. Will was

puzzled that Pop didn't have more money saved up by now. Pop said he could pay for the deposit for the room-for-rent "a few times." What did that mean – he only had twelve-hundred dollars saved? How could that be after selling ounces of coke for three years? Even though he was paying all of his mother's bills, Will thought Pop would have more money saved than that. After all, Will paid most of his mother's bills and bought all of his younger brother's clothes. Even after all that, he still had managed to save over seventeen-thousand dollars, though he hadn't revealed that fact to anybody, including his mother, Stacy or Pop. Since he already had his driver's license, his plan was to save twenty-five-thousand dollars and buy a car for about fifteen-thousand. Then, when he turned eighteen in January, he was going to get an apartment and fully furnish it. Will was excited about his plans and was proud that he had been able to save all that cash in a safe in his room in his mother's house on Ninth Street. As he thought about this, more customers walked or drove up, each buying between two and five bags.

As they stood there on the corner, Pop decided to play some music on his cellular phone. A song by Chinx Drugs, featuring Rick Ross and P. Diddy, entitled "I'm a Coke-Boy" was their theme song. Will and Pop rapped along to the music in unison as they stood there. That was, until the police drove by.

"Oh shit! We're slipping!" Will blurted out. "We forgot to take the rest of this shit back to the crib!" Fortunately, the police didn't bother the teenagers and kept driving by. However, the two young men decided it was a good time to go. They had sold almost half of their product within four hours. It had been a good night and it was time for Will to go see his girlfriend. "Alright, my nigga, I'll get with you," Will said to Pop before he entered his house to drop off his book bag.

"Alright, homey, be safe," Pop replied and walked down the street to his house.

Will walked to Roosevelt Boulevard and caught the bus, taking the short ride to Stacy's block. He knocked on her door and she opened it, wearing nothing but a smile and a negligée.

"Hey baby," Stacy embraced Will and kissed him softly on the lips.

“We’ve been waiting for you.”

“Hey sexy,” Will replied. “Who’s ‘we?’”

“Me and my pussy!”

“Ha-ha! Oh, I feel you,” Will laughed. “Well let’s get it popping, then!”

The young couple made their way to Stacy’s bedroom and Will aggressively tossed her on the bed and almost ripped her negligee as he pulled it off. Will grabbed Stacy’s breasts as he kissed her passionately for several minutes. Then he turned her around and entered her from behind, thrusting himself inside of her and smacking her butt. After about ten minutes, they had both climaxed and collapsed on her bed. Stacy rolled up a blunt of marijuana and lit it.

“Will,” she said and turned to look at him as she exhaled the smoke out of the opposite side of her mouth and passed the blunt to him.

“Baby, do you love me? I mean, do you *really* love me?”

Will exhaled the weed smoke heavily. It was really a sigh, however, and he tried not to roll his eyes since Stacy was staring at him. She asked him this same question every time they had sex. Of course he cared about her; they had been together for almost a year. But he was too young to have a girl who needed so much reassurance. “She probably needs so much reassurance because her father wasn’t in her life,” Will thought to himself.

“Yeah, baby, you know I love you,” Will replied coolly. “Why you keep asking me that?”

“I don’t know... I guess I’m just a little insecure. I know all these bitches want you since you get money and you’re an all-star ball player. I know I’m not the baddest bitch out here...”

“To me you are! You’re fine as hell,” Will reassured Stacy. He wasn’t lying. Stacy was considered one of the most beautiful girls in their school. But some of the groupies were also just as physically attractive and they were easy to have sex with, which made them even harder to resist!

“Just please don’t ever cheat on me, Will,” Stacy implored. “I would die!”

“I wouldn’t do that,” Will said as he took another drag and passed the lit blunt to his girlfriend. He felt bad for lying to her, but he couldn’t tell her that he had been cheating on her since day one.

“I know you said you’re gonna get your own apartment in January when you turn eighteen, right?”

“Yeah Stace, that’s the plan.”

“Can I move in with you?” Stacy asked with an innocent, child-like expression. “I can’t live with my crack-head mother anymore and I wannabe with you all the time, baby!”

“Maybe... we’ll see, ma.”

“Just think about it. I’ll cook and clean for you and everything! It will be great!”

“Yeah, I’ll think about it,” Will replied calmly. But in his mind he had already decided against it. “Well, let me get up outta here before your mother gets back,” Will said after they had finished the blunt.

“You’re leaving already?”

“Yeah, I’m tired, ma,” Will forced a yawn. “I’ll call you tomorrow.”

Stacy got up with a frown as Will got dressed and she followed her boyfriend to the front door.

“Okay, baby. I love you. Talk to you tomorrow,” Stacy said as she kissed Will goodbye.

“Alright Stace, I’ll get at you, baby.” Will walked down the block to the bus stop. “Damn that girl is too needy!” he said to no one in particular.

CHAPTER 2

Tiny's nephews, Jasiel and Jose, were twenty-one year-old, twin brothers and were stick-up kids who lived on Marshall Street near Hunting Park Avenue. Their father was serving a life-sentence in prison for a murder he committed when the twins were toddlers. Jasiel and Jose's mother had died of cancer when they were nineteen, leaving them the house and a fifty-thousand dollar life insurance policy. Wisely, they took their uncle's advice and had used the money to pay off the thirty-five thousand dollars that remained on the mortgage. They split ten-thousand dollars so they could each buy a vehicle for five-thousand dollars – Jasiel had purchased a used Pontiac Bonneville and Jose had purchased a used Chevrolet Impala.

However, they didn't really need two cars because they usually went everywhere together, unless one of them was going to visit a female. Most of the remainder of the money was used to buy guns, bullet-proof vests and a safe for the guns. Since they both smoked wet, or PCP, they used what money was left to get high. Their motivation to buy bullet-proof vests was because Jasiel had been shot in the stomach a few years prior while attempting to rob a drug-dealer in the park who had spotted him coming. The drug-dealer had shot him and fled and Jasiel used his cell phone to call his brother, which had saved his life. Jasiel spent three weeks in Temple Hospital recovering from his wounds. On this particular night, while Will was at Stacy's, the twins were at one of their uncle's bars, which was around the corner from their house, looking for their next drunk victim.

“Yo, bro!” Jasiel said excitedly. “We gotta get a nigga and get a nigga soon, man! The bar's about to close! Did you peep anybody in here?”

“Yeah, man,” Jose replied calmly as he pointed across the bar.

“See that big, fat nigga over there? He's drunk as shit and he got all that ice on. I seen him take out mad money last time he was paying the bartender. We gonna follow that nigga to his car and rob that fat motherfucker!” Even though they were twins, the brothers' personalities were polar opposites. While Jasiel was very excitable with a short fuse, Jose was mostly calm and laid-back.

“Ha! I know, right?” Jasiel laughed. “We got bills to pay! The water and electric is due in a week and the cable is due in two weeks. That’s like five-hundred right there, not to mention car insurance!”

“Don’t sweat that shit. We’re gonna get all his shit and sell that shit to the jewelry store. We’ll get his cash, too,” Jose reassured his brother. On this night, Jose had driven his Impala to the bar and was going to be the getaway driver.

“Y’all good?” Tiny asked as he walked up behind the twins, put his arms around their shoulders and greeted them.

“Yeah, we good,” the young men answered in unison.

“Y’all staying out of trouble?” Tiny tightened his arms around their necks as he smiled. He knew the twins had been stick-up kids since they were in their mid-teens and he did not approve of their choices in crime. Tiny would rather that they get into the cocaine business with him. He figured it was a little less dangerous than sticking guns in people’s faces, especially since Jasiel had been shot. But Tiny also didn’t agree with their decision to rob people for another reason. He felt it was better to earn your money hustling. Not to mention the fact that he suspected that not only did his nephews rob drug-dealers, but they robbed some of his bar patrons as well. Tiny suspected this because, on occasion, he would overhear some of his customers saying they had been robbed at gun-point around the block from one of his bars after leaving. “Y’all better not rob any of my customers, motherfuckers!”

“We wouldn’t do that, Unc,” Jose lied.

“I wish we could rob that Black motherfucker, Will,” Jasiel chimed in. “But you won’t let us!”

“You know I’ve been selling coke to the young-boy for years,” Tiny replied matter-of-factly. “You would be taking money out of my pocket! I’m a tell you again... don’t rob that young-boy!”

“Alright,” Jasiel agreed. “But I can’t stand that motherfucker! He’s always hustling in our neighborhood and fucking Boricua bitches! He’s *begging* to get robbed!” At that moment, Jose tapped Jasiel’s arm and motioned towards the fat man they planned to rob – he was heading toward the exit, walking

right past them.

“Okay, Unc... we’re about to bounce,” Jose said as he got up and shook his uncle’s hand. Jasiel did the same.

“Yeah, I need to close down this jawn anyway,” Tiny replied as he shook his nephews’ hands and walked away. Then, as he walked towards the deejay booth, he turned around and skeptically watched the twins hastily exit through the front door. He shook his head before continuing to handle his business and making the announcement for the last call for alcohol. Tiny sensed his nephews were up to no good.

The twins followed the fat Puerto-Rican man, trailing him by a distance of about twenty feet. The man had the feeling that he was being followed and kept looking over his shoulder at the twins, but they were far enough away that he wasn’t sure whether or not they were truly following him. However, once he reached Seventh Street and turned the corner and disappeared from their sight, they tied bandanas over the bottom halves of their faces and began to jog in order to catch up with him. He heard the rapid footsteps approaching from behind him and felt a pang of fear. Instinctively, the large man spun around and pulled a ten-inch blade from the holster on his belt-loop under his over-sized shirt and held it out to greet Jasiel and Jose as they rounded the corner. The fat man backed up towards the driver’s side of his vehicle, a white GMC Yukon Denali with twenty-four inch rims, and waved the long knife in the air towards his assailants, who had drawn their guns before they turned the corner.

“You motherfuckers get away from me,” he panted. “I’ll cut you up real good! I’ll gut you like a pig,” he threatened.

“You ain’t doing shit, old-head! Now give up the chain, the bracelet, the watch and the cash,” Jasiel barked. Jasiel liked to take the lead in the robberies. He was more aggressive so it worked out well for the twins.

“I’m not giving up shit,” the fat man replied. “Come on and get stabbed!”

“Come on, man,” Jose calmly replied. “We got guns... you’re not gonna win this! Just give up your shit, man.”

“Just let me get in my truck and leave,” the fat man said as he reached in

his pocket and pulled out his keys.

“That’s your truck?” Jasiel’s voice cracked as he cocked back his gun. Jose looked at his brother, knowing what he was thinking. Jose shook his head “no” at his brother, but Jasiel just ignored him. “Give me your keys, too, or I’m a pop you.” They both knew that the fat man was stubborn and wasn’t planning on easily giving his jewelry or money up, so why would he surrender his truck? Jose could tell Jasiel was ready to kill the man. Jose wasn’t ready to get into the murder game, that’s why he had shaken his head “no” at his brother. But Jasiel had changed since he had been shot. He was much quicker to fight, much quicker to shoot, and he talked about murdering people often, especially Will.

“I’m not giving you shit!” the fat man growled. As he turned halfway around in order to unlock his truck door with the keyless entry, Jasiel stepped closer to the man.

“Run that shit, nigga!” Jasiel demanded. “Give me all of it! I’m not gonna tell you again! I’m gonna pop you, dog!”

“Ahhhhh!” The fat man lunged at Jasiel, knife first, and tried to stab him. Jasiel, whose gun was already cocked, jumped to the side and shot the fat man in the side of the head, shooting him right above his ear. The man’s body went limp in mid-air, his knife clanged as the metal hit the ground, and there was a loud thud as his massive body fell on the pavement.

“Oh shit! What are you doing, man?” Jose panted, his heart racing.

“Getting this nigga’s shit,” Jasiel replied, smiling as he hurriedly took the man’s watch, chain, rings, and money. Jasiel could not get the man’s bracelet off, however, and he struggled with it for a few moments. Jasiel’s heart was racing, too, but out of excitement and adrenaline.

“Nigga, hurry the fuck up! Fuck that bracelet, man!” Jose whispered loudly. “We gotta get the fuck outta here, man!”

“You’re right,” Jasiel replied as he put the stolen items in his pockets.

“Go back to your wheel and meet me at the chop-shop down the Badlands. We gonna sell this motherfucker’s truck!”

“Alright bet!” Jose ran back down Seventh Street onto Hunting Park Avenue and jumped into his Impala and sped off toward the Badlands.

Meanwhile, Jasiel grabbed the fat man’s keys off the ground, hopped into the Yukon and pulled off. As he pulled off, however, he ran over the man’s legs, crushing the bones in the dead man’s limp body.

“Oh well, whatcha gonna do?” Jasiel thought to himself as he sped off, hoping the police weren’t on their way to the scene. Jose arrived at the chop-shop about three minutes before Jasiel did and was anxious the entire time he waited for Jasiel to arrive. Jose was deeply relieved when he saw his brother pull up behind him. Jasiel had called the owner, Tito, while on his way and the shop owner said he would arrive shortly. Five minutes after Jasiel had arrived, Tito pulled up to his chop-shop. Of course, Tito operated a front business there, too – a legitimate collision repair shop.

“So, what you twins got for me?” the short, stocky, middle-aged Puerto-Rican man asked as he smoked a cigar. Jasiel put his arm around Tito and walked him to the Yukon.

“Isn’t this wheel tough, Tito? I just came up on this shit. It has the keys and everything man,” Jasiel bragged. “What can you give me for it?”

“Yeah, it is nice, man,” Tito concurred. “What you want for it?”

“Twenty-five-hundred dollars,” Jasiel intentionally started the bidding high.

“Naw. Now you know I only give twelve-hundred for trucks, Jasiel,” Tito sternly replied.

“Two-thousand then,” Jasiel countered. “The rims are worth more than that!”

“I can give you fifteen-hundred cash right now – final offer,” Tito stated firmly.

“Alright man, but I feel like you’re robbing me,” Jasiel laughed.

“Me? Rob you? You’re the stick-up artist!” Both men laughed.

“Hey, what’s up with Jose? Why’s he staying in the car and not saying

nothing?”

“We smoked some wet earlier and maybe it didn’t agree with him,” Jasiel answered. They had smoked before they went to the bar, but Jasiel knew that wasn’t the real reason why Jose was acting strangely. Jose was acting that way because his twin brother had just shot a man in the head right in front of his face. “Alright, Tito, thanks man,” Jasiel said as he counted the money and put it in his pocket. “Talk to you later.”

Jasiel got into the car with his brother, and Jose pulled off slowly and headed home. Jasiel noticed his brother moping. He hadn’t even turned the CD player on.

“What’s wrong with you, man?” Jasiel barked. “Why you acting like a bitch?”

“I’m not acting like a bitch, man! You just shot that man in the head like it was nothing! Now you’re a killer! I didn’t wanna be no killer,” Jose whined.

“Well, you still ain’t a killer,” Jasiel snapped. “I’m the one who blew his head off! Besides, that motherfucker was trying to stab me – you saw it! If you weren’t so shook you would have been shooting at him, too! You’re supposed to have my back!”

“My fault man,” Jose apologized. “He caught me off guard. But on some real shit... I ain’t built for no bodies, man. I ain’t tryna go to jail for life!”

“Stop talking like a bitch, Jose! Ain’t nobody going to jail motherfucker! Matter-of-fact, pull over to that dumpster so I can toss this ratchet.”

Jose pulled over to a dumpster on Cumberland Street and Jasiel quickly got out of the car, looked around to make sure nobody was watching, and then threw his gun into the dumpster. He then quickly got back into the vehicle and they pulled off.

“So, how’s it feel to be a killer?” Jose asked with genuine interest.

“Same as the first time,” Jasiel grinned slyly in the darkness.

“The first time? What first time?” Jose asked in shock.

“Oh, that’s right! I never told you!” Jasiel pretended that the fact that he

had never told his brother about the first murder he had committed had slipped his mind. “Remember when that motherfucker shot me in the stomach? Well, a couple months later, after I was all healed up, I went back to the park with my gun cocked, crept up on that nigga and shot him four times in his back. He was gasping for air and shit and coughing up blood when I turned him over and emptied his pockets. He had like twenty dime bags of coke on him and three-hundred dollars.”

“That’s fucked up, man... why didn’t you tell me about that?”

“‘Cause I knew you would talk shit and act like a pussy like you are now! Plus I know you ‘ain’t built for no bodies’ like you said a minute ago, so I went by myself.”

“Damn, bro...” Jose exclaimed, “I can’t believe you’ve killed two people!”

“So far,” Jasiel chuckled.

“Damn, kid... you sound crazy,” Jose sighed.

“I just haven’t given a fuck since Mom died,” Jasiel explained. “And after I got shot I had to get that motherfucker, na’mean? I ain’t crazy, though. I’m just a street-nigga. Plus, it comes with the territory. When you robbing for long enough, you’re gonna have to merck somebody eventually! Even you’ll have to do it one day – you’ll see...”

“Naw, not me,” Jose protested.

“Well, whatever,” Jasiel replied nonchalantly as he pulled out the cash he had taken from the fat man’s pockets. “Yo, dog, there’s eight-hundred dollars here! Plus, we got fifteen-hundred from Tito for the truck and we’ll get something nice for the jewelry! We came up man!”

“Yeah, we did, but you caught a body behind that shit,” Jose replied, downtrodden.

“Whatever, man! That’s how I get down! And you better get down like that, too, before you get mercked out here! Anyway – enough talking about this shit. Put that Peedi Crakk CD on!”

Meanwhile, Will was walking home from the bus stop towards Hunting

Park Avenue. He saw the flashing lights from the police squad-cars and decided to stash his gun in some bushes and continue walking. Will hadn't completed crossing over Hunting Park Avenue when a police squad-car sped up next to him and two officers jumped out and ran towards him.

"Up against the wall," they commanded as the one officer slammed Will face-first against the brick wall. Will barely had enough time to put his hands up to prevent his face from colliding with the wall.

"What the fuck, yo? What did I do?" Will protested.

"Spread 'em," the officer barked as he kicked the inside of Will's feet and began to frisk him. "Anything in your pockets that will stick me or cut me?"

"Naw, man! What is this about?"

"There was a homicide a couple blocks away about forty-five minutes ago. Where were you? Where are you coming from, son?" the officer asked abruptly.

"I'm coming from my girl's crib over in Nicetown. I just got off the bus," Will replied truthfully.

"Is that so?" The officers looked at Will's driver's license. "Kinda young to be out at two-thirty in the morning, aren't you? You have a lot of money on you for a seventeen-year-old, too!"

"My mother gave it to me to go pay the electric bill tomorrow while she's at work," Will lied. "And she doesn't mind me being out late as long as I'm with my girl."

"Yeah, I'm sure," the officer snapped. "Well, get in the car... we're going to see your alleged girlfriend to see if your story adds up. If not, you're coming with us to the station!"

Will reluctantly went with the officers. He was uneasy but he wasn't worried, however, because he had been with Stacy the entire time and he knew she would vouch for him. Besides, he hadn't killed anybody! A few minutes later, they pulled up to Stacy's place and the officer banged on her door. After a minute, Stacy answered the door only to be greeted by her boyfriend with a police officer on either side of him. Her expression was that

of pure fear.

“W-what’s going on?” Stacy stuttered as she tried to catch her breath.

“Sorry to bother you so late at night, honey,” the one officer replied. “But is this your boyfriend?”

“Yes, he is, officer! What’s this about?” Stacy asked.

“There was a murder a little while ago...”

“Well, Will couldn’t have done it! He just left here twenty minutes ago,” Stacy cut the officer off.

“Are you sure about that, Miss?” the officer asked skeptically.

“Yes, for sure! I swear,” Stacy put her right hand in the air.

“Okay, thanks, Miss. That’ll do for now. Have a good night,” the officer replied. The officers walked Will outside and back down to the squad car.

“Told y’all,” Will replied with an attitude. “Can I go now?”

“No! We’re taking your ass home,” the officers replied, both smirking.

“Get in the car!”

They arrived at Will’s house and the officers banged on the door before Will even had a chance to take his keys out of his pocket.

“What the fuck, dog? You’re gonna wake up my mother,” Will snapped.

“That’s the idea,” the officer grinned. A few minutes later Will’s mother, an attractive, light-skinned, middle-aged woman, came to the door wearing a robe and slippers and curlers in her hair. She was still half asleep but when she realized that her son had two police officers with him, she quickly woke up.

“William Bonner! What is the meaning of this?” Misses Bonner, Will’s mother, screamed.

“Mom, it was a mistake!”

“You come home with two cops and you tell me it was a mistake?”

“Ma’am, please let me explain,” the officer who had knocked on the door began. “There was a murder on Seventh and Hunting Park about an hour ago and we saw your son walking, so we stopped him for questioning, but everything’s fine now. We just wanted to make sure he made it home safely.”

“So he’s not a suspect or anything, right?” Misses Bonner asked.

“No, ma’am,” the officer reassured Will’s mother. “But for his safety and your peace of mind, you might want to make sure you don’t let him stay out so late.”

“I understand, Officer. Thank you and good night.”

“Good night, ma’am,” the two police officers replied.

“Will, get your ass in this house,” Misses Bonner commanded as Will watched the officers walk to the squad-car and drive away. Will gave them the middle finger and then strolled into the house behind his mother.

“What you doing getting brought home by the cops at almost three-o-clock in the morning, waking me up on my last night off before I gotta go back to work? And you better be glad they didn’t catch you with nothing, boy!”

“I’m too slick for that, Ma,” Will laughed.

“Don’t ever think you’re too slick, little nigga! Those cops are real slick! They’ll have you hemmed up real good! What are they doing grabbing you up for a murder anyway?” Misses Bonner asked.

“I don’t know, ma. It was some bullshi...” Will caught himself before he cursed in front of his mother. Misses Bonner gave her son a stern look. She could curse as much as she wanted but, out of respect, she did not want her children cursing in front of her. “Anyway, I was with Stacy the whole time and she vouched for me.”

“Well, I’m glad to hear that. She’s a nice girl! I’m glad you’re dealing with a Black girl again. There’s nothing wrong with the Puerto-Rican girls – they’re pretty and all that. I just say, what’s wrong with dealing with your own kind?” Misses Bonner ranted.

“Yeah okay, Ma,” Will dismissed his mother’s comments.

“But anyway, boy,” Misses Bonner continued, “this whole situation with the cops brings me back to what I keep telling you. You need to get out of the streets and focus on playing basketball. I appreciate all the bills you pay. Lord knows I don’t know how I would do it without you, but what if those cops had caught you with some drugs on you? Then you would be in jail! You need to focus on this basketball – you’re good at it! You can go to college. Me and your brother will be fine.”

“Come on, ma, I’m not tryna hear that! You and Carl will not be fine if I go away and I’m not bringing any money in. You don’t hardly make any money at the nursing home, and I don’t want you working two jobs like you used to before I started hustling – especially with your diabetes. Just chill, ma, I got this. I’m tryna go to the NBA and get this real money or stay in these streets and make even more money than I have been making! I’m tryna skip the whole college thing.”

“Just think about it baby,” Misses Bonner pleaded. “I don’t want anything bad to happen to you.”

“Don’t worry about me, ma. I’m good.” Will kissed his mother on the forehead.

“What happened?” Carl, Will’s younger brother, asked as he came downstairs and into the kitchen where Will and his mother had been conversing.

“Don’t worry about it, C,” Will replied. “Everything’s good.”

“I’m going back to bed then,” Carl responded.

“Me too,” Misses Bonner yawned. “Think about what I said, though, Will.”

“Okay, ma, I’ll think about it.” Will said this just to appease his mother, however. He viewed college as a waste of time. If he didn’t go straight to the NBA, he’d rather be making money in the streets. And there was no way he was going to stop hustling at this point. It was going too well for him. Besides, he had goals – get a stash spot, get a car, get an apartment. Maybe he would even convince Tiny to front him a kilogram of cocaine after he got his stash-spot. Then he would *really* get paid. Yeah, everything would fall

into place. He didn't need college. Sometimes Will felt like he didn't even need or want to play basketball anymore – he just wanted to sell coke.

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