



SUPREME

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

SUPREME
SOUNDTRACK
INCLUDED

DERRICK "PREMO" RIDDICK, JR. X J. CERRONE

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X

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INTRO...

Dedications: To my mother, father, brother, sister and my niece, Empress. R.I.P. to Mrs. Wilson, who passed during the writing of this book. You've helped me grow more than you'll ever know.

This book is also dedicated to any young brother who feels like he's trapped and has no way out. Remember you need to outgrow your environment...

Content Warning: The language and contents of this book can be described as "mature" and might be considered offensive by some readers. This includes explicit language, violence, sexual acts between minors, illegal activities, the use of certain ethnic slurs and other graphic content. I have included this content because it is integral to the story.

Note: This story is inspired by true events. However, certain characters, names, businesses, incidents, locations, time frames and events have been changed to protect the identities of all parties involved.

DEFINITION OF “SUPREME”

Supreme (adjective) –

1: highest in rank or authority

//the supreme commander

2: *highest in degree or quality*

//supreme endurance in war and in labour**

- R.W. Emerson

3: ULTIMATE, FINAL

//the supreme sacrifice

(*Source: Merriam-webster.com as-of June 2020)

*****Bold and italics ours***

CHAPTER ONE

“The Pines” has always been a dangerous neighborhood in Suffolk, Virginia. Sincere Jones was a young, urban warrior and fully capable of navigating the vicious landscape on his own. The year was 1993 and twenty-four-year-old Sincere, or “Sin,” had just been released from prison and returned to “The Pines” to start his life anew after serving a six-year sentence for manslaughter.

Sin had taken a man’s life in 1988 after an altercation outside of a Norfolk, Virginia, nightclub. Both men were intoxicated. Sin’s would-be victim had intentionally pushed the native New Yorker and failed to pardon himself. This was a transgression a teenaged Sin’s ego could not handle at the time. Sincere lost his temper and went into a blind rage. Sadly, the other young, Black man lost his life. The crime was not premeditated, so Sin was charged with manslaughter and served his sentence in a nearby state correctional facility.

Sincere was known as a certified hustler; selling everything from narcotics, to loose cigarettes, to women’s handbags, to bootleg CDs and DVDs. If people used it, Sin could sell it! The young man hailed from New York City and originally found himself Down South, in Virginia, visiting his mother; a “snowbird,” who owned houses in both New York and Suffolk, Virginia. Being the money-motivated young man that he was; Sin made regular trips from New York City to Virginia and back. When he did so, he transported merchandise with his close friend, Boobie, to sell in either location. It was during one of these trips when Sin committed manslaughter.

“Thanks for letting me stay here for a minute while I get back on my feet, Mom,” Sin said.

“No problem, son! Just do the right thing now that you’re home.” Sin’s mother replied as she embraced her adult child. “My goodness! You got big, son! I hope you exercised your mind in there as much as you exercised your muscles.”

“I definitely did, Mom!”

“That’s good,” the young man’s mother smiled. “That should help you follow the rules while you’re here. You know everybody in this house works an honest job.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Sin sighed. “Pop already told me about this job selling cell phones on the way home from prison. I’m going to find out about it on the way to see my P.O.”

“Praise the Lord! I’m happy for you, baby. Well, I don’t want to hold you up, but I was going to cook for you if you have time...”

“I’ll make time for your cooking, Mom!”

Sin and his parents sat in the kitchen and reminisced on his childhood as his mother prepared the men a hearty meal. The young man’s parents agreed to allow him to parole to their home in Suffolk, so Sin immediately made the permanent move from New York City to Virginia upon his release from prison. The man was relatively short in stature but had developed a more solid build during his six years in the penitentiary. He had also used the time to read extensively – studying books about Islam, the Five Percent Nation, Pan-Africanism, psychology and self-improvement. Sincere had

gone into prison a short-tempered teenager and returned a more mature, level-headed man.

Sin's first destination after being hired as an independent contractor, signing up potential customers for annual cellular phone contracts, was the local Wal-Mart store. He arrived for his shift early the next day and assembled his table inside the store. The man took care, meticulously placing the sign, clipboard with sign-up sheet and display merchandise according to the instructions he received from his trainer; but he also added his own personal flair. Sin was far from a novice hustler. Hustling wasn't *on* him – it was *in* him! Sin could sell salt to a slug! This new technology would be easy for him to sell, he just needed to attract customers to his table.

The day labored away, hours passed, and Sin's stomach started to rumble. The young hustler decided to take his lunch break, but realized he hadn't packed anything to eat. He folded his display merchandise, placed them inside of the duffle-bag his employer had given him and walked towards the exit of the store.

“Who is *that*?” Sin wondered aloud when an attractive, young cashier caught his eye as he passed her on his way out. “I've got to make her mine!”

Sin promptly made his way out of the store to his vehicle, placed his valuables inside the trunk and returned inside the store. He looked for his attractive female peer's register, walked to her line, chose a snack and beverage from the aisle and stood in line until it was his turn to purchase his items.

“How are you doing today, my Nubian Queen?” Sin greeted the woman as she scanned his items. “Your melanin is glowing, sis!”

“Oh, my goodness,” the young woman smiled, “you’re spitting that Hotep game, huh, brother?”

“It’s not game, sis. I’m dead serious. But I can show you better than I can tell you! What’s your name?”

“Rita... same as the name-tag! What’s your name?”

“Sincere... same as my personality!”

“Oh, snap,” Rita blushed, “you’re too much!”

“Never, that, Queen! I want to be exactly what you need,” Sin coolly replied. “I’m working in the back, hustling cell phones in here today. What time do you get off?”

“Why? What’s up?”

“How you getting home?”

“The same way I got here – I plan on taking the bus,” Rita matter-of-factly replied.

“I can’t have *my* Queen taking the bus,” Sin said, looking Rita squarely in the eyes, “I get off at five. Let me take you out to eat and drop you off at home.”

“Um...”

“Come on love-birds,” a man waiting in line behind Sin huffed impatiently.

“Can’t you see I’m busy, son?” Sin growled as he turned and glared at the man before turning back to address Rita. “So, what do you say, ma?”

“Um... okay,” Rita acquiesced, “I get off at five-fifteen.”

“Alright, bet! I’ll see you up here at five! I’ll wait for you to get off.”

During their subsequent ride back to “The Pines” and their informal first date, Rita and Sin learned that they lived on opposite sides of the same neighborhood. That first date was quickly followed by a second, then a third and so on. Rita fell for Sin’s smooth, big-city demeanor and Sin was captivated by Rita’s small-town modesty despite her physical beauty. The young couple fell in love and made their relationship official after a short period of time, then moved in together.

Rita already had a son, named Kenan, from a previous relationship. Once Sin and Rita made their relationship official, the man voluntarily took on the role of step-father in the young boy’s life. This was perfect practice for what would follow; for Sin and Rita would welcome their first biological child together shortly thereafter. Rita gave birth to Sin’s first child; a girl, the couple named Cynthia, in the year 1995.

Over the course of the next several years, Sincere Jones and Rita Flowers resided in their neighborhood in “The Pines,” along with their two small children. They were unmarried but lived the life of a traditional, nuclear, American family. Sin continued to work random temporary jobs, but his hustler’s mentality remained ever present; causing him to remain in the streets, making money to provide for his family “by any means necessary” – selling whatever products proved profitable.

After Cynthia was born, Rita enrolled in college to become a Registered Nurse and did not work a secular job to focus on her schooling and child-

rearing, while Sin focused on providing for the young family's financial needs. This proved to be the best arrangement considering the fact that Rita suffered from chronic depression which made it difficult for her to maintain steady employment for substantial periods of time; while Sin had habits that accompanied his hustler lifestyle.

Sin was raised in an era which normalized snorting cocaine, so he had developed a routine of doing so recreationally. Sin regularly indulged in substance use for fun and to alter his mood – snorting cocaine, smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol. It seemed natural for Sin to indulge, especially since most of the people he associated with partook in the illicit substances.

Despite Sin's habits, however, he took care of his young family; kept food in the refrigerator, paid the bills and made sure Rita was able to focus on school, the children and her mental health. Sin's habits did not come close to entering the realm of habitual drug abuse that would alarm his friends, family or even his live-in girlfriend, Rita – at first.

More time elapsed and the year 1999 arrived. Sin loved Rita deeply and wanted to ensure that he kept their family together long-term. The man took the next step to make their relationship even more official and proposed marriage to his live-in girlfriend and child's mother. She gladly accepted and they were married soon thereafter. No sooner was the couple officially married, than they received unexpected news.

“Baby... um,” Rita stuttered as she addressed her new husband one evening when he arrived home from hustling, “I have news for you. Sit down and eat.”

“Thanks, beautiful!” Sin replied with a smile. “Everything good? What’s the deal?”

“You have to promise you won’t be mad,” Rita nervously responded, looking at her husband sheepishly as she took a seat across from him. “It was an accident.”

“What was an accident?”

“I’m pregnant again,” Rita said, sighing heavily, “I know it’s not a good time, but...”

“Baby, it’s all good!” Sin quickly interrupted his wife. “There’s no need to stress about it. You know I’ma get this money and hold us down like I have been. You just focus on Kenan and Cynthia, school and your health. I’ll take care of my Queen!”

“Aw, really, love?”

“No doubt, Queen! Ain’t nothing to stress about. Just try to manifest a boy for me, okay?”

“Okay, King!” Rita rose from her seat at the dining room table, kissed her husband on his forehead and wrapped her arms around his shoulders as he smiled and continued to chew a mouthful of food. “I love you, baby!”

“I love you too, Queen!” Sin smiled as he swallowed his food.

True to their wishes and manifestation; on January 1st of the following year, 2000; Rita Flowers-Jones gave birth to Sincere Jones’ first and only biological son. At the beginning of the new millennium, Sincere “Lil’ Sin” Jones was born.

At the time, nobody had any concept of the potential contained in this small package of a man-child. Time would test the boy's resolve and show whether or not he was built to survive "The Pines" and the world beyond his rough Virginia neighborhood. Would Lil' Sin become a product of his environment and grow up to be immersed in sin like his name suggested, or would he elevate himself, outgrow that same environment and reign supreme?

CHAPTER TWO

“Pass me the wrench, Lil’ Sin,” Big Sin instructed his young son.

“Which one is that, Daddy?”

“It’s the silver one with the open half-circle on one end and the full circle on the other end,” Big Sin explained.

Lil’ Sin carefully rifled through his father’s toolbox until he found the tool the man had requested. The two-year-old triumphantly lifted the wrench from the metal box, walked across the driveway and placed the tool in his father’s extended hand.

“Is this the right one, Daddy?”

“Yessir,” Big Sin replied from under the vehicle he was fixing, “good work out of you, Junior!”

“Thanks, Daddy,” Lil’ Sin beamed proudly as he bobbed his head to the music which played loudly from his father’s Ford™ F-150 pickup truck. It was a popular song entitled “Fabulous” by a singer named Jaheim. Both Big Sin and Lil’ Sin loved the song.

Always the hustler, Big Sin made sure he kept a steady stream of income flowing into his home. The family still lived in the crime-ridden neighborhood – “The Pines,” and their lifestyle was far from fabulous. Rita was still attending school to be a nurse and still battled her chronic depression while attempting to balance her responsibilities as a stay-at-home mother of three children.

Meanwhile, Big Sin had struggles of his own. Although the hard-working, Black man earned money daily; he spent it almost as quickly as he earned it. Big Sin had five mouths to feed, including his own. Groceries and utilities for two adults and three growing children was expensive.

In addition, Big Sin had demons he battled with daily; making it hard for him to devote one-hundred percent of his income to his familial responsibilities. Big Sin had killed another Black man at the tender age of eighteen. That was an act he could not forget, nor easily forgive himself for; especially after obtaining “knowledge of self” in prison.

The pressures of being a father and husband wore on Big Sin at times as well. He learned to cope by self-medicating – using a mixture of marijuana, powder-cocaine and alcohol to ease his mental anguish. The man had easy access to the items since he also sold them and was in constant contact with his supplier and friend, the neighborhood pusher, Boobie.

Despite Big Sin’s habits, however, he provided well for his family by hustling drugs and merchandise and by fixing cars as a mobile mechanic in the Suffolk area, using his F-150 as his work truck and transport vehicle. Big Sin kept his wife and kids draped in the newest clothing and made sure the bills were paid. The husband and father was especially fond of his namesake and took his youngest child along with him almost everywhere he went. Big and Lil’ Sin grew extremely close during Lil’ Sin’s first two years of life and Big Sin showered his Junior with gifts and attention.

When Lil’ Sin was two years old, Rita and Big Sin’s personal issues caused them to consistently clash to a point where they decided to legally separate. They regressed to living on separate sides of “The Pines.” Although the married couple maintained separate households, Big Sin still took his responsibilities as a man seriously and supported his family as well

as he could, both emotionally and financially. The main issue for Big Sin was that he was having a more difficult time supporting himself due to his personal demons.

Big Sin and his son remained close over the course of the following year. The man continued to pick his youngest child up from his estranged wife's home to accompany him on his money-making missions. Big Sin took Lil' Sin on fun excursions as well. He took his son fishing on one occasion and taught him how to put bait on the hook.

Despite these good times, there were many times when Lil' Sin found himself somewhat lonely. The youngest of three children; Lil' Sin was much younger than both Kenan and Cynthia – eleven and five years, respectively. Lil' Sin had little in common with his siblings and often led the life of an only child as far as peer-siblings were concerned.

In addition, there were many times when, due to both of Lil' Sin's parents' mental states and responsibilities, they could not keep him with them. That's when they left him with his "play" grandmother, Mrs. Chisolm. Mrs. Chisolm was like the neighborhood grandmother. She was a caring woman who took meticulous care of Lil' Sin when his parents could not do so. Lil' Sin always returned home at night, but he spent many long days as a toddler at Mrs. Chisolm's house, along with other neighborhood children whose parents were in similar situations to that of Rita and Big Sin.

"Yo, Boobie-Man! What you getting into later, son?"

“Why you always adding a ‘man’ to my name, bro?” Boobie huffed.
“The name is ‘Boobie,’ *man!*”

“Because I ain’t calling no grown man ‘Boobie!’” Big Sin laughed.

“Whatever, nigga,” Boobie scoffed. “Anyway... I’m about to take this trip Up Top. I need to handle some business. You know how I get down. You trying to roll?”

“Nah, man. I ain’t even built for it. Even if I was; I don’t feel like going to New York right now. The mood I’m in – I’d probably fuck around and catch another body!”

“Never mind, then. Stay your ass in V-A! What you and Junior getting into?”

“Well, I’m about to drop Lil’ Sin back off at Rita’s crib,” Big Sin huffed as he began his rant. The separation had taken a toll on the man. “I hate dropping him off and leaving. This separation shit is bananas, son! But anyway... I think I’ma go get a couple drinks at the bar after I drop Junior off.”

“Oh, alright, man,” Boobie rolled his eyes. A certified bachelor, Boobie just could not empathize with Big Sin. “Be careful, yo.”

“Yeah, I got you... good looking, fam.”

Big Sin drove Lil’ Sin to Rita’s home, hugged and kissed his three-year-old son and left. He drove away and immediately retrieved a small bottle of liquor from his large glove-compartment and took a swig. It was after seven in the evening, so Big Sin made his way to the nearest bar. He smoked a blunt full of marijuana as he drove. The husband and father alternated

between smoking and drinking as he listened to Jaheim's "Still Ghetto" album, his favorite R&B album at the time.

As soon as the hustler entered the bar, he proceeded to the bathroom, entered a stall and closed the door behind him. Big Sin reached into his pocket and retrieved a dime-bag of cocaine. He unclipped his knife from his pants, unfolded it and placed the tip of the blade inside the bag. After doing so, he placed the thin metal blade inside of his left nostril and inhaled deeply, sucking grains of fish-scale into his nasal canal.

Big Sin walked out of the bathroom, proceeded to the bar and ordered a double-shot of hard liquor. He gulped the shot immediately and asked the bartender for another. Big Sin swallowed the liquid and repeated the process. The man quickly became intoxicated as the mixture of weed, cocaine and hard liquor rushed through his blood stream.

At the same time, Lil' Sin and his mother, Rita, prepared to go to bed at home; oblivious to what Big Sin was doing at the bar. Hours passed and Big Sin continued to drink.

Eventually, Big Sin stopped drinking for the night. He stumbled through the parking lot, to his pickup, his car keys in hand and staggered into his truck. The engine roared as the man started his F-150 and drove away from the parking lot, tires screeching. The intoxicated hustler's vision blurred as he attempted to navigate the four-lane road without crossing into oncoming traffic.

Unfortunately, Big Sin was unsuccessful in his attempts to avoid all the other vehicles headed his way. The intoxicated hustler caused a metal-bending, bloody collision due to his dangerously altered perception and state of mind. Fortunately, nobody was killed, but several people in the

other vehicles Big Sin struck were severely injured. He was arrested on the spot and charged with driving with a suspended license and a driving under the influence (DUI).

Meanwhile, Lil' Sin lay in bed, dreaming about his young life and how he would escape his current circumstances and move to a better environment when he grew older. He had absolutely no idea that his father, with whom he had grown accustomed to spending so much time with over the previous three years, would have to spend the next three years away from him.

Big Sin was torn away from his family due to his own bad decisions, driven by his own inner demons. The man's actions made life even more difficult for Rita and her children, especially Lil' Sin, who lay sound asleep at home as his father sat in a Virginia jail cell. At the tender age of three, Lil' Sin would suffer a devastating loss. The saddest part was that the innocent toddler would not even comprehend the full scope of his loss until years later.

CHAPTER THREE

Things changed drastically for the Jones family after Big Sin went to prison. Lil Sin had no idea what was happening when his father was arrested for the drunk driving incident and was unaware of what happened to his closest friend. The little boy simply woke up one morning and was told his father was going to be “away for a while,” and was “sorry he couldn’t say goodbye.” Lil’ Sin had no concept of what occurred and felt lost.

“W-w-w-where’s my daddy?” Lil’ Sin began to hyperventilate, in an attempt to refrain from crying.

The young boy had grown extremely frustrated after enduring several months without seeing the man who had given him life and taught him essentially everything he knew. Rita had been unable to provide Lil’ Sin with a satisfactory explanation as to the whereabouts of his father. The now single mother of three children was forced to make adjustments in her own life due to Sin’s sudden imprisonment. Lil’ Sin was the woman’s youngest concern, but definitely not her only responsibility.

Although Big Sin had some substance abuse issues which precipitated the accident that landed him in prison for three years; he was a high-functioning individual before his incarceration. In society, there is a stigma attached to mental health and substance use. This stigma is often magnified to an even greater degree when individuals affected by these conditions are involved in behavior which negatively impacts others. This is a natural

reaction, but it doesn't always result in proper assessment of the individual's overall character.

Big Sin was not defined by his mental health and substance abuse issues. However, the man, his family and several people he came into contact with over the years were impacted by his issues and resulting behavior.

At the same time, Big Sin always had a big personality. The Melanated man impacted many people's lives in both negative and positive ways. Unfortunately, most people find it much easier and more exciting to highlight the negative aspects of an individual's personal history – especially when that person happens to be a Melanated male.

Lil' Sin was Sincere Jones Senior's youngest child and his pride and joy. He took his responsibility to provide for and teach Lil' Sin, his older sister, Cynthia, and his step-son, Kenan, seriously. The man missed his children dearly while in prison and struggled with the guilt over his actions and how they impacted his family.

Although Big Sin and Rita had separated and maintained separate residences a year prior to Big Sin's arrest, the man continued supporting his family financially. Big Sin still loved his wife despite the fact that they were unable to resolve their differences. The man also loved his children dearly and had grown to love his step-son, Kenan, long ago. It was a reflex for Big Sin to continue to provide for his young family financially, although they lived separately. He was a man of his word despite his personal addictions and demons. Unfortunately, once imprisoned, he was unable to continue to live up to his role as provider.

Mrs. Chisolm, the "neighborhood grandmother," was a sweet, older woman – the type of lady who would give you the shirt off her back. The

Jones family and Mrs. Chisolm bonded long before Lil' Sin was conceived. She babysat young Kenan and after Cynthia was born, Mrs. Chisolm babysat her as well. The cycle continued when Lil' Sin entered the picture.

Big Sin hustled and fixed cars to support himself and his family and paid all of Rita's bills before he was incarcerated. Rita did not have a secular career, but instead stayed home to care for Lil' Sin the first year of his life. After that, she re-enrolled in nursing school and Lil' Sin joined his older brother and sister at Mrs. Chisolm's neighborhood daycare. Rita continued to struggle with deep, chronic depression, so she did not really have the capacity to handle too much responsibility at once without suffering from extreme anxiety. She needed a lot of time alone to sleep and recover from school and caring for her children.

The additional stress of Big Sin's legal troubles and their impact on Rita's finances added to Rita's anxiety. There was no way she was going to be able to secure and maintain full-time employment, long-term, considering her mental and emotional state. Her financial situation quickly deteriorated and within two short months of Big Sin's arrest, she was evicted from her home.

When Rita learned she and her children were being evicted from their home due to non-payment of rent, she gathered the strength to make living arrangements for the four of them so they would not end up on the streets.

"Thanks for watching my babies, Mrs. Chisolm," Rita tearfully expressed her gratitude to the older woman. "I just needed some time alone to relax. I'm so stressed out about being evicted. I don't know what I'm going to do. We have to move out in two weeks and we don't have anywhere to go."

“No problem, baby,” Mrs. Chisolm replied as she smiled and gently rubbed Rita’s shoulder. “You know I’ll help you in any way I can! Besides, you know I love watching these Black babies grow up!”

“Aw, thanks! I love you, Mrs. Chisolm,” Rita smiled with tears in her eyes. “You’re so sweet!”

“I love you too, baby. So, what are you and your babies going to do?”

“Well, I was going to move in with my sister, Missy, for a while until I get another job and get my own place again, but she lives all the way in Clarksville and I don’t have any way to get there. So, that’s a no-go. I don’t know what I’m going to do!”

“Aw, baby... don’t cry,” Mrs. Chisolm placed her hand on Rita’s shoulder. “Y’all can stay here for a while. Save up some money until you either get a place or move in with your sister... whichever comes first. You can help me clean up around here and watch the kids to earn your keep!”

“Oh, really? Thank you so much, Mrs. Chisolm,” Rita shrieked as she burst into tears and embraced Mrs. Chisolm. “How can I ever repay you?”

“Just take care of yourself and those babies and rise above this madness. And figure out what you and Sincere need to do about your relationship. I know y’all are grown, so I’m not going to tell you what to do. I’m just saying – I’ve known Sincere and his mother for years. He has issues but he loves you and those kids to death!”

The next afternoon, Rita received a collect-call from prison. She accepted the charges, and waited to greet Big Sin even though she had no viable way to pay the upcoming phone bill.

“Hey, baby,” Big Sin’s voice resonated through the receiver.

“Hey, Sin. What’s up?”

“I miss you.”

“I can’t do this with you right now, Sin.”

“Did you get my letter?”

“Yeah,” Rita sighed. “It was nice. I’ll write you back. I just haven’t had the energy lately.”

“It’s all good, baby. I understand.”

“I told you about that, Sin. Stop calling me ‘baby.’ We’re not together, you’re in jail and me and the kids are about to be homeless!”

“Don’t you think I already feel bad enough I can’t do shit to help?” Sin’s voice broke. “I’m so sorry, baby – I mean Rita. I swear I’ll make it up to you.”

“When? In five years? Meanwhile, I have to raise the kids by myself just because you want to get high and drunk and drive like a damn fool! This is exactly why we didn’t work out!”

“Okay, Rita,” Big Sin replied as he glanced over his shoulders and surveyed the prison day room. “I understand you’re mad at me but these calls are recorded. You need to chill.”

“Whatever, Sin! Well, anyway... we’re moving in with Mrs. Chisolm for a while. I just wanted to let you know.”

-Click-

Two weeks later, Rita, Kenan, Cynthia and Lil’ Sin moved in with Mrs. Chisolm. Shortly thereafter, Big Sin’s sister, Raven drove from New York

City and picked the quartet up from Mrs. Chisolm's home to take the four-hour trip from Suffolk to visit Big Sin in prison. It was Lil' Sin's first time seeing his father since he had disappeared and the boy was ecstatic.

"Daddy!" Lil' Sin and Cynthia ran to the smiling man and embraced him as he picked them up and kissed them. He then quickly placed them back down on the floor and took his seat across the visiting room table, when he noticed a correctional officer making his way across the room in the family's direction.

"What is this place, Daddy?" Lil' Sin innocently inquired.

"Oh, um... Daddy is in school, trying to learn how to be a better man."

"Really?" Lil' Sin tilted his head sideways, pensively. "Why are you dressed like that? Those don't look like school clothes!"

"They are for this type of school," Big Sin chuckled, "this is my uniform."

"Oh, okay," Lil' Sin accepted his father's statement as truth although he was thoroughly confused. "I miss you, Daddy. When are you coming home?"

"Well, son," Big Sin sighed. "I have to stay in school for a while – a few years. I have a lot to learn."

"A few years? But I'm only three years old! That's my whole life!"

"I know, Junior. But time flies whether you're having fun or not!"

The family enjoyed their visit to the best of their ability. Rita, Raven and Big Sin spoke in code as they attempted to discuss "grown folks' business" without the children catching on. The children continually asked questions,

especially an inquisitive Lil' Sin, leaving their parents in a precarious position when attempting to strategically answer their children's questions without telling outright fabrications.

After a while, the visit was over and Raven, Rita and her children had to leave. The entire Jones family's mood automatically shifted when a correctional officer notified them that their visit had come to a close.

"Who is he, Daddy? He looks like the police! Why is he in your school?"

"Um... he's one of the security guards who is supposed to help keep everybody safe..."

"That's enough questions, Junior," Rita sternly instructed as she took Lil' Sin's hand in hers. "We have to go. Say goodbye to your father."

"But I don't want to," Lil' Sin wailed as he dropped to the floor, "I want to stay here with you, Daddy!"

"I miss you too, son," Big Sin replied, downtrodden, tears filling his brown eyes. "But you can't stay here with me. You need to go with your mother."

"No! I don't want to go!"

"Now, listen, Junior," Big Sin firmly instructed the toddler. "You know better. Get up. Now! This is not how you behave in school! You better learn now. You'll be in school in a couple years. I don't want you to *ever* end up in this type of school. Do what your mother says and remember everything I taught you. Your mother will bring you back to visit. I'll graduate and be back home before you know it."

“You promise?” Lil’ Sin sniffled, his large eyes glistening as he looked up at his father.

“Yes, I promise.” Big Sin smiled as he leaned over and kissed his son on the forehead. “I love y’all. See you next time.”

Big Sin turned and walked down the corridor leading back to his cellblock. Lil’ Sin immediately started crying as soon as his father disappeared behind the wall. Hearing his son scream in emotional agony tore Sincere’s heart from his chest and made his stay in prison all the more difficult for him, but he needed to focus in order to do what was necessary for his survival.

Rita and her sister-in-law, Raven, gathered their few belongings and the three children and exited the prison. They entered their vehicle and made the four-hour commute back to Mrs. Chisolm’s home in Suffolk. The Joneses stayed with Mrs. Chisolm for a while until Rita had the resources to move in with Missy in Northern Virginia several months later. When she did so, Rita, Lil’ Sin and Cynthia moved in with Missy, while Kenan continued to live with Mrs. Chisolm.

Missy, Lil’ Sin’s aunt, had a young son who was close in age to Lil’ Sin. Having another family move into his home unexpectedly was an adjustment that was difficult for young Alvin to make. He and Lil’ Sin developed a deep-seated rivalry during the time they lived together.

After several months living with Missy and Alvin; Little Sin, Rita and Cynthia moved in with a different family member, then another, then yet another. The Jones family’s nomadic lifestyle continued due to their desperate financial situation and Rita’s inability to maintain steady employment due to her chronic depression and her need to care for her

children mostly alone. Kenan continued to stay with Mrs. Chisolm, so his life was less hectic than his younger siblings' lives, although being separated from his mother and his step-father had an impact on the young, teenaged boy as well.

This unstable pattern continued for the next three years while Big Sin was incarcerated. This made a major impression on Lil' Sin's malleable mind. He continued to believe his father was in "school" for years until he entered school himself and realized the man was not in school, but was in fact, in prison. Lil' Sin realized that his parents had misled him in an effort to protect him, but he was still shocked and disturbed, although the new information made everything that occurred make more sense.

Lil' Sin was still young – a five-year-old, just entering kindergarten, but he analyzed his life. He loved his family and the time he spent living with different relatives. He appreciated that his relatives had shown his family love and helped them out instead of allowing them to be destitute and homeless, living on the streets. As young as Lil' Sin was, he remembered what his father had taught him.

Lil' Sin was intelligent and a deep thinker at a young age. He was a "Junior" and realized he would be a man like his father one day. When the boy thought about the many things his father taught him – both directly and indirectly, he drew some conclusions. Lil' Sin realized he needed to make choices in his life which would lead him down a path that would help him avoid prison as an adult. He also resolved to never be broke and homeless again. It was not fun.

Lil' Sin was a young child. Children want to have fun. Unfortunately for Lil' Sin, he could not fully enjoy his childhood due to the nature of the circumstances he was raised in. The young boy's father was ripped away

from him unexpectedly at age three and his mother was often emotionally unavailable due to no choice of her own. The family was in dire financial straits, so Lil' Sin did not have access to many of his own toys or any video games like most of his peers.

The family moved around often, so Lil' Sin was not able to establish real roots and make close friends, other than his father, during his formative years. Lil' Sin also spent the bulk of his days around dozens of young children at Mrs. Chisolm's house, so he did not have the opportunity to sit still and watch cartoons and movies like many American children do. All these factors had a major impact on Lil' Sin.

During his alone time, Lil' Sin reflected on his five years on this planet. He decided he was going to live life differently if he survived long enough in his environment to escape it. He would avoid drug and alcohol abuse and do everything in his power to be "happy," which was the best grasp he had on the concept of "mental health" as a five-year-old. These were the most important factors Lil' Sin felt had negatively impacted his family's lives. The five-year-old felt that if he could control these aspects of his life, he would have a much better quality of life as he matured. And money – he needed plenty of that too!

Lil' Sin never wanted to live life this way again if he could help it. At the tender age of five, Lil' Sin decided he was going to do everything in his power to avoid becoming a statistic of his neighborhood and elevate himself until he became the best version of himself that he could be – *supreme*.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Jones family continued their nomadic existence and eventually moved in with Rita's mother, "Mom-Mom." Rita's brother, Uncle Ace, already lived in the home along with his parents, so there was limited space for Rita and her children. The cramped conditions soon led to the need for Rita to make other living arrangements for Cynthia.

Rita's only girl and middle-child temporarily lived with Missy before moving primarily with her Aunt Raven in New York City. Cynthia made regular trips back to Suffolk to visit her mother and Lil' Sin. Rita also arranged for Kenan to see his siblings when possible when Cynthia visited from New York.

The adults in the family worked together and pooled their resources to ensure Rita and her kids were never left without a roof over their heads while Big Sin was behind the penitentiary walls and that the children were as well-adjusted as possible and maintained strong family ties.

Lil' Sin's Uncle Ace was a marijuana and hip-hop enthusiast. Ace's favorite artist was Jay-Z, and he spent an exorbitant amount of time at home, smoking weed and listening to the Brooklyn rapper's catalogue. The man's preferred pastime was lounging in his room in his parents' house, filling it with marijuana smoke as he lackadaisically gazed at the custom canvas painting of his favorite hip-hop artist and recited the lyrics to every song that blared from his stereo's speakers.

"Come on, Lil' Sin," Uncle Ace instructed his nephew one afternoon when the boy returned home to Mom-Mom's house from school, "you're

going to ride out with Uncle Ace and give your mother and Mom-Mom a break for a while.”

“Where are we going?” Lil’ Sin asked, ever curious.

“You’ll see when we get there! Now, come on, nephew!” Ace smiled.

Ace exited his parents’ home, his young nephew trailing behind him. The duo walked down the brick walkway and across the lawn until they reached Uncle Ace’s green Ford Explorer SUV, a gift to the man from his father, Lil’ Sin’s grandfather.

“Hop in, youngin’,” Uncle Ace instructed with a smile.

Lil’ Sin happily complied, excited to go on an excursion with his “cool” uncle. Ace powered on the vehicle as he instructed Lil’ Sin to strap on his seatbelt. Once the boy was secure in his seat, his uncle backed out of the driveway, sped away from the house and suddenly increased the volume on his stereo. As usual, a Jay-Z CD played from his CD deck. It was Jay-Z’s “Blueprint” album, released on September 11, 2001 – the same day as the World Trade Center tragedy in New York City. Uncle Ace nodded his head enthusiastically as he rapped along to the first track, “The Ruler’s Back.”

“What’s this?” Lil’ Sin complained as he covered his ears with his palms. “I don’t like this music!”

“What?” Uncle Ace bellowed. “You’re tripping, Junior! No nephew of mine is going to speak blasphemy against Hova! Why you don’t like him?”

“I don’t know what he’s talking about,” Lil’ Sin innocently admitted.

“Oh. Well, that makes sense!” Ace chuckled. “Well, Jay-Z is on some next-level shit! He’s way ahead of all these other dumb-down rappers!”

And he's about his business too! He's the greatest MC alive! His lyrics are probably just going over your head because you're a young-buck! You're my nephew, so I'm sure you'll appreciate his music when you get older."

"I guess so..." Lil' Sin shrugged as the music continued to play.

Ace continued driving to meet up with his marijuana dealer as he enjoyed the album. Lil' Sin, on the other hand, suffered through it. Lil' Sin's uncle blasted his music as he drove through Suffolk, slightly decreasing the volume when he arrived at his supplier's home and parked on the side of the road.

"Wait here. Don't move a muscle! I'll be right back."

Ace quickly exited the truck and briskly walked up the driveway towards the front door of the small house he had parked alongside. He knocked rapidly and rhythmically until a man opened the door and appeared in the doorway. Lil' Sin's uncle then disappeared inside for less than a minute; reappearing shortly thereafter and returning to the vehicle.

"See, that didn't take long, right?" Uncle Ace asked, looking over at his nephew as he discreetly stashed the zipper-bag full of marijuana in his center console. "I see you nodding your head. You like this song or something, Junior?"

"Yeah, this one is cool!" Lil' Sin affirmed as he continued to bob his small head to-and-fro as the fourth track, entitled "Girls, Girls, Girls" blasted from the premium, Eddie Bauer™ speakers. "I like girls too, so I like this song!"

"Oh, that's what's up," Uncle Ace smiled as he pulled away from the curb, "I see you smartened up while I was out handling business!"

“If you say so, Uncle Ace!” Lil’ Sin smiled before he resumed rapping along with the chorus. “I like girls, girls, girls, girls! Girls I do adore!”

The two returned to Mom-Mom’s house fifteen minutes later, Uncle Ace parked his truck in the driveway and led Lil’ Sin into the house.

“Hey, sis,” Ace greeted Rita as he entered his parents’ home, “your little man is a pretty thorough young-buck!”

“Oh, yeah?” Rita asked with a smile. “What makes you say that?”

“We had a good time during our short trip,” Ace explained. “I had to put him onto some good music!”

“Oh... you must be talking about Jay-Z!”

“You know it! Junior wasn’t feeling his music at first – he was tripping. But then he heard the ‘Girls’ joint and he came to his senses!”

“Well, I’m glad you approve of my five-year-old son’s taste in music,” Rita smiled, rolling her eyes playfully. “But I hope you didn’t take him with you to go buy your stuff.”

“Come on, sis! Why you sweating me?” Ace huffed. “You said you needed a break, right? You can’t have it both ways!”

“I guess you’re right,” Rita sighed. “Just please be careful. I don’t want my baby-boy to get hurt. His father is already locked up. I don’t know what I would do if anything happened to my baby!”

“Neither do I,” Ace pointedly replied. “That’s my nephew! You know I’mma make sure he’s good.”

That summer, Rita took Lil' Sin to her friend's house to spend the afternoon relaxing outside, enjoying the weather. It was a warm, summer day. The temperature was in the mid-seventies with a cool breeze periodically passing through the cities and towns of Southeastern Virginia. The crystal blue sky was clear except for the puffy clouds which resembled cotton balls. Rita and her friend set up chairs in front of her friend's house. The woman lived in a nearby neighborhood, Groveland, where the women ate crab-legs and played cards as their children ran around in the yard. As the two women relaxed and enjoyed their "grown-folks' time," Lil' Sin and Dennis played hide-and-seek outside.

Lil' Sin and Dennis enjoyed their child's play, at first. The two boys ran around the property, taking turns hiding from each other and finding each other – squealing with joy and laughter when one discovered the other. After several rounds of hide-and-seek, Lil' Sin was "it" again, so it was his turn to count and allow Dennis to hide before he searched for the boy on the property.

"Seven... eight... nine... ten," Lil' Sin called out as he covered his eyes while standing next to a large tree, "ready or not, here I come!"

Lil' Sin uncovered his eyes and took off running towards a fence leading towards the back of the property – a prime hiding spot the boys had discovered during their game. Unfortunately for Lil' Sin, he did not notice the piece of barbed-wire hanging from the fence, hovering over the opening he decided to use as a short-cut.

"I'm coming for you, Dennis!" Lil' Sin called out excitedly as he crouched down while running, top-speed, through a small opening under

the metal fence.

As Lil' Sin scurried through the hole in the metal fence, the hanging, razor-sharp, barbed-wire grazed his head, splitting the top several layers of his scalp, tearing his flesh apart with ease.

“Ahhhhhhhh!” Lil' Sin exclaimed, uttering an ear-piercing, blood-curdling scream as a deep, searing sensation consumed his entire skull.

Lil' Sin's scream echoed throughout the Groveland neighborhood, commanding Rita and her friend's attention and causing Dennis to immediately appear from his nearby hiding place. Dennis quickly sprinted over to where Lil' Sin lay on the ground, bleeding profusely from his dome. The young boy was injured badly – his head was hemorrhaging blood and the dark, crimson fluid poured down rapidly, spilling over Lil' Sin's brown face and eyes, obstructing his vision.

“What happened, Sin?” Dennis screamed, trembling in fear.

“You made me hurt myself!” Lil' Sin wailed in agony.

“No, I didn't!” Dennis protested in fear. “I was hiding! I didn't do nothing!”

“Yes, you did!” Lil' Sin cried. “This is all your fault! I hate you, Dennis! I need my Mommy *and* my Daddy!”

“I'm here, baby,” Rita informed her son, who was temporarily blinded from the blood in his eyes. “Oh my God, baby! What happened?”

“Dennis made me hurt my head on the fence!”

“We're all sorry this happened to you. Don't blame Dennis, though, baby,” Rita calmly reasoned with her hysterical child as she cradled him in

her arms and attempted to maintain her composure. “Y’all were playing a game. It’s not his fault. We’re going to take you to the hospital and get you all fixed up.”

Rita’s friend, Dennis’s mother, called “9-1-1” and reported the incident. Rita wrapped Lil’ Sin’s t-shirt around his head to contain the bleeding, carried her injured child to the front of the house and sat in her chair near the card table. A small crowd of curious neighbors gathered outside when the ambulance arrived to take Lil’ Sin and Rita to the nearest hospital. The injured young boy received dozens of stitches in his head and was discharged the same day to be cared for by his mother at home. Rita’s background in nursing came in quite handy, making it much easier for her to adjust to caring for her young son’s serious injury during his recovery.

Lil’ Sin was essentially bedridden for two weeks following the accident. Having his movements severely restricted and being in extreme pain, confined to a bed for two weeks agitated the active, young boy and further fueled his animosity towards Dennis. The only consolation for Lil’ Sin during the two-week period was that he could finally to watch television uninterrupted and enjoy the shows that most children his age watched regularly. Besides that, Lil’ Sin’s mandatory “rest and relaxation” time was extremely frustrating for him.

Lil’ Sin vented his frustrations to his mother as she cared for him. It took Rita nearly two weeks and dozens of conversations to convince her son that the incident was not Dennis’ fault. Fortunately, by the time Lil’ Sin was well enough to be released by his doctor from bed-rest, he had “forgiven” Dennis and the boys had become friends again.

It took roughly two months for Lil’ Sin’s injury to heal completely. The news of the boy’s injury spread rapidly among his family members and

throughout the neighborhood. Lil' Sin's relatives pitied the boy, for he had already been through so much at such a young age. The five-year-old's recent trauma motivated many of the adults in his life to dote on him during his recovery period.

Aunt Barb, who Rita and Lil' Sin were temporarily living with, gifted Lil' Sin his first stereo with a CD player and headphones during his recovery. Lil' Sin was happy to receive the gift, and he thanked his aunt, but he could only listen to the radio at first since he didn't own any CDs. Aunt Barb's gift took on new meaning for the boy when Big Sin's friend, Shaun, came to visit.

"What's up, young-blood?" the man greeted Lil' Sin one afternoon. "I heard you got your wig split!"

"My wig?" Lil' Sin repeated, confused. "I don't wear a wig, Uncle Shaun!"

"I'm talking about your dome! That big peanut-head of yours!" Shaun teased Lil' Sin. "Your father told me all about it. He's worried about you, so he told me to come check on you."

"He did?"

"Yessir. That's why I'm here. I got something for you."

"Really?" Lil' Sin asked, excited. "What you got for me, Uncle Shaun?"

Shaun was one of Big Sin's closest friends in Virginia, hence the reason why Lil' Sin referred to the man as "uncle" even though they weren't related by blood. Lil' Sin viewed the man as a cool "old-head," an "O.G." Shawn owned a burgundy Oldsmobile with a matching crushed velvet interior. The interior was immaculate, detailed in true Virginia fashion with

gold trim and multi-colored specks throughout the fabric. The car was equipped with a booming stereo system which Lil' Sin heard from afar every time Shaun pulled up to Mom-Mom's house. Since Lil' Sin looked up to Shaun, he was excited to see what the man gifted him.

“Well, I brought you some music,” Shaun began, revealing a large bag full of cassette tapes and CDs. “I heard your aunt gave you a boombox, so I figured you need something to listen to besides the radio!”

“Thanks, Uncle Shaun,” Lil' Sin gasped, his eyes growing wide in anticipation as he retrieved the bag and rifled through it. “What kind of music is this? Is it Jay-Z? Uncle Ace wants me to listen to Jay-Z. He only listens to him!”

“Yeah, I know!” Shaun laughed. “Yeah, Hov is in there. But there's a little bit of everything in there. Nas, Biggie, Ludacris, Keith Murray, Snoop Dogg, Mos Def and all that. I made you some mixed tapes too. I had to throw in some old-school R&B – baby-making music, so you can be well-rounded! You got some Motown, some R. Kelly, The Isley Brothers and of course I put Smokey Robinson in there!”

“Well, I'm glad you mixed some good music in with all that inappropriate, gangster rap you gave my five-year-old, Shaun,” Rita interjected, calling out from the kitchen.

“Take it up with your husband, sis,” Shaun chuckled, “I asked him if it was okay first!”

“I should have known,” Rita sighed as she went about her business of cleaning the kitchen.

Back in the living room, Lil' Sin and his Uncle Shaun discussed the boy's new inheritance. Shaun also gifted his "play" nephew a start-up basketball card collection which included Michael Jordan and LeBron James cards. Lil' Sin, however, was not as concerned with the sports cards. The young boy was captivated by the gift of music.

"Can I listen to something now?" Lil' Sin eagerly asked Shaun.

"Go ahead. Just not too loud," Shaun instructed. "We don't want your mom to start tripping! Matter-of-fact... why don't you use your headphones?"

Lil' Sin carefully emptied the contents of the grocery store bag full of cassettes and CDs onto the sofa next to him and sifted through the pile. He browsed his extensive selection until he saw a familiar name and album. Lil' Sin stopped when he saw Jay-Z's "Blueprint" tape mixed in the pile. The boy selected the cassette; the same album he and his uncle had listened to on their way to and from Ace's marijuana dealer. He opened the case, removed the cassette and placed it inside of his stereo's tape deck.

"I see Ace done turned you into a Jay-Z fan, huh?" Shaun chuckled.

"Nah," Lil' Sin nonchalantly replied, "I just like the song about girls!"

"My nigga! You're just like your pop!" Shaun erupted in laughter. "Well, I think that's the fourth track. That's a tape, not a CD, so you might as well just let the whole thing play instead of fast-forwarding it and messing up the tape."

"Well," Lil' Sin hesitated, "I don't really like the other songs, but I don't want to mess up the tape. Okay!"

“Well, have fun, young-blood,” Shaun smiled as he looked down at his incarcerated friend’s namesake and patted the boy on the head. “I’ll be back next week. I’ma bring you more music and cards. I’ma keep doing that every weekend until your pops comes home.”

“For real?” Lil’ Sin squealed excitedly. “Thanks, Uncle Shaun!”

Lil’ Sin sat back on the sofa and carefully placed the headphones over his head. He reached over to his stereo seated on the cushion next to him and pressed “play.” He watched as the wheels inside the cassette player slowly turned. As the gears spun, the first track, “The Ruler’s Back,” started to play. The sounds of tom-toms and various other drums reverberated through the headphones, traveling through Lil’ Sin’s eardrums and canals into his brain. Lil’ Sin leaned his aching skull against the soft sofa cushion, closed his eyes and listened as the music continued and Jay-Z’s ad-libs were introduced.

“Ladies and gentlemen... H-to-the-izzo!”

Lil’ Sin relaxed his body and mind as he lost himself in the music. The young boy gained a greater appreciation for the album, although a decade would pass before he reached his Uncle Ace’s level of veneration for Jay-Z as an artist and businessman.

Lil’ Sin followed Shaun’s advice and allowed the entire album to play in full. He did not fast-forward, and he did not rewind the tape. Lil’ Sin was extremely grateful for the unexpected gift from his father’s friend. He was also happy to find out that his father had learned of his injury from behind the prison walls and sent Shaun to look after him. Shaun had promised to continue visiting Lil’ Sin and bring him more music, and likely more communication from his father. That was almost the best of both worlds for

Lil' Sin considering the fact that his father was in prison and he could only visit him periodically.

Lil' Sin didn't want to do anything to jeopardize the arrangement with Shaun or to make Shaun think he didn't appreciate what he was doing for the boy. So, Lil' Sin listened to the tape from beginning to end, then he listened to it once more because he wanted to hear "Girls, Girls, Girls" again.

Lil' Sin's deep, ongoing love affair with music, specifically hip-hop, started that day. His relationship with the art-form would eventually change his life and shape the course of his future.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Sincere Jones Junior,” a woman’s voice echoed from the loudspeaker in Lil’ Sin’s elementary school classroom one day, startling the first-grade student. “Please report to the main office for early dismissal.”

“Ooh! Lucky!” a young girl called out with envy from the back of the classroom.

Lil’ Sin smiled from ear-to-ear as he quickly rose from his seat behind his small desk and closed his textbook. The excited young boy gathered the rest of his belongings, placed them inside his bookbag and slung it over his shoulder. He then waved to his classmates, ran out of the classroom, and sped down the hallway.

“Sin! Don’t run!” Lil’ Sin’s teacher called out from behind him.

It was too late, though. The same foot-speed that had resulted in Lil’ Sin’s previous barbed wire accident expedited the young boy to the greatest discovery of his young life awaiting him outside. Lil’ Sin heard the sounds of bass-heavy, guitar-laden hip-hop music in the distance as he neared his school’s main entrance.

“Now, if there’s something I want, no need for me to front! Why stunt? Better know to find them niggas from the jump!”

Big Sin stood outside his son’s school, leaning against his older cousin’s vehicle, wearing fresh, white Nike Air Force Ones™, rapping along to a Method Man song entitled, “Got To Have It.”

“Daddy!” Lil’ Sin walked outside and was shocked and overjoyed to see his father nodding his head and rapping – a free man. The boy squealed in excitement, ran to his father and jumped into the man’s strong arms. “I’m so happy to see you!”

“What’s up, Junior?” Big Sin replied with a large smile as he embraced his child and lifted him from the ground. “I’m so happy to see you too, son!”

“I can’t believe you’re here!” Lil’ Sin exclaimed as his father placed him back down on the pavement after a long embrace.

Lil’ Sin had never been happier in his young life. His face beamed and he smiled from ear-to-ear. As a young boy who was always happy to leave school early, he hadn’t anticipated that he would be greeted by his father when he walked outside. The last time he had seen his father was during his family’s last visit to the prison, over a month beforehand. Neither of Lil’ Sin’s parents had mentioned Big Sin’s upcoming release, so being greeted by his father outside of his school was the best surprise the young boy could have received.

“I promised you I would be home sooner than you thought, didn’t I?”

“Yes, Daddy!” Lil’ Sin nodded, his eyes filling with tears as he thought about the time he missed with his father.

As close as Lil’ Sin was with his mother, the young boy missed his father tremendously while he was away. Things just weren’t the same without his closest friend around. Every time Lil’ Sin saw another young boy out with his father, or at the park playing catch, or basketball, or being dropped off by his father at school; he grew melancholy and reminisced about the bond he once shared with the man he was named after.

However, all that was in the past now that Big Sin had returned home from prison. The two Sins could pick up where they left off now that they had been reunited. The thought brought Lil' Sin joy, but it was simultaneously overwhelming for the young child and he began to cry.

“Oh, Junior... don't cry,” Big Sin hugged his boy once more. “Come on. Let's hop in. My cousin, Art, drove all the way from New York to pick us up. Let's not keep him waiting any longer!”

“Yo, Junior,” Art called out from the driver's side of the vehicle as he rolled down his window. “Hop in, young-buck! Unless you want to go back to class!”

“Hey, Art!” Lil' Sin replied with a smile. “No, thanks! I want to go with y'all!”

The two Sins entered Art's vehicle, strapped on their seatbelts and pulled away from the elementary school. Art increased the volume on the stereo as he drove.

“Yo, Art,” Big Sin spoke up after several minutes. “Let's stop and get my boy something to eat. You want some Mickey D's, son?”

“Yes, please, Daddy!”

A few short minutes later, the trio arrived at the nearest McDonald's and pulled into the drive-through. Big Sin ordered a Happy Meal for Lil' Sin and two Extra Value Meals for himself and his cousin. After they received their order, Art parked in the lot and the three of them sat and ate their meals as they listened to the rest of Method Man's “4:21” album.

“Mommy!” Lil' Sin excitedly greeted his mother when he, Big Sin and Art finally made their way back to Rita's home. “Daddy's home!”

“Yes! I see,” Rita smiled as she hugged her youngest child, “isn’t that wonderful?”

“Yes, Mommy!” Lil’ Sin agreed. “It’s the best thing that ever happened! Now we can be a family again!”

“Oh, um,” Rita stuttered as she glanced at her estranged husband, “about that…”

“We need to talk to you, Junior,” Big Sin began. “Can you give us a minute, Art?”

“Say no more,” Art raised his arms in mock-surrender as he backed out of the kitchen, turned around and exited the house.

“Junior,” Big Sin continued as he looked Lil’ Sin in his eyes. “Sit down please. Your mother and I need to tell you something very important.”

“What is it, Daddy?”

“Your mother and I,” Big Sin sighed heavily, “we’re not going to be a family again.”

“What do you mean, Daddy?” Lil’ Sin asked, looking up at both of his parents, confused. “But you’re my Mommy and Daddy. How can we not be a family?”

“Daddy and I are getting a divorce,” Rita interjected. “We’re not going to be married anymore.”

“Oh,” Lil’ Sin replied, dejected.

“I’m sorry, son,” Big Sin apologized as he placed his hand on his son’s shoulder. “I know this must be difficult for you to hear.”

“Yeah, kind of,” Lil’ Sin admitted. “But at least it will be like it was before, right? Are you going to live with Grandma?”

“Um, no, Junior,” Big Sin huffed, “I’m moving in with Aunt Raven.”

“Aunt Raven? Oh, okay,” Lil’ Sin nonchalantly replied. “Wait a second – Aunt Raven lives far away!”

“Yes, Junior,” Rita confirmed, “your aunt lives in New York City.”

“You mean where Cynthia stays a lot?” Lil’ Sin asked.

“Yessir,” Big Sin smiled, “with my sister in Staten Island.”

“But that’s farther away than the ‘school’ you were in!” Lil’ Sin gasped.

“Yes, it sure is,” Rita agreed. “But everything will be okay. Me and your father are going to make sure we work everything out so you get to spend time with him. You’ll stay with Daddy during your breaks from school and your summer vacations.”

“Really? The whole summer?” Lil’ Sin squealed.

“That’s right! The whole summer. And Thanksgiving break and Christmas too. I’m going to stay with my mother, down here, this weekend before I move. That’s why your mother told me what school you were going to, so I could pick you up and bring you here to get your stuff for the weekend.”

“Really? Yay!” Lil’ Sin hollered joyfully as he jumped up, embraced both of his parents and ran to his room to start packing his belongings.

The day Lil’ Sin’s father was released from prison was bitter-sweet for the child. He was able to see his father walk the streets a free man again and

this brought Lil' Sin an immeasurable amount of joy. However, he was hurt to learn his parents would forever be apart and his father was moving hundreds of miles away. It would have been ideal for Lil' Sin if his father had been able to stay in Virginia, but unfortunately, things had not turned out that way. Lil' Sin's only consolation was that he would be able to visit his father on a regular basis and spend time with him.

Lil' Sin's Thanksgiving break arrived and the boy eagerly anticipated traveling to New York City to spend the extended weekend with the man who had given him life.

Rita and Big Sin had arranged for one of the man's friends from New York to pick Lil' Sin up during his own trip to and from Virginia and take their son back to NYC with him and his five children. The seven Melanated males rode the Chinese bus from Virginia to Manhattan, then took public transportation from "The Big Apple" to Staten Island. The ride was extremely uncomfortable for Lil' Sin, but his discomfort paled in comparison to the excitement he felt when he thought about spending the weekend with his best friend.

"Whoa!" Lil' Sin gasped when he looked out the window of the Chinese bus and saw dozens of skyscrapers as the group of passengers approached Manhattan. "Those buildings are huge! It's just like on Spiderman!"

"Ha-ha! It sure is," Big Sin's friend chuckled, "we're definitely not in V-A anymore, young-buck!"

“Yo, Junior! Over here!” Big Sin was waiting in eager anticipation for his son once the group arrived in Staten Island.

“Hi, Daddy!” Lil’ Sin squealed as he ran to his father and jumped into the man’s large arms. “I’m happy to see you!”

“Likewise, Junior! Welcome to New York City,” Big Sin replied as he embraced his son before placing him back on the concrete, “what do you think?”

“This place is so cool!” Lil’ Sin replied, his eyes wide, soaking in his surroundings. “There are so many tall buildings!”

“This ain’t the half, son!” Big Sin replied. “You’ll see!”

“Why is it so cold, Daddy?” Lil’ Sin asked, shivering. “There’s so much snow!”

“That’s New York for you,” Big Sin chuckled. “Speaking of which, let’s get back to Aunt Raven’s crib and get out of this cold!”

“Okay, Daddy! Sounds good to me!”

“Good looking out, man!” Big Sin turned to address his friend. “I’m about to get up out of here. Did that bread I gave you before you left cover everything?”

“Yeah, bro,” the man replied as he shook Big Sin’s hand. “We’re good.”

“Alright, bet,” Big Sin nodded. “Thanks again, brother. I’ll get with you later. See you at the meeting.”

Lil’ Sin was overjoyed to be back in his father’s presence. An added bonus was the fact that he was also reunited with other family members

while staying at his Aunt Raven's house – including his older sister, Cynthia. There were a lot of children in Big Sin's new neighborhood and Lil' Sin soon developed relationships with some of them as well.

“Daddy has to run to the city to grab some stuff to make some money,” Big Sin informed his son the next morning. “Wake up, eat some cereal and get dressed so you can go with me.”

“Okay, Daddy,” Lil' Sin immediately agreed and complied, “but I thought we were already in the city.”

“Yeah, I mean, we are,” Big Sin acknowledged. “But up here, we only call Manhattan ‘The City.’ That's where y'all first went when you got off the Chinese bus yesterday.”

“Oh. I understand,” Lil' Sin nodded in agreement.

Within a half-hour, both Big and Lil' Sin were dressed and waiting at the bus stop for the next bus to make their commute to Manhattan.

“What are we going to buy, Daddy?” Lil' Sin innocently inquired.

“I have to get with my connect to buy DVDs and CDs,” Big Sin explained to his son. “I know your Uncle Ace and my man, Shaun, put you onto that old-school. I have to put you on to some of the new stuff so we can sell it!”

“Okay, Daddy,” Lil' Sin eagerly replied, “sounds good!”

The two Sins made their way to Manhattan in the bitter New York City cold. Once they arrived, Big Sin met with a man in the back room of a seedy-looking warehouse and browsed the man's extensive collection of compact discs, selecting dozens of them and placing them aside.

“I’ll take all those,” Big Sin said. “What I owe you? A yard, right?”

“You already know,” the man replied.

“Alright, bet,” Big Sin nodded as he retrieved five twenty-dollar bills from his wallet and handed it to the man. “I’ll get with you. Come on, Junior. We out.”

“So, what are we going to do now, Daddy?” Lil’ Sin asked.

“We’re about to go make this money,” Big Sin enthusiastically replied. “We’re going to BK.”

“BK?” Lil’ Sin asked. “I’m not really hungry right now Daddy. I don’t want Burger King, but thanks anyway.”

“Boy, you’re hilarious!” Big Sin erupted in laughter. “I’m talking about Brooklyn! I see you’re going to have to get used to Up Top lingo!”

“Oh... yeah,” Lil’ Sin smiled.

“Now, put on my headphones and listen to this new Nas CD while we wait for the bus,” Big Sin instructed. “It’s called ‘Hip-Hop is Dead.’ Let me know what you think. We’re going to be pushing this one heavy today.”

Lil’ Sin adjusted the adult-sized headphones and placed them over his small head. He listened intently as the CD queued up and the music started to play.

“*My niggas got scarred grills, skully hats and gats be fullies...*” Nas’ raspy voice began as the first track, “Money over Bullshit” played over heavy bass and piano keys, vibrating through the bass-boosted headphones.

Lil' Sin nodded his head in silence throughout the entire half-hour bus commute until he and his father reached Downtown Brooklyn. Shortly before they arrived at their destination, Lil' Sin removed the headphones and passed them back to his father.

“So, what do you think about that CD?” Big Sin asked. “I didn't even listen to it yet, so I need your honest opinion.”

“I didn't get to finish it, but it was dope, Daddy,” Lil' Sin enthusiastically replied, a large smile filling his young face.

“Dope?” Big Sin smiled. “What you know about ‘dope’ music?”

“That's what Uncle Ace and Uncle Shaun always say when they like a song,” Lil' Sin shrugged.

“Ha-ha!” Big Sin chuckled. “I thought that's where you got that from! That's what's up. I'm glad you liked it. I'll have to let my customers know.”

Big Sin and his Junior spent the remainder of the frigid morning and afternoon in Downtown Brooklyn, selling CDs and DVDs. Lil' Sin was flattered every time he heard his father reference his opinion of Nas' new CD to motivate a potential buyer to purchase the album. This experience molded Lil' Sin's young mind and further fueled his love for music. His first experience in New York City also ignited Lil' Sin's love for earning money.

There was an additional factor which fueled Lil' Sin's love for music – R&B in particular. Back in Virginia, Lil' Sin's mother, Rita, had a close female friend who she associated with often. The woman would pick Rita and Lil' Sin up in her convertible Chrysler and take them out to run errands.

At the time, there was a popular song being frequently played on the radio. The song was entitled “Golden,” and it was sung by a Philadelphia neo-soul artist by the name of Jill Scott. Lil’ Sin rode around with his mother and her friend as they blasted the song and sang along to it.

“Living my life... like it’s golden! Golden! Golden! Golden!” Rita and her friend belted the words along with the soulful Philly-based singer as they rode through Suffolk.

Lil’ Sin loved his mother, Rita, dearly. Remembering that she seemed so sad most of the time, it was refreshing to the young boy to see his mother’s mood shift and become so upbeat when she heard that particular song. Hearing the song eventually had the same effect on the boy, for he was overjoyed to see his mother so happy. “Golden,” by Jill Scott, soon became Lil’ Sin’s favorite R&B song of that era.

This period of time required several major adjustments for the entire Jones family. Big Sin was released from prison, he and Rita divorced, Big Sin relocated to New York City and Lil’ Sin was required to adjust to the new shared custody arrangement. These changes are usually quite difficult for anybody to make, especially a small child.

However, Lil’ Sin adapted quickly and did so without many issues. He was a fairly well-adjusted child. Lil’ Sin was simply happy to share time with the two people he loved most in this world – his mother and his father. The boy was still quite young but well on his way to reaching his goal of attaining supreme status.

CHAPTER SIX

Aunt Raven lived in the Clifton section of Staten Island, a working-class neighborhood in the borough, when she welcomed her brother and Lil' Sin into her home. Her small family was relatively financially secure, although they lived in a neighborhood not far from the notorious Park Hill projects. The low-income community was made famous in the early 1990s by the popular hip-hop group, the Wu-Tang Clan, which hailed from the public housing complex.

Several other notable figures were raised in the Staten Island neighborhood of Clifton, including actors Mack Wilds and Michael Rainey Junior, who played Tariq on the popular television show *Power*. Legendary hip-hop artist, Redman, also spent time living in the area. Big Sin ran into the man on several occasions while the rapper was walking his dog around the block.

The first summer Lil' Sin spent in New York with his father was quite eventful. The two Sins remained active and didn't seem to sit still for long. Big Sin was mandated to attend Narcotics Anonymous meetings as a condition of his parole, and his son accompanied him to his meetings. Big Sin took the program and his recovery seriously. He was determined to remain a free man and a constant figure in his children's lives.

Big Sin also maintained a personal regimen of regular physical exercise – attending the gym daily. He took his son with him to the gym and even attempted to teach Lil' Sin how to swim in the outdoor swimming pool adjacent to the gym. He would place Lil' Sin on his back, begin to swim,

demonstrating how to move his arms and legs, then let go of his son, telling him to imitate his movements. Unfortunately for Lil' Sin, swimming was not an exercise he was prone to pick up on quickly. The young boy grew timid and afraid when he quickly sank to the bottom of the pool each time. He quickly gave up on learning to swim and waited patiently on the side of the pool for his father to finish exercising each day.

When Lil' Sin was not busy spending the bulk of his time with his father, he was preoccupied playing with the neighborhood children. During the summer of 2007, Lil' Sin grew close with a neighborhood boy, named Joseph, and his older sister, Tiana. The two children seemed to come from the “perfect” family – they had two parents at home, a large, three-story house, a plethora of toys, dogs, cats, a pool in their backyard and everything else children their age could wish for. Lil' Sin was happy to have met the children and to have developed a friendship with kids who seemed so friendly and willing to share their blessings with him.

Aunt Raven, Big Sin and Joseph's parents were friendly as neighbors for the sake of the children, but they weren't particularly close. They communicated just enough to make arrangements for their children to spend time together on a regular basis. After some time, the adults grew comfortable enough with the children's relationship and with each other to allow Lil' Sin to spend the night at Joseph's parents' home regularly during the summer.

“Thanks, Daddy,” Lil' Sin excitedly replied after his father reluctantly informed the boy that he would allow him to spend the night at Joseph's house for the first time.

“No problem, Junior,” Big Sin smiled. “Just remember to act right. Don't do anything over there that you wouldn't do over here!”

“I won’t,” Lil’ Sin agreed as he ran to his room and gathered his belongings while Joseph waited in Aunt Raven’s living room. Once he finished packing his belongings into his Spiderman backpack, his father walked him and Joseph down the block to Joseph’s house.

“Peace, Black man,” Big Sin greeted Joseph’s father when the man answered his door. “I brought the kids back. Lil’ Sin has his stuff for the night. Let me know what time you want me to pick him up tomorrow.”

“Okay, brother,” Joseph’s father smiled. “Whenever is cool with me. Lil’ Sin is a good kid. He doesn’t give us any problems!”

“I’m happy to hear that,” Big Sin smiled as he shook the man’s hand, then turned and hugged his son. “I’ll come pick you up on my way home from the gym tomorrow, Junior.”

“Okay, Daddy,” Lil’ Sin replied with a smile. “See you later.”

“Have fun!”

“Thanks, Daddy,” Lil’ Sin squealed as he ran into the house. “I love you!”

“I love you too, son,” Big Sin chuckled as he watched his son run off with his small friend.

“Hey, Lil’ Sin,” Joseph’s thirteen-year-old sister greeted the boy as she walked downstairs and entered the living room.

“Hey, Tiana,” Lil’ Sin nonchalantly greeted the older girl.

“What y’all doing?” Tiana asked.

“Duh! We’re playing superheroes!” Joseph taunted his sister.

“That’s kid’s stuff!” Tiana rolled her eyes. “You’re too cute for that, Lil’ Sin! You should play with me!”

“Stop being fast!” Tiana’s father commanded the girl as he entered the living room after overhearing the children’s conversation. “Go back upstairs!”

“I’m just trying to be nice, Dad! Sheesh!” Tiana complained as she stomped up the steps.

Lil’ Sin and Joseph continued to play for the remainder of the afternoon until it was time for the family to eat dinner. Lil’ Sin took a seat at the table next to Joseph. Tiana sat directly across from Lil’ Sin. As the family sat down for their meal, Tiana removed her shoe and gently rubbed her small foot along Lil’ Sin’s bare leg, imitating a seductive action she had seen on a movie.

“Hey!” Lil’ Sin jumped, startled as he leaned over and looked under the table, “what was that?”

“Oh, sorry,” Tiana apologized, a look of embarrassment plastered across her face.

“What are you doing, Tiana?” the girl’s mother snapped as she leaned over and peered under the table.

“Oh, um... I just accidentally kicked Lil’ Sin,” Tiana stuttered. “It was an accident!”

“Oh, alright,” Tiana’s mother rolled her eyes as she glanced at her husband, “as long as you’re not acting like a little hussy!”

“Mom!” Tiana shrieked. “No! He’s just a kid!”

“Eat your food, please, Tiana,” Tiana’s father sternly instructed, an exasperated look on his face.

Lil’ Sin continued eating as he observed the entire exchange. The young boy was confused. He had a feeling Joseph’s sister had some type of feelings for him, but he couldn’t understand how. She was much older than he was. Lil’ Sin was only seven years old at the time, while Tiana was thirteen. In addition, she was a physically developed thirteen-year-old girl – with shapely hips and large breasts. Lil’ Sin was still a small, pre-pubescent seven-year-old. Yes, he was handsome – probably more appropriately described as “cute” due to his young age. Even Tiana had said he was “just a kid.” But if she felt that way, why did she seem to be flirting with him? And why were her parents accusing her of behaving like a “little hussy?” What did that even mean? Lil’ Sin was at a loss.

The three children went outside to play after dinner. It was a warm, summer evening and dozens of neighborhood children met outside to play catch, hopscotch, double-dutch, tag and other common childhood games. After approximately an hour had passed, Joseph and Tiana’s mother called out from the door and instructed the children to come inside.

“Hey, kids!” the woman called out. “Come on in and hop under this water!”

“Here we come!” the three children replied in unison.

“I wish I could take a bath with you,” Tiana whispered to Lil’ Sin as she ran past him.

“Huh? What did you say?” Lil’ Sin asked, confused as the girl breezed by him.

The concept of taking a bath with another child was foreign to him, so the idea Tiana presented thoroughly confused the young boy as he walked into his friend's house. The three children took showers – Tiana first, followed by Joseph, then lastly, Lil' Sin. Once they had finished, the three children convened in the living room.

“Can me and Joseph and Lil' Sin watch a movie before we go to bed?” Tiana asked her father.

“Yeah, it's summertime, so that's fine,” Tiana's father replied, yawning. “Nothing inappropriate, though.”

“Okay.”

“Alright, then,” Joseph and Tiana's father yawned again as he walked up the steps leading to the second floor. “Don't stay up too late.”

“We won't,” the children responded in unison.

“I want to watch *Spiderman*,” Lil' Sin blurted out when his eyes locked in on the DVD in the family's collection.

“I want to watch *Tarzan*,” Joseph replied.

“Lil' Sin is our guest, so we should watch what he wants to watch,” Tiana interjected as she approached Lil' Sin, a large grin filling her young face. “Besides... he's cute!”

“Oh... um, thanks, Tiana,” Lil' Sin nervously replied as Joseph begrudgingly retrieved the *Spiderman* DVD from the entertainment center and placed it in the DVD player.

“You're welcome,” Tiana smiled. “It's true! You're my brother's favorite friend!”

“Thanks,” Lil’ Sin replied. “You’re my favorite friend’s favorite sister!”

“You’re so silly, Sin,” Tiana chuckled as the movie began.

“Stop flirting, Tiana!” Joseph complained. “Let’s just watch the movie!”

“Whatever! Shut up, Joseph!” Tiana snapped at her younger brother.

The time passed quickly as the children sat on the sofa and watched the movie. After less than a half-hour, Joseph grew tired and drifted off to sleep. His slumber went unnoticed by Tiana and Lil’ Sin at first until Joseph started breathing heavily and began to snore lightly.

“Joseph. Joseph? Joseph!” Tiana whispered. “My brother’s asleep, Sin.”

“Oh, okay.”

“You want to keep watching the movie, or do you want to do something more fun?” Tiana asked.

“More fun?” Lil’ Sin asked. “What do you mean?”

“Come sit next to me,” Tiana instructed.

“Okay,” Lil’ Sin shrugged as he complied, scooting closer to the young teenager. “What’s up?”

“You ever kiss a girl before?”

“Uh... yeah! Of course!” Lil’ Sin stuttered.

“Kiss me then,” Tiana commanded with a grin as she closed her eyes and leaned towards the young boy.

Lil’ Sin closed his eyes, pursed his lips and leaned in towards Tiana. When he touched his lips to her mouth, he was met with moisture and

realized her mouth was open.

“Ew! Is that your tongue?” Lil’ Sin gasped.

“Yeah, duh!” Tiana chuckled. “You have to kiss me like a grown-up – not like a little kid! You have to use your tongue. Like this...”

Tiana gripped the collar of Lil’ Sin’s pajama top and pulled him close to her. She slowly and repeatedly pecked him on his lips, then she gently pushed her tongue into his small mouth, moving her tongue around inside. Lil’ Sin felt sensations deep inside his loins he had never experienced before and he thoroughly enjoyed the feeling. Tiana let out a soft sigh as she kissed Lil’ Sin, which further excited the young boy, causing his private parts to stand at attention, something he had not experienced in this context.

“Help me take this bra off,” Tiana instructed.

“For real?” Lil’ Sin gasped. “How?”

“I’ll show you,” Tiana whispered as she removed her t-shirt.

Tiana then placed her hands atop Lil’ Sin’s smaller hands, reached behind her back and placed them on the clasps of her bra. She helped Lil’ Sin pull the clasps together and release the bra before she fully removed it; her young, soft mounds of brown flesh exciting the young boy on-sight. He leaned over reflexively and began licking and sucking on the older girl’s brown nipples, causing the young teenager to moan quietly.

“Give me your hand,” Tiana sighed sensually as she removed her pajama pants.

Tiana then took Lil’ Sin’s right hand in hers, spread her legs and inserted the seven-year-old’s index finger inside of her.

“Oh, my goodness!” Tiana squealed with pleasure.

“Are you okay?” Lil’ Sin asked.

“Yeah, I’m great!” Tiana replied, panting heavily. “Don’t stop, Sin!”

Joseph stirred and changed his position on the sofa a few feet away from Tiana and Lil’ Sin as they engaged in their inappropriate behavior while the movie continued to play.

“This is fun, but maybe we should stop,” Lil’ Sin suggested.

“Don’t stop, Sin!”

True to his word, later the next morning, Big Sin arrived at his neighbor’s home to pick his son up on his way home from the gym.

“Hey, Junior,” Big Sin greeted his son at the door, “did you have fun?”

“Yes, Daddy,” Lil’ Sin heartily replied, “I had a great time! Can I stay another night?”

“Yeah, can Lil’ Sin stay?” Joseph and Tiana asked bearing smiles as they stood in the doorway.

“Well, I don’t know,” Big Sin hesitated, “that’s up to your parents.”

“It’s fine with me,” Joseph and Tiana’s father shrugged, “Lil’ Sin is always well-behaved when he’s here!”

“Alright, then,” Big Sin replied. “If it’s cool with you, then it’s cool with me! Have fun, Junior!”

“Okay, Daddy,” Lil’ Sin replied with a smile, “thank you! I will!”

Lil' Sin, Joseph and the neighborhood children enjoyed their time together playing as children normally do that summer. However, when the sun set, Lil' Sin and Tiana had a different type of fun – experimenting with each other sexually. Lil' Sin had plenty of “fun” with Tiana that summer. He learned many things from her – experiences he would never forget.

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