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Sire's Kingdom: The Eyekon Empire

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SIRE.

.....Before his kingdom is afforded a chance to materialize Sire must journey from the pits of the ghetto to the halls of corporate America...an odyssey that brings with it a plethora of in-your-face mayhem.

Although no stranger to crime, he's compelled to spend over 25 years in the Florida prison system for a crime he did not commit. But, instead of becoming angry at a society which, for so many years, has been riddled with grave injustices, he vows to confront it on a scale never before accomplished.

* * * *

.....Little Teddy Hilson, at the tender age of 8 years old, finds himself thrust into a life on the streets; where trudging through the dark world of pimps, prostitutes, drug users, pushers; wine-heads, robbers, and killers, all of whom expose him to lessons unlike any you'd imagine. Quickly adapting to, and learning to survive in an environment where many adults have perished, Little Teddy makes a name for himself right smack in the middle of this dangerous world. Will Teddy be able to escape the potent and predictable destruction of the ghetto, where law and order is dictated by the meanest and the deadliest? Will he succumb like so many before him, spending a life in prison- - - or end up dead?

* * * *

.....Once Sire is released from prison, society all but reminds him that the convicted felon tag is not welcome and finding quality employment becomes next to impossible.

Returning to what he considered "soft crime" to raise cash to finance a business of his own, things begin to take shape and offer a promising possibility; that is, until an enemy from days gone by picks up on Sire's trail, intending to fulfill a promise made long ago: Sire must die. The enemy, a dangerous and deadly hit-man, who is feared by many, has never failed on a kill he'd been hired to do. Only this time, money is not his motivation. His vendetta with Sire is personal, and DEADLY.

.....When dead bodies start showing up all over the city, the Police begin to turn up the heat on everyone and everything... Sire, and his dedicated woman Tish, decide to get out of the hustling game and earn their living within the law by forming his Brainchild, EyeKON, a union for the nearly one hundred million convicted felons across America. EyeKON brings with it the potential to make Sire one of the richest and most powerful men in the country.

However...can Sire and Tish escape the deadly aim of the hitman? Will each live long enough to succeed in creating the powerful movement; one unlike any the United States has witnessed in all her past.....

THE EyeKON EMPIRE

A gripping tale of raw determination to excel in the face of staggering odds, while overcoming tremendous danger and betrayals, to rise to a level of majestic proportion. An informative, enlightening and touching story with all the excitement hoped for in a novel; one which is sure to transcend urbanism with its uniqueness. Its delivery is worthy of creating a brand new Genre: “Urba-Main” (urban and mainstream in marriage)

Preface

“A king does not begin or end with the description of a male ruler of a country; a king is also a man or thing regarded as supreme.

Ascendancy will never be inherited in a place where the only legacy passed down is penury.

Most men and women alike are capable of being supreme but, only after a burning desire is sparked, fanning the flame of achievement within them.

Oftentimes, that spark will only be noticed and become accessible when a person falls or is knocked down to the knees of defeat. However, it can only be realized through the refusal to accept total defeat.

No matter the game you choose or the one you're forced to play in life, somebody must lose and somebody will win; a real winner can take a loss and still come out being boss.

Such, is the epitome of a character required for supremacy.

Your own Kingdom will never reach you until you recognize its spark, allowing the flame to burn a pathway to your subjects”.

Sire.

Prologue

...The black Mazda, which is going in the opposite direction, makes a U-turn in the middle of Michigan Avenue. Its driver had noticed the female in the powder blue and white 2010 Chrysler 300. She was pulling into traffic from the parking lot of Shoemaker's florist. He begins to follow her. The Chrysler's windows are tinted but they are rolled down; the lady is avoiding the new-car smell that is found in most new automobiles; it upsets her stomach. She makes a turn on Henderson Street and heads to the cemetery where she parks and gets out.

The black Mazda follows the same route, but it does not stop. The man behind the wheel observes the flowers in her hands and continues on until arriving at Handy Court Park, which is located on the south end of Henderson Street. The Henderson Street Cemetery is accessible through three different entries: two with vehicles and one by foot. The guy enters the park and exits on the backside near the ditch on Ford Street. After turning right, he turns right and makes his way to Blount Street where he walks through the worn-down path leading to Indian Street. A few moments later he comes to a second ditch across from the graveyard. He crosses the small walk bridge and enters the Cemetery.

The lady, once she locates plots 50 and 51, begins to clean away the wind-blown debris and wild weeds from the grave sites. 20 minutes later the graves were neat and she was finishing up and about to leave, when she heard the sound of an old twig snapping. She turns in time to see a wild-eyed man bolting towards her with a large stick in one hand and a gun in the other. The thing is pointed directly at her head. A paralyzing fear immediately immobilizes her. The man's lips are drawn back into a grimacing countenance, displaying what was left of a few badly damaged teeth.

The look on his deranged face gives her the feeling that she is staring into the eyes of the devil himself. She wants to scream; she needs to scream. However, when her mouth opens to do so, nothing comes out. The fear is total. Then something deep inside her being commands her to run. Now! She turns and attempts to run away from the rapidly approaching madman who is hell-bent on reaching her. However, her overriding instincts kick in a fraction too late; the heavy truncheon in the maniac's filthy hand comes crashing down hard on the back of her shoulders knocking her to the ground between the two graves.

The pain is too great; it becomes a struggle for her to remain conscious.

"Bitch!" the madman utters threateningly, "if you try and run from me one mo' damn time, yo' ass will neva see the sun rise again..."

THE EYEKON EMPIRE

Chapter One

(circa 2010)

The day is almost over; the sun's setting and its reddish-golden hue could be observed far out over the horizon, where it would disappear and seemingly rest, before repeating the same laborious journey again tomorrow. The rain is also keeping up its downpour and drenching everything caught unprotected.

"Damn!" Sire thought out loud. He has an engagement later in the evening with Willie, Pool Shark Willie, as he likes to be referred to. The two men are to meet at Tee-Tots Pool Hall for some serious gambling on the pool table. The last time they met, Sire had taken Willie for nearly twenty-five grand, and the event generated wide interest among the street hustlers. Most of the people who will be there observing the same would be placing their own bets on who they surmised will win between Sire and Willie.

Sire put the DVD player on pause and then grabbed the remote control to his 60-inch plasma television. He flips through the channels until finding the weather station. According to the meteorologist, the rain should end within an hour or so. He releases the pause button the the DVD and the old boxing match between Ali and Frazier resumes.

At the exact moment when the bell sounded, ending round four, the cell phone rings and he reaches for it.

"Yeah," Sire says into the phone. It is Tish, one of his two women, calling to let him know that she is on her way home to drop off the money collected from Black Pearl and Ice Man; half of the four people handling weed for him.

"Cool Baby, just let yourself in. I'll be in the Jacuzzi." Thirty minutes later, Sire is still soaking in the warm relaxing water and listening to the soulful sounds of Keith Sweat's In the rain, Tish walks in the spacious bathroom and stands in the doorway admiring her man. God, how this man could move her; from the very moment she had laid eyes on him, an urge to serve him was so overpowering that she could only surrender, pledging to love him with all her might.

Sire, who is soon to be 43 years old. He stands at 5'11", weighing 225 Lbs. Although he's muscular he is not muscle-bound. After serving over 25 years in lock-down within the Florida Prison system, exercise was one of the few escape valves for convicts to release the stress build-ups that is simply a byproduct of long years of incarceration. He sports a bald head and is always clean-shaven; adding to his boyish, handsome features.

"You look so peaceful and desirable lying there. May I join you?" Tish asks from her position near the door.

The dulcet tone of her voice gently intrudes in on his ruminating. Opening his eyes and turning in her direction, he taunts her with silence before speaking.

"Tish, you know that if you climbed your fine ass in this Jacuzzi, it's going to interfere with the business we have at hand.

Must I remind you, my dear, that all success should be based on learning your business; understanding your business, and then you handle your business? When business calls, we've got to handle that first, never mixing it with pleasure. Pleasure has a way of dulling the senses to the point where concentration will refuse to pay attention to any other factor not related to its pleasure principle. There will be plenty of time for pleasure later." He says as he displays that little smile which somehow conveys both, deviousness and a virtuous implication.

"A girl can't argue with that. Especially when her man is so on point, love." Tish responds.

"Do you want me to fix you anything to eat before I leave?"

"No Baby, I'm good. Tell Stella I said keep her head up and to let us hear from her now and then" he says, before resuming the position of comfort enjoyed moments earlier. Tish is on her way to the bus station to see Stella off.

"Stay focused," Sire admonishes. Tish winks and blows a kiss at him.

She loves and admires this man. His unique ability to remain strong, regardless of the challenges he may be facing. He seems to be in touch with some divine method of understanding her inner needs. Even when correcting her following an error, he does so in such a respectful and loving manner, leaving her with a feeling like she's the one who caught the mistake and fixed it before it became a problem.

Keith Sweat's song, "Just one of those things" had replaced "In the Rain," and Sire continues reflecting on the ensuing event at the pool hall. Those Thoughts, however, are quickly replaced by those of Gorilla Seville. He begins to wonder how, and when would Seville try and move for some payback. It's a cinch that Seville would seek to avenge the embarrassing ass whipping that Sire had given him last month. It occurred during The Tribute, an event hosted in honor of former boss street players, hustlers, and Top-shelf whores, who once ruled the streets of Fort Meyers.

It was a gathering that brought to mind something akin to a class reunion; people received plaques, small gifts, and lots of laughter. Those who are no longer living were also remembered.

Stella, who is on the early side of 50 years old, continues to be a good resemblance to her younger, sexy, and super fine self. She stands a few inches less than six feet tall and weighs close to 170 Lbs. A great deal of the weight went to her huge, perfectly round ass. Stella is also a true red-bone. She still wore her hair in the style of the mini Afro, popularized in the 60s and 70s; she is still a very attractive woman.

The Tribute was sponsored by, and held at the New Phase II Lounge. When Stella first came on the Avenue, Gorilla Seville had lucked up and got his hooks in her. It was her popularity that enabled Seville to enjoy an otherwise unimaginable chance to rub elbows with some of the city's top players. Everyone knew that Gorilla Seville was not a true Mack Daddy; and that he was executing his game with scare tactics, not with the finesse that defines boss pimping. Seville had once broken Stella's leg by running her over in the Cadillac she had

peddled pussy to buy for him. She had stayed in the abusive relationship more out of fear than affectionate dedication.

However, all this changed one night when Seville got into a scuffle with another pimp over the guy's woman, and Seville shot the man in the head, resulting in a 25-year prison sentence. Soon afterward, Stella had squared up and left town. She was recently back to partake in the Tribute. Gorilla Seville had been released from prison only a few weeks earlier.

On the night of the Tribute, Sire was on the scene to pay homage to his friend and partner Pimpwell, who is that rare combination of pimp and Boss hustler. Particularly, Tish had come into the Lounge to inform Sire that one of his workers was on the phone and Sire went outside to get away from the noise and loud music. Outside, he observed a large crowd forming in the corner of the Lounge's parking lot.

"Ooh, that mother fucker is kicking that girl," said a female standing at the edge of the crowd in an angry voice. Sire put away his cell phone and nudged his way to the center of the melee. When he saw the sight, he too became angry.

"Hey, man!" Sire said, "Have you lost your mind? You're going to kill that woman and its a thousand witnesses here to send your fool ass straight to the pen."

Gorilla Seville took a respite from beating Stella long enough to see who the fuck was getting in his business. Everyone knows that he is the Gorilla Seville. The pause in trouncing the poor lady permitted Sire to observe how bloody, bruised, and swollen her face was. The all-white outfit she had on, with the matching mink coat, was also deeply stained with her own blood.

"Sucka," Seville spat in a gruffly, murderous tone, "If you don't commence to minding your own damn business, it's your ass these witnesses will see me tear up."

It came as a blur to those standing close to the two men; Sire delivered a straight right cross to the bridge of Seville's nose, shattering the cartilage and causing blood to flow from it like a facet.

"Auugggh. You sonofabitch!" Seville cried out.

"You're a dead man."

Before he could recover, Sire stepped in with a left foot, pivoting slightly, then sent a rocketing uppercut to the under chin of Seville, forcing his teeth to break from the impact. He was out cold before hitting the ground.

The female whose comment about Stella being kicked helped Sire lift the battered woman off the ground and the three went in the lounge.

Inside, Tish joined her and they took Stella to the ladies room to clean her up. Not much longer, someone came in the place and told Sire that Gorilla Seville had left, promising to return with his gun and kill him.

Sire, not wanting to leave Stella to face her nemesis, told Tish to get her things because the three of them were leaving. The new girl asked to accompany them....

...He had been in the jacuzzi for nearly a half an when he notices the time. He had gotten lost in thought since Tish had left to take Stella to the bus station. Reluctantly, he climbs from the Jacuzzi, dries off and gets dressed. Before departing, he walks to the middle of the bedroom

to remove the polar bear rug, revealing a sunken floor safe. He opens it and takes 50 of the 90 grand he'd managed to hustle up on and save since getting out of prison.

It was no longer raining and the highway along old U.S. 41 was crowded with vehicles going in both directions. When he gets to Edison Avenue he turns right and drives on until reaching Crandford, where he turns left.

Moments later, the back of Tee-Tot's Pool hall comes into view. The parking lot is filled with a variety of clean vehicles; most were decked out in the latest styles and trends. Some are sitting so high, the owner needs to use a small ladder to access the thing. Too much for me, Sire thought to himself.

The only parking spot left is one next to a cluster of trees. Before exiting the Escalade, he activates the alarm and hits the lock switch.

As he headed for the back door to the Pool Hall, he thought, how easily the clump of trees could harbor someone lurking in its foliage. Once inside he immediately familiarizes himself with all doors, windows, and exits. The front door is never used.

Not much longer after Sire arrives, Pool Shark Willie comes in sporting a serious look on his face. A small gathering of people is around the pool table enjoying light conversation and flaunting their stylish clothing and jewelry.

Old man Tee-Tot had hired additional help. A blend of beautiful semi-nude women: two blacks, one Latina, and a white female. Each one is a sight to behold; nice breasts, which are barely contained in the tiny bras and clothing that didn't leave much for the imagination. They're passing around drinks and snacks.

Tee-Tot gives the signal that it is time to start the game. The people by the table move away. Some of the biggest names on the hustling scene in Ft. Myers are here: East Coast; pimping ass Train; Tampa Red, Silky Dee; and Ho' Bender, just to name a few. All are dressed in the finest threads money could buy. They're wearing exotic animals on their feet; things like alligators, ostriches, and other kinds of reptiles. A few are sporting Tom Ford's attire.

Sire and Willie approach Tee-Tot and give him the 10 grand table stakes. Then Sire catches sight of Pimpwell, and goes to greet him.

"What's happening, my Brotha?" he says, before putting forth his fist for some dap.

"What a surprise, Playa. I thought you'd left for Chi-Town to participate in that pimp of the year ball."

"I am. However, the thing doesn't kick off until midnight tomorrow night, so I flew back in town to watch my partner take that chump's money - again."

"That you can count on, Pimpin." Sire responds.

"Right on right on, soul Brother." Pimpwell shoots back. It is eleven o'clock on the dot and old man Tee-Tot waves for the spectators to settle down because the game is starting. Pool Shark Willie won the coin toss, so he shot first.

"Crack!"

That's the sound of the cue ball slamming into the racked set of nine balls. Immediately, three balls fall in various pockets. Willie makes the other six balls without missing a shot. Sire

was denied a shot in game one. There are only four more games to go and Willie can win the tournament. The first to win five games is declared the winner.

Sire did not take too kind to not getting a shot, so he offered to bet Willie 5 grand more that he could not repeat the same performance again.

In response, Willie shouts:

“I have 10 grand, that I will win the second game,” really feeling himself.

“That’s a bet!” Sire says before placing the money on the side of the pool table. Crack.”

Again, balls flew in four different pockets, leaving only five to go.

Willie won game two. He denied Sire a shot for the second game in a row. All of the betterers on the sideline begin tightening up on their own bets. One better in particular, Setback, yells:

“I still like Sire for ten grand to be the winner when it’s all said and done.”

“I call that,” Ho’Bender bellows.

“Pool Shark Willie is going to get that ass tonight.”

Just three more games and all that green will be mine, Willie is thinking. Unknown to everyone else, Willie desperately needs the money to help pay for the kidney transplant operation for his only son. The stupid insurance companies had refused to insure the child or his family on the sole basis that Willie was an ex-convict. However, if he could take Sire for at least 25 grand, added to the 31 thousand he has, he’d have the fifty grand needed.

“Crack”

“Come on baby, come on, give me something to work with,” Willie cooed.

However, this time nothing. Not a single ball rolled in a pocket. Finally, Sire has a chance to shoot. He ran six balls before missing on a bank shot. This brought a chuckle from Willie, who is aware that he only needs to make three more shots to win his third game. Then he’ll need just two more. However, when the ball came to a rest, the position of the cue ball, in relation to the ball Willie had to hit, makes the shot a very difficult one to make. The cue ball had rolled to a stop in the center of the pool table and rested on the cushion between the two corner pockets. What this means is that, the only chance Willie has of making the shot, is to try and bank the ball in one of the corner pockets at the opposite end of the table.

“I’ll be damned,” “The bastard made the fucking shot.” Sire utters to himself.

The sideline came alive with all kinds of encouraging and supporting comments for Willie. Ho’Bender is aggressively offering to bet another 10 grand on Willie, to anyone willing to take it.

“Show’ em why they call you Pool Shark Willie; get paid muthafukah, wit’ yo’ good shooting ass.” Ho’Bender adds.

This brings laughter from many. Willie wins this game too. He also won game four. One game left. Sire had not won a single game, yet he is cool as if no pressure at all was upon him. When Willie broke the balls to the fifth and final game; none of the balls sinks. Sire asked Willie how much money he has on him, in addition to the 10 grand table stakes.

“Thirty-one thousand,” he says, “counting the 10 I hit you for on game two.”

“I’ll put up 30 more grand to 20, that when the smoke clears here, I am declared the winner.” Willie is no fool; knowing he only has to win one more game, where Sire needs to win each of the next five.

“You got a bet Sire,” Willie said confidently as he placed the money atop the pool table next to Sire’s. The place becomes completely quiet; you can feel the tension and excitement in the air. The side door opens and Sire looks up and sees Tish enter the place.

Sire chalks up his cue stick. When he bends to take the shot, he makes every shot; for the next four straight games. Willie starts to sweat profusely. Only three more balls. Two more. One more.

Sire pauses to chalk the cue stick one last time. Even though the shot is a fairly easy one to make; he didn’t want to make a dumb mistake. Wille also knew the shot is an easy one, especially for Sire. He’s fighting with superhuman strength to keep the tears from falling from his sad eyes. This was his only chance to save his son’s life. Although Willie is a hustler, who makes his living off the streets, he still tries to be a decent father to his only kid. Sire leans over to take aim for the final shot. The silence in the place is total. Ho’Bender is also seating bullets. Sire had drawn the stick back, about to push it forward, then came a thunderous crash. It had come from the direction of the side entrance, where a powerful force had caved the door inward and knocked it off the hinge. Before anyone could gather their senses, four people came rushing in. All are dressed in dark clothing; one of them begins firing an AK-47 assault weapon into the wooden roof of the pool hall.

“Get your fucking hands in the air: ‘dis a got-dam stick-up. Anybody move will die! No mo’ warnings.”

One of the intruders stations himself by the side entrance and one stands by the boarded up front door.

“Fuck.” Sire whispers. It’s 50 grand lying in plain view on the Pool table. Additionally, it is sure to be close to several hundred thousand in jewelry, judging from all the expensive rings, watches, and other valuables worn by these folks.

Shit! Thought Sire; Pimpwell is wearing his diamond-encrusted gold and platinum necklace in the shape of a P. That alone, cost well over 30 stacks. Sire is pulled from his reverie by the sound of a woman’s screaming.

“No! You ain’t taking Ho’ Bender’s Rolex. Hell no! I sold pussy for a whole month to pay for that damn watch...”

The barrel of the goon’s wicked-looking gun seems to be moving in slow motion as it explodes upside the woman’s head, knocking her to the ground. Blood begins gushing from an ugly gash above her left temple.

Willie, who had managed to ease close to the pile of money on the pool table, snatches it up and starts running for the door.

“Rat-tat-tat-tat,” goes the Uzi machine gun in the hands of the goon who appears to be the leader. The bullets hit Willie across the back causing his upper torso to veer right, while his

legs continue moving forward for several steps before he falls. Willie is dead. Even in death, he has a look on his face that displays a sadness unlike one you could imagine.

Tish, who is near the counter with the scantily dressed waitresses, catches Sire's eye and surreptitiously points towards her thigh, where she usually hid her Beretta; an exact replica of the one he has at the small of his back. She wants to try some Bonnie and Clyde shit and try to take the goons out. However, Sire knows better than to go up against such tremendous odds especially when he has a choice in the matter. No fucking way. He gives Tish a slight negative nod.

There is something else nagging at the edge of his mind. What is it? He's trying to recall. He tries to bring to focus the abstract nag. Then, it comes to him. It's the leader. There is something about him which is vaguely familiar.

I know this fool from...somewhere...

One of the goons outside sticks his head in the doorway and warns that sirens are approaching. This brings a sigh of relief to those not yet robbed of their belongings. The robbers run out the door and disappear. Everyone else hurries to vacate the premises; none cared to become an official witness to the murder. Pimpwell, whose expensive necklace was one of the first, items taken, says to Sire:

"That chain can be replaced. I am a good partner. However, I don't think you need to remain here much longer. The cops are probably on their way. I know you, my friend, you are more than likely packing some firepower."

"Yeah, Playa, you are on point with that. Hit me up later; we'll be at the palace if you need me - oh, and enjoy the Ball. Pimpin'. 76

Chapter Two

(circa 1970's)

No one pays much attention to the child as he moves in and out of the throngs of people; most of whom begin and end each day of their lives with something to do with the street life. Maybe the lack of acknowledgment is because the kid's mannerism so closely mimics their own. Then again, it could simply be the ways of the jungle out here, that if you are in these streets, then you are entitled to no sympathy; child or not.

The little boy can be no older than 10 or eleven, at the most. Yet, he acts so much wiser than his young years. He pretends to be picking up beer cans; a thing not uncommon to see during the mid 70's. Many young black kids hustled aluminum cans and soda bottles to earn extra money. However, what he is really doing is scoping the terrain for someone slipping. Someone not guarding their valuables as should be.

Tonight is Friday and all the clubs and jukebox-joints are loaded with people. Everyone is drinking the spirits of their choice, laughing, dancing, and just having a good time. At one point, a guy inside Tamp's Bar and Grill, who was sitting at a table praying with three other people, gets up and stumbles toward the single bathroom in the far corner. But it's occupied. The man then hurries out the back door of the bar frantically holding his crotch area, rocking from one foot to the other. He really needs to take a piss.

On the outside, the darkness is greater in some areas than others. However, the light shining from the club's interior lit the place in the immediate area by the door. The man veers left, where the reeking odor of old piss is so strong it smells like raw ammonia at a close proximity. As the man begins urinating, the little man-child materializes out of nowhere as if the night itself had given birth to him. With his left hand gripping the back pants pocket holding the guy's wallet, the kid's other hand held a single edge razor. He swipes the pants in a swift, adroit cutting motion, causing the man's wallet to tumble in his small hand.

Before the man could react, the little rascal had taken his billfold and hauled ass through the dark ally-way like the thief he is.

Chapter Three

Teddy Hilson is impatiently waiting for the last bell to sound, ending the school day. He used to get disappointed when the school day was over. But not anymore. Ever since his family had moved to the house on Anderson Avenue, all he seems to be able to focus on is the streets and the people who frequent them. He recently turned 12; a smart, good-looking kid, with curious roaming brown eyes. His only love in life is his mother, his sister, and the streets. Inez, his mother, tries to be a good parent, and in her own way, she is. However, being an alcoholic makes it a difficult task; oftentimes the liquor interferes with her intentions. Their relationship, though anchored in love, with deep trust, is more of a support system than a paternal one.

Little Teddy often makes sure that money is available to pay the rent and other bills; including school clothes for him and his older sister Cynthia.

The year is 1978; the country is not at war, and jobs are plentiful. Teddy is being exposed to the many experiences along AAU (Anderson Avenue University). He's learning most of the lessons encountered along this dangerous highway through Fort Myers.

Their residence is located on Anderson and is situated between Shorty's Bar and B.C.'s Jukebox Joints. Now that school is out, he enjoys sitting on the screened-in front porch observing the street people as they walk past.

During the winter months, he finds it especially exciting to see the big pretty Cadillacs pull up to the curb and the pimps get out wearing the bright colorful clothes with big hats atop their heads.

After three years of up-close exposure to street life, Teddy was no longer dreaming of becoming a fireman, lawyer, or professional sports player. Those dreams have been replaced with the overpowering desire to be a part of the life that is revealing so much of itself to him.

Upon completing the sixth grade and preparing to enter the seventh, two life-altering things occurred with Teddy: the middle school's administration felt that Teddy was too advanced, academically, for the seventh grade, and promoted him from the sixth to the eighth grade. Once in the eighth, he became eligible to participate in a new program called "Work Studies," which permitted him to attend School from 8 A.M. to 12, then he was allowed to leave school in search of work or to search for a job.

This also allowed him to be away from school without fear of being hounded by the truancy officer. Although Teddy had frequented pool halls since age 11, it is during his mid-teens that most of the regular old-timers noticed the skill with which he played the game and encouraged him to take his game to the "Avenue". Anderson Avenue. Club 21; Jack's Pool Hall and Club 82, where the big-money hustlers hang out. That's what he did. He quickly begins to earn a name and a reputation as a damn good pool shooter.

By the time he reaches the age of 14- and looking it, Teddy often runs into problems when trying to enter the bars and clubs. On one occasion, Dave, the owner of Club 82, who had previously refused to let Teddy in, returned from an out-of-town trip on Wednesday and was

taken by surprise to see the huge crowd gathered around the single pool table in the center of his club.

What was more impressive, was the people of this crowd and what they were doing. These were the cream of the crop of the hustling scene in town. They were betting on the two people shooting pool. Dave had noticed that one of the two pool players was the young boy he had denied admittance a few weeks previously. His first inclination was to run the kid's ass out the club, but he hesitated. Tonight is Wednesday he thought, and the club is doing twice the business he sometimes did on weekends. That night the club did really well for business. Dave no longer turned Teddy away.

Teddy has lost all aspirations for attending junior high school. Life on the streets had become his institution of learning; each day and night becomes a hands on lesson. Bringing with it a different class with each experience. However, unlike failing a grade in the traditional institution of learning - where a student would periodically be compelled to repeat a failing grade; when you fail a lesson on the streets, it usually comes with a price. Your life.

Chapter Four

“You know, that could have easily been you instead of Willie. This new generation of thugs are far more callous than when we were young. It’s a wonder everybody there wasn’t shot and killed. Do you have any idea who it was?”

“No, I don’t. However, it’s just a matter of time before I do. Anytime two or more people are involved in something, especially a crime as serious as murder, it will be next to impossible to keep things under wraps for very long. There was five of them. You can bet your bottom dollar, with this many some lips will surely come loose.”

“Why was Willie the only person shot and killed?”

“Willie was the only person ignoring the guns and the warnings. He tried to grab a pile of money off the pool table and make a run for the door. It was obvious that the goons were committing a robbery and the money was what they were after.”

“Sire, you are getting too old for those streets man, and you have far too much going for yourself. You told me when you got of prison that you were going to get a job, work for a while and then open up your own business. What are you doing man; what about the union for ex-convicts you spoke of starting, have you given up on it?”

“Rodney, slow down brother. You’re asking a million questions without giving me a chance to answer any of them. Now listen, that job crap, I tried. In addition, you know this. When I was in prison I obtained my G.E.D., completed several college correspondence courses and became an avid reader. Yet, each of the 30-something employers whom I spent many months approaching for employment, all displayed an interest, that is, until they learned that I am an ex convict.”

Rodney is one of the few people who were there for, and who had Sire’s back during the long prison bid. He, his wife Lois and Rodney Jr., would occasionally visit and send money for commissary.

Without family or friends, any prison sentence is pure hell. Contrary to the picture often painted, that prisoners are being cared for by the state on a grand level, nothing is further from the truth. The food is just awful.

Most prison officials are only focused on warehousing bodies. Prison is “big business” for the state of Florida and for wealthy individuals holding stakes in the industry.

“Sire, not every business that you visited turned you away.” Rodney shot back.

“They may as well. Hell, I presented verifiable credentials, which entitled me to a better starting position than a laborer or floor sweeper.”

Sire could hear Rodney laughing on the other end of the phone line.

“Listen Rodney, I’ll hit you back later, I was asked to stop by the police department and see Bandy Welks, about some possible information that could lead to an arrest in the pool hall murder - I got to go.”

“Okay man, watch your back.”

As soon as he hangs up the phone, Sire hears Shauka barking and goes outside to see what is causing the dog's fury. Shauka is a two-year-old reddish-brown pit-bull, who was a mere puppy when given to him by Pimpwell. He opens the door in time to see a neighbor walking by the house with their dog on a leash. Shauka wants to get to the other dog.

"Chill out Shauka, that dog ain't looking for trouble..." That's when it came to Sire with strong elucidation. The robber with tippy-toe walk is none other than Rock Blanks, the chump who loves to fight dogs.

Last summer Shauka had fought a long and hard battle with Rock's meanest dog, "Sho' Death." Sho' Death was getting the best of Shauka; having bitten his left ear completely off. The blood from both vicious dogs had turned Shauka's pretty, reddish brown coat a deep crimson. At one point, Sho' Death was on top of Shauka with the dog's lower jaw and part of his throat in sho' Death's mouth. Everyone thought it was over. But somehow, Shauka brought all four of his paws together with a move that was believable only by someone who had witnessed it, and kicked upward with such force that the other dog was flipped over his head. The other dog had landed on its back.

It was sort of like a wrestler's back-suplex move, causing Sho' Death's grip to break. Initially, Sire had thought that Shauka wouldn't last much longer, because the area where the other dog had locked on, was leaking blood profusely. Nevertheless, Shauka's own sense of survival, and purpose in kicking the other dog's ass changed his mind rather quickly. Before Sho' Death could recover from the suplexslam to the ground, Shauka was up and on the other dog's ass like Mike-motherfucking-Tyson.

Rock stood there with total disbelief in his eyes. Shauka commenced to munching on Sho' Death, snatching chunks of meat from the other dog with every bite and vicious shake.

Sire had started encouraging Shauka with:

"Get 'em boy, arrrgg; eat his ass up Shauka. Make a sissy out 'em, kill boy! Kill boy! Shauka carried on like he understood every word and it was now obvious that he would kill the other dog. Rock was sure losing the 5 grand bet.

Rock went further by offering Sire and additional five thousand if he'd pull Shauka back and spare Sho' Death, which he did.

Rock also has four other brothers, and all of them go for bad asses.

Sammy, the eldest in the clan, is a known contract killer, one who kills other people for pay.

Yes, Sire concludes, it was the Blanks' brothers who robbed Tee-Tot's and killed Willie. Not Good. When you have a problem with one of them, you've got a problem with them all.

This is a challenge that Sire would rather avoid.

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Later in the evening, Sire pays a visit to the storage shed off of Bay Shore in North Fort Meyers. He is picking up the last ten pounds of weed; his workers are out of product.

Additionally, he collects the Tec-9 semi automatic handgun and two Glock .40's that had been purchased a few months ago from some guys who had knocked off the pawn shop.

Getting the shed was Tish's idea, and a good one it was. It's in the name of a former colleague lawyer she used to date. Tish Henry is very smart and down to earth. She's also a very dependable person. At 39 years old, Tish always seems to be ready for a challenge; although a very cute lady, her face is always serious looking. She kind of put you in the mind of Pam Grier, in one of those blaxploitation films where she starred in; like Coffie or Foxy Brown, where Pam's about to kick some serious ass.

Sire had met her during a visit to his former attorney's office, soon after being released from prison in January 2008. She was a senior law clerk in the firm. She had challenged Sire that: 'if he would make her his woman, she'd walk away from life as she knew it and serve him until her last breath.' In response, he had sought confirmation of her challenge, by admonishing that she was safer in the world where she now existed; because, in his world she could very well be called on to risk or even give up her life at any given moment. Tish would not be denied.

That was eighteen months ago.

After closing and locking the shed, the cell phone rings.

"Yeah," he says. It's Skinner, asking when the meal would be delivered.

"I've just left the restaurant and now headed your way."

Ordinarily, Sire would not ride in a vehicle loaded with drugs and hardware. However, he makes an exception in this case because, when he had returned from the interview with Welks, Tish and Vye were at the Palace with the rental. Now, if push comes to a shove, he'd jump out and bust a move, leaving the rental behind.

Once he reaches Dunbar, the part of the city where blacks live, Sire parks the rental around the corner from Skinner and Big Man's crib. He opens two large grocery bags and puts five pounds of pot in each. The bags are further disguised by a family size bag of Lays Potato Chips.

Everything goes smoothly.

Now that he is on this side of town, he decides to do some looking around. The Blanks' mother lives on Guava Street, a fact he know; but she isn't of interest.

Rock lives on South Street. Therefore, he drives across town heading for the old recreation center on Edison, where he parks next to the STARS Complex Center. He then makes his way through the old projects to South Street. Rock's crib is at the far end of the road.

Mid-way down the street, and on the opposite side, is an old abandoned house, which allows a good view of Rock's place.