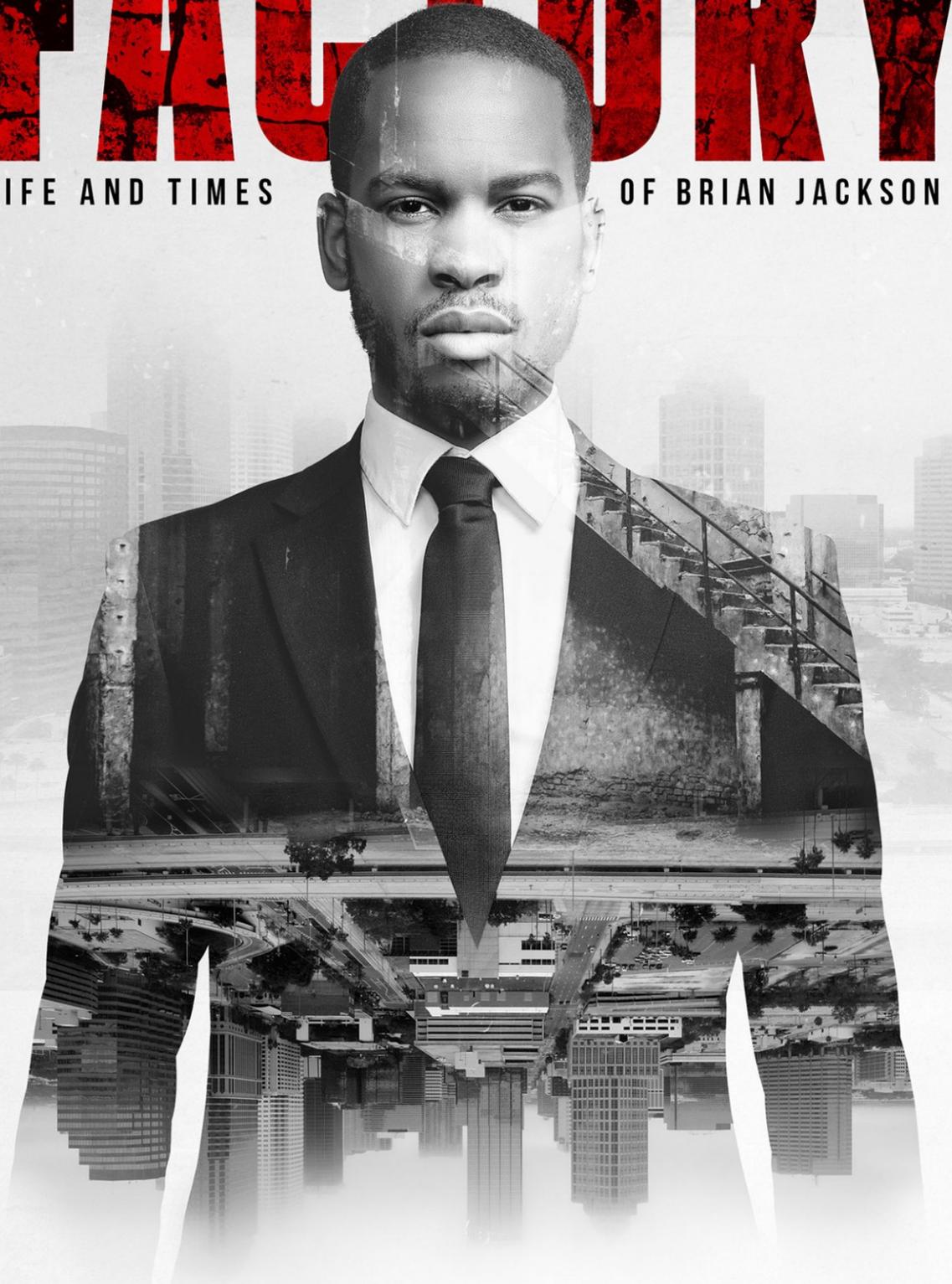


EBOOK SAMPLE

# FACTORY

LIFE AND TIMES

OF BRIAN JACKSON



G R E G D R A G O N

CHAPTERS 1 - 3

# THE FACTORY

CHAPTERS 1 – 3

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GREG DRAGON

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## 1 – DANTE

I REMEMBER IT being exactly 10:00 p.m. inside that building when it all started. We called it the factory, but it was a half-assed piece of a company that some douche bag's daddy handed to him when he was old enough to have his balls drop. I was there with Megan—a slim, brown-haired young hire for the company—and she was assisting me in gluing together a few prototypes. It was the standard grind for a Wednesday night; our absent-minded owner had called me earlier, telling me that I had to present to a client at 7:00 a.m. the next day. *Motherfucker*. The job already felt like indentured servitude, but *ole boss man* had to drive the point home with late notices, mandatory overtime, and—let me not get into how he spoke to us.

He was a small bastard, this boss of mine—nothing endearing about him. His hair was dark but dyed blond (more like orange if I'm being honest), and he hadn't seen a gym since the last time he walked past a *Muscle and Fitness* magazine. It didn't bother me that I worked for a worthless piece of shit like Rick Adler, but at times like this, when I hustled for overtime—man, did I want to choke him.

After an hour had passed in silence as we worked on the decals, Megan came over and placed several of them inside of my hand with a smile on her face. In moments like this, I couldn't help but objectify the hell out of her because, well, because it's how it was. There were eleven women in that factory of forty, and while one was an absolute fox, Megan was the one here, and she was a solid seven on the ten-point scale. Let me tell you something: in a factory full of dogs, she was what we called "office hot."

"Nice work," I said to her as I took in her gray eyes and her smile, which I would have considered too wide and slightly unattractive if it wasn't 10:30 p.m. and if we weren't alone in a massive factory. What else would I be thinking about as a young, twenty-six-year-old man? I wanted to throw her up on the table and reenact a Cinemax movie scene. Something like a 1950s film, with me being a private detective in a trench coat and fedora, and Megan the desperate damsel in distress.

Those men always got a nice advance on the investigation—if you know what I mean—and the damsels were always hot—like Megan.

She had completed the work that I asked her to do, and her smile was more like a puppy's—when it retrieves a ball that you sent it to go fetch—than a sexy seductress hinting at an “in” for some nastiness. I watched her as she exited the room, noticing that her rump was a little rounder than I thought it was, but making her hot in my mind was still an exercise of artistic license.

I looked down at the decals and frowned as they were not quite up to standard. Frustration took me over as I thought about the meeting coming up, but then when I looked over and saw the short-cropped brown hair that stood miles above the slender shoulders of Megan, the only thing that I could think about was running up those miles in slow motion with my tongue. *These will have to do*, I thought, as it was now closing in on midnight, and I wanted to leave. The girl was not qualified for the job. She wasn't the best artist, did not have the steady hands needed to cut vinyl, and she lacked confidence. What she was, however, was the owner's type. She was short, slim, not too voluptuous, and laughed with much gusto whenever you gave her the time of day. As her manager, I felt as if I was stuck with a blunt instrument, trying to use it to chop wood, and I wasn't allowed to throw it away and get a sharper one. But I liked Megan; she was a pretty cool chick, and she was actually bright—beneath the giggly exterior that she presented to the world—and I think she knew that I knew this about her.

We boxed up the decals and then stored them in an area in the back. It was pitch black outside, so I walked her out to her car to make sure she would be safe.

“Tomorrow at eight o'clock—right, Megan?” I asked, and she nodded at me with that smile of hers, making me wonder what the suave players on Cinemax would have done at that moment. “Drive safe,” I said as she got into her crummy old Volkswagen beetle and sped off into the night. I watched it go for a time, wondering if her smile was some sort of female signal that indicated interest and I wasn't picking up on it.

I went back inside the old movie theater—turned factory—and set the alarms and locks to prevent any decal thieves (as if any even

existed) from sneaking in. When I walked outside it was a quarter past midnight, and surprisingly, I wasn't tired. It's times like this when a man's mind wanders—like, *why am I here?* Rick was home with his horny wife, who probably had her legs in the air at that very moment, while I stood here like some sort of trained chimpanzee, locking up for his owner. People in my circle called me successful—I couldn't see it. Success to me was a multi-level house, a gang of movers and shakers at the end of a call, and a badass mistress that was two points over a dime. No, this was me being a chump; this wasn't success. This was bull!

I drove a 2000 Honda Civic; it was black, and it had a sound system—one that I spent a whole paycheck on in order to impress a chick I once dated. It was an awesome car; it was fast, reliable, and very sexy. I got in and drove the length of the long dirt road that led from our job to Highway 301. I wish I could say that my intention was to go home, fall asleep, and wake up to do it again, but Megan had primed the pump. It had to be a stripper's night, so I took a beeline to The Villa—a gentleman's establishment that I had frequented over the years.

I really liked the Villa. It was classy. I'm talking about red carpeting, plush leather couches, and beds for bed dances—yes, bed dances, as in those girls laying you down and taking care of you. I walked in and handed my twenty to the blonde with too much makeup on at the door. She flashed me a fake smile and let me in and I walked to the back, past all the resident perverts and losers to where the tables were set up and I wouldn't be solicited every second. I watched the pole dancers from a distance, admiring one particular girl that reminded me of my favorite porn star. Before I could settle in to order a drink, I heard a familiar voice and turned to see a tall, caramel-colored beauty with her breasts naked to the world—except for two well-placed pasties that covered her nipples. She wore a tight black G-string, and a pair of clear six-inch heels adorned feet that held a neat set of toes, French manicured to perfection.

I looked up to see the familiar face of Jada, aka "Passion," as she marched toward me to assume her role of stripper-wife. Strippers latched on to two sorts of men who frequented the clubs. There were those who hemorrhaged money to get off on the girls—but I didn't have to tell you that. Then there were those who had a little something extra

going on that could either cure their boredom (laughter) or eventually save them by way of a relationship. Being a dope dealer could get you a lot of attention too, but that, again, should be a given. Now, Jada was into me, but I couldn't figure out why. I didn't hemorrhage money, I didn't do much by way of conversation, and I wasn't a drug dealer. All I did was give her my attention—not that it was hard; she was the hottest black girl in there, a certified fox.

For many months—since the time she started working at the Villa—I would have light banter with her, pick at her playfully, and buy a few dances. We had developed a sort of rapport with one another that I couldn't understand. I loved the attention, so dwelling on the “why” was not something I did; I just assumed that Jada wanted something else from me.

“Why didn't you tell me you were coming in, Brian?” she said to me excitedly, and I grinned at her while wondering if I would be stuck with her for the remainder of the night. Jada was fine as hell, and being one of only three black women in that club made her stand out like a goddess, but she had given me over thirty dances over time and I knew way more about her body than I really should have. Men come to the strip club for strange women; a familiar woman is someone you date, marry, or live with, right? Jada was worth my time, don't get me wrong, but I had come in trying to get a chance at someone that looked more like Megan.

“How was I supposed to let you know, goofy? I don't have your number.”

“I got your goofy. You should have my number by now; you're in here enough. Here, give me your phone!” Then she mounted me and took my cell phone—in a way that the bouncers couldn't see her take it. Then she opened my contact list and added herself. It was an aggressive and brazen move, which made me wonder if she was testing me. It was bad enough that I let her lock me up whenever I came into the club, so who knew what was going through that girl's head concerning our thing?

I recalled a night when I had come in for my birthday with my friends Jimmy and Steve. They paid a Korean beauty a few hundred dollars to rock my world through a series of dances. She was mixed-

race and toned—but thick in the right places—and had a honey complexion with beautiful almond eyes. I thought that I was in heaven. During what had to be the tenth dance, I caught a glimpse of Jada as she shot me icy daggers with her eyes from a distance. She later admitted to me that she was jealous. Of course, she was. Some strippers are crazy, and although I knew this, I liked her being jealous. She had never allowed me to stray again after that day, so whenever I would come in when she happened to be working, she would stonewall the other girls and virtually lock me up.

“I don’t always answer, so you may be better off sending me a text,” Jada said as she began to gyrate her hips to the sound of “Magic Stick” by 50 Cent. She rested her arms on my shoulders and rubbed against me hard. It was not possible to keep my cool as she started doing it in slow motion and then forced me to make eye contact with her as she did so. “You should take me to the VIP,” she said, in between her singing the lyrics and smiling with the devil in her eyes. Lil’ Kim’s verse of the song came on and she threw her head back to recite them loudly, which caused me to experience a moment of embarrassment as the other strippers—within earshot—looked over at me being ridden.

I tried paying attention to what she was saying, but her buttocks felt like soft, fluffy pillows. Seriously, they really did. The girls at the Villa were not prostitutes, and given my stigma with that sort of thing, I wouldn’t go there if they were. However, Jada’s ride convinced me to pay the three hundred dollars required for an hour in VIP.

“Sit there,” she said and then proceeded to remove the pasties from her nipples while glancing up at the camera to make sure that we were barely in its line of sight. She mounted me again and commenced her dancing, but this time she was kissing me on my neck and unbuttoning my shirt. *What is she trying to do?* I thought, and my mind began to jump to shady scenarios where she would keep me there for a long time and then try to charge me more money. Then there was the chance of the bouncers kicking me out of the club violently for touching her, or me catching a beat down—after she had robbed me. The fear of a bouncer catching us made me paranoid, so I kept my hands planted across the back of the couch as she unbuttoned the full length of my shirt and began touching my chest and abs. This went on for a while

until she reached into my pants and grabbed me. She got up off my lap and continued to act as if she was dancing before leaning over and putting it into her mouth, therefore crossing the line.

I left the club at 3:00 a.m., feeling more confused than happy for what had happened. I couldn't finish—too much anxiety under the fear of being caught—but she tried really hard to bring me to climax. Once we had gone through what felt like ten songs, she had zipped me up, got back on top of me, and then danced slowly with her arms around my neck. We had separated in the most awkward way afterward, and I was trying to debate whether or not that would be my last visit to the Villa, or if it would be the beginning of something crazy. I debated calling her or sending her a text to see if we could finish whatever that was, but I sat in my car for a long period after that, smiling at the entire situation.

I was still reminiscing on it when a knock on my car window brought me around, and I was surprised to see Jada, dressed in her street clothes with a bag on her shoulder. She opened the passenger-side door and hopped in, throwing her bag in the back and pulling her seat down as if to hide from someone.

“Drive, Brian.”

“Drive? Where are we going?”

“I don't care; just get me out of here before any of those bitches see me.”

As I stepped on the accelerator to take her back to my apartment, she sat quietly, looking frustrated as she kept her eyes forward and her hands by her side. When I could take my eyes off the road to look at her, I noticed that outside of the deceptive lights of the club, she was strikingly beautiful. This was dangerous territory for a young man, and I thought that I knew better. She was bad—as in gorgeous—but she was a stripper, which I could care less about since I was a money hound in my own right; but strippers had a reputation for drugs, jealousy, and all-around crazy. I had heard horror stories from different men throughout my life about them. Jada and I had crossed the sexual line, and she was on my mind in the most hardcore way. Not to mention, there were now thoughts seeping into my head of keeping her all to myself.

“Can you pull over somewhere?” she implored, as we sped down the lonely two-lane road toward the bridge that would bring us into the city—and my apartment. I assumed she needed to use the bathroom, so I pulled over near some tall bushes and put on my hazards. As soon as I parked, she climbed over into my seat and resumed the things that she had started an hour before when we were in the VIP section. She seemed to be a master at it, taking me out of my pants, rolling on a condom—which appeared, seemingly, from out of nowhere—and mounted me to begin what turned out to be fifteen minutes of hot, unbelievable, car sex. In my mind I was great—you’re going to have to take my word for it—and when we were finished, and tired from the anxiety, the struggle, and the adrenaline of our union, we sat inside that car without speaking a word for another ten minutes. Let me tell you something: foggy windows in theory are not as impressive as seeing them after a climax.

After time had passed, I looked over at Jada and saw that she had fallen asleep in her seat. Therefore, without thinking better of it, I took her back to my place and helped her into my bed.

I stayed in a tiny corner apartment on the bottom floor of The Seasonal Palace, one of many “seasonal” palaces that were scattered around the city. It was only my second apartment since leaving school, and I took great pride in keeping it clean and “together.” The walls were decorated with framed posters depicting movies that I liked—especially the ones that featured a hot actor. There was *Undercover Brother* with the lovely Denise Richards in a white bodysuit, *Resident Evil* with Milla Jovovich in a short, red dress, and some classics like Jennifer Lopez in *Anaconda*. My furniture was all mismatched—hand-me-downs from my family—but they were clean, and they matched the brown, green, and tan motif of my rugs. I wondered what Jada’s house was like—probably something standard for a young, black female: R&B albums, photos of her with friends on the wall, and matching furniture that cost quite a bit. Strippers took home thousands of dollars a week, so it probably made mine look like a shack. Still, my house had character, and you cannot buy character out of a catalog.

The fact that I had had sex with this stripper was too much, too fast, and too surreal for me to process, and I imagined the look on Jimmy’s

face when I told him about my night. I walked over to the bar area of my counter, unscrewed the top of a Kahlua bottle, and poured the brown liquid into a glass. Then I added milk and vodka to complete the potion. It didn't bother me that it was now well after five and I had to make a presentation in a couple of hours. The only thing that was on my mind was what had happened, and I drank the cold liquor—now dressed in my robe—thinking of myself as one of those cool playboy types from a movie.

A loud knock on my door made my heart skip and I wondered who it was that would knock on my door this early in the morning. Getting up to peer through the peephole, I saw a big black man in a trench coat and shades waiting patiently for me to answer. My mind started to work overtime as I tried to figure out who the guy was and why he would be there at my door. Was he Jada's man? I had no gun or weapons in the house to fight him if he was—or maybe he was a pimp! If he was a pimp, I had fallen for the wickedest trick known to man, and I would be extorted and beat down as soon as I opened the door. Who was this dude? Was he the police?

As I sat on my decision, his deep voice blasted through the door. "Look, I know you're in there and you can hear me, so open the door, man."

Without thinking about it, I opened the door and he looked me in the eyes and sized me up. A look of annoyance reflected across his face as he pushed his way past me and stood in my living room with his hands in his trench coat.

"Who are you, man?" I asked as I tried to assess my next move.

"Look, is a girl named Passion here? Jada? I ain't got no pro'lem with you, bro, but you got to tell me."

As I made to answer him, he spied the sleeping stripper inside my bed through the open bedroom door and rushed inside to yank her out of the bed as she woke up with the fear of God in her eyes.

"DANTE?" she yelled, with a hint of recognition and surprise in her voice. She scrambled desperately for her things as he dragged her out of the apartment behind him, and I watched in disbelief as they left my apartment. It all happened so fast that I didn't know how to react. I barely knew Jada, and I had no idea who this Dante was. So, I stayed

back and watched him pull her out, and as she exited the apartment, she averted her gaze. I looked at the clock when I heard them pull off, and the hour was near 6:00 a.m. I had to present in the next hour.

## 2 – STRIPPER DOWN

“**YOU KNOW THAT** was her pimp, right?”

It was Jimmy on the other line as I sat in my car at lunch, telling him about my adventures from the night before. Jimmy knew more about the Villa than I did, but he didn't know much about Jada. The mere thought that I was romping around with a prostitute turned my stomach, and I wondered if she had left me with any diseases that would ruin my life forever.

“How do you know she's a prostitute? You're basing all of that off of what happened? Come on, man.”

“Okay...But if that was her man, or her husband, then what kind of bitch-ass nigga would run up into another dude's crib to get his girl? If that was me, and you was busting my girl...man, you would have to see me, dude. I would've whooped her ass, whooped your ass, and left her on the side of the road. No, man, that's some pimp shit. Next time you go in there, check if she got a black eye or some teeth missing.”

“If that was a pimp, why didn't he tax me? It was obvious that we was fuckin'. So why snatch her up and leave me alone? I'm a big dude, but I'm sure he had a gun, and he was in my house. A pimp would have taxed me for all of it.”

“That was her brother then.”

The thought made me even more wary as it went through my mind. A sad brother that followed his sister home to some other dude's apartment to possibly save her life may want to confront me at a later date. There was something about the relative calm in which he dealt with me that read “crazy.” A standard cat would have come at me just on general principle, or at least tried to bark at me to let me know that he disapproved. Dante had treated me as a mere casualty of the thing, a

nonissue, a mere speed bump, and the thought of his disdain made me even more concerned.

I had a nice pair of hands when it came to fighting—as evidenced by the number of wannabe thugs that I laid out in high school—but this wasn't eleventh grade, this was adult life, and it was a man's game. Men killed over pussy; this has been a fact since the days of Genghis Khan. My only choice was to either buy a gun or find out more about Dante, to evaluate my living future.

“Can you look into this dude for me, Jimmy? Just ask one of the other strippers or something. I'm gonna need to be ready if this shit goes down.”

“Aight, you know I got you. I'll roll by there tonight and see what I can find out for you.”

I was surprised that Jimmy didn't call me out on my carelessness; it wasn't often that a situation like this presented itself, and we were always trying to get in jokes on one another. He must have realized just how serious this was.

The sun was out, so I had my air conditioner blowing as I ate the cold tuna sandwich that I had brought from home and counted scattered rocks on the quiet road. The presentation had gone well. We showed the decals, the rich white men liked them, and then they left in their luxury vehicles after many handshakes and card exchanges. Rick had showed up briefly to greet them and show his teeth, but he took off after five minutes had passed, as the art department demonstrated what we could do for Laenar Enterprises and its fleet of motor vehicles. Unlike me, Megan had a full night's rest, so she came in bubbly and annoying. She asked me about my bloodshot eyes and my less-than-stellar shirt and tie, but I took it as a diss and told her to mind her own business. Somehow, she wasn't cute to me that day, and I began to wonder what the hell was wrong with me to ever want to mess around with her. To think, I was one bad decision away from inviting her over the night before, when she gave me that second glance after getting into her car. She was just a plain, big-mouthed girl, who was playing me too close on what I was wearing. I just wasn't feeling her...and who could blame me? I had gotten my mind blown by the rarest breed of mares—

all danger aside. The memory stuck to my forehead like glue. Jada—goddamn!

I walked back into the building once the hour was up for my lunch. It's funny how we were given an hour's break to eat but were made to do overtime every day. I had gotten my present position when the last manager got fired. They had set him up because the owner didn't like him—poor bastard. They planted porn on his computer at work. Then one day, Michael—Rick's spineless vice president—"accidentally" opened a folder labeled "fun" that was sitting on his desktop. Fun was filled with a ton of black on blonde nastiness, and being that Michael and Rick were good, upstanding Christians, well...they had to force his resignation right then and there. They gave me the job when they noticed that my general nonchalance for the bullshit they fed us did not affect my work ethic. I could play the game, but where I stood a hungry lion looking for an out that would pave me a path to money, they saw me as a "good boy," who was okay with his menial paycheck.

I had wanted to take a nap in my car for the lunch break, but who could sleep after a visit from Dante? I sat at my desk pretending to work on new designs for a logo and thought deeply on what had happened last night. Jada had sought me out. No. How could she seek me out without the knowledge that I was coming in that night? She had always stuck to me when I visited the club, and we had been dry humping for six months before the VIP session last night. *Did Dante work for the club?* I thought on it in length. *Was he one of the bouncers or the deejay?* I had never thought to look at those guys for more than a second. If Dante was one of those gorillas, I wouldn't be the one to tell you.

I thought about how good Jada was in every single way. The lack of sleep and the fear that kept me awake made the sex sit fresh in my mind. I wanted to see more of her, to see how long I could last inside of her and try freaky things from the pornos that I liked. How often does a broke crumb like me get to flip a dime around in bed? Not often—believe me; men like me are normally kissing up to the Megan's in life, who reciprocate with boring struggle-sex. I got the chance to lay a stripper—one of the finest strippers in the club, too. Not to mention, I didn't really trick. The sex was free and brought on by her. *Can you say winning?* I wondered, if I went back, would Dante be there ready to try

me. *Would Jada be there?* She probably quit the club, and if she did, who would tell me where she lived or where she had gone? For all I knew—if it was any of the scenarios that we thought up—she would probably be gone, or at the very least be out for quite some time.

When it was the evening time and the five people who worked for me had gone home, I sat in front of my computer staring into nothingness until I felt a presence behind me.

“Still here, bud?”

It was Rick, and he had the fakest of fake smiles on his face as he stared at me.

“Yeah, I’m trying to cook up the urge to go home. Feeling a bit exhausted today—didn’t get much sleep.”

“You look it, guy. You seem a bit crispy.”

*What the fuck did this dude mean by crispy? Was that a race joke? Wait—crispy, crispy...oh, he means I’m burnt out. Who the hell says crispy anyway? I wish he’d just take his ass on and leave me alone.*

“I should be good for tomorrow. I’m gonna go to bed early tonight and then wake up and try again.”

“How’d it go this morning with Laenar?”

“Went very well actually. We showed them the decals and explained our process and they seemed genuinely excited to do business with us.”

“I hope so, because those decals looked like shit. We have to do better than that, Brian. Especially when we have potential clients coming here to look at them.”

“We’ll step it up, Rick, no problem. I know what we did wrong and it shouldn’t happen again.”

“That’s my boy!” *Your boy, huh?* “Come on upstairs and hang out with me and Michael a bit. We have some plans for the factory that we’d love to get your input on.”

See, this is the part where the pet worker bee is supposed to get excited because his boss man is allowing him to contribute a few words toward the next billion-dollar idea that he won’t see a dime for. This was the standard routine for a Thursday. We would sit up in Rick’s nice office—which he had built extra special when they gutted the theater—sip on whiskey, and talk about which girls in the office we wanted to bang. It should have been pure heaven for a young guy in my position. It

was what young men talked about, right? Getting ass. Here I was with the two top dogs, breaking bread (if bread was liquor) and swapping notes on poking coworkers. Rick especially had a thing for Megan, and I wondered if my lusting for her was some subliminal, dark desire to taint his pure white princess. Oh, man, to see his face if he found out or caught us, it would be priceless. I'd be like, "Do you still want her, Rick?" And he would probably just drop his head in defeat.

Rick's office was actually pretty damn nice. He had a thing for Japanese samurai swords, and there were some nice ones on display on two of the walls. He did not know or care anything about the culture, but the weapons looked pretty, so they hung without honor on his wooden walls.

"So we've been talking about giving you a raise, buddy. How'd you like that?" Rick said as he blew smoke from a huge cigar and sat back relishing his role as boss of all bosses in our decal mafia.

"I would really appreciate that, Rick."

"Well, I'm sure you would, buddy! Mike, what's he at right now?"

"Thirty-six, I think. You're at thirty-six, right, Brian?"

"Yup, after the bonus last year I am at thirty-six now." I made sure to flash my teeth to make them think that I was still sleeping in the aroma of their bullshit. It was so embarrassing that I could die, but I convinced myself that I was simply buying time. For what? Hell, I didn't know, but fate gives you hints of the future that you want for yourself and I was the type to pay attention. They knew that they were fucking me, and what made it even worse was that I knew that they were fucking me too. But that's what they paid, and my peers in the industry were not doing that much better. I had started a side hustle of playing online poker on the weekends, but as much money as it brought in, I had my eyes on a bigger future. I just didn't know where or how to get moving toward it.

"Well, we are going to move you up to thirty-eight, bud. Do you know why?"

"No, Rick, please tell me why."

"Because we value you as an employee, Brian. You have done very well in your new position. Plus, Amber likes the hell out of you; she told me herself. You're like part of the family, bud!"

“Thanks, fellas, it will help me a great deal.”

I smiled like a fool for them so that they could feel satisfied in keeping me asleep, but I thought about Amber “liking” me and it was hard to believe. I had met that chick only once. Amber was the standard WASP queen, with big red hair and fancy clothes. She was younger than I was, attractive, but would follow behind her husband like a whipped dog. But, you know what, she liked me, and what else could I ask for? I did the math for the extra two thousand in my head and deducted the taxes. In my young mind, it was enough for two extra dances at the Villa, from a girl that was not Jada. It would have to do. Plus, the distraction these two men were providing for me—since I wasn’t rushing home—was welcomed. So, I drank the liquor and swapped perverted thoughts with them.

By the time it was 8:00 p.m., we were saying our goodbyes, and I was seeing the world tilting and shifting like the ocean. It was too late to hang out in front of my computer again, so I risked the DUI and drove home. As I cruised along the road, my cell phone lit up and it was Jada’s number, so I answered it quickly and put the phone to my ear as I tried to drive like a sober person.

“Brian, you there?”

“Yeah...er...Jada, you all right?”

“I’m good. Just wanted to call you and make sure that we’re cool after last night and everything.”

“No, no, we’re good Ja...uhm, so who was that dude?”

There was a long pause on the other end of the line as I heard movement and then the click of a door shutting as the background noise on Jada’s end grew more silent.

“Sorry, I had to change rooms. That was Dante; he’s my little brother.”

“Little?”

“Hahaha...no, he’s younger than me, but he just got out of jail and was worried about me.”

“Dragging you out of my house like a bag of clothes doesn’t seem like worry to me, Jada. Look, I don’t care who that dude was, but I do want to see more of you. I need you to tell me if that’s a problem with

this cat—whoever he is—because if he’s your man, that’s not a game I want to play.”

“Look, don’t worry about him; we’re cool. He left this morning anyway to go up to Gainesville. So you don’t have to worry about him.”

“So, can I see you?”

“I know you didn’t get much sleep last night with all of this mess, Brian, and I don’t want to cause no problems...”

“Not thinking bout none of that, Jada. I just want to feel you...you know what I’m saying?”

“Yeah, I miss you too. You got me all sore today, so you know I couldn’t take my mind offa you.”

“I want to see you, baby. Where you at?”

“I’m at my house, but we can’t do nothing here.”

“You live with people?”

“I got two kids and they’re still up.”

“Jada.”

“Yeah...”

“Those are Dante’s kids, aren’t they?”

“Is that a problem, Brian?”

“Just be square with me and it won’t be. You have somebody there to take care of them?”

“Yeah, my mom stays with me, and she can watch over them.”

It was all making sense to me as I spoke to her. She was with Dante—a jailbird—who got her pregnant and left her to dance and whatever else to feed his kids while he paid his dues to the system. She was fine, model fine at that, but she was a mom, and she was probably messed up in the head a little bit too. Now don’t get me wrong, I didn’t see any kind of future with Jada, but you do remember what I said about dimes and guys like me, right? I wanted to ride her out as long as I had access. Plus, the way her body felt the night before—when I was slow stroking that little thing—I needed more of that, and I needed it to last until I got tired of it. If that was even possible.

We rendezvoused at a seedy Motel 6, and I was beating the back out of that thing of hers until it was about 1:00 a.m. I found myself slipping. It isn’t something I’m proud of, but that girl felt and looked so good that I made it a mission to go through half a box of condoms as if there was a

camera crew and a record to break. I sat up in the bed, with her nestled in my arms, watching the movie *Heat* with Robert De Niro and Al Pacino. The long hours of being awake plus the depletion of bodily fluids caught up with me and I passed out, fast asleep. I didn't trust that Jada was telling me the truth about Dante, so I had moved my car across the street at a Radiant gas station.

When I woke up it was 5:00 a.m., and Jada lay sprawled out across the bed, fast asleep. I was due to work in a couple of hours, and I was very disappointed in the rash decisions that I had made on the last two nights. I tried to shake her awake. "Jay, wake up baby. Jada!" She rolled unto her side away from me, and I realized that waking her at this point would take an act of God. She was so fine; I wondered if waking her up with some morning sex would be okay. *Would she be okay with me doing it?* It didn't matter; I couldn't risk it, so I pulled on my clothes and tried to wake her again. I asked her where she lived, and she groggily fanned me away as if I was of no concern. Pacing the room and wondering how I would get back home and then to work in less than two hours, I began to panic, but then I remembered that I had left a shirt and tie in my back seat.

Jada kept on sleeping soundly, so I stepped outside, locked the door, and made the walk across the now-busy street. Not before I took a picture of that sleeping beauty in the bed, however—I needed evidence in case she turned out to be crazy. When I made it to the gas station, I got back into the Civic and drove it to our motel.

I showered, ironed my black shirt and khaki pants, tied a half-assed Windsor knot, and looked myself over several times in the mirror to make sure that I looked the part. I left thirty dollars with a note for Jada to call a cab when she woke up or hang around until 11:00 a.m. when I would be able to come back out to collect her. As I got back into the car, I felt guilty—would she be okay with her ex floating around ready to snatch her up at the drop of a hat? I wanted her to call me. A lunch break with Jada would be so much better than sitting in my car sleeping, but something told me that I wouldn't get a call. Jada was my nighttime thing; I could not even imagine kicking it with her during the day.

I wasn't sure what it was that sent me spiraling down a dark abyss of bad thought during that day of work, but I was pretty grouchy. Jimmy called and told me what I already knew about Dante, but I played it off as if it was news and then thanked him for looking into it for me. Megan messed up another set of decals, and I brought her into one of the side offices to let her know that she was on thin ice. I wasn't particularly stressed; I didn't think that I was yelling at her, and I had tried my best to not appear threatening. Still, it was as if I read the girl a death sentence as she turned red and began to cry, and it was all too much for me to stand for very long.

"Just...try to be more careful, Megan, all right? I know you can do this."

When it came time for my lunch break, and me not being all too aware of my gloomy mood, I called Jada and she dug into me with a barrage of cuss words and name-calling. It was not what I expected to hear, and she was angry to the point of screaming through the phone.

"Hey, you need to calm the hell down, Jada. You know I work! What the hell did you expect me to do when you wouldn't wake up and let me drive your ass home?"

"Motherfucker, you left me alone in that nasty-ass motel. I don't remember you waking me up. That shit ain't cool. What if someone had walked up in there?"

"Jada, I tried to wake you up. Did you get ho—" She hung the phone up on me and I sat in my car stewing, wondering at the events of the last few days and playing it over and over in my head. This was when it dawned on me that I had had my fill. There was too much baggage with that girl, even though I knew that it was going to be a long and bumpy ride with her. The gangster ex-boyfriend, the neglected children, and the hint of crazy on that last phone call should have been enough warning for me. I went back into the building, cracking the whip of a frustrated taskmaster, and while I knew that my staff liked and respected me, I was out of pocket that day, and it wasn't really fair to them that I was behaving this way.

Sometimes a leader has to put his feelings to the side and overcome the reactionary motives of mere mortals, to keep up the morale of his men. I walked over to where Megan was doing the decals, and I took my

time to show her what I knew would make the decals easier for her. I didn't know it was happening—I swear I didn't—but I caught myself standing behind her, guiding her hand with my own as she moved the X-ACTO knife over the vinyl. As her soft, pert bum brushed against the front of my slacks, I felt the familiar stirring of an erection coming. I quickly backed up off her, trying my best to play it off. I couldn't believe that I had gotten behind her like that, but I was happy that it happened. *Did she feel that? I know that I'm not crazy, but she was very relaxed with me behind her like that.* I felt a mixture of arousal and embarrassment as I walked back to my office to make the final touches on another design.

As the late evening came and the natural light was replaced by the fluorescent light bulbs of our work area, I walked out to a large part of the factory where several workers were mass-producing decals and boxing them up. The room really bothered me. Rick's office sat above it with a large glass window that allowed him to look down upon them. I thought about a plantation house that I had visited as a child, where we were shown a hidden porch where the master of the house would sit and look down upon his slaves working in the cotton fields. The workers here were paid—very different from the slaves that I was comparing them to—but I did not like the idea of the window. I could imagine Rick pacing up there, looking on as they packaged and moved decals down the assembly line. It was too dystopian, too *Metropolis*. It was like one of those old science fiction stories.

I hated going back there during the day. It was mostly due to the looks that everyone out there gave me. I could tell that they saw me as one of the bad guys: a poorly paid taskmaster—like an overseer—doing what I could to stay in Rick's good graces. The only thing I liked about going back there was a short, brown-skinned girl by the name of Rosalita. She was a real sweetheart and a certified banger. She was sexy and was one of the many subjects of guy-talk with Mike and Rick. We had surmised that Rosie (what she preferred to be called) was a virgin; it just was not possible for a girl that sweet to have been tainted by the evils of sex. I didn't know why I went back there to look at Rosie as the workers packed up to punch out and leave, but I stood there as if frozen by some unseen force. When she saw me standing by the door she gave

me a curious glance and a smile, then joined the procession of women that practically ran outside the side door. They always worked hard daily, and the hours were long, so I couldn't blame them in wanting to leave.

Rosalita had to know that I had a thing for her. I just didn't want to jeopardize my job by pushing up on her at work. She was "the one." I would look at her and imagine myself living with her, surprising her with gifts...hearing her giggle, and the whole proposal-wedding thing. You would think that with my romping around with strippers, lusting after Megan, and chaotic handling of life I would be immune to falling in love, but I was drawn to Rosie. She was my Mrs. Jones, and though I put no effort into devising a way to get with her, I knew that if it ever happened, I would probably pop on contact. However, outside of sex, I would do right by her. Those fingers and toes of hers were meant to be adorned with rings, not rolling vinyl and aching on Rick's concrete floor.

The building cleared out and I turned around and returned to the art department. Megan was still doing her prototypes, and Cleve—one of our newer hires—was clicking away on his computer. I walked over to Megan to see how she was doing. She looked up at me and smiled, which made me feel good, being that I thought things would get awkward between us after the meeting we had earlier. She held up the decals to show me, and they were damn near perfect. It was a great improvement from what she had done before.

"Look at you with the perfect prototypes," I said to her, smiling, and she beamed up at me with happiness. It was almost 8:00 p.m. and it was a Friday. I thought it silly for all of us younger twenty-somethings to be stuck doing overtime before the weekend, so I decided to send them home.

"Go on home, you two; it's a Friday. Rick isn't running a sweatshop, no matter how much it may seem like that sometimes. Have a great weekend, and I'll see you on Monday."

The pair returned the sentiment and rushed out to their vehicles. I was still thinking of Rosalita when I locked the place up, but my phone began to ring, and it was Jada's number. I let it ring out of spite, not wanting to hear her curse me out again, and wanting a break from her since she'd probably be calling again to hook up. The phone kept on

ringing, and when the third cycle of rings came through, I answered it, frustrated, not knowing what I would say.

“What?”

“Hey, Brian, this is Sherry from the club—”

“Who?”

“Sherry. You know. ‘Delilah.’” How could I forget? Delilah had given me the best lap dance I had ever had in my life, back when the Villa was just a strip club and not the place where Jada—the stripper I was having a relationship with—prevented me from going astray.

“Oh, hey, what’s going on?”

“Nothing much. Listen. I have Jada’s cell phone, so I was calling to see if she’s with you. I know that you guys have been together the last couple of days, so if you know where she is, tell her I got her phone.”

“How do you have her phone? Did she come to work today?”

“Yeah, she came in earlier and decided she wanted to work. Sosa said it was cool, but she just vanished. I figured she hooked up with you after she got out of here.”

“Well, I’m still at work, Sherry. Jada hasn’t contacted me. Tell you what, though. If I do see her, I’ll let her know you have her phone.”

“Awesome. Thanks, Brian!”

“You got it, baby.”

### 3 – KNOCKOUT

**JIMMY’S APARTMENT WAS** a pigsty. It was so filthy that I wondered if he even lived there. I hated being inside of his place, but it was a Thursday, and we were going to a club called Amaretto’s. We were waiting for “Freaky Steve”—our ride to the venue, but he was running late. Steve was late for everything that did not involve him getting money, and even though we knew this, we always gave him the benefit of the doubt. We wanted to make it there before 11:00 p.m., since the cover would only be ten dollars, but it was now 10:45 p.m., which meant that we would be paying about twenty dollars each. Of course, Jimmy was not happy.

“Brian, remind me again why we go anywhere with this motherfucker.”

“Hey, you the one that keep inviting that clown. Maybe you like dude’s driving, I don’t know.”

I did not want to touch Jimmy’s nasty leather couch or the clothes that were pushed lazily to the side to present some sitting room, so I sat at the bar area looking around at the filth in disbelief. When Steve finally showed up, I almost ran out of the apartment just to get away from the dirt. I knew that it made no sense, the way I expected either of my friends to change their ways, but I was really waiting for them to come around. Jimmy had always been a dirty bastard, and Steve had always been late. I would show up at Jimmy’s place, forgetting that it was a pigsty, and step inside disgusted, as if I had never seen it before. We stayed upset at Steve for making us late to things, and I am sure that there was something about me that pissed them equally off too. But, we were boys; we had known each other since high school and while we had our annoyances, we had each other’s backs.

Steve was the transporter since he drove like a pro. His love for sports cars—especially the ones he would never be able to afford—was second only to his love for women. Jimmy was always funny but had a temper that was short and violent. Being around him had gotten me into several scuffles at various clubs, football games, and the random times that we trolled around Seventh Avenue looking for sexy women. Being his friend had made me just a little bit “off.” I may have looked and talked like a square, but behind all that was a partner for life to Jimmy “hit man” Smith. I didn’t ever want to end up in jail or prison, but we kept a code of respect that we expected other men to abide by. Do not touch me, do not call me a name, and do not threaten me. Very easy rules to follow—at least that’s what we thought, but dudes would end up violating.

Steve, on the other hand, was a white Tampa native who had lied all through high school about being Puerto Rican. Jimmy and I didn’t understand his need for faking his heritage. I knew many white kids that did this, and I wondered if they thought that people of color had a much more interesting background than, say, a person of German or Irish blood. The Italian kids clung to their Italian thing like a lifeline, the

Jewish kids did the same, but Steve wanted to be Puerto Rican. I just couldn't figure it out. In high school he would wear a large flag of Puerto Rico on his T-shirts, drop the word "nigga" at liberty—which got his ass kicked more than a few times—and date Puerto Rican girls exclusively. He had even gone through a "black phase" around the time when blue-eyed soul was prevalent in hip-hop. Throughout it all—the chameleon days of white boy Steve—Jimmy and I stuck with him. He was our boy, and though Jimmy always clowned him, we stayed tight throughout the years.

We reached downtown and the place was jumping, so Steve took us to the back of some apartment complex, where he parked his Acura, locked in his steering wheel club, and turned on the alarm.

"You think that's enough security, Steve?" I asked sarcastically.

"Man, do you know where we at?"

"Good point." I couldn't front; I was nowhere near comfortable in that neighborhood.

We walked over some railroad tracks toward a large, empty parking lot where the fence had a hole in it and there were flyers all over the place. It was a decent walk, and when we got to Seventh Avenue, my shirt was soaking wet from the humidity of the night air making me sweat. The line for Amaretto's was not bad, so we took the time to look at the female "talent" that was being let in free. We took turns looking at one another when something amazing would pop out of that sea of "Tampa Typical"—plastic blondes, busted Latin broads, and hood bitches. It was pretty packed—which made Jimmy excited—and we found a nice spot on the upstairs overhang to look at girls, order drinks, and take our pick of any that we deemed "fuckable."

This futile exercise of clubbing to get with women was one that we had been using since my days in college. I saw it as a break in my routine—a break to look at strange, accessible women—but I felt as if Jimmy was there to find a wife. Steve was already married. He had stayed with his high school sweetheart while the rest of us jumped for greener pastures. His wife, Jennifer, was pregnant, but that did not stop the party animal from coming out with us. I looked down at the dance floor and saw him there—Steve, the married party animal. It was no surprise to me that he had a short Latina all over him.

“Freaky Steve doesn’t mess around,” I said to Jimmy, who had his back to the railing, looking at a thick, light-skinned girl that he was cooking up the urge to approach.

“Steve just in here fucking it up for errbody. He ain’t gon take her home. Sheeet, not unless he fuck her at your crib. We both know he won’t do it. But he out here getting his grind on just to crash on your couch later.”

This was true; whenever Steve would go too far on his drinking, I would call his wife in the morning to apologize for “letting” him go so far. Then he would sober up and drive home to do damage control. What Jimmy didn’t know was that Freaky Steve had brought girls back to my place before. It was on the nights that Jimmy either was in jail or was out of town on one sort of business or another. Steve got his, but I kept it gangster and didn’t put his business out there, not even to my best friend.

I looked over at Jimmy after he had gone quiet, but he was at the bar talking to the girl that he was staring at, and it made me smile and wish him a silent good luck. The place was bumping, and the third Crown Royal that I was sipping on began to speak to me. Before I knew it, I was on the dance floor, popping, locking, and letting the energy flow through me like a piece of live wire. They were bumping a Lil’ Jon song, and some older women were taking turns dancing with me. Tampa had the oddest mix of people at these places, and for guys who liked women north of forty, a crazy nightclub like Amaretto’s would yield just as many as anywhere else. We stayed until the place closed down and then walked the strip of Seventh Avenue to sober up a bit.

“Man, did you see the honey that I was dancing with, B? She was fine as FUCK!” Steve yelled into the night air, and I gave him a grin with a nod of approval as we kept on moving. We made it to the car after the streets had thinned out, but none of us was in good shape to drive. We volunteered Steve—our resident driving expert—since he seemed to have his wits about him, whereas my world was slowly spinning. I was at that drunken phase of regret, when you realize that you no longer have control.

“You got it, Steve?” I asked, worried that the car’s movement would cause me to hurl. I steeled myself for the trip, hoping to close my eyes

and open them up to find my friends dragging me into my place, where I could sleep the rest of my drunkenness off.

The car started and Jimmy slumped over in the back and passed out immediately. We began to move, but almost instantly, the crashing jolt of something snapped me awake. We were on the corner of a small street, and the car that had hit us was on the other side of the street. There was a young black man in Steve's face, yelling and screaming, while another person looked on. When I exited the car, I could hear the dude threaten Steve, and I didn't like it.

"You good, Steve?" I asked as I stepped over to them, trying my best to look big and intimidating.

"It's okay, Brian. It's good, man. Can you call the police? We need to report this and, fuck, whatever else."

Steve seemed to have sobered up a bit, as he was content with taking an L on the DUI and facing his punishment. Jimmy—who had woken up from the shouting—was now out of the car and on to something else. He marched over to the man that was throwing threats at Freaky Steve.

"Yo, won't you shut your bitch ass up, nigga!" he said to the man while jabbing his finger at his face. "You making all that goddamn noise, like that shit's gon fix your car." He stepped back with his hand on the gun in the small of his back, and I knew that things were about to go south, fast.

"Yo, let's chill out, fellas, and do this the right way," I said as I tried to calm the situation so that Jimmy didn't get himself—and us—in trouble. The man's girlfriend, who looked like an angry version of him (I am being serious; they could have been twins.), was on her phone, and I assumed that she was calling the Tampa Bay Police Department. Jimmy agreed to chill, and we all waited for another fifteen minutes to see if the cops would come. The streets of Ybor City were empty of most club goers and workers going home, and I concluded that the police were not coming.

Jimmy had returned to the back of the car and was guzzling some water that Steve had gone inside of a store to buy for him. Steve was hoping to sober him up for when the cops arrived, but we all knew that it was futile; we were about to be in deep shit.

A Toyota Tundra pulled up after a while, and four black men hopped out wearing sagging pants, wife-beaters, and various forms of what we called “thug attire.” The female twin became empowered when she saw them and began pointing us out as if we had hurt her. The main thug came at me, running his mouth, and before I could think better of it, I threw a right cross and clipped his jaw. He landed on his back, where his head hit the asphalt and opened up like a grapefruit. Jimmy was out of the car by the time I swung and fired several shots at the men who were around the truck, causing them to scramble back inside and drive off.

“You done fucked up!” he said to the girl as she and the other man jumped into their wrecked car and sped off down the street. Jimmy fired once more into the rear of the vehicle, and it spun out and crashed into a light pole near the far intersection.

“White boy, you better drive like you know how to drive right fucking now!” Jimmy said to Steve, who jumped into the driver’s seat and did just that.

We were in the hood when we crashed, and it would take some time for police to make it out there. The thugs that had come at us could identify us easily, but we all lived on the other side of town. Jimmy was an ace of a mechanic and could fix the little fender bender on Steve’s car, but we were two black males and one white man in a black Acura. We were friends, hung out together often, and had no alibi for that night. My mind was going into overdrive.

“Yo, did I kill that motherfucker?” I asked aloud as Steve whipped the car like one of those old stagecoaches during the chase scenes of a Western movie.

Jimmy didn’t answer me, but Steve was shaking and began to ramble hysterically. “Man, that dude was sleep, Brian! Like out. You might have killed that motherfucker. Did you see that dude’s head? With all that blood? And Jimmy—I think Jimmy shot the bitch!”

Jimmy was eerily quiet, and he was in the back doing something to his gun that I couldn’t make out from the rearview.

“Brian, I need to get rid of this piece,” Jimmy said. “You know how in them forensic shows they always track bullets and shit back to a gun? This shit here is hot.”

He was asking me to help him hide what could very well be a murder weapon. They had always known me to be a quick thinker, and he was relying on me to get him out of a jam. "Give it to me, J. I know where to get rid of it." *The factory*. "Okay, fellas, this is how it's going down. Steve, you are staying by me with the same drunk story you always pull on Jennifer. That's our story, you hear me? We got lit, I drove your car back to my spot, and you passed out on my couch. Jimmy, we got to have Steve's shit fixed by tomorrow, man. Jennifer can't see that dent. Cause if one of those dudes or that dumb ass bitch is dead, and they start investigating shit, Jennifer might say the wrong thing. She don't know to keep quiet about that shit like we do."

I looked down at my knuckles and saw no bruises, so I threw up a silent prayer of gratitude for that. Steve crashed on my couch, and Jimmy took the car to his shop while I hopped into the Civic and tucked Jimmy's gun away deep inside my gym bag. He had pulled it apart and given it to me without the bullets. This was a crazy night, but don't get me wrong, it wasn't our first dance with Ybor thugs and gunplay. Normally, it never came to the point where Jimmy would fire off his weapon, but when several men threatened to do us harm, I had to switch gears to "dangerous" to protect my man Steve.

Jimmy and I had always fought for one another since high school, so when he saw me punch the guy out, he knew that I needed cover. I was going to clean up our mess one way or another, but the first step was to get the gun to a place where the cops would never find it.

When I got to the factory, I sat on the hood of my car, contemplating what I could do to get rid of the gun. I let my eyes roam over the building and its dark, mysterious expanse, thinking about where I could bury the gun. To think, the factory was once a site for the newest movies, popcorn, and overly priced candy. There were rooms inside that building that had never been renovated. Rick had bought the theater, but in reality, the decal company was only using a third of it.

I unlocked the door, punched in the code for the alarm, and bypassed turning on any lights. I kept a tiny flashlight on my keychain, so I used it to light my way as I walked into the large room where Rosalita and the other workers normally worked. I moved past her workstation to the break room, then opened its doors and entered the

kitchen. When I got to the kitchen—where the drone of the refrigerator made the darkness damn near frightening—I used my key to unlock a small steel door and then stepped into a theater room that was still intact, minus the chairs. It looked like a dark coliseum from hell, and I wondered, if I stayed there long enough, would the curtains part and Michael Meyers emerge to cut me up with a wicked knife? Nevertheless, it was not a time to be afraid.

My mind was working overtime on the disposal of the gun, and as I carefully pushed my way through the refuse to the base of the stage, I thought about what the future finder of the gun would think. By then it would not matter. Those were a couple of worthless thugs from the hood. The cops would give a shit for at most a week and then move their detectives on to something else. By the time they found Jimmy's gun, they would not be looking for any of us. Plus, I expected the gun to be sleeping there for several years after I hid it.

I found the hole that I was looking for. Why was there a hole in the front of the theater, you ask? I had no clue, but I had found it when we first looked over the building, when Rick was looking to buy it. The flashlight pierced the darkness of the hole, but I couldn't see the bottom. It would be a wonderful hiding place, so I tossed the bag with the gun parts into it and waited, listening until I heard it hit the bottom. We would be okay.

Look, I'm a good guy, a square guy. I don't really do anything criminal, and I pay taxes and bills. But this isn't to say that I haven't been tried in the past when it came to thugs, and it isn't to say that I didn't handle the hell out of it back then when I had to. I'm a good guy, but I'm not a sucker, if you get where I'm coming from. Jimmy and I beat a guy within an inch of his life once, when we thought he had raped the daughter of a girl that Jimmy was seeing. We actually thought that we snuffed his life out then—the human body is a resilient machine; let me just say that. But the times in my life when I've had to resort to illegal activity, I can count on one hand—this one being the fourth or fifth. Putting bad guys in check was just that one annoying itch we all come across in a relatively good life.

I was a college kid who made ugly decals for a living, but I grew up with the apes, the gorillas, and the chimpanzees in the jungle. When it

came time for me to speak that language, I could be pretty damn fluent, and this is why hiding a pistol for my best friend—who used it to keep me safe—did not seem like that big of a deal to me.

The next day was a Saturday, and I spent the majority of it pacing my apartment, worried that the phone would ring or that there would be a knock on the door, questioning my whereabouts from the night before. When the phone finally rang, I literally jumped, but it was Jada's number. I wondered if it was actually her.

"Jada?"

"Hey, Brian."

"Yeah...where the hell have you been, baby? You had me thinking—"

"Aww, I'm okay! Let me talk to you when I get over there. You don't mind if I stay with you for a few days do you?"

*Well, this was sudden.* I replied with an "of course not," thinking about all of the "live-in" pussy that I would be getting from my stripper dime-piece, but a part of me was worried that she would be coming with a lot of drama and extra foolishness to complicate my life.

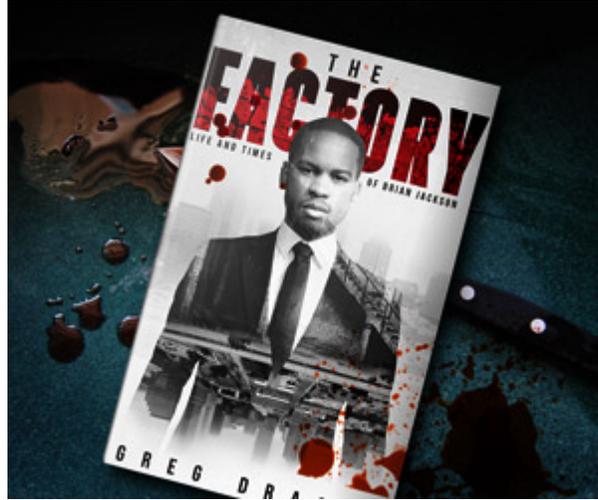
When she came over, all of the concern that I had melted away. The girl was beautiful. When she came to my door, she was in a small, white top with some tiny jean shorts that cut into the corner of her privates—it made me hard just looking at her. On top of that, she had on blue, open-toed pumps so that her perfectly pedicured big toes could poke out to the world—you know I have a foot fetish, don't tell nobody—and her legs were like flawless mahogany. I swear to God I was poking out of my pants at the sight of that girl. The whole drama from the night before became ancient history.

I lifted her into my arms, locked the door, and then walked her to the couch, where I sat her down and commenced with opening that blue and white gift box. Jada was such a delicious treat, but I was worried that I was falling in love with her. For years, Jimmy had kept warning me about the way I played around with the strippers—that one day I would end up with one—but who would have thought that it would be Jada? I mean...damn! I hadn't stopped thinking about her when she disappeared, and now that she was here, I had to devour every inch of her. She liked being with me; I could tell. She liked where I placed my tongue and the way that I would constantly push the boundaries on

experimenting with her. Me? I was making up for lost time and for the times in the future, which I knew would be coming, when Jada would have moved on, and all I had was lotion and a fuzzy memory.

THANK YOU!

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