

DIAMOND DROUGHT

Diamond Drought

THE
DIAMOND SERIES

DIAMOND
DROUGHT

Brandon McCalla

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First Printing

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*Let me tell you where I grew up at/sip mo, threw up at/flip coke,
blew up at/where fake thugs got they vests-s chewed up at...
Brooklyn beef/who want that...?*

BK Anthem, Foxy Brown

I had to quote her. I know what she was feeling when she was in the booth just about to spit those first 16 bars. When I wrote the first 3 chapters of this, I was like, *I gotta rep it correctly*. Mos Def and Talib Kweli know, Jay-Z definitely knows. Brooklyn is more than just the hood to us, it's our province and hip-hop is our culture. Spawned in the boogie down Bronx, but the shit migrated and when it came to BK it never left. We went from break dancing to intricate lyrics about our environment over break beats to the Donald Goines route with it. So I had to base this book in Brooklyn, it was only fitting.

I'm very proud of the culture. Jay-Z signing Kanye West gave me more faith in it. I felt we were losing sight. I decided to go another way people; sure, I produce music, but my Triton's in the closet now. We need more for us, an alternative direction to direct our minds... but I'm not the KRS type. I don't teach nor want to. You don't want me preaching. I could only spew sin from my jaws. My intention initially was for you to read this and get entertained. I tried to hit this urban literature market at a different angle, hold the H&K diagonal like in the movies and let off a few just so you would pay closer attention. I unloaded on the masses not giving a damn about how these other books were written by those other authors, I never read a single one. Why read about the life you're already living, right? Then I read my own book and knew why. You will know soon enough...these books are hot. It's rap but with about 60,000 more words... the run-on verse.

Now I read the competition (I still got that emcee mentality). I'm a fan. I won't mention any names but Teri,

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whoops... I like your stuff. But it's all about the sales, retail... feel me? Who wanna battle...!

My mother gets all the props because she's my biggest supporter, PERIOD! No mushy shit, but thanks Mom... I'm going to Disney World and I'm taking you with me.

Earl Cox you deserve a trophy. This shit could not have been done without you. We all know this. Plus most of the time I'm not a team player, so those reading this should understand that me typing this is something real. I don't like working with people, people get in the way.

Audra Shivers you took most of the illiteracy out of my manuscript and gave it more muscle. People with books they want published need to check you with dough... that's all I gotta say about that. I didn't like editors, till I met you.

Whoa! Wait, I got a few more heads. The people who were behind the project when it was just me writing this to amuse myself. G Double, Add A Lesson (my nigga), Kimsy, Christina (the white girl), Ta-Ta, and my ex-fiancé for making so many copies of the manuscript when it was just a fetus—I hate u bimbo (just kidding...?).

Everyone who purchased this THANK U...! If you just borrowed this... unless you just couldn't afford it...

I know... like I never borrowed a book before, right? I'm an author now, it's all different to me now... buy my fucking book.

Peace.

Brandon McCalla
March 2004
Brooklyn, New York

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America's First Hip-Hop Soap Opera DIAMOND DROUGHT – THE CAST

Rich was once a very cagey and smart drug hustler. Now he has finally anteed up; his new whip has more technology for his producing endeavors, and a less visibly active grip on his lucrative drug empire. He has bigger sights and a more legitimate dream ahead of him.

Rich has grown weary of all the drug doings and bullet dodging. He secretly wants out of the game completely.

Rich's plan seemed so simple to him; continue to produce the hottest beats and drop that album he's been working on with his partner Afta, so that he can buy that huge capacious home his woman Leaya has her sights on.

But someone doesn't want that to happen. Someone in Rich's past wants him dead. An old nemesis that's just as cagey and smart as he is. Someone who knows Rich just as well as he knows himself...

Leaya has everything she could ever want. A face and body like Beyoncé Knowles, and a spending habit like Lil' Kim.

She just doesn't have the answer. Her man Rich is up to something, and she doesn't know what it is. What else would a man keep from a woman besides another woman? All Leaya can do is ponder or plot—find out what secret Rich is holding, and whether or not it's some bitch he's fucking.

Leaya is not without her own resources. She's not Rich's woman merely for her wonderful looks...

Afta will forever be a playa. But even playas occasionally fall off their game. What is life to him but a hot bitch a day, a potent blunt, and a hotter verse to spit? How about falling in love?...something not in the playas rule book. Afta fumbled the ball and found love where he should have never looked. How simple a glance at a cute face and a fat ass seems in the

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beginning...ends in something forbidden, more *West Side Story* than *Boys in the Hood*...

The hazel-eyed thug **Major** is Rich's oldest and most trusted friend. He's that gun when it's needed...the hustler's hustler still in the grind, still in the streets when he doesn't have to be.

Lust can often turn to love unexpectedly. A dame who plays hard to get can seduce you just as quick as some slut practically begging you to hit it. Major's lust for a neighborhood chick has turned into something more, something that has him more affectionate than gangsta—something that can make a tragedy...

The black Erica Kane, **Shantel**. She often gets what she wants. She has everything she could ever wish for, but that isn't enough for her. Nothing ever seems like it's enough...

A glance, she notices him. He's that dude. Shantel wants him, but who is he? Who is this man who might quite possibly measure up to her overwhelming standards? Shantel searches for answers and finds them, but they come from a shady, sinister source...

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ANNA THE SPY **PART ONE**

Rich rolled the first of many blunts that would be smoked this day.

He generally would start his day off with a Dutch Master filled with some form of dime weed for self; then wash up, kiss his chick good-bye, and ogle over his red Lex coupe before he made moves. Hustling finally paid off last year. Now he finally had some shit to show. Now his mother didn't have to hate him as much.

Rich walked around his whip twice before he inserted the key—the ritual. The engine ignited as the door opened. Such lovely technology, he thought. I love this car more than my bitch, he mused.

His cell phone began to play the *Star Wars* theme. “What, Leaya?” he answered.

“You forgot to tell me you love me before you bounced,” his girl replied.

“Sorry about that but the car got lonely.”

“You care about that vehicle more than me. But I love the way we look in it together, so I'm not tripping...yet.”

And why would you? Rich wondered. I give you everything. Good dick, you shop every day and you have a nice crib. Now that the money's right, we never argue, at least not the way we used to when I was getting locked up every other month.

He nestled in the snug, leather driver's seat and brushed a finger across the wood-grain dash. The engine purred, promising him that no one could stun him today. His 22-inch wheels and chrome that keeps spinning assured him he was hot.

But it also assured the cops that he was selling. It was as if his mother was the snitch who told them that he never worked an

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honest job. He was the most watched on the avenue, and the most likely to get harassed. He knew the car made it worse, knew the price for such a fly ride; it wasn't like it was a Rolls-Royce convertible or a Six, but it was hot. It kept every chicken's neck twisting.

Leaya watched Rich from the second-story window of the private building they live in. She knew he was no good for her. Always knew, but like her mother, she always preferred an attractive, exciting nigga. Plus, she and Rich were both young, and things could change. After all, like Rich always said, "Can't hustle forever."

He already had bought about \$10,000 worth of studio equipment. He was still working on that power move—not one of his samplers or rack systems was even out of the box yet. Sometimes Leaya had problems figuring her man out. As his red dream wheeled off, she made a phone call.

"Anna," Leaya said into the receiver.

"What is it girl? Damn, do you know what time it is?" Anna complained.

"You're always hovering over the phone bitch, don't play me. You picked up on the first ring."

"True enough, I love my phone, but I'm tired of you every morning with this 'Oh, Rich' shit."

"I know, but I love him and I'm worried."

"About what now?" Anna spoke, yawning. "Excuse that, I'm tired. I got fucked last night."

"Do you think Rich loves me?"

"I'm hanging up on you this time bitch. Every morning with this 'do you think he loves me?' shit. He buys you everything."

"So, what does money have to do with love?"

"Everything, all I do is get fucked, at least you shop."

"But..."

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“Listen!” Anna interjected. “I’m tired of this. Remember that time you sent me out like Dick Tracy spying on this nigga, and for what? All he does is produce music, watch over his workers, and eat you out.”

Leaya laughed but pondered. “Yesterday he smelled like D&G cologne.”

“So?” Anna yawned.

“The female version. All over his neck, and as soon as he got home he went straight to the shower.”

“Hmmm...” Anna was silent for a moment. “Maybe I can do some snooping around. But I need a new disguise. Something that he’s never peeped me wearing, Prada perhaps?”

“Excellent. I’m going to wash up and pick you up in an hour.”

“An hour? Didn’t I tell you I got worked on last night?”

“Yeah, probably a little dick nigga...not like my Rich.”

Anna laughed. “He was average length, but his tongue was real mature.”

“As mature as your throat,” Leaya commented and chuckled.

“Don’t fuck with me, girl. I’m always doing your dirty work. Next you’ll ask me to hold Rich’s dick while you suck it.”

“Or while I cut it off.”

Leaya decided she would not blame her suspicions on her insecurities this time. Perfume is perfume. And coming home and running straight to the shower is cheating, or a strip club, which is the same thing, her mother always told her.

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CHAPTER ONE

When Rich rolled up on the avenue it was evident it was going to be a good day. It wasn't because the dope and crack fiends were following directions, and it wasn't because no cops were visible. On most days the fiends crowded around the block and made it obvious that some drug doings were in progress. Major, Rich's most trusted person, was always regulating the customers.

On any given day he could be heard yelling, "Fall back!" or "Keep it moving!" A worker's work was never done. Rich was glad he had evolved from that. He was no longer a flunky. Major was a few steps beyond being a mere worker, but on occasions he still had to work on a personal level with the fiends.

Major was always the first one on the ave and the first to get gully when required. He knew how to make money and wasn't scared of cops like most motherfuckers.

So when Rich pulled up and no fiends were in the area, and Major was on the block with a fat blunt lit, puffing in the broad morning—it was a good day.

"You will never guess who's in the spot waiting for you," Major said between puffs of skunk. "Taste this Arizona." Major extended his arm toward Rich, but Rich was busy inspecting his rims.

"The whip needs washing."

"You wash this shit more then you wash yourself," Major joked. "Let me finish my story."

"Do that," Rich mumbled, smoke rising from his mouth.

"Earlier..."

"Earlier? It's not even eight-thirty yet."

"I know. That's why when she rolled up in that Benz and asked for you like she did, I was like, let me roll this blunt right now!"

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“The Benz she rolled up in? Oh, that metallic-grey, 4-door 600 across the street with the chrome that spins?” I really do need to wash my car, Rich thought. “She asked for me?”

“Yeah, she said she met you last night at some place called Jiggles.”

Damn! Rich took a longer pull on the weed before he passed it. “Who told her where I am? Who told her my name?”

“Afta took one look at her and escorted her to the spot. He told her to wait for you inside.”

“That grimy nigga, always thinking with his nuts. He should have never let her in the spot!”

“Damn! Is she an undercover?”

“No. But why let that broad in anyway. I don’t even know her.”

“She knows you. She even inquired about Leaya, said she didn’t want to go to your crib. Did you get this bitch pregnant?”

“Pregnant! I just met her the other night.”

“It only takes one,” Major joked.

“I never hit that.”

“Good. That’s the spirit. And keep that same face when you tell your girl.”

*

Rich only had to walk to the next corner to reach their spot—a storefront. Back in the mid-eighties, the first dealers to pump dope out of the store would supply it with sodas and groceries from legitimate distributors. If people wanted to cop, all they had to do was purchase a bag of chips or a soda then place their order at the counter. The nigga who used to run it back then had his baby’s moms doing cashier work and dealing.

Now the store never opened. The gate was always down. It only came up when somebody went in, and very few heads had that kind of access.

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Now the fiends would roam the area until they clocked a worker or a lookout, and then inquire whether or not shit was hot. If the cops weren't on the block, it wasn't hot, and a fiend would be good for a purchase. But if it was hot, a worker would yell, "Get the fuck out of here! Do I look like a drug dealer to you?"

Only on occasions would the 24-hour window open, and then EPMD—business as usual.

But that was a rare occurrence thanks to the cops. Just like they caught on to how the old timers were doing it in the eighties was the same way they were catching niggas now. With fiends snitching and nosy neighbors, it wasn't like the movies. Sometimes a nigga never could find out who talked, so he had to play it safe.

Sometimes other niggas that hustle would rat on somebody to the police just to hate, to make a nigga lose his momentum. A setback in the hustling game could close a nigga down hard. No filing for bankruptcy in this game, only a gun and revenge.

Rich slid the gate down and closed it tight. He went to the back of the store where a flight of stairs leading up would take him to the bitch from yesterday. Who could have told her where the spot was?

As he approached the door to where most of the visitors lounged, he knew he would soon have his answers. He would let Afta have it.

Rich wondered, Why the fuck is he mingling in my affairs? Does he want to get shot this early in the morning?

*

Leaya and Anna got an early start. Leaya pulled up in front of Anna's abode in her metallic-grey Yukon. Her system was blasting *Ill Street Blues*, a classic Kool G. Rap, and her mind was on Rich since Kool G. was his favorite emcee. Anna entered the vehicle looking fly with her Louie leather and snakeskin boots.

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Leaya had on a blue Diesel goose and Diesel sneakers. She was way too preoccupied worrying about her situation to doll up. Anna greeted her best friend with a kiss after she closed the passenger door. With her patented teeth sucking, she scrutinized the choice of music coming from the speakers.

“You are my favorite bitch and we’re going to find out what your nigga is up to.” Anna crossed her long legs and lit a cigarette. She lowered the window closest to her and inhaled her first cancer stick of the day. “But don’t subjugate me to this Queens shit; BK to the fullest.”

“Rich was born and raised in Brooklyn, but he loves Kool G. and so do I,” Leaya said on the defensive.

“Don’t you have *My Life* in that rack system in your trunk? I think you need Mary in your life right now, not Queens’ finest. Or put on Jay-Z’s *Reasonable Doubt*, or how about...”

Leaya raised the volume to cloud Anna’s words as she pulled off in her truck. Anna leaned farther down in the leather seat, allowing the Virginia Slim to linger in her lungs with each pull.

“I wish this was a blunt,” she blurted out when Kool G.’s *Truly Yours* began after *Ill Street Blues* ended.

“I got weed. Let’s get a Dutch Master before we hit the city, and spark. It’s only a few minutes after 9:00 anyway. I don’t think the Prada boutique opens till noon. And bitch, don’t break me. Let’s try not to go over \$1,000 today shall we?”

“Leaya, my spy costume won’t cost you even half that. I got my eyes on this top I saw. The one that popped my breast out the last time we window-shopped. Remember that shirt I tried on?”

“Do you want Afta drooling over you again?” Leaya pulled up in front of a corner store and put on her blinkers.

“He’s not bad looking,” Anna replied.

Leaya hopped out her ride and went to purchase the cigar.

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I knew she was feeling that nigga, Leaya mused, while asking for the Dutch Master. On her way out, she sidestepped some cornball trying to get her attention. She entered her truck; the beginning of Mary J. Blige's, *My Life*, greeted her as she sat down. She scrutinized Anna with a carbon of her teeth sucking as she peeled off.

*

The bitch from yesterday stood up as soon as Rich entered the room. Neither one of them spoke a word at first. Only looked, and observed each other intently. The bitch was about 5 feet 8 inches tall with a fat ass and a slim waist. She had light-brown skin with long, dark hair that looked like Dominicans touched it.

She wore thin-framed glasses that leaned off her nose, and she didn't blink once as she eyed Rich. Rich tried to keep eye contact, but she had her North Face jacket open and her full breasts kept him distracted. He was about to speak, but she beat him to the punch, extending a hand that he instinctively shook before he found his senses and blurted, "What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Somebody told me that I could find you on this block and they weren't lying."

"They weren't lying," Rich said. "They might be dead after this. I don't recall giving you an invitation to come here and check me. What made you think you had the privilege to do this?"

"My fat ass and pretty face," she said smiling. "Once you left the club, one of the girls told me that you said you produce music. That interested me so I did some research on you and found out where you hang out. I always get what I want."

"How much did you pay for your rims?" Rich felt like changing the subject. He really didn't want to think about who snitched on him. And he didn't think he would get it from her by simply asking. He admired the bitch's beauty. Leaya was

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ridiculously gorgeous, but she didn't have an ass on her like this one.

"I paid just as much as you paid for yours. And if you're wondering, my name is Shantel."

Rich also liked this broad's style. He almost forgot about Afta, but he was reminded once the nigga made his presence known. Afta walked into the room smiling, holding a lit L.

"Ahh, I see you finally arrived. Shantel was telling me about this record label she runs. I let her hear some of our earlier work," Afta said.

Afta approached Rich and put his arm around his shoulder. "She was feeling our shit, son. She owns that strip joint, Jiggles." Afta then whispered, "And she's got an ass on her."

Owns Jiggles? Rich mused. Last night he thought she was just another stripper. She didn't speak much.

Rich thought she might have used one of her hoes to game him, to get him talking, but for what? He was just another nigga in the club last night. He was only there on business—to talk to Dante.

Who could have told her anything about me? Rich wondered. Dante had left before I did and he wouldn't say shit. Dante is too thug to reveal shit to bitches, and I didn't have enough alcohol to speak but so much. That dancer Sparkles didn't get anything but a few singles—I didn't even use my real name last night.

Somebody in Jiggles was peeping me on the low and letting this Shantel broad know shit. I should kick her ass out, but that won't reveal anything to me. This dame's got me intrigued and she knows the ball's in her court.

All I can do is wait, let her talk, and watch her. I'll find out what she wants with me and play the game for a while. Afta is already gassed, I would just show signs of weakness if I pulled him aside now.

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I don't want to give the dame anything else to work with. No more emotions and no more information, she knows enough already, and I know so little. But if I just concentrate on the things I do know...maybe I'll do some research of my own.

Shantel narrowed her eyes, observing Rich, wondering what he was thinking. Maybe coming here wasn't the brightest idea, she thought, batting her eyes at him. She wondered what had possessed her to take things as far as they were going. Regardless, she knew she would be taking things even further.

*

Major stuck his tongue out at the blue 'n white as the vehicle went by. The two officers inside the police car shrewdly observed him as they drove past. It was always Officer Andrew who kept his eyes on the avenue, and always his partner, Murphy, riding shotgun.

The same routine for Major day after day was clocking them as his workers came through with dough and left with more bundles of dope. Scooby's, otherwise known as crack cocaine, were the hottest commodity in the community along with weed.

Major supplied his workers with dope for the fiends and sold ounces of weed to customers who paged him. He kept dope stashed in the spot and only went inside when one of his employees had to re-up.

Since Rich and Afta owned the spot, Major paid them to stash. Rich distributed his own product to Major, which Major gave to his workers. Afta had a great weed connect, and supplied Major, as well as half of East New York, Brooklyn—so he always said.

Major made most of his money by selling large weight in weed since his customers were drug dealers themselves. Rich made a great deal of his money with Major's hustlers shuffling his product.

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It was good for Major. His ace boon was always handy with drugs, and Rich and Afta owned the store.

“When are you going to let me hit that?” Major asked Monique as she walked by in her pajama pants and slippers.

“When you get off the ave nigga, that’s when,” she said, laughing as she shook her booty and eased by him on her way to the Arab’s corner store. She only had on a bra under her North Face, which was just partially zipped. She lived just two blocks down, but Major knew it was the freak in that bitch that allowed her to come outside half dressed.

One time he got high with Monique and almost fucked her in the spot. Monique held her ground and bounced on him in the middle of them kissing on the couch. She knew how Major was, always fucking females and forgetting who they were the very next day.

Major allowed the drug game to keep him doing extra innings. Regardless of how cute he was with hazel eyes and mid-brown skin, Monique knew she couldn’t hold him down if no other female could.

As she entered the store, she looked back and caught him admiring her body.

How many of my friends have you fucked, nigga? she wondered. She thought about how many bitches she’d seen in the past crying for his drug dealing ass. Why would I want a motherfucker who’s destined for jail anyway? Regardless of how good you look, she thought.

Major never let dames interfere on his court. At least not the way Afta and Rich did. Rich, living with a bitch, and Afta, falling in love every other month, plus his baby’s mother. Afta’s infamous baby’s moms, Destiny. He and Rich called her queen of all hookers.

Nah, he thought. Rich and I should stop calling her that. Destiny’s a good girl, real hot looking, and faithful. Even after

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popping out a kid she held on to her nice slim waist and quickly lost all the weight she had gained.

Major knew it just wasn't for him. Why would he get some bitch pregnant that he wouldn't marry or cohabit with like his parents?

"I'd rather fuck them and forget about them than have them half ass," he said to himself. But why wouldn't I want some hot little novelty item like Monique? he wondered. What harm would come to me if I just held this dame down?

He was always thinking about her, and that kiss they shared meant something—what, damned if he knew, but it was something. Something he had never felt, some cinema shit, like them running down the ave holding hands in the ghetto. He laughed as she exited the store.

"Mo, come check me later. I want to see you more. I feel like you're avoiding me. Are you?"

"Am I what?" She stopped right in front of him. A thin stream of air rose up from her mouth as she spoke. The brisk air made her nipples jab at the bra, making them more visible.

"Avoiding me. We can't be alone again because of what might happen the next time."

"There will not be a next time nigga," she sang in her playful voice. "Never a next, you won't catch me with a nigga like you. Not in this life and not in the next."

"Nice nipples," he mentioned as he eyed her. "I didn't get the full effect of them that last time." He grabbed Monique by her waist and spun her from his right arm to the left. "They will not be slighted the next time, I assure you."

Major kissed her. It happened way too fast for her to avoid. One moment she was in his right arm, then the left, and then the kiss. Her lips parted to let her tongue enter his mouth but then she stopped herself and pushed him away.

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“How dare you!” she responded, acting melodramatically. “Are you besmirching me, Major?”

“I’m trying to court you bitch... I mean, fair maiden,” he said jokingly.

Fair maiden, she thought, as she relaxed in his easy grip while looking seriously into his hazel eyes. Court me? she wondered. This is either interesting gaming tactics or something else. What, damned if I know, but something...something different, and I’m feeling it.

Monique kissed him on the cheek and nimbly slipped through his hold. She then gave him her most sensual smile and said, “Let’s let me avoid you just a little while longer. Courting in the medieval ages sometimes took years. I’m no cheap wench. How much is this worth, Major?” she asked, displaying herself.

“How much do you want?” Major said, pulling a roll of twenties from his pocket.

“I want time. Something you can’t afford. Make me think I’m special. Sweat me for a while, and don’t fuck for a change. Save yourself up for a big nut off.”

“Next you’ll want me to take you out. Or how about this... we double with Rich and Leaya,” he said sarcastically.

“That doesn’t sound like a bad idea.” The words fluttered by him as she zipped her jacket and began to walk. “Make that happen. And bring me flowers when you pick me up. Call me a few days before it’s popping off,” she sang. “I’ll make sure my hair is looking wonderful for you, nigga. From the way you look at me, I know everything else looks good.” Her voice trailed off as she walked away, leaving Major pondering on the ave.

*

“I don’t think Rich would cheat on you,” Anna said to her best friend as they bounced down Broadway with shopping bags and concerns.

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Anna knew Rich. Her brother Derrick had been buddies with Richard since the third grade; before Derrick became Major and Richard became Filthy Rich. Rich would flirt with a bitch if she were fly. What man wouldn't? But cheat on Leaya? That almost seemed impossible. Especially after the first time Anna spied on him. Little did Rich and Major know that Major's little sister was deep into *The Art of War*.

Plus, there was a smoke screen between them; Rich didn't know exactly how close Anna and Leaya really were. He didn't know that Anna's most exquisite articles of clothing were sponsored from his very pockets.

The last time Anna snooped on Rich after Leaya became suspicious of him, he had had total trust in Anna. Rich never masqueraded around her. But it was hard for Leaya to exist with Rich and not reveal how close she and Anna really were.

But it was this little scheme that she concocted with Anna that kept her with Rich.

Her love for him was strong. Stronger than some miscellaneous ho, but she wasn't ready to trust him completely, not yet. She knew of his track record before she entered his life, and so did Anna. Anna knew things she still kept to herself "to protect the innocent" as she had stated. But Leaya knew it was to protect Rich.

Fortunately for Leaya, Anna was deep into that Sun Tsu stuff, *The Art of War*, especially Chapter 13. Always Anna, plotting and scheming—on her job, at her college, and in Leaya's life.

"As long as he's oblivious to how close we really are," she said to Leaya when they were in the Prada boutique, "you will always have the upper hand on him...I'm your seeing-eye dog," she said as they walked into Tower records.

"You're a bitch," Leaya said, agreeing. "I can't argue with the truth, but it's already 1:00 and we went way past the \$1,000

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limit. I hope this new outfit will motivate you to do some good skulking.”

“Skulking is what I do best.”

“Besides sucking dick,” Anna heard Leaya mumble intentionally loud.

“You know how sensitive that subject makes me,” Anna said, feeling hurt. “And quiet down bitch, do you want everyone in here thinking I get down like that?”

“But you do get down like that,” Leaya replied, and then whispered, “you get down on your knees.”

“Only to scrub floors. I’m mad domestic on the low,” said Anna.

*

They wanted some new tunes for the ride back to Brooklyn. They spent nearly an hour browsing before they settled on Mobb Deep’s second album, the classic *Infamous*. Leaya felt the choice because Rich loved the Mobb. Anna chose the album because she liked the way Prodigy looked.

“I have a thing for little niggas,” Anna said at the counter. “Too bad Jay-Z exposed him as a punk. I like my thugs real. Queens is mad pussy anyway.”

“You can’t dub the whole borough as pussy, Anna,” Leaya chastised. “Before Jay-Z’s *Blue Print* CD came out you were ready to suck that nigga off.”

“I would never suck off a punk.” Anna paid for the disc. “But he is better looking than Shawn. But you wouldn’t realize it because of your obsession with Filthy.”

“That’s right,” Leaya replied.

Anna and Leaya left Tower through the revolving door, turned left, and trotted toward municipal parking.

“Rich is all I want. All I ever wanted. You have to find out if I’m all *he* wants.”

Diamond Drought

*

Rich spent nearly three hours talking to Shantel about the music industry. He found out that her uncle won the lottery in Connecticut and started his own independent record label; he left Shantel in charge of it. Shantel pimped girls at Jiggles and had more than one million dollars to run the label.

Her whole aura fascinated Rich to the point where he found himself marveling over her wit and humor. He was enticed by her looks, all the way down to her thick thighs and unusually small size 5 feet. Shantel adjusted her glasses. They slipped down her little nose occasionally, and she felt embarrassed when Rich smiled, noticing.

“Stop looking at me like that,” she said.

“Like what?”

“That...forget it. What do you produce with?” she asked.

“The Triton, it’s a workstation by Korg.”

“I know it’s a workstation. It’s the hottest one on the market. Do you mostly sample or create original works?”

“Both,” Rich said, concentrating on her almond-shaped eyes within her gold frames. “Sometimes I sample sounds, like kicks and snares, but bass lines come from the keyboard. Strings, melodies, and horns come from the board also.”

“Interesting.”

Not as interesting as that ass, he thought to himself.

Shantel strolled around the interior of the spot, inspecting the dingy surroundings. She occasionally observed Rich watching her curiously while she paced around the room. The black leather couch was the focal point of the room. It was situated in front of a 19-inch television on a milk crate with a PlayStation 2 and Nintendo GameCube on the floor. A small fridge was in one corner of the room and an Empire house safe was next to it.

“What’s in the safe?” she asked.

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“Don’t get nosy. I’m barely tolerating you as it is. Don’t think I forgot how you got here in the first place.”

“What do you mean?” she asked innocently.

“Who’s your informant?” Rich demanded. He really didn’t expect an answer, but he had to keep her on her toes.

“I can’t tell you yet. If looks could kill Rich, I can only imagine what you would do to the poor creature if I told you. To think that somebody knew you and told me where I could find you... it’s a small world, cutie. Someone in the club was bound to know you. I heard you get around.” She gave him her best smile then sat down on the couch, crossing her legs.

Does my reputation precede me? Or is this game being run on me? What is this bitch’s angle? Rich thought about all these questions as he walked toward a window and looked out.

The room was so dark that when he opened the blinds he had to squint for a few moments while his eyes adjusted to the new light. The afternoon dwindled on. Major was gone. Probably off to check some pigeon or situate his drug hustling. Probably got a call and had to do a weed run, Rich thought. He looked at the metallic-grey Benz across the street, and then looked down the block at his red Lexus coupe—the SC 400 with the chrome rims that keep spinning. He felt for his keys inside his jeans pocket and cocked a crooked smile from the window at his vehicle.

“What are you looking at?” Shantel said creeping up behind him. He turned to face her and her breasts bumped into his chest. He grabbed her by her shoulders and looked into her wonderful almond orbs.

“I’m looking at you now. But before that I was observing another beautiful machine, look.”

“I know what your car looks like, Rich.”

“I know you do. But you haven’t seen the inside. I have some extra modifications within. It’s customized.”

Diamond Drought

“Well I’m not customized, nor am I a machine. You haven’t even asked me why I’m here. Are you that cool, Rich? I know the fact that I’m here now irritates you. Just like the fact that someone told me where you hang out, told me that you produce, that your boys rap, and told me your girlfriend’s name.”

“I’m sure I’ll find out eventually,” he replied. And when I do, I’m gonna fuck the nigga up who told you. Or smack the ho that opened her fucking mouth, he thought.

“Where did Afta go?” Shantel inquired.

“He went to get cash. This is our ghetto establishment. We have other less criminal business ventures elsewhere. Want to see one?”

“Maybe.” She smiled.

Shantel loosened herself from his grip, reluctantly, and walked toward the couch again. From the window, Rich took another look at her Mercedes before he spoke again.

“Let’s take my whip. Don’t worry, your wheels will be safe. I’ll get one of Major’s workers to babysit it until we return.”

“What time is it?”

“It’s 3:30,” he said, looking at his watch. “I got to lock up here first...catch!” He tossed his car keys to her.

She caught them. “Give your lucky lady my regards while I’m warming the car up. I’m more than sure you’ll call her as soon as I get downstairs. Feel free to drool over my ass while I find my way out.”

As she left the room Rich frowned, but felt the urge to follow her seductive frame as it swayed down the stairs. He went back to the window to watch her as she sleeked toward the car.

I wonder where Leaya is? he thought.

*

Anna called Major as soon as she got back from the city. Leaya dropped her off at her crib at about 2:30 p.m. When her

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brother pulled up in front of the house around 3:00, she ran out, still buttoning her new, tight Prada shirt.

“I need that car, nigga!” she screamed. “It’s an emergency. I’ll be late for my test.”

“What test? A pregnancy test?” he jested, laughing at his little sister.

“No, Derrick please, you know how I hate to take trains. All those niggas ogling over me... you know these hazel eyes are a curse. I won’t be properly focused if I take the train. I need to study in the library before I go to class. I need the car.”

“Why don’t you take Mom’s? No, don’t answer. I already know. Because the last time she lent you her Lexus, you crashed it.”

“Which is why I’m going to take your wheels, and you ride Mother’s.”

“Don’t think that just because this car and the insurance is in your name that you can just regulate.”

“Thank you,” she said, kissing her brother on the cheek. The engine was still humming and the door was already open. She practically jumped in the ride as soon as he got out.

“Mom’s keys are in the kitchen drawer. You know you like the luxury of the ES better anyway, don’t play dumb. And don’t get caught with contraband in Mom’s car. You don’t want to do that.”

“You don’t want to crash my Infinity...seriously.” After thinking the moment over he said, “Hey, you don’t even have classes on Friday.”

I know that, she thought as she peeled out. But she did have spying. Her cell phone was off and the light was green, Derrick wouldn’t be able to reach their mom’s car in time. Anna knew Derrick would kill her for this, or he would threaten to kill her the next time she pulled a stunt like this again. But she only needed to do it this once.

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Anna drove directly toward Ghetto Sound's studio. Rich and Afta bought a fully blown audio studio from a Jew who sold his whole shop to them for \$200,000. He felt the industry was getting too violent for him and decided to bail out while he still had his real teeth in his mouth. Rich and Afta invested money they had saved from the drug trade. The studio was located downtown. They rented out time for \$100 per hour.

Rich called Leaya on the cell around 3:30 p.m. to tell her he was taking a client to the studio. This was Anna's perfect opportunity to do some recon work. Aspiring to be a singer, Anna was working on her demo. Rich made a few tracks for her and never gave her a second glance whenever she came through. *Major's little sister* was a title that had its advantages. It got her free studio time and the ability to be around Rich, which was a challenge unto itself. Rich was very evasive. Leaya was lucky to befriend me, Anna thought.

While she and Leaya had shopped for her disguise, Leaya told her that Rich had recently bought \$10,000 worth of equipment for the crib alone, just to make beats at home. Producing music was almost as sacred to Richard as the drug game. It was something he was proud of and something worth bragging about. It was just the right setting for intriguing a bitch...Anna and Leaya both knew it, and they both knew Rich. If he had some hooker in his life, she would be there; it was the only place Leaya didn't care to be, and the only place Anna could appear without being scrutinized. They figured if he had a dame on the side, she would eventually be at Ghetto Sounds.

Anna navigated her brother's Infinity Q45 while puffing on a Virginia Slim. All this scheming made her antsy. She would need another blunt before the day was through.

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CHAPTER TWO

The moment Anna made her frantic peel out was the moment Rich and Shantel arrived at Ghetto Sounds, which was located on Lawrence Street, one block from Fulton Street downtown. A damn near perfect location, Shantel thought to herself. Real easy to get to, near major train stations, and plenty of parking facilities. Plus, it didn't have the high rent prices like Manhattan, even though it was just a Brooklyn Bridge ride away.

Rich pulled his whip up to a meter across the street from the office building where the studio was located.

"You too cheap to pay for parking?" Shantel asked with a chuckle. "I would've never imagined you being cheap, cutie."

"We're not going to be here long. Oh, I get it; you think this studio is the less criminal venture I was telling you about?"

Shantel watched Rich as he talked. She looked at his mouth move, waiting for that smirk that seemed to come so naturally. She found herself waiting for that lovely smirk every time he said something.

"I was going to tell you to wait in the ride while I go upstairs to get this cash from Afta." He shut the engine off and eyed her innocently. "But if you feel the need to be by my side that much..."

He let his words linger and watched Shantel watch him. His coupe was so snug he could smell her sweet breath every time she exhaled. He could see himself within her eyes, magnified by the slightly medicated lenses in her expensive glasses. Rich concentrated on her full lips, the way they always stayed partially open, showing off a cute gap in the middle of her teeth.

Shantel pushed her thin frames up on her nose with an index finger.

"By your side, nigga? Don't you have Leaya for that?"

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“I have Leaya for a lot of things. Don’t think I’m that predictable, another nigga with dreams of going platinum in the music industry,” he said while laughing. He gave her a smirk. “This music shit is more Afta’s than mine. I love banging out beats, but I never expected to make myself rich producing or renting out time.”

OK, Rich, Shantel thought. Stop making me want to get tangled up in the web. Stop making me want more of you in my life.

“I’ll wait in the car,” she said.

Shantel didn’t want Rich to think she was sweating him. She never wanted him to think that. But what else would he think? She’d practically stalked him and still hadn’t given him a good reason why. He didn’t seem to even want the reason anymore. Either that or he didn’t want her to think that he did.

Are we all playing the game? she thought. Even the person who told me about you probably did it for his own reasons. He made it obvious that he hates you.

From inside the Lexus, Shantel watched Rich walk in the building across the street. The remix of *Special Delivery* by G-Dep, bounced inside the compact vehicle. Shantel heard Craig Mack kick his verse and wondered, When was the last time I heard Craig?...*Flavor in Your Ear?* Did he do anything after that? Rich had left a blunt clip in the ashtray. She lit it and inhaled, allowing the music beat to embed in her skull and interact with the thoughts that lingered within. Thoughts of things yet to come... she knew she was going to fuck Rich.

Rich probably knew he was getting this ass the moment he walked into the spot and found me, she laughed. The smoke from the weed began to cloud the interior. She remedied that by cracking the window open and leaning down in the comfortable leather. Inhaling more in her system, the haze enshrouded her.

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She ejected the CD that was playing and replaced it with Rich's demo; puffing and pondering the many possibilities...puffing and puffing.

The first song kicked in hard, licking her ears with real ghetto melody. It wasn't loud or wild like Brooklyn's rap group MOP, but it was real. It kept her head rocking. The weed coursing through her system complemented the nature of the song. Afta's oxymoronic verses, "*loving the bitch he hates...*" was on some *Make it Last Forever* shit, but it was ghetto. Not real thuggish but real street.

Interesting coming from a bunch of criminals, she thought. I guess only the fake thugs sound true. The real ones don't want anyone to know that they do shit—they keep quiet. They don't promote companies in their rhymes unless they have an exclusive endorsement deal. But it's the type of sound I would invest money into. I don't have to worry about you two stargazing, she presumed. You're already stars. I see the way people look at you, Rich. You have great chemistry with women and your partner isn't bad looking either. Plus, you got a good sound coming from that Korg. But you're making me think that it doesn't mean much to you. Why?

Why come here to collect money? Why didn't you two conduct this business at the spot? And where did Afta get this money?

I wonder how "filthy" you really are, Rich. How come that nigga told me he wanted to kill you? He didn't actually come out directly and say I want Rich dead, but he did say, "Sign Rich while he's still breathing and get him off the ave before he's hauled off." And with all those "fuck Rich" between every sentence, I'm wondering how you will react when I tell you who told me about you.

*

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Leaya was wondering why Anna wasn't answering her phone. She didn't leave a message on the voice mail because the greeting was nearly three minutes long. Anna actually placed one of her songs on the outgoing message. She told Leaya she was promoting herself, everyone who called was a potential fan.

Leaya placed her cordless back on the base and laid her head on one of her many pillows. Lounging like this always encouraged her thinking process. She knew Anna was on the hunt, knew that bitch would hold her down. Anna would find out what bitch made Rich's neck smell of female fragrance. She would find out if he was fucking somebody else. But what if he was fucking someone else... what then?

Should I confront the ho? she pondered. Use my manicure to make her face less desirable, or leave him?

Leaya never considered that an option until now. Not even during the first scandal when she thought he was fucking around. She figured then that if he was, she would key up his whip and beat the piss out of the bitch, and then call it a day. Don't fuck around anymore, Richard... you know how much that cosmetic damage to your car will cost to fix, she mused.

But things were a bit different now. Her love for him vastly migrated into something more complicated. They had more at stake than back then; more expensive vehicles to maneuver, owned by Rich but in her name, and the studio she co-owned with Afta since Rich thought his name was too dirty for such a lucrative business venture.

"What if I get locked up again, but this time for a long time?" Rich had spoken those words to her at the lawyer's office the day he encouraged her to sign for the partial ownership of Ghetto Sounds.

He had explained, "We're not married, baby. They can't snatch my assets up from you. All I worked for won't be fucked... thanks to you. Otherwise, they would say I'm laundering my drug

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dough through Ghetto Sounds. Then I would lose that and my freedom.”

It all made sense, she thought as she shifted back to the present. Who could Rich trust more in the world than me? she wondered, smirking. And who could do for Rich better than me?

Leaya snatched the phone off the base right in the middle of its first ring. “What’s going on?” she asked Anna, whispering in the receiver.

“Why are you whispering, bitch? You think your phone is tapped? Anti-bug devices are much more effective than you mumbling words... speak up.”

“I don’t know why I’m whispering,” she said, then sighed. “What is Rich up to?”

“I didn’t see Rich yet. But I see his car and I see some bird in it.”

“Who is she? What does she look like?”

“Wait,” Anna said excitedly. “He’s coming out of the building now. I’ll call you back as soon as I get more.”

She closed her Sprint PCS and leaned farther down in her brother’s Infinity. She watched as Rich approached his red coupe with the chrome rims that keep spinning.

*

Leaya groaned and slammed the phone back on the base. The phone bounced off the base, the force of her arm sent the cordless flying. She didn’t even bother to pick it up. She felt a tear trickle down her face. She wiped it off with such intensity that one of her immaculate nails scratched her delicate skin. One thin line of blood replaced the tear then slowly crawled down her face. Leaya jumped off the bed and went over to her dresser. She lingered upon her image in the mirror. She slowly smudged the blood across her face like Indian war paint, leaving two crimson lines directly under her left eye.

Diamond Drought

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Anna hoped Rich would not look her way. She prayed that he didn't spot Major's car. She didn't park too close, but she was close enough to watch him. She detected the mysterious female in his passenger seat and witnessed him enter his coupe. It was more than possible that he could eye her also, Rich was so cautious. But if this bitch in his vehicle was someone he was fucking then he wasn't cautious enough, she processed.

But maybe this person was the client Rich told Leaya about. Maybe Rich had a R&B bitch in his whip, she figured.

"I don't think you've spotted me," Anna muttered to Rich, still sitting in her brother's car. "I can follow you, but you would know if you were being tailed. I'm quite sure of that. But if Afta is upstairs he would know where you're going. He knows everything about you."

As soon as Rich pulled off, Anna jumped out of the car. She ran to the building that harbored Afta and Ghetto Sounds. Getting info from Afta would not be easy, she thought, while frantically pushing the elevator button. *But with this shirt on...* Anna undid another button on her shirt, amplifying her already revealed cleavage.

As she entered the elevator, she pondered the issue more. Why would a potential client for the studio stay in the car? You would think this chick would've gone upstairs. That particular quirk gave Anna more than enough incentive.

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Afta focused on his task. He was tweaking each track on the console methodically as he listened to the clear and concise sounds thumping from the studio monitors.

He isolated the high hats from the bass and kick drum hits so he could evaluate whether they meshed well with the bass line.

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Afta had gotten so intimately attuned to Rich's production that he no longer needed Rich around when he mixed down his tracks. Prime Time, one of Major's workers, nodded his approval while hovering over the chair Afta sat in. Prime made a cameo appearance on this particular track, spitting the hook and laying a verse.

"Rich is on some ridiculous shit, nigga. This is definitely a money track." Prime always had a habit of pulling on a blunt way too long and the ashes never seemed to hit the ashtray when he was present.

Afta criticized this bad habit with a snarl, snatched the lit L from him, and tapped the cigar filled with narcotic, allowing the ashes to take their proper place in the ashtray.

"Of course this shit is ridiculous; it's my hit single," Afta said. I want this dropped first and arranged on my album directly after the introduction skit." Afta heard the intercom beep and lowered the volume on the board.

"What?" he said into the microphone that protruded from the console, allowing him to speak with people in the vocal booth and the receptionist at the front desk.

"It's Anna," a feminine voice replied.

"You act like she's a visitor or something." Afta was annoyed at first, but then added, "She's always here. Why even give her an introduction?"

"Because I wanted one nigga," Anna hollered as she walked into the control room where the heavy musical apparatuses blinked and radiated their LCD luminance.

While she was walking toward Afta, she brushed a finger across the keys on Rich's Triton. It was on but not connected or situated directly into the console, so no sounds emitted from the speakers. The numerous devices present—the MPC 2000, the antique SP 1200 and other sampling works of technological art

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were like eye candy to Anna, who wanted to learn how to produce, on the low.

“What is this new thing you got in the Midi Rack?” she asked Afta, staring at the console that held some of their studio equipment. She bumped into Prime as she motioned past him. Prime smiled at her while looking at her petite frame, licking his lips like James Todd.

“It’s the Mo’Phatt. Rich’s new toy. It gives you extra sounds,” Afta replied.

“It looks so cute. I’m feeling the color; I want one of those for my GameCube so I can sample Luigi’s Mansion.”

“But it’s not a sampler,” said Prime.

She turned, looking directly at both males, allowing them to look at her amplified size 36C’s. She sat on Afta’s lap, a rather unexpected action, and said, “I knew that motherfucker. I was just practicing my dumb blonde routine. I know how much Afta loves dumb blondes, at least the bleached ones. Did your baby’s mother change her hairstyle yet, Lawrence?”

“Lawrence?” Prime muttered.

“My government,” Afta responded, indicating his birth name. “My baby’s moms made a drastic change, shaved off all her hair like Lauryn Hill, got her a banjo and is unplugged as we speak.”

“Bad joke,” Anna replied.

“Ugly shirt,” Afta retorted.

Anna sucked her teeth at his comment and gave him her best mortified expression.

“Rich, I mean...I, paid \$600 for this. Show it a margin of respect, dammit.” She buttoned the next to the first button, smothering her cleavage a little.

Anna jumped off Afta’s lap then inched her fingers toward the console and raised the volume. Gradually, her slender digits pushed the main volume control levers and they slid up. The song

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Afta was mixing down, before the interruption, continued to thump. It appeared that Anna had some technical knowledge of the studio, because as Afta resumed his work, she took the mute off some tracks, the vocals in particular, and asked Prime, “Is that you rhyming nigga?”

“Yup,” he said proudly.

“Do you still reside in Queens, money?” she asked.

“Yup, why?”

“Because you suck and you sound like a Queens nigga. All you Queens niggas are bitches. I can smell ya’ll a mile away.” She laughed at Prime.

Prime, stunned by the ill comment, hesitated where he would have normally smacked a bitch for such an insult.

But Afta laughed along with Anna, which was the only thing that simmered him down. That and the fact that Major was her brother.

“I only like Noriega,” she rolled her eyes at Prime. “Jay-Z tore the heart out of Nas.”

“Hold that bitch,” Prime responded. “That’s a subject to debate. You can’t just say shit like that. You don’t even...”

“Let’s talk about the way KRS did Shan. Let’s talk about it, nigga,” she said while shaking her cute head. She knew he was getting lost in her hazel orbs. Just like every other man, she thought. When you have a figure like mine and are as adorable as me, men will always stay out of character, she eyed Prime.

But you’re too grimy for me. Besides, I’m here to find out where Rich is headed. “Let me not get sidetracked by some corny Queens nigga,” she said to herself. I like your Iceberg leather though—I love Snoopy.

“Afta, I came here to talk to you. But it’s personal. Can we be alone? Can we find a more intimate setting?”

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“Whoa,” Afta blurted. He did not expect this from her. “I was about to shut this place down anyway. We don’t have a major session until tomorrow night, Prime Time.”

“What?” he said to Afta, glaring at Anna. She winked at him and gave him one of her big smiles.

“Are you rolling with Major tonight?” Afta asked Prime.

“Of course.”

“Give him these.” Afta went into his pocket and handed him a set of car keys.

“You fucking pickpocket!” Anna yelled. “Those are my keys!”

“Those are your brother’s keys,” Afta corrected. “Major called me as soon as you tricked him. He said, ‘make sure my lovely sibling walks home.’ But I don’t think you can make it in those heels. So I’ll take you with me and drop you home when I’m finished.”

“Finished with what?” Anna asked. “Me?”

“Maybe,” he said. “I have to meet Rich later. So you and I can have that talk on the way to the club.”

“What club?” she asked.

“Ahh,” was all Afta said.

This is turning out far better than I could have ever planned, Anna thought. She couldn’t have wished for these turn of events to wind up as good as they did, even though she had little control. However, that never stopped her before, and if she had anything to do about it... it wouldn’t stop her now.

All she had to do was call Leaya and tell her that she was making progress. Soon they would know exactly who the bird in the car really was.

*

“I makes/hardly no mistakes/what I create/is infested with the hate/I’m a terrible date/make a hell of a mate/produce better

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than great/induce others to hate/cause I'm exactly what they ain't/I fell from grace/was once the most noted/but rise up in mere moments/the time is now and I own it...I don't get around/but I might come around and fuck you/the way you look/I would love to/give it some time and I'll rub you/the wrong way/anal and no foreplay/and fuck you all day/in my building hallway/won't even ask you to call me/won't even smack you when you O.D./your pussy's deep now/you owe it all to me now/you ain't prepared/you're on the rebound/your ass comes with a fee now/you don't count sheep/you count me now."

"Prime," Major interrupted, "you wrote that?"

"Nah," he replied. Smoke rose from his nostrils as he passed the lit L to his ace boon.

Major was Prime's nigga. He would bust his guns for him, and most of the time Prime had heat handy. But he wasn't stupid enough to rock heat on the ave. Not in this known drug area. The authorities kept a keen eye on the whole block. The spot was far too known, the warrant squad came unexpected weekly, and that was the excuse they needed to search a nigga.

"That was some of Afta's madness," Prime said.

"Good. I can understand those lines being Afta's, but if that was your verse I couldn't see it." Major had his leather zipped up tonight while they stood post on the block.

He would usually rock his shit open to expose what he had on underneath, some expensive shit like an Iceberg sweater or something more exclusive. Both Major and Prime had an Iceberg fetish. It was basically the only thing they wore, like they had an endorsement deal, but they didn't. They weren't that group, Lox. They just liked the way the designers used the Red Baron Snoopy. It reminded them of the cartoon, *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown*, with the fucked up Christmas tree. And the *No Dogs Allowed* song in that other cartoon they didn't know the title of, the

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one where Snoopy went to the hospital to see the sick European bitch.

Now they purchased any and every article of Berg that had the Red Baron, or Snoopy for that matter. Bart Simpson, Goofy and even Charlie Brown were boycotted. It was only Snoopy. That was the only reason they purchased that shit. And if not Iceberg, anything that looked good and was rugged, just in case they had to run and jump a few fences. They were always suspects. Officer Andrew made it his priority to harass them daily. Neither felt too proud to dash off when Officer Andrew got real eager for an arrest. Major never got bagged dirty, but Prime sometimes had work handy. When Prime was with Major he did most of the dirty shit, but they weren't both posted on the block for nothing. They were out tonight to make money.

"I wanna use that Brand Nubian beat, the joint on the first album, *One for All*. I wanted Rich to twist that for me. He would know where that sample came from," said Prime.

"Yeah, he would," said Major. "That sounds good. Good looking on getting my 45 from my sister; I'm gonna fuck her up when I see her."

"Don't fuck Anna up, your sister is hot. Sorry duke, but if she wasn't so 730, you know, crazy, I'd try to talk to her myself. Yo, she said that Nas lost that battle with Jay."

"Who knows who really won?" Major replied.

"I do. I know I'm a Queens resident, but, let me school you. Nas is about to drop a new album. They both came from different directions in the battle. Nas's moms passed. Nas was bushwhacked, caught off guard while he was mourning. But now he's ready. Now we will see."

"Yeah, that's true. But Jay-Z got the momentum and a strong staff with Beanie Sigel and Memphis Bleek. It's not like when LL Cool J did it to Ice-T, Hammer, and Mo Dee on that *To Da Break of Dawn* track." Major took his final puff and handed

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Prime the remaining portion of the spliff. “That was straight murder. He did point blank damage to all three of them niggas on the same song.”

“LL was dope. And to think Shan had a grudge with him. Remember when KRS said, ‘instead of trying to take out LL, you need to take your homeboys off the crack’?”

“Whoa!” Major exclaimed. “You quoting Kris One? That’s ill. The world might be coming to an end. You make me want to believe in God.”

“Even Queensbridge alumni acknowledge KRS, and he was right. Hip-hop didn’t start out in Queensbridge.”

Major was awestruck.

“But Nas made up for Shan’s shortcomings. When Nas hit the streets he made us think he was Rakim all over, and no one came close to the way *Illmatic* impacted on the game when it dropped,” said Prime.

“OK, nigga. Stop preaching your Queens shit to me. *Illmatic* is definitely one of the Top 5 greatest rap albums of all time, but you could probably put *Reasonable Doubt* in the Top 5 also.”

“Now we could argue that,” Prime said as he dropped what was left of the L. When it hit the concrete, he stomped the dead blunt with his boot. “Even Rich would question that, and he’s a die-hard Jay-Z fan. Rich would put Kool G. Rap’s *4, 5, 6* CD on that list, and Biggie’s, *Ready to Die*; Eric B. and Rakim’s classic, *Paid in Full*; and NWA’s, *Straight Outta Compton*, but I wouldn’t put anything West Coast in the Top 5.”

Major put his hands in Prime’s face. A few heads in the hood noticed and started to pay attention to the heated conversation. The fiends kept their distance, Major at times threatened death to any one of them, so they seldom came close. At times he preferred that they conducted any communication they had with his employees.

Diamond Drought

“Never dis’ NWA. *Fuck the Police* is the anthem—Ice Cube was brilliant.” Major got emotional, but then he laughed, and the fingers pointed at Prime’s dome became mush. Some neighborhood niggas came up to put their two in.

Prime and Major gradually slipped their way out of the conversation they brewed up, jumped in the Q45, and as Major fired the engine, Prime began to gut a Dutch Master.

“That whole NWA shit was the beginning of straight gangsta to be honest.”

“Even with the Jheri Curls?” Prime asked.

“Even with that. Just think about it. Four niggas dressed in all black with chemicals dripping from their hair, and AK-47’s...”

Prime knew it was going to be a long night. He hoped the bundles they had out on the streets would go easy. It was a couple of weeks after the first of the month, but there was still good dough out, and fiends had to get high, Newton’s Law.

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CHAPTER THREE

Leaya heard the dim hum of Rich's engine as the coupe pulled up in front of the private building where they resided. It was about 4 a.m. and Anna had not dialed her since that afternoon. She said some broad was in Rich's car and she would call her as soon as she got more. Now it was the next day. Leaya heard Rich slam the door to his Lexus. She heard the keys to the building's front door jingling in his palms. She knew he was a little tipsy by the way his Timberlands dragged as he climbed the stairs.

He had about 25 stairs to climb before he would make it to the second floor, and then to the front door of their apartment. She knew that she wouldn't be content with any of this shit until Anna called her. She didn't know why that bitch hadn't called. What happened? Who was that bitch in his car? There were so many dark areas. Blank spaces that had to be marked and Anna had all the missing pieces. But Anna was a missing piece herself, and that made the whole night torturous for Leaya. She didn't even know if she should be mad at this nigga yet. And she wanted to hold him, even if she had a reason to kill him. No matter what, she would always want to hold Rich, even if it was just his corpse.

She played sleep when he entered the bedroom. He sat down at the edge of the bed and started unlacing his boots. Even with the pillow over her head, she could smell the lit L and heard him take a pull. As he took off his jacket he recited some verse that Afta had created. His leather hit the floor. He put his blunt in the ashtray on the dresser then curled up with her. She instinctively touched his chest with her back and realized it was bare. She hadn't heard him lose the sweater.

He kissed her on the back of the neck from beneath the comfort of the pillow. Rich was hers. She would never let some bitch get him without pain. Normally she would have chastised him for entering the bed with the streets still on him—he hadn't

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showered and was still in his jeans—but her mind was in the murk and she had no strength to fight him now. She was too insecure to muster up any strength. Her ignorance of the facts about last night made her weak.

Rich seemed distracted and a little agitated. He curled a lock of her hair around his index finger and hummed some miscellaneous tune. Leaya figured it was probably something he had produced. She was enjoying the sound, it gave her goose bumps. She could tell that he wanted something, but she didn't know what. She didn't sense his guilt, or that he wanted to talk. She wasn't feeling him enough to give him anything or be intuitive. She was the only thing she had to offer at this point, and she wasn't even sure if he wanted her, or deserved her for that matter. But she wanted him. So she gave herself selfishly to get a bit of him. She hoped...as she unbuckled his belt and massaged his penis under his boxers...and prayed, while sucking his dick...that he was worth the blowjob.

She prayed that when Anna called, she would find out that the bitch who was in his car was just a client. Maybe some R&B bitch with a voice like Faith that he discovered at some talent show.

While she was riding him, he probed her body with his hands. She lost all thoughts about that bitch as he caressed her breasts and rubbed her hips. Within the passion of his flesh, she tucked away what plagued her heart. When he flipped her over and put his mouth on her most delicate portion...she knew at that point that whatever Anna had to say, whether good or ill, it would have no substance.

But she also knew that soon the joy of him would subside. Soon what they shared would be what it always became...the sweetest of memories. This was only a little distraction from the bitter reality of her life. If Anna had ill to speak, Leaya thought

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this could be the last time she'd let Rich get inside her. But when she came, she thought about it again.

*

The melody was laid back—some electronic, southern, gangsta shit Rich had made for Afta a few months back let loose in Afta's truck. The instrumental was real hard.

Anna was in Afta's Escalade. It was like last night had never ended. They were parked right around the corner from Ghetto Sounds and were still a little wired from the weed and alcohol they had consumed at the club. Afta was a bit confused. Anna never paid this much attention to him before, and he didn't know what to expect.

Besides, this was Major's little sis. Although she was 21, a full-grown woman—real grown, with beautiful hazel eyes, a nice round rump, and baby-birthing hips—always laced in the hottest fashion, and humorous, she was still Anna. That meant she had her own motives, which usually meant trouble—two things he didn't need and never cared for. His own broad Destiny was enough, and if it wasn't for little Afta on the sidelines, he sometimes wondered if she would be in his crib now.

"The hook on this song is ill. I like the way you write, Lawrence," Anna said with a grin. Each word that came from her lips was sweeter than the next. "Spit something else for me then let's go to IHOP for breakfast. You do know how to treat a lady don't you?"

"I never met a lady before. I only have experience with bitches," Afta replied, smiling.

Before she could respond, he cut the music down some and started his verse.

"I've done black on black crime/beat down devils/friends become foes/wifey's become sluts/it might be I'm too smart or don't know much/might be a mistake/but ya only live once so/if I

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was wrong I'll learn from it/if it don't kill you/you get strong from it/bitch! It's written all over ya stomach/wipe the semen off/and act like it wasn't/but it still happened/things change us/you would never change up/you're stuck up/your whole genetic makeup/is caked up like make-up..."

"Enough!" Anna yelled excitedly. "Hot lyrics make me horny, and I'm hungry. We were out all night, please feed me. I feel like the plant in that movie, *Little Shop of Horrors*."

"You want blood instead of IHOP? We can find you a blood bank."

"No thanks. Waffles are all I need. And maybe if you play nice, I'll be nice." Anna leaned into him and rubbed his shaved head. Afta kissed her on the forehead and wheeled off.

Anna's phone rang just as they hit Atlantic Avenue. She didn't know why Afta was taking the long way to Canarsie or why he was so quiet during the drive, but when she answered her PCS, nothing she thought about mattered.

"I can't talk right now. I'm still in the middle of the assignment," Anna told Leaya in her low voice. "I know bitch. But I can't say shit right now. And I'm hungry and I can't think when my stomach's growling, and it is."

Leaya was in the kitchen on the cordless, frying turkey bacon and toasting bagels. Rich was taking his new Triton out of the box. For some reason, he decided to set up his little home studio today. She heard him coughing from the dust the boxes had accumulated.

"What are you doing? Why didn't you contact me?" Leaya asked.

"Did Rich tell you anything?" Anna whispered. She didn't want Afta to get suspicious, but he gave her a look while she was whispering, and then smiled. She knew what he thought, that she was on the phone with some nigga.

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“Rich said that you were with Afta last night, and he was shocked to see you both acting lovey-dovey.” Leaya lowered her voice as well. Rich was in the next room and he had good ears.

“I have to go.”

“Did my comment make you uncomfortable, Anna?” Leaya asked even lower. She knew speaking as low as she was could also make Rich suspicious, but she had to get something from Anna before she hung up.

“I’m still with him bitch,” she mumbled in the phone. “Last night never ended yet, at least not for us. But I’ll tell you this much, that female who was in his car is definitely suspect. But keep it contained. I don’t have enough data on her. I’m not quite sure if Rich is guilty yet. Good-bye.”

Anna looked at Afta. “Some niggas just don’t know when to quit. They start pulling that O.J. stuff after they’ve fucked me, and not a second before. I understand how my pussy makes niggas, but shit.”

They both laughed.

Anna soon realized why they hit Atlantic ave; they were heading to the spot. Maybe to get more weed since Afta never held contraband on him. He always made sure his truck and the people inside were dry, just in case.

“Not the ave. Please, Afta, I don’t want to see my brother. He might hit me,” Anna pleaded.

“Major is home by now. If anything, Prime is posted, or he’s in the spot sleeping. Whichever the case, you’re safe. But only for the moment. Eventually you have to go home.”

“No, I don’t,” Anna cried. She moved in close and kissed him on the cheek. “You’ll protect me.”

“I’ll put a Trojan on but it’ll be to protect myself.”

And with that, Afta hit the area. The block was empty except for a few people coming in and out of the few stores and homes around the spot; his hood. The place he, Rich, and Major

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made notorious. He spotted Monique and honked his horn. She waved as she made her way to the train station.

“Who was that?” Anna asked.

“Your future sister-in-law.”

“She looks like a hooch. What could my brother see in her?” she asked.

“That ass she has for starters, and her pretty face. She has nice breasts, and I heard big nipples.”

“Get off her dick already. I’m here. I’m all you need to think about. I can’t see my brother slapping a diamond on her finger.”

“I can. Monique’s no hooch. You’ll meet her soon. She’ll be at your next family cookout. You guys will be in Bloomingdale’s together looking for Coach bags.”

“Louie, motherfucker! Don’t ever lower my standards!”

*

Shantel couldn’t stop thinking about Rich as she took her shower, lathering her sexy form. She didn’t drink much last night, but today she brought a glass of wine with one ice cube in it into the bathroom with her. She took sips of it periodically as she scrubbed suds off of herself.

She recalled the night before. She had not given Rich her number, but Afta had her card.

Maybe he’ll call me and I’ll have an excuse to see Rich again, she thought. Rich made it seem like we would never get the chance to see each other again. He was way too cool. I never met a nigga who could resist me, until now. Maybe he really loves his girl.

“I want to see whose man I want,” she said to herself, laughing from the effect of the wine.

*

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Monique loved to read. Sometimes she would just puff a L and lay back in her crib and just read—novels, self-improvement, philosophy, and astrology books. She never bothered to get a library card, even when she was in grade school. She never even attempted to go to college after she graduated. She didn't see any use in it. Monique was simply more interested in life, poetry, thought, and grasping the moment. She wanted to grow dreads and lamp out in the tropics. Maybe even marry some nigga who thought like her. They would have two kids, one of each gender.

So on Saturday's like this, as early as it was, Monique found herself once again on the A train heading toward Barnes and Nobles bookstore near Union Square.

Monique was still looking for a job. She was 18. A year out of high school and she had hardly begun to start her life. Nothing was ever simple for her. She grew up in the projects. Her mother eventually got a better job, and a house. The neighborhood wasn't the ideal place she had in mind, but it was what her mother could afford. She didn't have a picket fence, or a yard for that matter. Their home was semi-attached, but it was a house. That meant walking straight outside and getting fresh air, instead of down a hallway to a piss-smelling staircase. It wasn't the Pink Houses or any other project anymore.

Monique had her Sony CD Walkman on with 50 Cent blasting out her earphones. Her head was nodding as the iron horse made its way toward 8th Avenue. She would purchase a few books, lounge in Starbucks, order a large French vanilla, and read. This was what she did every Saturday since breaking up with her ex. Although she thought about Major often, she thought about her ex nearly as much.

She knew he loved her, regardless of the way it went down when they severed ties. That umbilical cord of codependency wasn't as elevator cable as they had both thought. Not strong enough to last the year they spent fucking each other, but they had

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some real good times. Dante was real romantic. He always set the mood, even made some days magical, she thought.

Can Major measure up to Dante? Monique wondered. Can anybody? Dante was my first real relationship. Sometimes I think the reason we had such a shaky road was because I wasn't accustomed to having someone other than family within my existence. He didn't take my virginity, but I used to tell him that I wished he had—and I meant it. Sometimes I would feel like a virgin when he touched me. Dante knew how to touch a woman, and I never truly turned into one until I met him.

But he's a piece of shit, she thought. Maybe it's 50 Cent's lyrics and all this thug shit that's riling me up, but fuck Dante. He hurt me. I never thought he could do that. I know what he told me and why he said he did it and I know what kind of idiot I can be, but he took things way out of line and now the wall is up, he's behind it, and I'm in motion. But I'm hurt and I don't want anyone else doing this to me.

She had read enough to know that she would probably go through the same shit with somebody else.

Lost in thought, Monique had totally lost track of time. The next stop was 14th Street and she had to catch the L train to get to Union Square. She was going to call Major after she purchased her books.

Monique preferred the Starbucks on Astor Place. She would stroll down Broadway with music in her ears, the streets and the people to watch. Once she hit 8th Street she would hang a left, walk into Bucks through the side entrance, grab a coffee, find a couch, and read. But this time she decided to take this walk with Major.

She wanted to finally use the number she had tucked in her Coach wallet for nearly a year. She was still with Dante when Major had given it to her. She only took it because he was a neighborhood nigga and someone she sparked weed with. But he

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was attractive, and when she was 16, she did tongue him down in the drug spot. But she was grown up now, and it was time for Major to know this. And time for her to forget about Dante, if that was possible.

*

*Major/we force our thoughts travel/hammer down the law
like a gavel/make squads scramble/Emmitt Smith with the mic
handle/lick shot from the side angle/gang bang you/use slang like
rhymes do/know where to find you/conserve your rep/ease ya
step/so many niggas got swept/quiet as kept/I acquired the skills of
a vet/shoot on the side of your vest/look all inside of your
chest/inside of this industry/making my own history/where 22-inch
chrome rims ain't a mystery...*

Major's cell phone rang. Prime grabbed it and flipped it open. He was in the back seat of the Infinity rolling the next L. "I remember that rhyme, I wrote it two years ago," he said to Major while talking into the phone.

"What?" Monique said. "Can I speak to Major?"

"Who is this?" Prime Time asked.

"It's Monique. Is this Prime?"

"Yeah, oh shit! Monique from the ave?"

"Yeah, that's me, from the ave. Where is Major? Where are you two?"

"Damn, we're at the studio. Afta was supposed to meet us here. We had a session, another symphony track."

"Oh, I see. Well, just tell Major I said peace."

"No, wait. I think he might want to speak to you."

"Oh, really?"

"Yeah, he's right outside the car. This bitch he knows just crawled up. We were just about to go up in the studio. But hold on, it's just some broad, let me let him know you're on the phone."

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Whoa! Monique thought, issues already. Probably another bitch he fucked. I know the nigga's cute but let's get serious, how many dumb bitches are there in the world, and am I one of them? What will make me different?

"Monique. You finally decided to use that number. That's incredible. I'm about to cry right now. I'm emotional." Major turned to the broad. "Later toots, say hello to your family." She smiled and bounced. Prime glanced at her ass as he licked the cigar. He would have fucked her.

"Major, I was thinking about you," Monique said lovingly.

"I was just telling this girl Tracy about you," Major said. I was telling her how smooth your skin is."

"Don't you mean was? Saying *is* implies that you think you will feel it again, but that remains to be seen.

One day I'm gonna get you. And that'll be that, wifey...just you wait," Major swore.

"Come check me now. And bring roses. One whole dozen...leave Prime at the studio. Let him do a solo today."

Major was speechless. He had no words. Sometimes females were so unpredictable, but only when you didn't want them to be.

He never lost a bitch, but he never really had one either. Some have better results juggling many than those who just deal with one.

"Where are you?"

"The Starbucks on Astor Place."

"In the city?"

"Yeah, the city. Don't forget the roses. I'm sitting on the couch. My legs are crossed and I look banging. Mad niggas are sweating me. And when you get here, I'll let you feel my thighs and they will think you're the man...even though you aren't."

"Sounds wonderful. Fortunately for me, I am the man, and..."

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Monique hung up.

Yo, she wasn't even listening! She just expects me to scoop her or join her at Starbucks? I never even had coffee...that's really wack. That's some Kurtis Blow shit! he thought.

"Prime, drive over to Astor Place," Major commanded.

"Why?" Prime was just about to light the L.

"Why? Because I have spoken," Major said as he opened the door. Prime was talking to him from the lowered window of the rear seat side. He hopped out and entered the driver's side, igniting the 45.

"I'm in love, Prime Time," Major said dryly. "I want this one real bad. This is the other shit. The shit that got Afta and Rich all fucked up. Why do you think I roll with you all the time?"

"I don't know."

"You're hard, son. Bitches don't get to you. You hold it down...*We don't love them hoes!*"

"Maybe, but your sister is real fly. And since we're on the subject of love, I'm really feeling her. Tell me about her childhood."

Major had to laugh. Sometimes Prime had a sense of humor. But if one of his boys really got overly emotional with Anna, it could turn out bad.

This ain't no mafia shit, but still, don't fuck with my sister, Major thought. We know how fucked up we all are.

Major wouldn't expect any of his niggas to treat any bitch right, except maybe Rich, he didn't make many mistakes.

Besides, Richard wouldn't fuck with his little sister; that would be nasty. That would be like Major trying to hit up Leaya. He wouldn't even think of it. But if he did, he knew he would feel ill.

He continued to think. Leaya is banging, but she's Rich's bitch. Even if they were separated and she tried to press up on me,

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I would always fall back. Anna should be treated the same way, she's my sister.

*

Anna couldn't believe she had just slept with Afta. First they went to IHOP and had brunch. She felt bad about not getting a chance to tell Leaya about last night, but she could still get more information just by hanging with Afta. But that wasn't true, all she was doing was getting to know him—she found she really liked the nigga.

But she was learning more about this mystery woman, Shantel. She knew that she owned a strip club and a record label. She also saw how good-looking she was. That was a dime Rich had with him last night. Anna knew Shantel was irresistible, but Leaya was also beautiful, Rich wouldn't have her if she wasn't. But Shantel had a stripper's ass and was witty, everything Rich would be attracted to. Anna knew that Leaya had to worry. If she had a man and this type of bitch was around him, she would be at that nigga... *'What is Beyoncé doing in your car!'*

Anna got out of bed and looked down at Afta. She really was feeling him. He was real nice, and really real. He was cute, had money, and was a rapper. But he lived with his baby's mother. Anna knew Destiny was a real bitch; she didn't want her hair pulled out or her face bruised—she would die!

Afta looked at Anna as she went into the bathroom. She was naked and beautiful. She had a dancer's grace, not like a stripper's. Anna had studied ballet since 6, and took a few modern and jazz classes in college just so she could wild out in the club. She even knew how to do the hustle and had won a competition. Afta had so many things on his mind. He was thinking how he and Anna had decided to go to the Marriott.

Afta reflected, I thought she was just joking. Now I'm smelling her all over me. She smelled so good, I hit it raw. Who

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knows why I did that. I never hit anything raw, not even my baby's mother, and she thinks I have issues because of that. But I'm just that type of nigga. But what kind of nigga am I now? I just slipped up in Anna. Major doesn't need to know about this. He's way too emotional and might overreact.

*

Shantel called Willie. She hadn't spoken to him since the night she met Rich at the club. Sparkles, one of the strippers who had started working the pole only a couple of weeks ago, lap danced him and was gassed. She was telling Shantel about him—how good he looked, and his fly watch, and gear. His leather looked like it cost about four grand alone, and he rolled up in a Lexus coupe. Shantel was never the type of dame that would sweat a nigga, but sometimes people tended to act out of character. This was one of those times. Shantel had to know this one.

She was very opulent and successful; a bitch who didn't need much from a man besides a big dick and some good conversation. Some men supplied those things but on occasion she wanted more. She knew few men who could supply her with anything extra. Maybe some kid who had a college degree could accommodate her or some thug who had a head on his shoulders... but how many thugs have heads, and how many black men have degrees? She had only a few choices when it came to men. She preferred men who already had a woman. If some other female had an interest in him, and she was fly, then he had some interesting qualities at least. That was the game she played, it gave her a purpose. She had been alone for the past year. She used a vibrator because every man she dealt with wasn't interesting, or was a stupid thug.

Now Rich was her new project. He was smart, real good looking, and had money. But the most important aspect about him

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was that he was interesting and he compelled her to know him. She felt like he had her by a leash and he didn't know it.

"Willie," she said when the nigga picked up. "It's me, Shantel."

"What up?" Willie pimped. "What's popping?"

"I want to know more about Rich."

"Fuck you, bitch. I just gave you some information because I thought it would fuck with him," he spoke smoothly. "But if you're getting feelings for this nigga...well, it doesn't matter; I'm about to place a cap in his ass anyway, don't get too attached to him."

"Why do you have beef with him, Willie? What did he do to you?" Shantel asked, concerned.

"You sound like you really want to know. But I won't tell you shit. Get Rich to tell you. Bitch, I just got a few of my hoes dancing at your club. I can have them hoes back on the track and I can make my money ugly," he said real slick.

Willie was a real easygoing motherfucker, the type of person who could kill with little malice, like in the movies. He was an old G. Most people knew what to expect from him, nothing. But if they did get something, it was because he wanted them to have it, because it would somehow be beneficial for him.

"I want some more information, Willie," Shantel persisted. "What can I give you for some info on his girl?"

"A blow job," Willie said laughing. "This nigga really got you on his dick."

Willie was in his car. He whipped a Lincoln Navigator. It was green and sat on 20's; three television monitors were inside. He had a couple of his hoes in the back seat while he talked to Shantel on his Nokia. They sat quietly and looked out the window as he drove down St. Nick ave.

"Enjoy him while he's still breathing, I'm gonna get him."

"Willie..." Shantel could hardly find more words.

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“What do you want to know, bitch? My time is money.”

“I want information on his girl.” She hated this nigga, but he made sure bitches danced at her club. Shantel was gangsta, but not on the level of actually pimping hoes, she left that to Willie. Willie was a pimp, he just didn’t have the big hat with the feather. Since 42nd street was shut down, he kept his pimping in the clubs and had some call girl shit operating. Willie made money. Shantel respected that, she made money also.

“Do you got a three way pager?” he asked.

“Yeah, why?”

“I’m gonna text message you all the stuff I got on his bitch—where she lives, where she gets her nails done, and her mother’s maiden name.”

“How did you get all of this information?”

“You feeling bad now, Shantel? I don’t like that nigga, Rich. So I’ll do anything to ruin his ass. I think your obsession with him will ruin him. I was thinking that the moment you asked me about him the other day. Yeah, bitch, I can use you. I’ll give you whatever you want.”

“Damn. I’m not feeling this, Willie. Maybe I should talk to you later.”

“Come now, pumpkin. I was just fucking. You never heard a nigga pop shit before? Easy, just give me your E-mail address. I’m laying back in the cut driving around my hood listening to Jay-Z. I’m at the top of my game. Rich’s girl is real good looking. What do you want to do, stalk her?”

“Kind of, I want to see what I’m competing against.” Shantel was frustrated. “I don’t really know what I’m doing.”

“Good,” Willie replied. “I like bitches who don’t know what they’re doing, I make a living on stunts like you, let Willie help you. I’ll get you Rich, and you can give him misery. And I want him miserable.” *Or dead*, he said to himself. Willie started

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plotting in his head. He saw so many things right now, and Shantel could make those things happen.

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THE WORLD ACCORDING TO WILLIE
PART TWO