



MONEY *Grip*

A Novel by Divine G

MONEY-GRIP

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Also by Divine G

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MONEY-GRIP ®

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Dedication

This novel is dedicated to the numerous family members, friends and associates who were very instrumental in helping me to get this novel written, edited and published. The list of supporters is so huge and extensive, I am very apprehensive about attempting to mention names, because from past experience, if anyone is inadvertently left out and feels he or she should have been mentioned, it creates a lot of bad feelings. So, this time, I am taking the safe road by sending out a universal dedication to all those who played a part in the success of this novel, without itemizing each individual name. If you were there, by my side, had my back, and was supportive, then you are the person I am referring to when I send out this dedication. This novel is dedicated to you for being there when times got extremely rough, rocky and raw. Once again, thanks for all the support, love and understanding.

CHAPTER # 1

Rasheen Smith sat on the bed with both hands clamped to his bowed head as he listened to the bloodcurdling screams of his mother being beaten mercilessly by Black Bob in the adjacent room.

“Okay, Bob!” Barbara shrieked. “I didn’t mean it—“ A vicious punch to the jaw dropped her to the floor. “I’m sorry, Please—“ Black Bob began stomping her with his brown Timberland boots as Barbara curled up into a ball trying to protect her high yellow skeleton face by tucking her head close to her chest. She was hollering and screaming as loud as she could while clutching the crack pipe, keeping it close to her bosom for extra-added protection. Normally her screams would slow Black Bob down, but tonight she noticed it wasn’t working.

Rasheen fought desperately to tame the blinding rage circulating through his body. He looked up and saw his 11-year-old brother, Lameek, pacing like a caged Cub. His infant looking features no longer gave off accurate images. Lameek was so infuriated it looked like steam was seeping from his ears. His light brown complexion, dark brown eyes and rigid overall facial features, brought a deep pain to Rasheen’s 17 year old heart as he observed his baby brother in a state of utter distress.

“He’s gonna kill mamma!” Lameek shouted as the tears finally started to drip from his eyes. “We gotta do something, Rasheen.”

Rasheen got up and hugged Lameek in an attempt to comfort him while looking around at the roach infested bedroom. Although most of the roaches were hiding at the moment, it was evident an army of them would come out and play the second the lights went out. He glanced over at the dresser and saw a roach crawling on his old Spiderman doll, an antique toy of his that he possessed since he was five years old. His mother's agonizing screams re-ignited the extreme hatred and utter disdain he had for black men who abused women. Images of a river of blood rolling down the gutters of the 'hood, all initiated by his own hands, flashed before his third eye.

The sound of breaking glass unhinged both Rasheen and Lameek, forcing them to break their brotherly embrace. Rasheen sat back down on the bed shaking his head, trying to tell himself that his patience would pay off.

Lameek was breathing hard with panic. Suddenly, he ran to the closet, snatched a baseball bat and headed for the door.

Rasheen sprung to his feet and intercepted him. He snatched the bat from Lameek's grasp. "We tried that already!" He grabbed Lameek by the collar. "Black Bob's too fuckin' big for us!" He pulled his brother back towards the bed and made him sit down. "How many times he gotta beat flames out of yo' dumb ass for you to realize we can't whip his ass head up?" Rasheen sat listening to the screams while humming the new rap tune by Biggie Smalls.

Lameek was squirming as he sat listening to his mom now screaming for help. “We should call the cops on Black Bob’s ass!”

Rasheen felt an electrifying jolt from Lameek’s remark; he turned in slow motion, faced Lameek and stared at him. “What the fuck did you say!?”

Lameek saw the rage in Rasheen’s eyes and inched away from his big brother, who acted 10 years older than his real age.

Rasheen jumped up and slapped Lameek damn near across the room. “You ain’t ever ‘pose to call the cops! Ever!” He bolted for Lameek and slapped him again. “That’s snitchin’! The worse motherfucker in the world in a fuckin’ snitch!” Rasheen sat back down and refocused himself. “I told you I got a fuckin’ plan, didn’t I!? Now come yo’ ass over here and sit the fuck down.”

Lameek reluctantly sat next to Rasheen and a few seconds later they could hear the worse of Black Bob’s ass whipping started to die down. They could still hear their mom, weeping, moaning and groaning, so they knew she was still alive.

After a moment, Rasheen put his arm around Lameek’s shoulder and said, “Sorry for wiggling out on you like that, but you know better than talkin’ about snitchin’ on somebody. We straight from the ‘hood, man. We keep it real. We don’t get down like that. You my baby brother and you gotta be thorough. Let me show you somethin’.” With a smile, Rasheen lifted his shirt and pulls the huge

9mm from his waist. Rasheen's 17-year-old hand gripping the weapon made it look much larger than it really was.

Lameek's eyes lit up with something much stronger than glee. An observer would have thought he had just laid eyes on the biggest toy store in the world. "Is it real!?" he reached for the gun with awe gripping his entire being.

Rasheen pulled the Browning 9mm out of his reach, took the clip out of the weapon and handed it to his baby brother. Rasheen's smile grew two inches larger as he watched Lameek dancing around the room, pointing and playing with the gun. After a moment, Rasheen said, "Come on now, that's enough, give me it."

Lameek handed it back reluctantly.

"Ima show you how to use it soon. After I blaze Black Bob." Rasheen said without the slightest hint of insincerity.

"Can I come with you!?" Lameek said hopefully, "I wanna shoot him too." Lameek's expression was more serious than the crack epidemic of the mid-1980s, a plague that was supposed to be whining down according to a recent news report dated November 12, 1993.

"You can't come with me on this. But you can help me out." Rasheen saw Lameek's serious facial expression grow into a network of smiles and wide-eyed delight. "When Bob breaks out, I'm gonna follow him. I need you to fill my bed with clothes to make it look like I'm sleep. If mom comes in, act like you sleep

and she'll leave. I need you to stay up so you can open the window back up when I come back, alright."

"Where you gonna get him at?" Lameek's 11-year-old mind was gearing up for an onslaught of questions.

"Dirty Ricky said Bob be at his house with his mom. He comes here, takes mom's money and be usin' it to get high with Ricky's mom. Ricky told me earlier he heard his mom and Bob talking and he said he was gonna come over tonight after he came from here. I'ma try to beat him over to—"

Rasheen heard his cue.

"I'm gettin' the fuck outta here." Black Bob said, "When I come back tomorrow afternoon, bitch, you better have my money. You laying up around here smokin' up all my god dam money when you supposed to be bringing that cheddar to me . . ."

Rasheen shot to his feet and grabbed the brown winter coat he recently took at gunpoint from some unknown, cornball cat caught in the wrong 'hood. The moment he laid eyes on the coat he knew it would be just right for this very special occasion. He raced to the window with Lameek on him as close as a shadow.

Rasheen opened the third floor window and the vicious January winter cold lashed at him with unrelenting anger. He turned to Lameek and said, "Remember what I said."

Lameek nodded as he excitedly ushered his big brother on, savoring the thought of Black Bob finally getting what he deserved.

Rasheen raced down the fire escape of the old, decrepit Tenement building on Jefferson Avenue near the corner of Lewis Avenue, the tip of the heart of do or die Bedstuy. He jumped from the last ladder step and landed wrong, hurting his heels. Rasheen hastily took flight down Jefferson Avenue on his way to Dirty Ricky's crib over on Putnam Avenue.

Black Bob exited the Tenement building and headed in the direction Rasheen had just ran; he was completely oblivious of the small figure running in front of him with his bangy Guess blue jeans and the unfamiliar brown coat.

Black Bob had a crack craving as angry as a full-blown hurricane. Plus, he was still infuriated by Barbara's audacity to try to hold out on him. That bitch and them two dirty ankle havin' ass gremlins of her owed him their life when it came right down to it. He helped Barbara find an occupation that allowed her to work at home, and stay as high as she liked. He hated ungrateful niggas with severe cases of amnesia.

Moments later, Black Bob entered the crack spot on Hancock Street and Marcy Avenue, copped four nickel vials of crack with half the money he got from Barbara and wondered should he go straight to Darlene's crib. Darlene was one of

his newest mules he was currently in the process of breaking in. She had a gigantic ass that was destined to bring him in suitcases full of money.

A huge wind lashed out and helped Bob to decide to stop at the pool hall a block over on Halsey Street to check on two of his other broads he had on the stroll. Candy cane and Sarsaparilla were straight 'hood rats that would fuck a freak in the circus if the price was right and they were definitely his kind of hookers.

He reached into the pocket of his Alaskan Parka to warm his hands. In ritualistic fashion, he caressed the 38 snub nose revolver and felt that familiar sense of security sweep over him.



Rasheen paced back and forth near the entrance of the dark, garbage littered alleyway on the side of Dirty Ricky's house on Putnam Avenue between Nostrand and Marcy Avenues. He sucked on the last of the Blunt and tossed the butt to the ground. The tingling sensation of the weed (marijuana) racing through his bloodstream instantly started taking affect. For what he was about to get into, there was no question he had to get his head right. Every so often he would peek out, down the Street to see if Black Bob was coming.

Despite the wind cutting about the small area, the wretched odors were so unbearable that it easily masked the smell of the weed. At times when the shitty diapers and rotting food got too deep inside Rasheen's nose, he had to come out of

the alleyway and stand near the curb in order to catch a whiff of fresh air. When he heard movement inside the building or saw a crack head approaching, he would snatch a lung full of fresh air as if he was about to submerge himself in water, and then retreat back into the stomach curdling sea of horrible smells.

His teeth were chattering, and his whole body trembled with uncontrollable intensity. He didn't know for certain whether or not it was from the cold or due to the fact he was about to use the gun on Black Bob. Despite the weed in his system, he was scared out of his mind, but the fury in his heart was too powerful to push him to seriously consider any other options.

Rasheen was fighting with that voice in his head; the one that kept telling him not to do it. The other voice, the one telling him to do it in order to save his mom and the other women under Black Bob's iron fist, wasn't as loud as it was earlier. The dark cloud of doubt and indecisiveness was growing, but all the brutal beat downs he received at the hands of Black Bob was just as powerful. His vindictiveness was even more pronounced and even if he wanted to turn back, his predisposition for always having to come out on the top with everything he did wouldn't allow him.

To keep his energy fully charged, Rasheen started reminiscing. The time Black Bob knocked him out cold when he came to his mother's aid, sweeping a baseball bat at Black Bob was a very memorable moment because it was the first

time Rasheen was ever knocked out and it was like a part of his life was cut away. The only thing he remembered was swinging the bat, Bob blocked it and everything instantly went black. The numerous other times Black Bob beat him, slapped him, kicked him in the ass, threw him down flights of stairs, and even made him and Lameek watch him fuck his mother in the ass while she was sucking on a crack pipe. He could still remember that sickening odor of shit that fumigated the room.

Rasheen was scared, but he was a man-child who had reached a point of no return and was pushed completely over the edge. He was beyond traumatized, brutalized and victimized; there was no one to turn to, so he did what he always did; turned to himself. His 'hood had rules and he'd been mastering those rules since he was old enough to throw rocks at the bodega and run and hide when the storeowner came out and chased him. Whoever dished out the most violence was the most respected was the top rule on the list.

He seen so many shootouts, murderers, stabbing, and violence of all varieties he was practically immune to it. Not to mention he had a very violent upbringing of his own, to say the least, but so far he hadn't killed anyone . . . yet.

Even his six-month stay in DFY wasn't enough to derail his antisocial attitude and behavior. From the moment he learned how to operate a switchblade he'd been wondering how it would feel to kill another person?

As Rasheen looked around the cold, smelly alleyway, he realized tonight he was going to finally find out. His cherry was gettin' popped tonight fo' sure! Rasheen thought with an inward smile.

Rasheen suddenly felt dizzy; he stumbled slightly and started to panic. What was wrong with him? He was so cold and he'd been out here so long, he realized he couldn't think straight. He wondered was this woozy feeling caused by the brittle cold? He knew he wasn't properly dressed for a long distance stay out here, since he thought this would be a quick run and assumed there was no need for any extra clothing, but he didn't think it would have him feeling like this. About twenty minutes ago, he realized Black Bob was taking way too long to get here. *It definitely don't take an hour to walk eight blocks*, Rasheen said to himself as he paced on unsteady and trembling feet, trying vigilantly to keep his blood pumping. He wished he had a watch to see exactly how long he'd been waiting.

After what seemed like another twenty minutes slipped by, Rasheen was as numb and weather beaten as great grand mom's decrepit Quilt hanging on a cloth line in the Arctic Circle. His willpower to stay out in this treacherous cold was rapidly fading. The reality of knowing that Black Bob had turned his mom out on heroine, crack and angel dust, then made her a prostitute who he abused every time he laid eyes on her, was the only force capable of holding Rasheen out there in that brutally inhuman cold, and allowed his thoughts of hatred to run amuck in his

mind. But his instinct was telling him he would kill himself if he remained out there any longer. Then, right on the heels of this premonition came that little voice, reminding him that it really didn't matter because by all standards he was already dead.

Rasheen decided to exit the alleyway for another whiff of fresh air. As he took his position near the curb and began walking in place to keep his blood circulating, Rasheen didn't realize a limousine had turned onto the block. Since Rasheen's head was turned in the opposite direction, and the vehicle's headlights weren't turned out, he didn't notice the Limo until it was dead upon him. When Rasheen turned and saw the Limo slowly cruising by, he almost panic and was about to bolt back into the alley, but common sense told him it was too late. Whoever was inside the Limo that had very dark tinted windows had apparently saw him. Rasheen watched the Limo until it disappeared down the street and convinced himself it was nothing. It was probably some dudes showboating and getting high with some chicks. He knew it was common practice for dudes to rent Limos, ride around the 'hood with a carload of homies and girls getting high. Shit, he and his ace homie Jack Mack had done it twice before. Rasheen went back into the alleyway not giving the incident another thought.

After other thirty minutes crept by, it became obvious that Black Bob wasn't gonna show. Rasheen realized Bob must've changed his mind or something and

went to another one of his whores' houses. Rasheen, with tears of defeat in his eyes, decided to head back home and try it again another day. Half delirious with hypothermia, Rasheen stepped from the alleyway and strutted down the street.

After taking a dozen wobbly steps, he looked up ahead and saw a figure down the block and it looked like Black Bob and another man. While squinting and refocusing his eyes, Rasheen noticed the green Alaskan Parka and that was enough to confirm the ID. Lightning bolts of mind swirling adrenaline rushed to Rasheen's head, making him completely forget about the cold. Although he was trembling profusely as he held the 9mm in his pocket, it was apparent his shakes had nothing to do with the cold.

Suddenly, he saw horrifying images flash across his mind; one of them was of him dying, the other was of him going to prison, leaving his brother alone to fend for himself, and another vision was of his mother dying. It seemed like everything was going in slow motion as Black Bob and the other man drew closer and closer and his heart started beating faster and faster. He was so glad he had on the new coat, since it was highly unlikely Black Bob would recognize him as long as he kept the hood on his head and in a position that blocked his face.

Rasheen started breathing faster when he was within a few yards of the two men. As he walked pass Black Bob and the other man, Rasheen's shoulder brushed the other man. In an instant, Rasheen pulled the 9mm, walked after the

two, took careful aim at Black Bob's back in the same way he target practiced on empty Old English 800 Malt liquor quart bottles in the back of an abandon building on Halsey Street, and began squeezing the trigger. The loud ear-tormenting roar of the gun and Black Bob's body jerking from the impact of the four carefully placed bullets brought a thrill to Rasheen that had him in an elated state of mind.

The moment the first shot was fired the other man walking with Black Bob took off running while reaching for his weapon. He heard Bob hit the concrete with a hard thud as he made it behind a small red car and took aim.

Rasheen was so embroiled in the fact he was finally getting his revenge on Bob, he completely forgot about the other man. He fired two more shots into Black Bob's chest as he lay motionless on the ground and looked up at the other man behind the car. When Rasheen saw the man aiming a gun at him, he learned firsthand why the saying, "my life flashed across my eyes" was used quite frequently because he saw it was true. Rasheen focused his vision and saw it was Killer Kato, the second biggest drug dealer in their 'hood.

Killer Kato held the position as the thick smell of cordite faded rapidly. He instantly recognized the shooter was crack head Barbara's little crumb snatching rug rat. A smile began to creep on his face as though he was a proud father watching his son successfully ride a bike for the first time. His huge brown eyes

and his distinctly African pug nose could barely be seen beyond the hood covering his head.

Killer Kato lowered his gun and said, “Little Nigga, you can’t be creepin’ like that. Boy, you about to get you damn wig peeled back.” Kato was scanning the immediate area and saw there were no peeking toms in any of the windows. At least that’s the way it looked.

Killer looked over at Black Bob; he shook his head pitifully with a half-cocked grin. He had repeatedly told Black Bob he was going overboard with all that domestic abuse on those women, and he warned him that abusing them kids growing up in the ‘hood could definitely be hazardous to one’s health. But, some folks had to learn things only one-way; the hard way.

Killer Kato looked up at Rasheen. “Tomorrow, I want you to come see me about this shit, you hear me?!”

Rasheen’s heart was about to burst from his chest as he was stepping away. “Yeah, Killer Kato. I—I—I ain’t mean to diss you, man, but that fuckin’ nigga there be—“

“Get outta here!” Killer Kato shouted as he started heading down the street. “Come see me tomorrow!” Killer Kato took off running and shouted over his shoulder. “Don’t make me come lookin’ for you.”

Rasheen bolted back towards his apartment. His brain was throbbing with so many different emotions, stressors and physical distress, it felt like he was on the Cyclone at Coney Island. He was trembling uncontrollably from both a mixture of cold, fear and delight. The closer he got to his house without being picked up by the cops, the more intense his thrill of victory grew.

When he arrived at his fire escape apparatus, he was breathing hard and realized that the run back to his crib had warmed him up to the point a small sheet of sweat was forming on his forehead and under his armpits.

Rasheen climbed up the ladder and when he got to his bedroom window he saw all the lights were out in the room. Rasheen peered into the room and saw Lameek was in the bed asleep. A tidal wave of rage was about to burst from his voice box, but he quickly curtailed the reaction. He couldn't blame Lameek for falling asleep, since he'd been gone probably three hours or more. Rasheen lightly tapped the window with his numb fingertips. He saw Lameek didn't budge. A few seconds later, he tried it again, this time tipping a little harder with the same results.

Rasheen sighed, took a seat, pulled his hood tighter over his head, and prepared himself for the long wait. As he savored the thought that Black Bob was laying dead over on Putnam Avenue with crazy bullet holes in his body, he realized the brutal cold wasn't that bad after all.

CHAPTER # 2

Rasheen woke up to the screams of his mother. Yeap, she got the inevitable news. Word traveled fast in the ‘hood. Rasheen opened his eyes with a struggle as last night’s drama entered his mind. He looked at the clock on the nightstand and saw it was 10 minutes after eight, and noticed Lameek wasn’t in his bed. Hearing his mother’s cries, he didn’t know if he was more upset with her or Lameek? How could she be so distraught over this foul, low life, sadistic motherfucka, who didn’t give a rat’s ass about her!? At times he wanted to slap some fuckin’ sense into his mother.

He also realized he was still upset with Lameek. This morning at 4 o’clock Rasheen had finally woke up Lameek when he shifted in his sleep and Rasheen tapped on the window just at the right moment. When Rasheen entered the apartment, he couldn’t help but slap Lameek across the room. Without saying another word, Rasheen got undressed and went straight to sleep with Lameek begging him to tell him all about what happened.

Rasheen rolled over in his bed and clamped his pillow over his ears. Suddenly, Barbara burst into the room.

“Rasheen!” Barbara said in a whining voice with genuine tears in her eyes accompanied by huge bags under them; each eye had a bluish texture to them. “Somebody killed Black Bob.”

Rasheen got out of bed with an attitude. He snatched his pants and put them on as he spoke with hostility in his voice. “That’s good for him! I don’t know why you be buggin’, mom! Why you care about that nigga!? All he did was—“

Barbara charged at Rasheen with her pointer finger inches from his face. “That nigga was paying the fuckin’ rent! Now, what the fuck am I supposed to do!? Huh!?”

Rasheen wanted to tell her to wake the fuck up and smell the coffee, since she didn’t need a pimp to regulate her money. She could fuck and keep the money for her fuckin’ self. But that would only inflame her even more, so he said, “I don’t know, mom.”

“You need to get your sorry ass out there and find a fuckin’ job! And help me with some of these damn bills!” Barbara stomped out of the room, huffing and puffing. She needed a hit to calm her nerves; she raced into her bedroom, slammed the door, and found her crack pipe. She had two dime vials left and the usual thought of running out of crack terrified her. As she tapped a white rock into the stem of the pipe, she assured herself that everything was going to be all right. When she flicked the lighter, placed the flame to the stem, and the rock sizzled as she sucked in the cloud of smoke, all doubts vanished. Not only was everything going to be all right, but she also was instantly feeling all right as the cocaine raced through her system.

Rasheen finished getting dressed, brushed his teeth, drank a glass of kool-aid and was ready to walk Lameek to school. Twice he had to give Lameek the look of death when he started inquiring about the shooting adventure in a whispering tone of speech.

The moment they got out the apartment Lameek started up his inquiries like a nosy madman, since he knew outside was their usual place to talk about things that were meant to be safe from mom's omnipresence ears.

As they walked down Jefferson Avenue, Rasheen kept the story short and sweet, deliberately leaving Lameek fiending for a blood gripping 'hood tale of blazing guns and baggy pants heroes with rap tunes swirling in their minds.

"When you gonna show me how to shoot yo' gun!?" Lameek inquired.

"When you stopped fuckin' up in School." Rasheen said as he waited for the storm to follow.

"You ain't say that before!" Lameek's eyes were wide with anger. "You said you was gonna show me after you shot Black Bob."

"If you could learn that school stuff the way you know those raps, you'd be alright." Rasheen said. "You know damn near every rap song under the sun, but if I ask you what you learned in school you dumb out on me."

“That school shit is for the birds,” Lameek said. “That shit is mad boring. Rapping is real and that’s what I wanna be, a rapper. I write good raps too and you know it. My shit is thorough. Look at you, you ain’t in school—“

“That ain’t got shit to do with it,” Rasheen knew this was coming, since his baby brother always seem to latch on the theory that if Rasheen could do it so could he. “Listen, Lameek, I done told you, my shit is different. I’m out here making shit happen so you don’t have to do what I’m doing.” He knew this was game at its best, but it always seemed to work. “Don’t I be hitting you off?”

“Yeah, but you actin’ like I gotta be on some white boy stuff, like I gotta be a brainy act or some other—“

“Ain’t nothing wrong with being smart!” Rasheen shouted. “And that ain’t no white boy shit. Black folks is smart too. You see, that’s why you shouldn’t be getting crazy with the rap game because you gettin’ shit all twisted. Now, for saying that dumb shit, I ain’t teachin’ you how to shoot my gat. I don’t fuck with dumb niggas.”

Lameek was shattered; he was on the verge of tears. “That’s fucked up! Why you always gotta flip the script every time when you wanna make me do stuff—“

“I’m only messin’ with you.” Rasheen punched Lameek in the shoulder with a brotherly smile. He loved the shit out of his baby brother and it tickle him silly at

the way he was always able to push his buttons. “Stop whinin’ like a little girl, nigga. You know my word is bond. Anything I say I’ma do I do it.”

Smiling, Lameek said, “So when you gonna show me!?” Lameek saw images of himself blazing away like the Terminator in the Movies.

“This weekend, I’ll let you hang out with me and Jack Mack. We’ll go shoot up some beer bottles and shit.” Rasheen saw Lameek’s face gleaming with happiness, and he wished he could find a way to make that look stay on his mug permanently. Seeing his brother happy always had a way of making him happy. There were only four people in his world he had any love for; mom, Lameek, Jack Mack and himself. He had Aunts, Uncles, first cousins and other distant relatives all over New York City, but he didn’t care about them, since they didn’t care about him.

After dropping Lameek off, Rasheen headed for Jack-Mack’s crib. He could never understand why his mom, who was a straight up crack addict, wouldn’t let him hang out in the crib during school hours, while Jack-Mack’s mom would let him do whatever Jack Mack wanted, and she wasn’t on crack. Although she drank like a mad Russian on the weekends, she never touched any other mind-altering substances.

Rasheen made a pit stop at the weed house over on Hancock, brought two nickel bags and continued on his way. As he strutted down the street, his thoughts were running wild. He'd just smoked a muthfucka and it felt dam good!

The nagging thought of having to go see Killer Kato came to mind, and the anxiety came to life. Killer Kato was one of the most thorough ballers in their 'hood and he definitely earned the name Killer. Rumor had it that Killer Kato killed so many people even he lost count. Rasheen didn't want any drama with him; at least not now.

His mind started imaging all sorts of possible reasons why Killer Kato wanted to see him. Did he violate by killing Black Bob without putting him on point? Rasheen heard that in some situations, a cat wasn't supposed to get laid down without getting permission from the big dogs; that was the way the mafia did it; this lead him to wonder was there some secret code he had missed.

After tossing around a few more potential scenarios, he pushed the issue to the back of his mind and started focusing on other more pressing matters, like what was on his and Jack Mack's agenda for today? Who would be the unlucky victim to get robbed? Ever since Rasheen dropped out of school last year in the middle of the 8th grade, he'd been trying to come up with ways to make fast money.

There weren't many occupations in the 'hood, and the choices were very limited. Drug dealing was at the top of the list, but everybody was doing it and

Rasheen didn't have the stomach for it because it reminded him of so much pain; his mom came to mind every time he thought about slinging a few bags and that was enough to make him seek out a different line of work. There were other ways of getting paid like pimpin', boostin', jostlin', credit card scammin', and burglarizing people's homes. But for Rasheen the next best moneymaker was sticking up. This line work thrilled him because it was more action based than all other 'hood occupations, and it took a lot of heart to roll up on a person and take his shit.

Although it was a naïve expectation, Rasheen vowed to get rich from robbing folks and move his mom out of this fucked up world of drugs, prostitution, rat and roach infested apartments, and all the crabs in the barrel bullshit that came with poverty stricken people stuck in the ghetto. Ever since he was a child and was able to understand the pain and misery black folks were experiencing on a broad scale, he had always wanted to get his momma out of the 'hood and make her happy.

For years Rasheen had been doing an in-depth analysis of the power of money. Everybody needed it. Everybody wanted it. Some folks would kill for it. Other folks would flip on family for it. And money earned its title hands down as the root of all evil. If there was some drama in the air, you can bet money was behind it. Even if money wasn't the main cause, if you looked beyond the surface,

beyond the underlying layers of facts, you can rest assured that money had its claws in there somewhere. Rasheen, like everybody else, loved money. He worshipped, cherished and praised that mean green. It was like the God of all Gods in his world.

Another love was women. However, if there were a tossup between women and money, Rasheen would take the money every time. He'd learned when he was only seven years old that if you had the money you could get anything else after you got your pockets fat. Money was the epitome of power! Whenever he thought about this topic of money, he always remembered the lyrics in Whodini's rap song, One Love, which said, "I know what the Beatles were thinking of when they said that Money can't buy me love", and he wanted to meet Jalil so he could tell him to his face he was a motherfuckin' lair. Money could buy anything! Love, peace, happiness, and harmony! You name it money could buy it. Most of the celebrities had plenty money and from the way it looked to Rasheen they were well loved, they seemed to be happy, and they were living in a state of peace and harmony. The complete opposite of what he saw all around him in a money deprived community.

But Rasheen also knew money was one of the strangest forces around. It seemed like the more money you got, the more you spent it and the more you needed it. In his 'hood there was never enough of it. It wasn't an addictive drug,

but once you started indulging in the acquisition of money you couldn't stop. This craving for money was almost as powerful as a crack addiction for some and Rasheen fitted perfectly into this particular category.

Rasheen's daydream was broken as he looked up and realized he was approaching Putnam Avenue. His heart started to beat a little faster, even though the scene of the crime was about three blocks away. As he entered the intersection, he slowed his pace and looked down the Street. He wasn't surprised to see a blue and white police car and a dark blue DT car in the middle of the street with stripes of yellow tape flapping in the wind. Rasheen caressed the 9mm in his coat pocket, grinned animatedly and picked up his pace. For the first time it struck him that his piece was hot; his baby had a body on it. According to the rules of common sense, he had to get rid of his precious 9mm and get a new one. He would have to go check out Bishop, and see if he could work out a trade or something.

After some additional pondering, Rasheen realized that his 9mm was probably already hot as hell fire when he got it from that kid Kendu from East New York. His baby probably had a dozen bodies on it. There were very few guns running around the 'hood that wasn't used in some kind of shooting, whether it was a murder or an assault. Rasheen also knew that most gun dealers in the 'hood usually bought guns that were filthy with bodies from a distant Borough, like the Bronx or Queens, and then sold them to ballers in Brooklyn, and visa versa. Very

rarely was a gun thrown in the River like in the movies. To the average money hungry gun trafficker it didn't matter who got caught with a gun with crazy bodies on it as long as it wasn't him.

Rasheen climb up the stairs of 145 Madison Street and, as usual, Jack Mack was playing his music loud with the bass rattling the walls. It was about 9:30 in the morning and Tupac was waking up the neighborhood. Rasheen couldn't believe how Jack-Mack was able to pull this off without anyone calling the cops. He never got around to asking how he did it, but one could obviously assume the neighbors either liked the music or was scared out of their minds of Jack-Mack and his thuggish antics. Rasheen hit the doorbell and a moment later the music was turn down only a few notches and Jack Mack opened the door with a blunt in his hand.

"Rasheen!" Jack Mack gave Rasheen some dap (tapped his clenched fist with Rasheen's fist) and ushered him inside. Jack was all smiles and his dark brown, chiseled facial features and his muscular physique was in accord with his harmonious mood. "We was waitin' for you man."

Rasheen entered the living room, saw Lisa, Diana and Carmila, three classic chicken heads who all had sheer freak in their blood sitting around with cups, and blunts in their hands. Quart bottles were all over the place.

Rasheen smiled, snatched the blunt from Jack Mack and sat next to Carmila. She was three years older than him; she had a heart shaped ass and was drop dead

gorgeous. Jack-Mack knew he had the hots for Camila and he gave Jack a big up for making moves to get her here.

As he sparked up some petty conversation with Carmila, Rasheen realized he was slipping; they were supposed to be constructing a run for the day, but after seeing these fast boards all that instantly became history. There was no doubt he very rarely put business in back of bullshit, but after last night's adventure and the anticipated meeting with Killer Kato, Rasheen knew he just had to get his skeet on, get his lady lovin' rod wet, get his freak on or any other phase you want to call it.

As he got deeper into the dialog with Carmila, it suddenly dawned on him. This was unusual. Why was Jack Mack celebrating? He played his music all crazy in the morning, but never did he party at this hour of the day. When he looked over at Jack-Mack and they made eye contact, he instantly realized Jack-Mack knew about last night's run and was celebrating the fact he popped his cherry. By the smile on Jack Mack's face, Rasheen saw he was acting like a proud big brother. Jack-Mack was about three years older than Rasheen and had laid down two 'hood renowned thugs.

No good, Rasheen thought. He had no intentions of ever telling anyone about the body; not even Jack-Mack, his best friend.

After a moment of other facts coming into play, it hit him. Everybody knew Black Bob was beating flames out of him, Lameek and his moms. And if he was

murdered, Rasheen definitely had a damn good motive to want to do it. Rasheen suddenly started to perspire. He never took any of these factors into consideration until now. That panicky sensation started to take hold of him.

Camilla looked Rasheen over. “Rasheen, you all right?”

“Yeah, I’m a’ight,” Rasheen drew in a deep breath and let it out hard. “I was just wondering, why don’t me and you go in the back room and kick it on another level?” He stood and squared off like a real live thug. He had to do something to clear his mind and fuckin’ worked for him every time.

Camila smiled, she’d always wanted to get with Rasheen on the sexual level. He was a little shorty, but he was fine! “Let’s do this, boo.” Camila rose to her feet and followed Rasheen.

Rasheen saluted Jack-Mack with a raised clenched fist and headed down the hallway to the bedroom. As he moved towards his destination, Rasheen made a note to have a nice long talk with Jack-Mack to find out if his assumptions were correct.

The moment Rasheen entered the bedroom he saw Camila was stepping straight to her business, peeling out of her clothes with a unique gracefulness and a golden smile. When Camila’s huge, voluptuous breasts sprung from the confines of her bra, Rasheen’s manhood stood at full attention and was practically ripping a hole in his pants, trying to make its presence understood. He went to her without

further a due, and started kissing, caressing her body and navigating her towards the bed. By the time he fell on top of her, the only garment left to be removed from Camila's banging body was her thong style panties.

As Camila slid her panties off, Rasheen hastily undressed, and resumed the kissing routine. Meanwhile, his hand began to explore Camila's womanhood; he was young but he knew it was wise practice to liven up that thang thang before going deep sea diving. His finger probed, swirled, dipped and dived energetically in and out, up and down, toying with her super slippery gee shot while his tongue danced with her tongue. Her moans and groans were causing the blood vessels in his joint to throb with a vibrant urgency.

After the lovely fragrance of her womanhood was in the air, Rasheen knew she was ready and so he mounted Camila, determined to show and prove that a three year age difference didn't mean shit when it came to a fast cat like himself growing up in the 'hood. When he began to pound deeper inside of her, he knew that she understood that the only thing that mattered was exposure; and since Rasheen had been exposed to sex at the age of nine, he had plenty experience by now, which showed in the way he rode Camila. When Rasheen rode her for twenty minutes before shooting his load, she was convinced that he was a man-child in her promise land.

CHAPTER # 3

After riding Camila for another fifteen minutes, and busting off another nuts in the process, Rasheen exited the room buckling up his pants with a crazy smile. He sat next to Jack-Mack and kicked up a conversation while Lisa and Diana were in the kitchen cooking hamburgers and French fries.

“I gotta kick it with you, sun,” Rasheen grabbed the bottle of ice cold Ballantine Ale, took a huge swig and said, “I need you to hold me down. I gotta go see Killer Kato about some shit.”

“Killer Kato!?” Jack-Mack was now at attention and was all ears. “What’s the deal with that!? You think it got something to do with Black Bob?”

Rasheen locked eyes with Jack-Mack. It was a fact; Jack-Mack knew what time it was. “What you heard about this Black Bob shit?”

Jack-Mack smiled. “I ain’t hear shit. I just know you, sun. You a real live nigga, who ain’t gone let a mufucka keep dissing him.”

Rasheen sighed, took another swig and said, “After we eat we gotta get rid of these boards and hit the bricks, sun. Before we figure out what we gonna do today, I’m a go check out Killer Kato. See what’s happenin’, you know. I need you to lay low outside his place—“

“Man, fuck that!” Jack-Mack said. “I’m going in with you. We been bangin’ together with everything we do and this ain’t no difference.”

Rasheen suddenly realized he was acting real stupid trying to keep Jack-Mack in the dark about him bodying Black Bob. Jack-Mack had been rolling with him every since he was in public school, and it would be futile to continue trying to play dumb with him. “Alright, if you wanna roll we roll.”

After Rasheen and Jack-Mack ate an earlier lunch with the Camila, Lisa and Diana, they were out of Jack-Mack’s crib. Rasheen and Jack-Mack told the girls they would meet up with them later at 8 o’clock tonight at the Restoration Mall on Fulton Avenue. Camila gave Rasheen a mean, exotic tongue kiss that announced to everybody that he had hit that thang really right, and everybody laughed jokingly while cracking jokes as they departed.

Rasheen and Jack-Mack headed down Madison Street on their way to Killer Kato’s game room over on Gates and Nostrand Avenues. They both had 9mms with an extra clip concealed within their baggy attire. As they strutted down the street, Jack Mack kicked up a conversation.

“Yo’ you know that nigga Kato got his hands in other shit besides drugs,” Jack Mack said caressing the extra clip inside his coat pocket. “He got cats stepping to them rappers, pushing up on them on some security shit.”

“I heard.” Rasheen said looking at an elderly lady struggling with a shopping cart, feeling the urge to go help her because she reminded him so much of his

deceased grandma. “It’s supposed to be on the down low, but it’s touching certain people’s ears.”

“That nigga got skills, Sun; he pressured L-Cee and Big Willie Moe to put his people down with they security team; got on some real Al Capone shit. He basically told them cats that if his people ain’t a part of that work force, won’t be no peace at nobody’s concert.”

“I’m feelin’ that,” Rasheen said, remembering all the recent news reports of riots at various rap concerts, and wondered did Kato have his hands in all that drama. “So what you saying, that nigga be sending in motherfuckers’ to fuck up shit unless his people eat?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying,” Jack Mack said. “If the rumors are right and exact, he be running up on rappers, squeezing them to let his people eat, and if they flip out, he shut they concerts down. One of them if we don’t eat, nobody eat type thing.”

Rasheen nodded his head and went into a silent cocoon as they turned the corner and were several dozen yards from the game room; he saw Jack Mack put on his screw face and zip lip expression. This was one of the reasons Rasheen enjoyed working with Jack-Mack; he was all business when it came time to put work in, and very rarely caught diarrhea of the mouth when it was time to do the do. Even when he was red from the trees they smoked Jack Mack had the ability

to stay focused, an attributed Rasheen had long since mastered and knew it was an ingredient needed to survive and flourish in their 'hood.

Rasheen was the first to enter the game room. Wu-Tang's thirty six Chambers was booming on the jukebox and Rasheen saw the thirteen cats inside were officially thugged out, wearing screw faces and baggy clothing; some were showboating Rikers Island razor scars on their faces; they all wore their pants hanging off their behinds, and Rasheen had seen a few of them before at parties, hanging on various street corners and other places. Almost all of them were known heat-handlers, hell-raisers and strong-arm specialists.

A short, husky brother with a missing tooth approached Rasheen and Jack-Mack; his hard walk told everybody he was running things. After a moment, Rasheen recognized it was Ramrod, one of Killer Kato's top Lieutenants.

Ramrod gave Rasheen and Jack Mack 'hood style handshakes, and said, "Killer's in the back waitin' for you." He gave Jack Mack a suspicious snare. "He ain't say nothin' about you Jack Mack. I gotta ask him if it's cool for you to roll—"

"Ain't no need for all that." Jack Mack said. "Killer Kato know how me and Ra role."

Rasheen chimed right in with clear attitude in his voice. "Whatever he got to say, he can say it to both of us."

Ramrod instantly locked eyes with Rasheen. *This little mufucka think he the real deal, huh?* Ramrod thought as he decided to lay down his grill face game on Rasheen.

Rasheen stared back, handling the stare down, intimidation tactic like a veteran, not blinking or wavering once. He saw Ramrod's locked jawed grimace bounced back and forth between him and Jack-Mack. Then, suddenly, he gave one of his nearby soldiers a head nod, and the soldier went through a blue door.

Meanwhile, Ramrod, Rasheen, Jack-Mack and the dozen other brothers inside the game room silently eyeballed each other the whole time it took for the soldier to return. The soldier came out the door, went to Ramrod, and whispered in his ear. When the soldier finished, he stepped back into his earlier position and Ramrod stared at Rasheen and then said, "He only wants to see you, Rasheen."

Right on the heels of this comment all thirteen of the brothers inside the game room pulled out weapons, most of them had Mac 10s, while a few had Desert Eagles. They didn't take aim, but their grandstanding gestures made it clear the issue wasn't open for discussion.

Rasheen and Jack-Mack knew better than to even think about reaching for their weapons. Rasheen gave Jack-Mack a nod and headed for the door.

Jack Mack was smiling good naturedly, and then raised his hands playfully, “Hey, dog, I’m in line! Our all mighty emperor has spoken.” He laughed dramatically to try to break the tension without much luck.

Rasheen stepped through the blue door, and into the back room. He saw Killer Kato sitting behind a wooden desk with an ultra fine, light skinned sister massaging his shoulders. On the right side, he saw a muscular brother counting so much money it made Rasheen’s eyes bulge with disbelief. There must’ve been at least five hundred grand on that table. Next to the stacks of bills was a huge assault rifle; it had to be an AK-47 Rasheen realized. Then, on the left side he saw there was a huge bar, were two men sitting with drinks in their hands. Rasheen didn’t see their weapons, but any sane person knew they were heavily armed. Their entire demeanor announced that they were professional killers and probably had a body count as high as any frontline Vietnam veteran.

“Rasheen,” Killer Kato said, with a fake ass smile. His huge brown eyes, his distinctly African nose and his smooth, golden brown skin twinkled with a deceptively friendly glow. On first observation, no one would image he was a mass murderer, and had brought a whole new meaning to the word ruthlessness. He rose to his feet and extended his hand and Rasheen shook it. Killer Kato waved for Rasheen to have a seat in the chair positioned in front of the desk in hot seat fashion.

Rasheen took the seat and was surprised he wasn't scared out of his mind.

"Listen Rasheen," Killer Kato sat back down. "I was feelin' you last night. You handled yourself like a genuine hitter. I also know you had every right to do what you did. But, in the game there are rules, and where there are rules there are consequence for those who break those rules." Killer Kato paused in order to allow his point to sink in.

Rasheen's heart started to pound. The word consequences told him he had fucked up and there was going to be a backlash.

Killer Kato continued, "Now, don't get it twisted, I don't give a flying fuck about that nigga Black Bob. He was a foul, grimy, bully ass nigga that loved beatin' up on the weak. He wasn't no coward, but a real nigga don't beat up on folks who can't fend for themselves. So, Black Bob, basically got just what he deserved. My problem is this. Black Bob owed me a hell of a lot of money. You killed him and now I can't get my money because the dead are not known to return from the grave. A dead mufucka can't reach into his pockets and pay me what he owes me. You feel me?" Killer Kato paused again, staring at Rasheen all the while.

Rasheen wondered was this the part he was supposed to say something. He was about to speak, but Killer Kato cut in.

“I don’t take losses. I ain’t took a loss since I was in public school about twenty five years ago. But, you, Rasheen, got some choices here. I always give people choices. It’s always healthy to pick and chose; cause then, we have some control over our lives.” Killer Kato smiled and paused again.

Rasheen swallowed hard and said, “So you saying I gotta cover Black Bob’s tab he owed you?”

The room was deathly silent.

After a moment Killer Kato said, “That’s it in a nice sweet and neat nutshell.”

Rasheen sighed, “So how much was it?”

Killer Kato saw he had him a nice little herb. Although Black Bob owed him five grand, Kato knew he could milk this kid for at least ten times that amount and also run those chumps out of that Miller Avenue spot he’d been trying to get his hands on for the last eight months. He liked Rasheen and saw this little Shorty had mad heart, and he was definitely capable of killing. He also noticed he wasn’t stupid and reckless like most of the young ass knuckle heads roaming the streets, doing some of the dumbest shit. He also knew Rasheen was smart enough to know he couldn’t go up against him and expect to win. Rasheen had independent thinker written all over him and his loyalty to whatever cause he got involved in was visible by the way he handled himself. Yeah, Killer Kato always kept his eye on

any new rising star and made sure he found a way to make them understand who was boss around this motherfuckin' 'hood. For what it was worthy he was gonna test the waters with Rasheen and Killer Kato said, "That bitch ass nigga owed me a hundred grand."

Rasheen felt an electrifying jolt of shock. He was a vet at masking his inner responses to disturbing information, but this was way too much for him. "A Hundred thousand dollars!? Where—How the fuck you expect me to pay a tab like that?" Rasheen blurted out the words, not realizing what he was saying until after the statements rolled off his tongue and he couldn't take them back.

The room was engulfed by another deadly serious wave of silence. The vague sound of Method Man and Mary J, Blige's song "You're all that I need" was seeping into the room from the crack of the door.

Rasheen quickly refocused himself; he felt subconscious by the way he just reacted and scolded himself inwardly for such a hasty, shook looking response. He hated to look weak and now he suddenly felt he had to prove he wasn't shook or soft, so he said in a too calm tone of voice. "That's a real big tab, man."

"Yes, it is." Killer Kato rose to his feet walked around to the front of his desk and sat on it. "I'm a realist, so I know this is an amount cheddar that can take some time to build up, if you're dealing with petty, bullshit robberies like you're used to doing. But, before I go any further, I need to know are you gonna

straighten out this thing? Ain't no sense in me, laying down the important parts of the run, if you ain't down with it."

Rasheen was about to stare Killer Kato down, but his instinct told him Ramrod and Killer were two totally different people. He might be able to pull that shit off with a soldier, but not with the man who was running shit and bodying motherfuckers like murder was perfectly legal.

After a moment, Rasheen said, "Do I really have a choice in this thing? I either play or pay is the way it's going down. But it would be nice if I can hear how I can fix this thing before I start picking and choosing."

Killer Kato smiled; he liked a young brother who was sharp on his toes and knew how to flip the bullshit back at the person dishing it out. "Check it. I hear you and your man Jack Mack like sticking up shit. It's sad y'all two are letting those talents go to waste. Y'all out here crumb snatchin' petty ass shit like coats, gold chains and other silly ass kid shit. And after what I saw last night, you got a damn good handle on playing with them burners. Take it from me, Rah, you got the gift. Ain't many cats in the street built for handling hardware. Most of these cats out here don't think or plan shit, and that's why most don't survive."

Killer Kato paused as he went back around the desk and took a seat. Killer Kato then said, "Here's the deal. I got a run that could solve this thing in one nice smooth hit. You ever been to East New York?"

“Yeah, I been to the East.” Rasheen said, hoping it wasn’t to move drugs because he was not going to bend and would have to try his luck.

“Well, I got a little headache over on New Lots and Miller Avenue. There’s a drug spot in a building with a green door. It’s the only door on the block with a green door and you can’t miss it. On Fridays, this place brings in at least a hundred and fifty grand. You hit it, bring me my hundred gees, and whatever’s left is yours. Now, don’t get it twisted, them niggas are heavily armed. If you ain’t going in there to lay down a couple of mufuckas, don’t even think about fuckin’ around.”

The silence returned and Rasheen allowed his eyes to take in his surroundings as he thought about what was presented to him. After a moment Rasheen said, “No disrespect, but this sounds like a drug spot shut down. Sounds like those cats are taking all the business from you in that area and it’s hurting your pockets. Why don’t you just send a crew over there and knock ‘em off? Why all the stick up kid stuff?”

Killer Kato was shocked but didn’t show it. Shorty was as sharp as a Gillette razor. That’s exactly what he was up to, but he didn’t think his approach was that blatant. Killer Kato had to laugh it off in order to disguise the embarrassment he felt in front of his crew, since he’d told them earlier that Rasheen wouldn’t figure it out. His crew, in robotic fashion, joined in the laughing charade.

After ten seconds of laughter, Killer Kato stopped laughing suddenly, and everyone stopped on a dime.

Rasheen felt a sheet a sweat forming on his forehead; he wanted to wipe it away, but didn't want to make any nervous gestures. *Never let 'em see you sweat* was what the voice in his head was saying as he humbly and respectfully allowed his eyes to wander.

Killer Kato said in a smooth voice. "You got a good eye, but contrary to your belief, the real reason I want you to do it is because I can kill two birds with one stone. Knock out a pain in the ass and get my mufuckin' money. How that sounds? Sounds like a wise move, wouldn't you say?"

Rasheen nodded his head, "Yeah, that make sense. A whole lot of sense."

"So what's it gonna be, Rasheen?" Killer Kato said point blank and then locked eyes with Rasheen's.

Now it was Rasheen's turn to hold the silence. Rasheen rode this soundless wave until he was certain it had irritated everyone in the back room and then said, "I'm in." He paused for a moment and then said, "I'm rollin' with just me and Jack Mack. I'm gonna need some serious hardware. Hey, dog, you know I'm only seventeen and I ain't used to fuckin' around with the big boys, so I'm gonna need all the help on the fire power tip I can get."

Killer Kato smiled, and realized he had to find a way to get this little smart-ass nigga on his team. He could be a major asset. But, then, that little voice in the back of his head was telling him Rasheen was the type you didn't want around you because he was the kind that could knock you off your throne if you weren't on top of your game. As usual, Killer Kato's arrogance wouldn't allow him to seriously entertain such a scenario on a serious level and decided he was going to get Rasheen down with his team one way or the other. *He would be an excellent clean up man. Pulling him out, and cutting him lose on the competition, only at times when there was a need for major cleaning.* It kind of reminded him of how he came up the ranks from street thug to drug king pin, with hopes of soon turning it all into a legitimate empire. "Say no more. I'll get you whatever you need."

Rasheen smiled, and from that point forth his world took off like a rocket escaping the earth's atmosphere. But, the only difference between the rocket and Rasheen was that when the rocket ripped through the several layers of the atmosphere it burned away most of the spacecraft; with Rasheen it would work in the reverse.