

The City

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THE CITY

by Ron Goodwin

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ISBN

To those who believe

We stand tall, we claim the world We see the traps that ensnare the weak
They do it in order to feed the machine/ We're not worried anymore
Our minds are focused we walked through pain
The same pain that forges steel So now they say, 'He is the one.'
And then they say, 'Began where you are ...' We're not frightened any-more
The lines are clear to those who paid attention
in class We learn, we grow! If we can change
the city, we can change the world / We're not angry anymore
We are ... our beginning

PART ONE

In the back of cell the inmate looked out of his window at the largeness of the world. It was around twelve noon. He had just finished a set of twenty five push ups. He was six three and lanky with oversized hands and feet. His cell number was 15 A. He walked around the cell, shaking his arms out to loosen the muscles. To him the prison cell was a box, confining and entrapping rather than

housing. From the tiny mesh covered window in the back of the cell he could see it was raining outside. That would mean cancellation of all outside recreation.

He knew his cell mate would spend most of the day in the Activity Day Room, watching tv and playing dominoes. This would give the tall inmate plenty of time alone in the cell to collect his thoughts and write letters to his daughter's mom, promising to do all kinds of things he knew he could never do in a million years.

Still gazing out at the rain, he heard something behind him and turned. What happened next was totally unexpected. Five inmates, dressed like him in orange Central Corrections Department scrubs, stepped into his cell, their faces hard and contemptuous. One of them looked him in the eye, a kind of sizing him up. Then without a word they rushed him.

The tall inmate went down under a barrage of left and right punches to his head, face and chest. The inmates threw blow after blow, some of them so anxious to get to him that they missed and bounced punches off each other.

In the beginning the tall inmate fought back bravely and even landed a few blows of his own before he was overwhelmed again. When he fell the punches became kicks and stomps, punctuated by exhales of breath from his attackers. The attack seemed to go on forever. Soon all he could do was cover his head and face on the floor, and wait for the punishment to end. One of them kicked him in the solar plexus and he was left breathless, unable to move.

Finally he heard words that were like a blessing to him. The voice was gruff, emotionless. "Fall back!" it commanded. Instantly the attack ended. The tall inmate sensed his attackers backing away. A second of silence passed, in which he could hear his own desperate ragged breathing.

"Open your eyes ..." the calm emotionless voice said to him. He blinked his eyes open, one already swollen to the size of a golf ball. Through his distorted vision he saw a short stocky inmate with dreads and a high forehead standing in front of four others.

"Can you get up?" the man with dreads asked, "A real nigga can take that shit and still get up ..."

The tall inmate understood. His body was wracked with pain but he struggled to his feet and glared back at the men in front of him.

The man with dreads nodded, "Dat's what I'm talkin about. Be strong, baby. You almost done. You almost dere ..."

The tall inmate tried to speak but blood stuck in his throat like cement. The man with dreads looked at the beaten inmate, his eyes unwavering. "I need you to listen carefully," he told him, "And comprehend. The men standing behind me are witnesses, bruh ... You- caint- fuck- this- up ..."

His eyes surged into the tall inmate's. He made his voice heavy with emphasis. "I need you to repeat every word I say ..." he stated, "Exactly as I say it." The tall inmate nodded eagerly. The leader looked at him, his eyes insisting that he recognize the significance of what was happening. He lowered his voice and recited, "Slowly the wolf came down the hillside- "

"What the- ?" the tall inmate garbled, "The fuck is this?!"

"This- is where you get on, nigga," the man with dreads snapped, "Or where you get off! But getting off at this point would be hazardous to your health. Y'feelme? Now you need to repeat

exactly what the fuck I say!"

The man with dreads started again and the tall inmate managed, with a fractured jaw, to repeat every word he said.

"Slowly the wolf came down the hillside ..."

"The people in the village came out to greet him ..."

"They lay out silken garments before him."

"They spread a succulent young calf before him ..."

"And as he devoured it they bowed to him ... And they said, 'Thank you, Maharajah, for your grace ...'"

After repeating the words the tall inmate stared, dumb-founded and confused. "We are the 'wolves ...'" the man with dreads explained, "Anybody who aint with us is a sacrifice, as far as we concerned ... what we call a 'cow,' a casualty- of- war. You gotta abide by our laws now, homeboy, same as we do. That was our main oath, you'll take another one later. But for now, you good. You been, what we call, 'reinvented.'"

The tall inmate's good eye was growing big in wonder. The man with dreads met his eyes, not embracing him, not pulling him in physically, but pulling him in. "We created our own fuckin nation, see ..." he said, his eyes indecipherable, "Inside of this one, cuz this nation is corrupt. Congratulations, my nigga. You one of us now ..."

CHAPTER I

TORRELL

First there was darkness. Then he saw light. A series of orbs illuminated and swirled above the constellation. Under this violent sky a middle aged man appeared in silhouette seemingly out of nowhere. He was walking down a deserted sidewalk. His manner was urgent, as though he had a lot to do and very little time.

The person experiencing this dream somehow sensed explosions, what sounded to him like gunshots, one, two, three of them in succession. It felt cataclysmic, like the end of the world. When it was possible for him to see again the person dreaming saw the middle aged man lying on the ground. The man beckoned him and he went to him. Blood was pooling under his body impossibly fast. Soon it looked like almost enough to swim in. The dreamer could not see himself because this place existed purely in his un- consciousness.

The older man spoke to him, his words laden with regret. He said, "You won't make the mistakes I made ... You gon be a better man than me ... I promise ... You gon be better ..."

And that was when Torrell Grogan woke, that was always the point where he woke. He sat up, calmly, his breathing only a little accelerated, his forehead beaded with sweat. The dream again. He had loved his dad, he always would, but sometimes he wished he would just- go, move on. Maybe whatever was left unsaid after a person died, was meant to remain that way.

His pop always said the same thing in the dreams, “you’ll be a better man than me ...” How could he know that? And anyway what right did he have to lay his expectations, positive or not, on Torrell’s door step, and then just die?

Torrell was a twelve year old kid when his father was killed, little more than malleable clay. Now he was a grown man, thirty one years old, and an entirely different man from who his father had been. His father’s life was not his life, in any way, but the physical similarities were there. At six one, Torrell was tall also. He was muscular, not like a bodybuilder, but more like a basketball player on a weight lifting regimen. His skin was dark like midnight and he had a broad masculine face with arresting brown eyes that burned with intelligence. He knew that women found him handsome, (he’d overheard that a few times).

Since he was a kid he had wanted to do something that would somehow improve upon the world. He wasn’t going to cure cancer or erase the deficit, but he was sure he could contribute something on a smaller scale.

As a boy he was mesmerized, like most boys, by the make believe world of tv action heroes. The genre he liked best were the shows about cops, detectives and secret agents. By the time he was in his teens he had developed serious well thought out aspirations of entering the field of law enforcement.

As he grew older the scope of his dreams naturally widened and, as people do, he began to think in more practical terms. He still wanted to make a difference but maybe he didn’t have to be on the front line chasing bad guys and dodging bullets. Still, for him, the allure of law enforcement, (at least his concept of law enforcement), never completely went away.

Two years out of high school he decided to post- pone college, in spite of his mom’s disapproval, and took a job at a local fitness center as an assistant trainer. Subconsciously it was all coming together for him. To meet the physical requirements of the Police Academy, he’d heard, was no piece of cake. He would need to be in top shape.

Eventually he’d also need a working knowledge of the law. And that was how the next piece of the puzzle fell into place. At twenty four years old he saw an ad for a “paralegal in training” one day while skimming the classifieds. The job was with a law firm called Gandy and Associates.

The phone ringing on his night stand quickly brought him back to the present. He grabbed it and checked the display. Right on cue, it was his boy, Grant, from the law firm.

“Whassup, bruh?” Torrell greeted him, climbing out of bed. “Whassup, dude?” Grant said. Grant was shorter, thinner than him, and brown complexioned. He had large, almost bugged out eyes and a lightning fast sense of humor. Torrell could tell from his voice that he was grinning. He was almost always grinning, though not so much on the job. At Gandy and Associates it was mostly business, very little grinning or ‘dapping’ each other up and very little slang spoken between them.

The idea of two black men having to represent for their entire race, because they were in a segregated business arena should have been outdated in the year two thousand and fourteen. Torrell and Grant had tripped about that. Nonetheless they were the only two black men the firm had ever hired in its fifteen year history. And that was the reality.

"I was calling to see if it was past yet," Grant said on the phone.

"If what was past?" Torrell asked him.

"You know, nigga ... your curfew!"

Torrell had to laugh. This was an old joke between them. "Muuufucka, I aint got no curfew," he said to his friend, "You crazy? I'm a grown man. I go where I wanna go."

Grant grinned on the other end, "So Natalia's not there with you, right?"

"I go where I wanna go," Torrell asserted, "I'm a grown man. Aint no woman gon 'paper train' me."

Even though Torrell found this amusing Grant knew it was also a sore spot with him so he pressed the issue, barely holding back the laughter. "I'm just saying," he went on, "I call your place one night and the chick tells me it's late and y'all in for the night. I mean, shit, if she's calling the shots, cool. That's y'all thing."

"Like I told you, we had made plans to stay in that night," Torrell said, "And do that 'horizontal thang.' What, you hatin'?"

Now Grant did laugh because he knew he had succeeded in pulling Torrell's chain. "Man, forget all that," Torrell laughed along, "We still on for tonight or what? Whassup?"

"Yeah, yeah, we still on," Grant said, "But don't you need to call your girl first?"

"Naw," Torrell told him, "Just yours ..." What he saw no need to tell Grant was that he had already talked to his girl and he knew that she planned to turn in early that night and catch up on some sleep. If she knew that he was heading to one of the hottest night club and singles spots in the city she wouldn't have argued. That wasn't her style. But she would definitely let him know later that she disapproved, or in other words, that she was pissed. So Torrell saw no reason to tell her.

It'd been close to a year since he'd been to a nightclub. He'd always loved the boom- clack- boom of the monster club sound systems and the women swishing around in almost invisible club outfits didn't hurt either. On the other hand, the meat market atmosphere wasn't really his thing so, all in all, he hadn't missed it.

He was doing this as a favor to Grant. That's what a friend did, he believed, he stepped out of his comfort zone for a homeboy when the homeboy asked. Like a few weeks ago when Grant went with him to the Community League baseball game, even though Grant thought baseball was about as exciting as watching paint dry.

The club was called Archie's. It was fairly extravagant as night clubs went. There were three floors,

or levels, Intro, Midtown and Finis. On the different levels you could find giant screen televisions, dart games, a dining area, computer kiosks, bars, of course, and even a planetarium on the third level, Finis, which was geared toward people who wanted to chill and converse. The second level, Midtown, was where Torell and Grant agreed to meet. This floor had one of the largest bars and one of the largest dance floors in the entire city. It was for the hype people who wanted more of a high energy experience.

The crowd was practically elbow to elbow and ass to ass. It meant you had to side step someone nearly every second, or collide with them. A lot of the guys appreciated the crowd. It guaranteed that you would be pressing against a lot of female flesh, intentionally or unintentionally.

Torrell and Grant met at the main bar on the second floor. Torrell was a people watcher. He noticed things, like the woman standing next to him at the bar and what her eyes did when her lips smiled, how they froze hard and then warmed up. He could tell which one of the giggling girls at the table twenty feet away wasn't feeling the night and was wishing she had stayed home. He saw people's eyes avert and skip away to better places. He saw the club 'predators' covering their fangs. He saw the beautiful girls in their fake surrenders. And he definitely noticed the two women who seemed to materialize out of nowhere, on his left.

They were dressed similarly, encased in black silk dresses, almost bursting at the seams. They had voluptuous bodies, courtesy of their local fitness centers, that instantly captured the attention of every man in their circumference. And Torrell and Grant were no exceptions.

Torrell glanced their way as they took stools at the bar. The two noticed him also. There were roving eyes and inviting smiles. "I see what you're feeling, young man!" Grant said on his right, "I see what you're feeling!" Over the bump of the dancehall reggae the deejay was spinning Torrell could barely make out his words. But his smile said it all.

Torrell leaned in toward the closest chick. "You ladies are looking beautiful tonight ..." he complimented her. Almost shouting to be heard over the music, he offered to take care of their drinks. Their faces lit up at the compliment and drink offer.

"My name's Torrell," he eased in closer, "This is my boy, Grant ..." Grant came around to face them, offering his hand and a smile. They said their names were Lashay and Gina. Or was it Ginette and Lasalle? The four surface talked about internet scams, phone apps, and who was hot in music and on reality shows, everyone doing the little things to show that he or she was interested.

It was all good until an unbelievable girl on girl couple showed up minutes later, a few people down from them at the bar. The men almost immediately found their attention diverted. The new freaks were both tall with skin the color of hazelnut. Their 'painted on' jeans and midriff baring shirts showed off tight bodies without an iota of flab. More so than their pretty faces, it was their superlative physiques and fuck-the-world attitudes that made them the new main attractions. The women in black that he and Grant were talking to were nice, but the new arrivals were on another level, like the difference between the number eight and the number twelve.

Suddenly the dj spun a new song, a hip hop piece, some 'music studio thug' was claiming he'd shifted some 'ho's' internal organs around with his dick. But the beat was undeniable. When the new duo stepped onto the dance floor, about twenty yards in front of them, under the floods of multi colored lights, it was all Torrell could do to remember who he was talking to at the bar, Gina or Lashay. Unlikely as it seemed, out of the dozens of men in their vicinity, before long the new pair seemed to focus on he and Grant from the dance floor. They writhed, bounced and jiggled to the music, their toned bellies undulating in ways that made Torrell's mind gridlock. He and Grant gave each other looks that said it all, 'Daaaammn!'"

"Look at those dike ho's," the woman beside Torrell grumbled. Torrell was looking. On the dance floor the women alternated grinding each other. The one who was on the other's ass at the moment caught his eye, while the one in front gave him an almost imperceptible nod, like 'Whatchu gon do?'

The dancers separated, their mid sections and hips making circles and S movements. They eyed Torrell and Grant overtly, with blank challenging faces. It was too much. When the deejay changed the song Torrell seized the opportunity. He said, "Good talking to you," to the woman beside him. Then he walked straight ahead and ended up on the dance floor right in front of one of the tall freaks of nature. From the corner of his eye he saw Grant approach the other sexy dancer.

Behind them at the bar the women they'd been talking to froze, stared in disbelief and threw their hands up in dismissal. As the old song morphed into something new, the female on the dance floor, who Torrell had moved in on, didn't miss a beat, she never stopped moving. She barely blinked an eye, as if guys behaved that way around her all the time.

Torrell was shuffling his feet, dancing, bopping- he didn't know what the hell he was doing. He'd never claimed to be Chris Brown or Usher. Instead he was totally into what she was doing. Up close the interplay between her deep set eyes and glossed over pink lips was killing him. When she moved in closer her light brown eyes held him and he couldn't look away. Strands of her long black hair brushed against his face.

He felt sexual hunger that was immense, animalistic. They were almost close enough to kiss. Her eyes were amused and maybe curious but she didn't smile. Her lips parted and she spoke over the booming music. She uttered one word to him that was an invitation, a challenge and a question all at once. "What-?!"

CHAPTER II

WAYNE PHELPS

"There's a growing call for prison reform," a sober tv anchor man reported, "In the wake of allegations of widespread violence and employee misconduct at a local prison. The facility in question has allegedly been the site of rapes, inmate assaults and even murders in recent years. One woman who formerly worked as a nurse at the prison, speaking on the condition of anonymity, compared the experience to 'entering a war zone everyday.' She stated, quote, 'I'm sorry to say, but the only way to remedy the situation might be to shut the place down and lock the doors. For Gods sake, something has to be done!'"

Governor Wayne Phelps sighed, stood from a leather couch and clicked off the television embedded in the walnut cabinet in front of him. Phelps was a large man, six three and well above the optimal weight for his height. He was slightly pigeon toed and had something of a bowling pin shape to his physique. Those in the political world, however, knew him as both a brilliant tactician and a world class 'actor,' when the occasion called for it.

He stood next to the state prison system Chairman, Steve Baker, who he had been conferring with.

The Governor's face was so somber it almost evoked the tone of a religious experience.

"When you go out there," he said to the Chairman, "Don't be apologetic to these fucking idiots, Steve. Acknowledge their concerns, yeah. Don't dismiss anything they say, even when you know it's total bullshit, but you cannot be apologetic to 'em ..."

Minutes later Governor Phelps stood at a podium in an assembly room of gleaming parquet floors adorned with authentic hand woven rugs from every corner of the globe. He stood before an audience of about four hundred, almost as comfortable as he would be standing at his own dinner table.

The spectators included political VIP'S, press, junior politicians and concerned citizens. Seated behind the Governor on the podium were local dignitaries, including a local Mayor and Steve Baker, the Central Corrections Department Chairman he'd spoken to earlier, a man who was more than an colleague to Phelps, if not exactly a friend.

Wayne Phelps saw the platform for what it was, a stage. When he stood at the microphone he was a performer. His job was to placate, soothe, explain and often to entertain. With so many elements at play- in any political speech- truth was often the first casualty, like excess baggage to be dropped on the roadside. Phelps looked at the reporter on the second row who had just posed a question to him and gave the man his trademark smile.

"I feel like we've come a long way in addressing those concerns," he responded to him, "And I have full confidence in the administration we have in place ..."

"So to understand you, sir," the reporter followed up, "You don't believe a significant shift in policy is necessary?"

The question pricked Phelps like a needle, but he knew it was important to not hesitate when confronted with a question he resented. Instead he kept his eyes on the man and said, "My philosophy has never been to abandon the plan and revamp from the ground up. My grandma-ma had a saying. She called that 'throwing the baby out with the bath water!'"

There were a few accommodating laughs. Like any good politician Phelps could wear multiple hats. 'Good ole boy' and 'International finance expert' were just two of them.

Another reporter stood, but before Phelps could acknowledge him a third man shouted a question from the rear of the audience, "Governor, what about Grandon Hall Prison?"

The Governor processed the question that had been shouted. If the previous one had unsettled him, this one absolutely chafed his ass. Of course he'd predicted that this subject would come up but not that it would be brought directly to him when Steve Baker was obviously on hand to field the topic. It didn't help, either, that the son of a bitch had ignored all decorum and spoken over other people.

Again Phelps never paused or revealed any discomfort. He simply ignored the loud mouth asshole and motioned for the other reporter, the one who'd actually followed the established rules, to proceed.

"Governor," this reporter began, "Do you foresee an increase in the overall state budget in the near future?"

"We certainly hope so," Phelps nodded, "We believe we've been careful wards of the state trust. We see the need for increased funding in areas like Education, the Department of Transportation, and the upgrading of our public libraries and other state facilities."

"There's also been a call to improve some of the state's major highways and bridges ..." the reporter pointed out.

"Absolutely," Phelps jumped on that, "You might recall that my office was a leading proponent of 'Proposition Six' last year, which was responsible for the reconstruction of Freeland Bridge."

"Governor, what're you gonna do about Grandon Hall Prison?"

'Fuck you and Grandon Hall!' Phelps wanted to say, but, of course, that would have been irrational, as well as political suicide. Still smiling, he looked around the audience for the loud mouth and found him in the rear of the crowd, a square head with round glasses. "Governor, with all due respect -" the man piped up again. But this time Phelps cut him short.

"Sir, with all due respect," Phelps told him, "Please follow protocol and wait until you're acknowledged!"

He looked down at the man without glaring. There was a beat of uneasy silence. "Moving along," Phelps said, "I'd like to bring up Mister Steve Baker, Chairman of the Central Corrections Department ..." He fanned his gaze and smile through the crowd, sensing that it was time to lighten things up. "If I'm not mistaken," he quipped, "There's somebody out there with a question for him ..." There was a smattering of laughter that quickly subsided.

With that CCD Chairman, Steve Baker, stout, balding and anxious looking, stood from the rear of the stage and moved to the podium. When he reached the cluster of microphones Phelps stepped aside and moved back to the seats with the other dignitaries. Baker cleared his throat and glanced back at Phelps.

"Thank you, Governor ..." he monotoned.

He faced the audience and the loud mouthed reporter who had already stood to address him. With a reluctance that was obvious Baker recognized him, saying, "Sir, I'll be glad to hear your question."

Sounding exacerbated, the reporter said, "Yessir, I'd simply like to ask what changes are planned for Grandon Hall Correctional Institution. As you're aware, the facility was recently named as one of National Geographic's 'Ten Most Violent Prisons in America.'"

Baker gathered himself, "Well, first I believe that's malicious and unwarranted ... Of course, we recognize the challenges Grandon Hall faces ..."

"Five inmates killed by other inmates," the reporter referred to his notes, "Thirty assaults on staff by inmates- fifty allegations of criminal misconduct by staff, including providing drugs, weapons and other contraband items to prisoners. And all this in the past year!"

Baker raised a hand to slow him down, "Sir, I'm aware of the statistics and the allegations," he told the man, "I believe you wanted to hear about solutions ..." He paused then continued, "We'll be

implementing a program at Grandon Hall for officers that will offer incentive pay, while requiring more training and more accountability from them. We're also looking at increasing the number of officers at the facility."

He met the gaze of audience members, as his Management Training Public Speaking courses at the Department had taught him to do years ago. "We're confident that we can turn this thing," he said to the loud mouth and to the rest of the crowd, "We look at some of our other facilities like Burton, Chelsa and New Bratton as examples ..."

"But Mister Baker," the reporter came back, "Haven't both Chelsa and New Bratton both seen an increase in gang activity and violence- according to the expose?"

On the stage behind Baker, a light arced through Wayne Phelps' brain. It felt as sharp as a knife and just as damaging. The expert speaker in him generated the answers he would have given and how he felt Baker should respond. More importantly, he was already thinking of how he and his people could diminish the black eye this fucker was giving his administration.

At the mike Baker was taken back. He had not anticipated this criticism of his other prisons. "I'm not aware of any increases at those institutions..." Then he lost it a little, "Nor am I prepared to take this so called 'expose,' which no-one from my office participated in, as gospel!"

The rebuffed reporter fingered his tie nervously. When he spoke again his voice had a new humility, real or not. "I suppose the worst aspects of a story can get magnified sometimes," he said grudgingly, "And the positives can be overshadowed ... That's unfortunate..."

Baker still hadn't regained his footing. He stared at the man. "Yes ..." he said uncertainly, "That is unfortunate ... isn't it?" There was stark silence in the room then, no-one more quiet and contemplating than Governor Wayne Phelps.

TORRELL

The girl met every thrust Torrell gave and returned it. The darkness of the hotel room painted their bodies in images undefined, but it didn't matter. This was about feeling, not seeing. She caressed his chest, as he lifted her legs for better access. They switched and she climbed on top, moving at a frantic tempo. He reached out to squeeze her breasts. It was incredible, a feast of physical sensations eking throughout his body. Every swerve and grind of her hips drove him towards sexual euphoria.

"This is the happiest my pussy has been in a long time ..." she murmured above him.

"I aim to please ..." Torrell said, pushing deeper inside her. What his mind thought was, 'Whatever... ...'

In his mind connections unhinged while others formed. She leaned over him, kissed his lips and in that moment he came, suddenly, tremendously, almost violently.

Minutes later the night club Mona Lisa came out of the bathroom and poured herself into his arms. He loved it. Her skin was so smooth it felt almost like liquid. In the dim light from the bathroom her feline eyes were mesmerizing. There seemed to be something she wanted to say to him. For some

reason she never did.

He got home to his condo in Maywich Village a little before six that morning, still soaring high on male sexual ego gratification. Even as a man there was a part of him that had difficulty sometimes with the one night 'hit and runs,' the idea of being so intimate with another human being without being allowed to feel any emotion. He knew that he was never going to see or talk to her again. He went to his fridge, pulled out a platinum Bud light and turned it up.

Like he always did when returning home he grabbed the land line in his living room and sprawled on the couch to check his messages. He turned up the beer again as he scrolled down the caller id display. As he scanned his eyes grew wide. He felt a chill that was like icicle fingers creeping down his neck. He had ten messages, nine from his girlfriend, Natalia. The last one was at five twenty.

Natalia had never been the jealous type, so why was she telephone stalking him at five in the morning? Okay, she had caught him in a lie. He'd told her he was staying in like her. They'd been serious for about two years now. Things were going okay but something was missing. She had a great sense of humor, a great body, but the only real excitement and interest they seemed to generate lately was in the bedroom.

He knew he should call her. Obviously she was still awake and wondering where the fuck he was. Torrell was probably one of the few people in America under age forty who left his phone in the car when he got out of it. A 'missed call' just wasn't that serious to him and he honestly found the damn thing annoying at times, so he knew he had plenty of calls on it too.

He highlighted her number on the land line as he unbuttoned his shirt. Her phone rang. Seconds ticked by before he quietly ended the call. He was going to have to shoot her a lie and he just didn't feel up to it at the moment. He appreciated Natalia in the same way that he enjoyed his job and his life, but something was missing. He didn't know exactly what he wanted, but he knew what he needed.

Like many people who possess large amounts of ambition and talent, Torrell had outgrown his life. Now he was constantly bumping into the walls and ceilings of his self imposed limitations. He needed a life that would grow and keep pace with him, creating mental and physical challenges, as he needed them. Whenever he envisioned a perfect life his thoughts did not recognize boundaries of time and place. He knew it wasn't too late to make a change for something better.

There was the 'Torrell' his family and friends knew, the one they all had their own hopes and expectations of. And there was the man only he knew, the man who had no limits and no boundaries. This was the person his teachers had in mind years ago, the person they pointed to beyond the horizon with wide eyes and beaming smiles, the man Torrell hadn't achieved yet, had scarcely approached.

He loved the sky lights built into his living room ceiling. He liked sitting in his chair and staring up at the night sky. Sometimes, while sitting there, he would get into a thought pattern, a kind of positive affirmation that would resonate within him. The thought was always the same, 'better days, better days, better days...'

CHAPTER III

JASON

The city rotated and oscillated like a coin with a thousand faces, revealing different facets of life to different people. To hundreds of thousands of people, at any given moment, the turn of the coin brought happiness. To hundreds of thousands of others it brought unhappiness and despair. And still even more existed somewhere in between.

It was Friday night, eighty three miles outside of the city, and Jason Caufield was somewhere in between. The chick standing across from him in the yard, at the barrel fire, was giving him the eye. Jason was accustomed to being the object of women's attention. While girls and guys laughed and shot the shit over the flickering blaze he looked at the woman and tried to compute her merits. She seemed cool but didn't quite belong, it seemed to him. Most of the females at the party looked twenty to thirty something. She looked more like forty something and had the vibe of a bored housewife.

'What the fuck am I doing here?' Jason asked himself. His feet were planted firmly in adulthood now. These days he was more concerned with work, obligations, his son, Brice, and their outlook for the future than how to get in some girl's pants. Still he was only thirty and that meant there were going to be times when the twenty-something year old in him reared his unruly head, like tonight at the party. That was why he was here- the twenty-something year old's search for fun and distraction.

Some people described Jason as conceited. He preferred to say that he knew who he was, simple as that. He had blond hair, blue eyes and a wide grin that displayed perfect teeth. His six foot frame gave the impression of being layered in muscle. He had beefy pecs, biceps, forearms and thigh muscles that seemed to contract with his slightest movement. Simply by walking by he could be intimidating to other men, like an animal who was priming itself to attack.

At the party some people chilled on the big wrap-around porch of the house, while others sauntered around the yard talking and turning up brews. Jason Caufield stood at a barrel fire in the front yard with five other people, their faces illuminated by the glare of the flames, all of them laughing and passing around prime sticks of weed.

He lived in a small mill town, about eighty three miles from the city which was the state capitol. People who lived outside his town sometimes called it 'Hicksville.' Whether this was a label or stereotype the citizens of the small town wore the banner proudly. They loved their under populated streets, shopping malls and restaurants. They appreciated the slow pace, wide open spaces and the relative quiet. This was the best living America had to offer, as far as they were concerned, and no amount of slick urban sarcasm could convince them otherwise.

The bored housewife's body still looked tight and firm to Jason, like no-one had told it it was on the decline. She wore a black wool dress and black boots, stylish but sort of formal for an occasion that was not only informal, but not really an occasion at all. He checked the sparklers on her fingers and figured she might be free handed with the money too.

But tonight he just wanted to have fun, he wasn't trying to meet anybody. He stared just long enough to make her blush and look away. He was playing the game, but not to win, not tonight.

His cell pulsed in his front pocket and he pulled it out to check the display. He was surprised and a little annoyed. Why the hell was his cousin calling? After all he was right inside the house with the rest of the party people.

Jason hit talk and said, "Whassusp, kid?" Years ago BET, MTV, the 'Martin Lawrence' show and 'The Fresh Prince of Bel Air' show had accomplished something no amount of laws or legislation could, a merging of young black and white culture, including much of the music, slang and attitude. With the advent of these entertainment landmarks and the arrival of the computer age, there was now no area in America so remote that its citizens couldn't peek into the lives of other races and cultures all around the globe.

"Come holla at me, cuz," Jason's cousin said, "I'm in the lower level of the house, in the basement ..."

It sounded urgent. Jason shut off the phone and gave the woman in front of him at the fire a wink. "Don't do nuthin I wouldn't do ..." he told her, then headed for the house, leaving one disappointed housewife behind.

There were people lounging everywhere outside, smoking 'trees' and turning up drinks. There were guys freaking girls, girls freaking girls, not fucking but pretty much everything else. Jason passed people in the front yard, on the porch and inside the house, giving and receiving fist bumps, because he knew most of them.

Down in the basement he saw his cousin, Brody, hanging out with a dozen or so other people at a regulation sized pool table. His cousin looked like a younger much thinner version of Jason.

"Whassup, dude?" Brody, said as Jason approached. Both men's breath reeked from alcohol and marijuana. Jason took a long look at him, reading his eyes and demeanor. "Awww, shit ..." he said, "What the fuck you do, man?"

"Nuthin," Brody assured him, his eyes jumpy, "I just wanted you to meet somebody ... that's all."

Jason tried to give him the X ray, the look that always penetrated his bullshit but Brody turned away. Then, like a man on a mission, his cousin walked up to a skinny guy in the corner with a Mohawk and a disinterested scowl on his face. The man's teeth were ragged and misshapen like a jack o lantern's.

Brody looked at Mohawk. "Yo, this is my cuz, Jason ..." Jason thought it sounded more like a threat than an introduction. Mohawk looked at Jason and frowned like he'd tasted rancid food.

"What the fuck is this, cocktail hour?" he said, "What, we doing introductions?"

Jason had figured even before he met this guy that Brody had gotten himself into some shit and now wanted him to step in and be the 'intimidation factor.' They'd been doing this since they were ten and eight years old respectively. Brody, the big mouth joker and Jason, the intimidator, sometimes even the punisher.

Jason took Creatine supplements and could bench four hundred pounds. What most guys would call a fight would be light calisthenics for him. He couldn't remember the last time he'd been intimidated by anyone.

His cousin was puffing out his chest and Jason started to get an old and familiar feeling, like he was looking at a hurricane, waiting for it to slow so he could leap right into the eye of it. He still enjoyed the feeling sometimes, but not the way he used to years ago.

"Naw, it aint like that..." Brody said to Mohawk, "I just wanted you to meet my man, my cuz." Brody turned to Jason and muttered, "This dude's got motherfuckers at the front and back doors upstairs, saying I can't leave until I pay him five hundred dollars."

"I told you it'd cost you five hundred to rack 'em!" Mohawk explained.

"And I told you I wasn't with that bullshit," Brody insisted, "I don't shoot pool for fuckin money!" As their voices rose everyone in the room took notice. Even guys on the pool table paused their game to see what was going to happen next.

Mohawk showed discolored teeth, "You say you don't shoot for money," he challenged Brody, "But you still racked 'em, dint you?!"

"I was playin' for fun!"

Mohawk stepped away from the wall. When he moved forward Jason moved also, so that he was right beside his cousin. Mohawk's eyes were locked on Brody. "I guess losing aint no fun, huh?" he hissed, "You owe me five. I don't care if you bring your muscle headed cousin, your daddy, your uncle-!"

Jason raised a hand, "Whooooa ..." he said, "Let's not go there, bro. This is just a misunderstanding ... that's all. And you misunderstood, motherfucker." He turned deliberately to Brody and said, "Look, fuck all this talkin. I'm outta here. You comin' or what?"

Brody nodded like a happy kid. Jason stared at Mohawk, held the man's eyes when they tried to slide away, allowed him to see what would remain in him if the calm went away. He spoke emphatically to him, "We're outta here, dude."

Mohawk's words stuttered out like rapid fire, "So- so- somebody's payin me my money ..."

Jason looked at him in amusement now, "Yeah, bitch," he said, "Somebody might. But not us."

Calmly and nonchalantly they headed across the room to the stairs. On the ground floor they moved through the revelers, the meth heads and the drinkers. They headed through the living room. There were two long haired guys the size of NFL linemen standing in front of the door, their arms crossed. They looked and smelled as if they hadn't showered in weeks. Jason was still amused but he'd known the owner of the house since they were kids working together at burger joints. Out of respect for him (where-ever he was) he said to Brody, "Fuck it... we'll go out the other door ..."

They turned and walked through the kitchen to the back door.

There, at the back, two huge doughy looking guys with ponytails loitered. Like the other two, they looked like NFL linemen or Hell's Angels rejects. Jason walked a half step ahead of his cousin and stepped toward the door, his anger igniting. The men slid over to block his path. When they did that Jason saw the eye of the storm, opened his arms and prepared to leap. He only had one question for the behemoths, "Y'all sure about this?"

Before they could answer Jason grabbed the nearest one by the shirt and pants and hoisted him in the air like he weighed five pounds. He threw the man and the giant landed on his back ten feet away on a kitchen table. The table exploded under him like someone had tossed a grenade at it.

The man lay on the floor in the debris, writhing in pain.

The other reject's eyes bulged. He sheepishly withdrew from the door. It appeared to Jason that he even gave him a small bow as he stepped away. Jason glanced behind him. He saw Mohawk frantically duck behind an entertainment center.

Brody slapped him on the back and said, "Let's get the fuck outta here..."

Minutes later in Jason's ForeRunner the cousins laughed and celebrated as if they'd won medals in some 'Drunk- Out- The- Ass Olympics.' Brody turned up the iPod and danced and sang like it was the proudest moment in his life. After the initial burst of exhilaration, however, he went down in a drunken slumber, and Jason was left alone with his thoughts. It seemed that most times when he was drinking and went from a public to a private place, the alcohol hit him and he discovered he was drunker than he'd realized. Tonight seemed just the opposite, he found he wasn't as drunk as he'd thought.

He looked at his sleeping cousin and realized that this lifestyle had lost its appeal for him. The carefree work like a maniac, play like a maniac and don't stop drinking until you pass out shit –with video games in between- that he'd been doing since high school. It had gotten really, really old.

The brightest parts of his life now were the times spent with his five year old son, Brice. Jason called him "Little B." There was drama in his life threatening to spoil that, but he wasn't going to let that happen. His ex girlfriend, Sindy, had custody but Jason saw his son often and talked to him at least once a day. His life wasn't bad. He had a decent job. He'd been rebuilding transmissions at an engine and tranny shop for about two years now. The only drawback was that he worked on commission and the work wasn't always consistent. In a good week he could make as much as two grand, but on a mediocre week, he might make a third of that. Still restlessness was growing inside him that had nothing to do with the job or money.

Maybe he needed a change. Maybe it was time for something different. He was almost never broke and he rented one of the nicest Brownstones on his street, three bedrooms. He had plenty of homeboys and homegirls (including some female friends who came with nice fringe benefits.) But something was missing. Something was calling him.

Was it West Mariner's road, the main highway leading in and out of town? In the car Jason blasted Radiohead's Sail To The Moon on the iPod. He reached a stop sign at the intersection of West Mariner. With his cousin snoring beside him, he wondered, just for the sake of wondering, what would happen if he turned left instead of right, the direction he was supposed to go in, hit the gas- and never looked back.

NIKKI

She was unstoppable. She was on top of the world. There are things that nourish the physical earth, like rain, seed and sunlight and there are things that nourish the spiritual earth. Like the laughter of the young and young at heart. Twenty seven year old Nikki Rogers and her best friends, Tammy and Andrea, walked into the store about eight that Friday night, the way they walked into most places, confident and carefree, the sound of their laughter peaking high with the

exuberance of the young.

Nikki gave her friends a look and repeated the punch line from a movie they'd seen the previous night, "Me! Me! Me!" Like before the other women erupted into laughter. Not only were the three of them so gorgeous it was difficult for men to take their eyes off them, but the fact that they were laughing uncontrollably drew even more attention to them.

Nikki, at five three, was the shortest. Her face was slightly round with flawless coffee colored skin. Her brown eyes had a slightly Eastern slant that gave her an exotic look. She had naturally long hair that she'd been wearing in "micro braids" lately, and a slim but beautifully curvaceous body.

The three friends considered themselves not only more attractive than most but more clever. Their jokes, they figured, were beyond the grasp of "average people." Likewise, they felt, their fashion styles would only be fully understood by others long after they had moved on to the 'the next thing.' They were on another level, they believed, and the world was theirs.

The store was an upscale boutique called Fanfare, located in a trendy part of the city full of one of a kind shops, cafes and bars. Fanfare, moreso than any of the other establishments in the area, was a world market with rattan furniture from Singapore, handcrafted stoneware from Africa, and other unique items from around the world. Being young women, Nikki and her friends were interested in a more personal product line, jewelry.

Entering the store they gravitated toward an aisle that showcased beautiful singular creations of pearls, jade, opal and other exotic gem stones.

"You won't do it," Tammy, a well endowed read head with a tiny waist, said with a cryptic smile on her face.

"I already did it, bitch," Nikki reminded her, "Whassup, you still doubting me?"

"Yeah," Andrea challenged her, "You did it once, once upon a time..." Andrea was thin, skinny really, with deep chocolate skin like Nikki. The other women sometimes called Andrea "Lips and Eyes," because hers were amazing.

"Me and Drea did it lots of time," Tammy pointed out. They were giggling, giddy. Nikki walked slightly ahead of her friends, cutting her eyes back at them. "Just shut up and follow the leader," she told them.

The other two knew the routine and knew their roles. There were four Middle Eastern workers in the store, all of whom apparently ran the cash registers, as well as stocked, three guys and one female, all in their thirties.

These employees lingered around four cash registers at the front of the store. When Nikki, Andrea and Tammy heard the female worker announce, "I'm gonna take my break ..." they knew it was on.

Tammy approached the men inquiring about some obscure item the workers had never heard of. She did whatever it took to keep their attention, giving them lots of eye contact and leaning slightly over the counter at the register so that her 'upper assets' protruded. She slid her tongue innocently over her lips once or twice as one of the men told a meaningless story about how his father came up with the concept for the store.

At the same time, in the middle of the store, Andrea made a show of sorting through a rotating display of pearls, supposedly trying to make her choice. What she was really doing was shielding Nikki from the workers and the view of the camera pointed in their direction.

Nikki knew what to do. She plucked a few choice necklaces of genuine stones off a display, and with the speed of a sleight of hand artist, slid them into her bra. It felt to her that her heart was beating loudly enough to shake the earth. It was incomprehensible to her that no-one could hear it pounding. She absorbed this initial rush of fear and held on until it passed.

In a brief second or two she was done. Now it was time to put the finishing touches on the farce. She and Andrea met Tammy at the front of the store where the men were yapping a mile a minute, all of them competing for her attention. "I couldn't find anything for the party," Nikki told Tammy.

"And they don't have anything in emerald ..." Tammy responded, "So we might as well roll."

"Ladies, ladies, beautiful ladies!" one of the men exclaimed, "Before you 'roll,' promise you'll come again. You know, we get new items in every week."

Nikki served up her sweetest smile, "We'll be back," she assured him, "You guys have some incredible stuff, just not what we need for this event."

"Not a problem, babe," another of the men said, "We promise we'll try harder next time ..."

With that the trio walked out of the store. They had barely reached Nikki's red Jeep Cherokee, thirty feet down the curb, before their squeals of delight and triumph began. "I told y'all skanks!" Nikki boasted, "As long as y'all live don't ever-"

She was interrupted by a voice behind them, a demanding voice that virtually pulled the ground from under her feet.

"Excuse me, ladies!"

Nikki turned to see the female employee from the store, one male worker and a large black man in a security uniform, all trotting toward them. The trio froze like their feet were stuck in cement.

The security guard's face was set like rock. His chest seemed to expand as he reached them. "Ladies ..." he said, "We gotta problem ..." Nikki reached for her car door. Under the circumstances it was definitely the wrong thing to do.

"Please- don't do that, ma'am," the security guard warned her, "The police are on the way right now."

Thirty minutes later they were being processed at the City Police Department. Nikki, Andrea and Tammy followed the directions of a bull headed veteran policeman: "Stand for a photo." "Gimme your hand for fingerprints." Nikki was in a daze. There were dozens of people being escorted to desks, offices and cubicles. She thought most of them seemed amused by the presence of her and her friends. She couldn't collect her thoughts. It was like she had separated from herself and become another person, someone strong enough to withstand this ordeal.

All three women were petrified but they still giggled a little and presented superficial confidence.

In a section in the rear of the station marked 'Processing' there were partitioned booths where officers were taking information from suspects. The large headed cop took a seat at a desk in one of the booths and had them sit in front of him. There were only two small metal chairs. Andrea chose to stand. The policeman gave them a look of disdain. He was chewing something Nikki didn't want to identify. He told them to recount everything that had happened at Fanfare.

Lying at that point was futile since a female officer had already searched them and recovered the stolen jewelry. The cop also made it clear that they'd all conspired to commit the theft, so they were all guilty of it, regardless of who actually had the evidence in her bra. He asked them a few innocuous questions, allowing the women to talk, embellish and lie as they saw fit.

As they talked he scribbled on a note pad, occasionally glancing up in a derisive fashion at whichever one of them was speaking. After about thirty minutes a woman entered the booth in a plain blue dress. Even in her simple attire there was no mistaking that she was a police officer, a detective. She nodded at the bull headed policeman. She looked at the three women as if she had bought and paid for them. She had a square face, a small disapproving mouth and tiny blue eyes that unnerved Nikki.

"I'm Detective Sanford," she said, her tone one hundred percent formal and officious, "Come with me ..."

CHAPTER IV

TORRELL

Damn. The dream again. Sometimes it varied. Sometimes Torrell's father would scream at him, "Get back! Get back!" Sometimes Torrell held him as he died and literally watched him disintegrate into ashes. But his last words were always the same, exactly what he'd said as he lay dying in their driveway that day. "You won't make the mistakes I made ..."

The dream kept returning, because it was his mind's 'unfinished business.' It was never completely accurate, of course. It would never be. It was a dream, some miscued interpretation derived from Torrell's conscience, his desires and God only knew what else.

He woke at ten pm. that night. His sleep patterns were all fucked up. He got up around six each morning, had his shower, shave and shit- and was at work each day by eight fifteen with a bottle of juice and a protein bar. He rarely needed an alarm clock, he just woke up.

After work he'd come home, grab a shower and then hang out with Grant, Natalia, David, (a buddy from the fitness club), or some other friends. After that he'd return home and watch tv but usually in less than a hour he'd be out. He would nap for about two hours most nights then wake up and work out in the gym he'd set up in his den. Afterwards he'd try watching tv again, more successfully this time, and then turn in for good usually between one and two in the morning.

Torrell wasn't exactly the whistle- while- you- work type but he'd always been optimistic about life. Lately, though, he was snapping at people for no good reason, even on the job. Grant told him he was out growing the job. Maybe he was right. His day to day duties varied greatly. It was obvious to everyone that Grant utilized him for work that was more upper level than the jobs the rest of the firm asked him to do. Gandy and the other attorneys, for example, regularly had Torrell file papers, answer phones and handle their daily itineraries. Grant, on the other hand, had him draft legal documents like complaints, subpoenas and disposition notices, as well as actually interviewing clients and witnesses. He'd even gotten Torrell out of the office twice to sit at the defense table with him at trials.

For about a year he'd been encouraging Torrell to consider law school. He insisted that Torrell had the mind for it and that, while not an overly talkative person, he had a unique way of turning phrases and talking through problems.

Meanwhile, the lead attorney at the firm, Thomas Gandy, took Torrell aside earlier that day in a conference room. He began by expressing how much he and the other attorneys admired his work ethic. Then he asked Torrell if anything was wrong. Torrell assured him that he was cool, as cool as he'd ever been. Then Gandy asked, in all sincerity, if he still enjoyed working at the firm.

If this had come from anyone else Torrell would've taken it as some kind of bullshit veiled threat. But he knew Gandy better than that. First the older man seemed to genuinely like him. Secondly he wasn't hesitant about speaking his mind (unless in a courtroom). When he asked that question Torrell actually had to think about it for a second or two. Naturally he was compelled to say, 'Yeah, I still enjoy working here ...' Later, all that evening and night, he struggled with the honest answer.

NIKKI

Nikki and her friends walked behind the female detective in the downtown Police Substation. A male uniformed officer trailed behind the three young women. They entered a large room that had cement walls and no windows. In the center of it was a twenty foot table surrounded by metal chairs. Nikki noticed two small triangular cameras that extended from opposite corners of the ceiling, with pin point sized green lights pulsing inside the housing of them.

The detective made an impatient shooing gesture prompting them to be seated. She nodded to the male uniformed cop, letting him know he was dismissed. She had this. Besides, there were two other detectives monitoring everything, via the cameras, on the other side of that cement wall.

For one minute that felt more like thirty to Nikki the detective stood in front of them saying nothing, just holding a clipboard and fanning that disapproving gaze over them, while pursing her thin disapproving lips. The young women were uneasy but that didn't stop them from smirking, snickering and basic feelinging that all this was beneath them.

"What is it you guys want?" the detective finally addressed them. The trio exchanged looks, smiles. "No, really," the woman said, "You're not criminals. So what is it y'all want? Street cred? An adrenalin rush? To embarrass your mommies and daddies?"

Nikki laughed out loud, without knowing why. The woman glared at her like she wanted to rip her throat out. "Let me clue you little girls in on something," she went on, "You are no longer

'tweenies', 'teenies' or any of that cute shit. You're grown women who conspired to commit grand theft. We gotchu on camera with about three thousand dollars worth of jewelry in your perfumed boobies! Now who still thinks this is a fucking joke?"

She waited for them to respond while they struggled not to look terrified. Nikki experienced a hopeless feeling like someone submerged in the ocean. But her impulse was to continue to smile and try to look confident. Meanwhile Andrea turned to Tammy and muttered under her breath, "Oooh, girl, I am so 'scared straight!'"

The detective turned on her, "Bitch," she said, "You wanna be a comedian? I'll throw your ass in jail so fast it'll make your head spin! Try me!"

Her eyes were on fire. The trio was subdued. For the moment. None of them wanted to "try" the detective. Suddenly the woman's tone softened, "Ladies," she spoke slowly now, "Trust me, this is not what you want. This is where we keep the bad asses! You don't get time off here for your pretty faces or perfect tit to ass ratios." She seemed pleased when none of them offered a response.

"Fanfare has declined to press charges," she told them, "So has my Captain. Looks like y'all got your 'get outta jail free' cards. Please don't take this to mean that the world revolves around you and your magnificent twats, cuz it don't ... You just got lucky this time."

"Ass, tits, twats," Tammy mumbled, cutting her eyes toward Andrea and Nikki, "I think somebody's got a 'magnificent' obsession ..." Giggles bubbled up inside Andrea. She struggled to hold them in. Nikki snickered too but it wasn't real for her now. Out of the three she was the one most hearing the detective's words and feeling their intent. She could behave like her friends and when they were together she did, but there were plenty of differences between the three. Nikki had been her high school's valedictorian, with a perfect four- point- o average through most of her years there. She'd also had the third highest SAT score in the state.

Detective Sandford threw up her hands at Tammy's wise cracks. "You know what?" she said, "I hope I see your fake Barbie doll asses again! See if that bullshit sarcasm saves you next time. Get the fuck outta here! The Processing officer up front'll release you!"

The three rose. They started toward the door, with Andrea leading the way. "Shit, my knees are shaking so bad," she said in a low voice, "I don't know if I can walk ..." The detective chose to ignore her.

Andrea and Tammy walked out of the room, errant bursts of giggles still erupting from them. They were royalty, after all, they expected to win. Nikki lingered slightly behind. "Y'all go ahead," she told her friends, "I'm coming ..."

The other girls paused, 'What're you doing?' the words half formed on their lips. They gave her more questioning looks. Finally they started away.

"Hurry up," Tammy said, louder than necessary, "This place stinks!" As they walked away Nikki turned to find Detective Sanford staring impatiently at her, arms crossed. She read the detective's eyes to say, 'Fuck you bitches!' She had no more time for them. "What is it?" she snapped at Nikki.

Nikki's eyes darted away from her heated gaze. "I wanted to apologize," she explained, "For what we did ... and for the way we acted just now."

Sanford was skeptical. "You don't need to," she said, her lips pressed tight, "The charges were dropped, remember? You got off!"

For a second Nikki was strangely close to tears, then she regained her composure. "What is it you want?" Sanford repeated, her tone bruising and harsh. At that point she was anxious to have the young woman out of her sight.

"I wanna apologize," Nikki insisted, "We acted like fucking kids... Plus I wanted to ask you a question, if you don't mind ..." Sanford looked at her, saying nothing. "What makes you, as a woman, wanna do a job like this?" Nikki asked her.

They faced each other. Anger, resentment and conflicted feelings still filled the air. Nikki imagined the detective lunging at her and putting her in a choke hold. Instead, as she watched, Sanford's stern demeanor changed. She very nearly smiled. They were at the door of the interrogation room.

"Have a seat if you want ..." she said to Nikki. Even her voice was different. They took seats on opposite sides of the table.

"It's not about being a woman," she said to Nikki, "Not for me, it's about being a human being. See, I fucked up too when I was younger, trying to decide what to do with my life. I was sorta like y'all, but a lot younger, and a whole lot badder than you guys are trying to be. Nowhere near as pretty, though ..."

Nikki blushed at the compliment. "That's why," Sanford said, "That weak ass performance y'all were giving pissed me off. I mean, I know 'hard' and y'all aint hard! When I was going through my own 'stages,' doing dumb stuff, a friend of my mom's, a college professor, tried to do for me what I was trying to do for y'all ... Looking back now, she actually changed my life."

Nikki listened, waited. She wondered what her parents would say if they knew she was here, not actually in a jail cell, but in jail. She wondered what her older brother Arthur, a college Professor, would think. He was her mother's biological child, not her father's. Maybe that was why Arthur never seemed to completely accept the ready-made sibling his mother had taken on when she married Nikki's dad. He was twelve then and Nikki was four. Their relationship had always seemed 'polite' and strained to Nikki, even when she was a little girl. He had his own family and career. He rarely visited or called, and when he did call her it had the feel to her, of someone fulfilling an obligation. *

A classic tale of crime, punishment and triumph. Torrell Grogan is on a journey of self discovery. He's agreed to work at the state's most notorious prison as a Correctional Officer, with the hidden agenda of finding the reasons why the facility has seen such a surge of gang activity, violence, inmate and employee corruption. His attempts will take him to the depths of human depravity and teach him lessons about himself and the true nature of humanity.

Werewolves in the City of Alleys - Bibliophiles in Hyderabad can now attend the city's 33rd annual book fair, which opened its doors on Monday and will go on till January 1, The Routledge Handbook of Anthropology and the City: 1st - Turkish Airlines Â® Street Book - City of Boston - Dublin: One City, One Book encourages everyone to read a book connected with the capital city during the month of April every year. Powell's City of Books at Burnside - Powell's Books - Welcome to Books and The City, the home of female fiction. County and City Data Book, 2007: A Statistical Abstract - He eventually finds himself in a bewildering city of foreign customs, peculiar animals, curious floating objects and indecipherable languages. With nothing more One Book, One New York - MOME - NYC.gov - Independent Booksellers London Palo Alto City Library - Buzzing with excitement, book lovers from across the city gathered at the 33rd Hyderabad book fair that boasts of 330 book stalls and is Book Review: Shoup Passes the Torch With Parking and the - ... Craft in Art, 1950â€“2019, at the Whitney Museum of American Art, in New York City. Â© Liza Lou. Courtesy the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City. Secure Parking: Car Parking, Commercial, Long Term, All Day - â€ˆâ€ˆâ€ˆâ€ˆâ€ˆt's hard to describe how gorgeous and intricate this fantasy novel is." - SYFY Wire â€ˆ" The City of Brass reads like an invitation for readers from Baghdad to Book us! - The City at Eye Level - NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY THE LOS ANGELES TIMES, THE SEATTLE TIMES, AND PUBLISHERS WEEKLY When a murdered A Burglar's Guide to the City - In early 2012, we started the project that would become The City at. Eye Level: Lessons for Street Plinths, a book that was published by the end of that year.

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