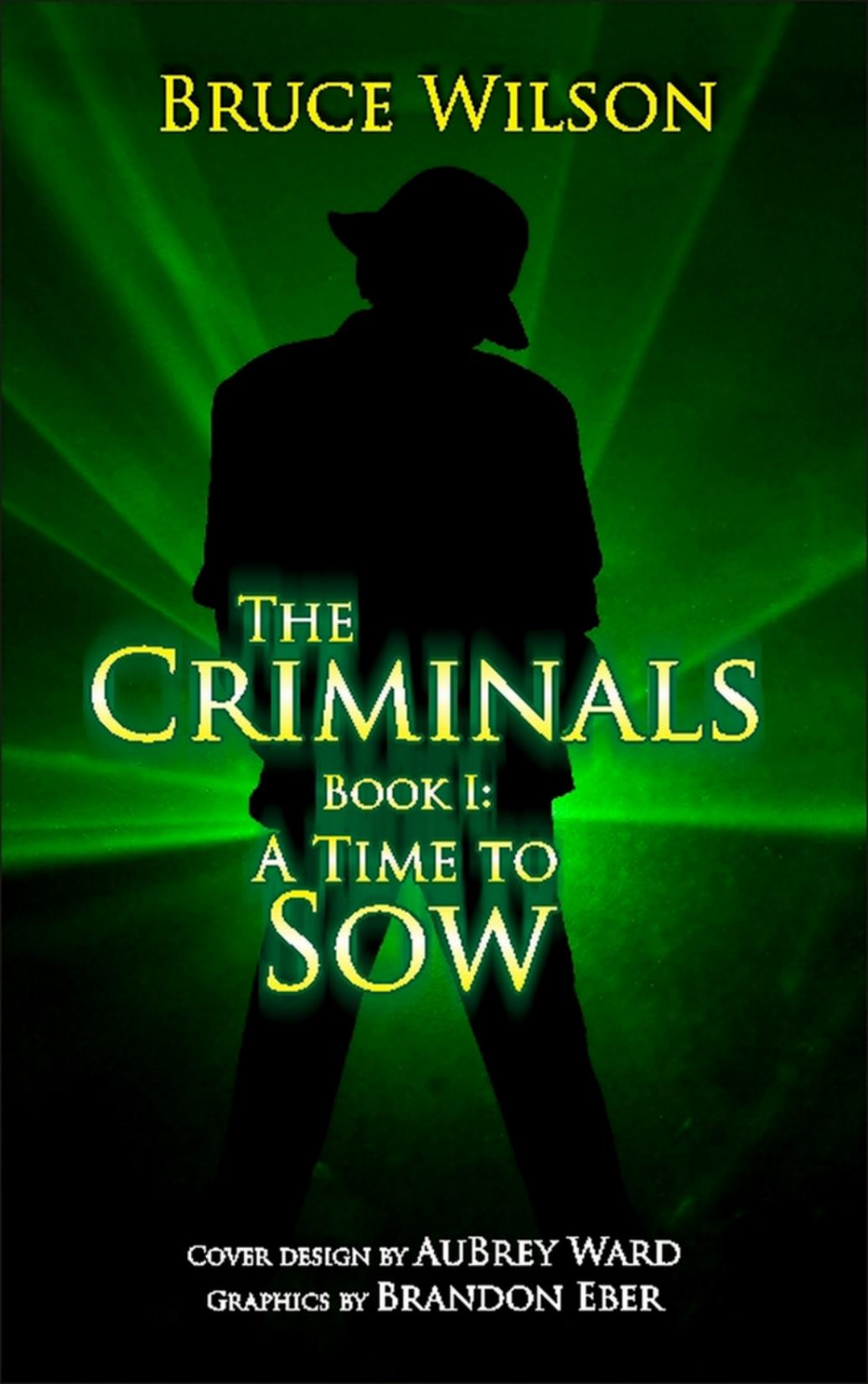


BRUCE WILSON

The background is a vibrant green with several bright green light rays emanating from behind the central figure. The figure is a black silhouette of a man wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a jacket, standing with his back to the viewer. The text is overlaid on this scene.

THE
CRIMINALS

BOOK I:
A TIME TO
SOW

COVER DESIGN BY AUBREY WARD
GRAPHICS BY BRANDON EBER

The Criminals

Book I

A Time To
SOW

Bruce Wilson



Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.

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U.S. Regional Coordinator – World Fashion Organization,
President – Palm Springs Fashion Council

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A TIME TO SOW

Prologue

It was the time of year when salmon left their habit in the sea to surge up the raging river, defying the resistance, in pursuit of pools in which to spawn. It was also the season when the birds of the air flew about gathering the necessities to prepare their nests one twig at a time.

It was spring when Orion Jackson left his habitat of the Arkansas Correctional Facility. He faced the raging rivers of challenges, defying the resistance that confronts underdogs in the mainstream of life. He pursued the solace of a pool where he could spawn his aspirations and goals. He had to gather the tools to prepare the nest of his empire one twig at a time.

At the prime age of twenty-eight, Orion was mentally and emotionally equipped for the colossal challenges on his plate. He was physically equipped as well. A towering six feet three inches, he was supported by a lean, athletic frame. His radiant caramel complexion was

complemented with divinely sculpted features that accentuated his light brown eyes with a golden hue. He wore his black hair short, with wavy spirals like ripples on a glassy pond.

Orion was fortunate to have a nest egg to help catapult him toward his quest. While he was locked up in prison, his grandmother passed away and left him a sizable estate in California, which he sold to afford himself several hundred thousand dollars to play with. He'd gravitated toward the urban illegal trade market, investing in guns, drugs, and prostitutes. The rough streets had groomed him for this endeavor, and he was confident that he could do anything he wanted by dealing in those three commodities, but he felt it was necessary to relocate to California to fully achieve his goals.

Guns had always intrigued him. He considered a gun a vital extension to a man's extremities, giving him the option to use it as a deterrent to encourage others to behave themselves. Alternatively, he could use it as a deadly instrument to avoid a problem that he chose not to tolerate.

He found the enormous wealth and power generated by drug sales to be nothing short of exhilarating. He was also fascinated with the erotic magic that a prostitute could perform simply with lips, hips, and fingertips that compelled gullible men to depart eagerly with their hard-earned cash.

He pursued his dreams of great fortune driven by passion and relentless determination, both essential ingredients for monumental success. However, he carried a

heavy burden on his back that compromised his manhood. While incarcerated, he was sexually assaulted repeatedly by three ruthless convicts who overpowered him. That perverted memory tormented him every time his private door cracked open. He was acutely aware that the demoralizing bones that hung in his closet would never completely go away on their own. He wouldn't be able to reclaim his life fully until all the culprits responsible for the brutal violation each made atonements for their misdeeds. He planned to take care of that personally. He was determined to deprive all of them of their worthless lives.

Orion was fortunate to have the meticulous task of orchestrating the infrastructure of his underworld ventures with a criminally brilliant mind. He'd also reunited with his homeboy, Corey Jones, who had been stuck with a menial job going nowhere. After a brief conversation, he learned of Corey's academic achievements while doing time in prison. He had successfully majored in business, obtaining his associate's degree, and his skills with a computer only added more icing on the cake.

Orion's prudent calculations quickly assessed Corey to be a valuable asset to his black-market enterprise. He considered him a magic genie that needed to be freed from the confines of a bottle to help him manifest the wishes and dreams that his craving heart sought.

* * *

Los Angeles, California

The blazing sun beamed down mercilessly on the old

metal warehouse where Corey Jones worked as inventory manager. His dark ebony skin glistened, and his shaven head beaded with perspiration. His five-foot-nine, well-toned physique was folded upright on the seat of the forklift as he skillfully maneuvered to unload the shipment that arrived earlier that morning. Invisible fumes tooted from the exhaust of the propane-powered Clark machinery as he operated the sturdy vehicle to distribute the cargo on the warehouse floor efficiently.

Corey paused from his duties when he observed his boss approaching with a grim expression. His strides were steady, but Corey sensed reluctance in his pace, as if he resented going where he was ultimately headed. Perplexed lines creased above his brow, and he leaned forward to shut the engine off.

An eerie silence loomed in the warehouse when the droning sound of the motor ceased. Footfalls announced his boss's sullen approach in the quiet stillness. Corey wiped his brow with the back of his hand, consumed with exasperation. Sweat dripped from under his arms when he crossed them over his chest.

Corey watched his boss's slow but inevitable approach and saw his gaze dart aimlessly around the warehouse in an obvious attempt to avoid eye contact. Corey braced himself for the imminent bullshit. The dreadful footsteps came to a halt.

His boss leaned back on his heels and cleared his throat as he summoned courage to deliver the information. He looked up and caught Corey's gaze. "You're doing fine. Check the invoice against the inventory, and

then clock out for today,” he said in a gravelly, low-pitched voice.

Immediately, Corey checked his watch, and alarm glinted in his eyes. “It’s only twelve o’clock. I still have tons of inventory to log, and I gotta—”

“I’m not concerned with that right now. It’ll have to wait,” his boss sharply interjected and then cast his gaze down to the warehouse floor. He resented having to cut back Corey’s hours so drastically, but the recession was strangling the life out of business.

Corey knew that a rebuttal would be useless. His eyes blazed and stared somewhere beyond his boss. He shrugged, fumed a little, leaned down to fire up the forklift, and then stomped on the accelerator, leaving his boss standing there with his mouth hung open in a plume of invisible exhaust.

It was beginning to be downright crucial for Corey. His hours had been sliced and diced to less than twenty a week at a mediocre hourly rate. How was he expected to take care of his six-year-old son, his four-year-old daughter, and his baby mama on the peanuts that they tossed at him? He studied his ass off in prison to better his education and sharpen his vocational skills. And what happened? That effort turned around and kicked him squarely in the butt.

His boss stood in his office and peered out of the fixed glass window as he watched Corey storm out of the warehouse with anger scribbled on the features of his face. A man with Corey’s skills and qualifications were invaluable in the workplace. He regretted that he

couldn't give him full-time hours and dreaded losing such an important asset, but he was paralyzed by the economic crunch and had no other options but to downsize work hours to the bare minimum. His eyes drooped with remorse as he forced himself to turn from the window.

Corey plopped down in the seat of his Ford Focus and vented a hefty dose of his anger by slamming his car door. It sounded like the muffled blast of a shotgun. He jammed his key in the ignition and then clicked it on and held his breath while the gas gauge lazily moved to less than a quarter of a tank. He banged the steering wheel with his palm, venting pent-up frustration. Fortunately, he lived only a few blocks away.

His financial situation had become a ridiculous circus act. He was now a professional at walking a tightrope while juggling past due bills over his head. He was tired of jumping through hoops and going nowhere in the redundant process. What was he to do? He'd contemplated looking for evening part-time work, but looking for work was a full-time job in itself that required a lot of time and an enormous amount of patience.

While driving, he suddenly realized that his grip on the steering wheel had tightened to a stranglehold and his teeth gritted audibly. He took a deep breath, then blew it out nice and slow in an effort to calm himself. Having turned on his street, he swooped into the driveway, over the sidewalk, and when he spotted it, it was already too late. He plowed right over his son's bicycle. The screech and whine of twisting metal infuriated him.

He muttered an elaborate chorus of profanity through tightly clenched teeth.

He leaped out of the car and once again slammed the door with excessive force. He marched to the front of the vehicle, leaned down, then violently yanked the mangled metal from beneath the undercarriage of his car and slung it haphazardly across the yard.

He approached his house with a frown deeply embedded on his face. He lived in a small two-bedroom house constructed in the fifties. The simple box-shaped structure resembled a basic bungalow, much like the rest of the houses that were in that impoverished section of Los Angeles.

The enticing smell of dinner emanated from inside the house, but it did very little to alter his sour disposition. He opened the door, and the heat from the cooking hit him like a blast from the Sahara Desert. A small oscillating fan was propped on the dinette table adjacent to the kitchen. It whirled as it blew the scorching air around the room. The lines on Corey's face deepened.

Laurie, his baby mama, heard the front door close, so she peeped out of the kitchen. Her hair was pulled back into a ponytail, and a small wisp of loose strands fell across her attractive face. She gazed at Corey quizzically. "What's up, babe? What are you doing home? I didn't know you were coming home early," she said with perspiration beaded on her nose.

Corey regarded her with an obnoxious glare. "Duh! Well that's just one of the many things that your stupid butt didn't know," he snarled.

Laurie's mouth fell open. Instinctively, her hand went up to the base of her throat as she recoiled from the harsh reply. Quickly, she perceived that there had been problems at work. She accepted the verbal abuse as a warning to tread with caution before she found herself sinking in a quagmire of misdirected fury.

Corey regretted his words as soon as he said them. What he had said was cruel and uncalled for. He hated to bring his problems at work home with him. Laurie was hurt. She peered at the man, loving him, yet fearing his rage. Corey avoided her gaze. He'd have to apologize later. He couldn't face her now. Things were too crazy. He felt volatile and didn't want matters to get worse.

Abruptly, he made a 180-degree turn and walked right back out the front door. Laurie ran behind him and stopped in the open doorway. Her mouth opened and closed, but failed to articulate a single word.

As Corey strode across the yard, he glanced over and saw the heap of crumpled metal that once was his son's bicycle and experienced a surge of rekindled anger. No way would he be able to replace it any time soon.

"I need a cold can of beer. Yeah, that's the bizness," he declared out loud.

Feeling determined, he headed for the store with the coldest beer in town. He rolled to a stop neatly between the lines in the parking lot of the liquor store. He glided his gear into park and shut the engine off. The windows in his car vibrated from the pulsating bass line of the blaring sound system in the shiny BMW 750i, straight off the showroom floor, parked next to him. Compulsively,

Corey bobbed his head to the banging beat of the music. With a cool nod of the head, Corey acknowledged the dude seated behind the wheel. Then, suddenly the decibels of the music lowered.

“Hey, Corey!” the guy called out.

Corey stopped, turned around, and peered into the BMW, but didn’t recognize the driver. The guy placed his hand out of the window in a “what’s up” gesture. Corey leaned forward and squinted his eyes for a better look. Immediately, his eyes brightened, and a big smile curled on his face. “Orion Jackson? Hell no, I know that ain’t you,” he said, genuinely surprised as he headed over toward him.

By the time Corey got there, Orion was out of the car and on his feet to greet him with a hearty embrace. The fragrance of expensive cologne registered as he stepped back and took a good look at Orion’s subtle, yet flamboyant, appearance.

“What the bizness is, my nigga?” Corey asked.

Orion smiled demurely. “Man, it’s the same ol’ crap. Just trying to survive.”

Corey gave him a miss-me-with-that-bullshit look. “Damn, dude, look like you blew the hell up since the last time I saw you.”

Orion modestly masked a grin. “Oh yeah, I’m doin’ a little something something.”

“Yeah, right, nigga. If you don’t knock it off. Your watch on your wrist is worth more than my Ford Focus, and I’m struggling to hold on to that,” Corey replied with a smirk.

Orion laughed dryly as he thoughtfully studied Corey's face. "How long have you been out?" he inquired.

"Of what? Prison?" Corey asked.

"Yeah, nigga. I sho' ain't talkin' 'bout the closet," Orion joked.

"You got me twisted, my nigga," Corey told him, as he playfully jabbed him in the chest with his finger. They both busted up laughing.

The merriment settled. Corey looked at Orion soberly. "I did three and a half years for some bullshit gun charge. I've been out now for about four months." There was a brief silence. "I got my AA degree in business management while I was doing my time. That's what I did do, my nigga. I'm serious about mine," Corey said, breaking the silence.

Orion arched a brow and pursed his lips. He was impressed. "We are gonna have to talk. We need to have a serious talk on some real shit," he told him, while he held Corey's gaze. "What did you come to the store for?" Orion asked.

"I need to go up in there and rob they ass, broke as a nigga is."

They both laughed. Corey regarded Orion seriously. "Nah, you know I wouldn't do no crazy shit like that. I'm just trying to chill, man. All I need is an ice-cold beer," Corey said.

Orion clucked his tongue as he pondered his thoughts. "Follow me. I've got beer and all that at home. I need to holla at you anyway."

Corey stood there motionless for a moment and appeared to be indecisive.

Orion's brows gathered. "What's wrong? Are you afraid to venture up in the hills? That's your problem now. You need to start thinking out of the box," he admonished.

Corey suddenly snapped out of it. "I feel you. I ain't trippin'. Let's go. I'll follow you," he told him. Then he spun around and went to get in his car.

Orion cranked up his car, and it growled like a tamed lion. He swiftly and efficiently converged into the flow of the afternoon traffic. Corey took off and lunged in behind him, pushing all four of his car's cylinders to their maximum performance. He had no idea where he was going or what specific hills Orion was referring to. He looked down to view his gas gauge and cringed. He was afraid to venture up in the hills, or anywhere for that matter, without enough gas.

As Corey followed, he noticed the sun reflecting brilliantly off the luxurious paint and gleaming chrome of Orion's car. He switched on his turn signal and followed him into the left lane. On a whim, Corey decided to tailgate closely behind Orion's car to complete the left turn after the light had changed red. This ridiculous she-nigan caused several impatient motorists to honk their horns at him as he turned. Corey flipped them off and pushed the gas pedal.

They traveled along Mulholland Drive, the major thoroughfare that served as an artery to the affluent Hollywood Hills. Corey observed that the houses were

becoming more expansive and stately. He marveled at the properties that had homes securely tucked away behind fortified cinder block walls covered with ivy vines. His heart raced with excitement, but when he glanced down at his gas gauge, his heart raced even faster.

They came to a stop in front of an elaborately designed wrought-iron gate. Corey anxiously tapped his left foot on the floorboard as he waited expectantly. The ornate gate gracefully glided open to allow their admittance to the grounds of Orion's estate.

Orion led Corey along a cobblestone driveway that displayed a vast manicured landscape graced with mature oak, elm, and poplar trees. Weeping willows were strategically situated amid the immaculate sprawling emerald-green lawn like beautiful, breathtaking canopies.

Nestled in the midst of the picturesque scenery was a Tudor-style mansion. The two-story edifice screamed money and lots of it. The extravagant beveled-glass windows dazzled with rainbow iridescence, which contrasted brilliantly against the mauve-colored stucco. The roof was designed with contoured geometrical hips, ridges, gables, and dramatic protruding dormers. Corey gazed around in complete wonderment, like a kid's first visit to Disneyland.

He followed Orion around the arched driveway, and they came to a stop under the porte-cochère. Colorful perennials bordered its edges. Beautiful tulips with large, showy, erect cup-shaped flowers and daffodils that

displayed huge blooms with trumpet-like centers arrayed the flowerbeds with brilliant colors.

Corey sat transfixed, taking in the pristine view. He was jarred away from his musing when Orion yelled, “What are you gonna do, sit there all day?”

Corey flinched, and his eyes fluttered. He turned the motor off and stepped out of the car. He slowly craned his neck to survey the opulence that surrounded him. “Wow, you’ve been doin’ the damn thang. I like this shit, my nigga,” Corey uttered breathlessly.

Orion formed a wide grin. “I believe in spreading the wealth, my brother. Feel me?” he asked as he led him along the pea gravel walkway embellished with polished stones.

The fragrance of the potted gardenias that lined the pathway infused the atmosphere with a delightful essence. The azaleas were in bloom, speckling the hedges with tiny pink and white flowers, and ferns flourished vigorously along the walkway with lush, green, feathery leaves.

“Damn, man, this is like walking through the rain forest. I’m just waiting for the monkeys to start swinging from the trees,” Corey joked. They both laughed.

Corey couldn’t conceal his astonishment when he saw the huge doors at the front entrance. The pair of twenty-foot-high, masterfully carved solid oak doors blew him away. They were appointed with exquisite oversized gleaming brass hardware.

Corey shook his head. “This house must have been built for basketball players.”

Orion glanced over at him. “No, my brother, it was built for giants. Can you feel me?” he asked.

Corey smiled and whistled through his teeth as he stepped over the threshold onto the hardwood floor in the spacious vestibule. An enormous colorful Persian rug splayed across the floor beneath a humongous crystal chandelier. Positioned prominently against the wall was a seven-foot grandfather clock that perfectly matched the wood grains of the fancy carved credenza that displayed rare and valuable novelties.

They walked across the plush carpet and up the marble spiral staircase. Orion led Corey to his office and opened the door ceremoniously. “I refer to this as my oval office, but you may have noticed it ain’t round.”

“Okay, Mr. President, I think I get your point,” Corey said as he ran his fingers along the wood cabinetry. “Not too shabby.”

The cabinets and shelves were beautifully handcrafted out of rosewood in artistic, intricate details. A subtle gurgling sound emanated from the aquarium that was recessed in the wall. Tiny air bubbles ascended to the tank’s surface as colorful exotic fish meandered in their aquatic environment.

Orion strode over and slid a cabinet door open that revealed a small refrigerator. He opened it and retrieved two cold Coronas. When he turned from the cabinet, Corey was seated at the computer.

“Hey, dude, what do you know about that?” he asked with a sly grin.

Corey swiveled around in the seat and accepted the

cold beer. "Computers are my life now. I took a gang of computer courses as electives in my college studies while I was locked up," he said.

Orion held out his beer. "Hold that thought a minute. Let's make a toast to our reunion. This is to champagne wishes and caviar dreams," he announced.

Corey raised his beer, and their bottles collided with a dull clink. He turned up his beer and guzzled. It was damn near finished when he lowered it from his mouth.

Orion eyes widened in mock surprise. "Damn, dog. You must have been thirsty as hell."

"Yeah, man, I've got some issues. My job is slowly dying, and it keeps me thirstin' for more money."

Orion studied Corey's face thoughtfully before he spoke. "I have a spot open for a man with your qualifications, and it pays quite handsomely, I must say."

"I'll take it!" Corey said without hesitation.

Orion held his hand up. "Whoa, pump your brakes, brother. I assume you know I'm not going door to door trying to sell vacuum cleaners to gullible housewives."

With a baffled expression, Corey looked up at him like a student in class who forgot to do his homework. He was stuck for a moment, and then he asked, "What type of business are you in?"

Orion looked him straight in his eyes. "I sell guns, dope, and beautiful prostitutes," he told him with a smug smile.

A lump developed in Corey's throat the size of a golf ball. He paused for a moment and then swallowed deeply. "Well, it looks like it pays the bills and leaves you

with money to burn,” Corey said as he looked around the lavishly decorated office.

Orion caught his gaze with a stern look. “Where much is given, much is required, my nigga. The position that I have available ain’t for no soft-ass dude,” he told him. Then he took a swig of his beer.

Corey bolted upright in his seat. His posture epitomized masculinity. “Ain’t nothing soft about me, except my smooth executive hands that have a lightning fast trigger finger,” he told him, while he held up both of his hands and admired them.

Orion laughed to himself and regarded him with approval. “You know, you must be clairvoyant or something. It’s like you read my mind. You are seated right where I need you, at the computer. I know a little about them. I can wrestle with the mouse and hold my own on a day-to-day basis, but the technical jargon boggles my head.”

Corey laughed and sipped his beer. “Don’t trip, my nigga. I got you. It was designed to do our bidding.”

“Well, that’s your job now. Can you handle it?” Orion asked.

Corey raised his head with confidence. “I can send this computer like you send those hoes. I can go online, get everything you trying to find, and drop it on a dime, every damn time, my nigga.” His freestyle flowed with poetic eloquence. Then he swiveled back around in his seat to boot up the computer.

CHAPTER ONE

Two Years Later

The Lear jet taxied swiftly along the runway. Orion peered out of the small oval window as the scenery raced by in a blur. He settled himself into the Corinthian leather seats when the aircraft began to ascend into the sky. The jet glided through the cumulus clouds that hung in the air like huge cotton balls as the chartered flight embarked on its journey to Little Rock, Arkansas.

The climate in the cabin was warm, but the blood crawled cold in Orion's veins. This excursion was sinister in nature, and he had malicious objectives to achieve. He had waited patiently for the three perpetrators who raped him while he was incarcerated to surface after their release from prison so he could personally usher them to their ultimate demise.

Icy-cold chills rippled down his spine as he recalled the savage gang rape that took place, which reduced him to the equivalent of a prison house whore. He was haunted by the memory of the excruciating pain of

them callously ramming their engorged manhood deep inside of him, tearing and ripping open his backside. It sickened him to think of the hot, foul breath that scorched the back of his neck as they panted and grunted while they viciously humped him. All three culprits had repeated this torturous process until they had successfully reached their climatic fulfillment.

All of a sudden, Orion's face contorted as he experienced a wave of nausea. Frantically, he grasped at the clasp of the seat belt to free himself, then he hastily scrambled his way over to the wet bar. He heaved uncontrollably and threw up in the small stainless-steel sink.

The sudden commotion alerted the young flight attendant, and she immediately intervened with fresh towels. She delicately dabbed his face with a moist hand towel, seemingly longer than necessary. She admired the leanness of his torso, the hardness of his biceps beneath his paisley silk shirt. She averted her gaze from the overspray of vomit and opted to glance into the pools of his light brown eyes.

Orion appreciated the attention she lavished on him. The young lady was at least a decent dime piece, plump mango-size breasts, a cute face, round butt, and a narrow waist. She had all of the proper equipment to turn a man's head and mind toward pleasure. But at this crucial time, the excessive pampering was annoying. He couldn't afford to lose focus on the purpose of his mission. To allow himself to be distracted would be asinine, and there was no time for stupidity.

He allowed her to help him back to his seat. She

acted as if he were incapable of walking on his own. She extended her arm snugly around his tapering waist as her other hand grappled the firmness of his biceps. After she eased him down in his seat, he manufactured a brilliant smile, displaying gleaming white teeth. Then he dismissed her to fetch a seltzer to aid his stomach. She scampered away dutifully.

The seltzer she concocted did a splendid job calming his stomach and settling him down. In fact, he was able to doze off for a moment. He was jolted awake when the tires on the landing gear screeched down on the tarmac. He gazed lazily out the window and viewed the images racing by until the plane gradually came to a halt. He stretched his limbs and then released the seat belt.

As he stepped out of the aircraft, a burst of sunlight caused him to squint under its glare. He placed his Kenneth Cole shades on, then craned his neck to take in the familiarity of his surroundings. Orion's pulse surged and his heart marched in his chest at a rapid cadence as he anticipated the satisfaction of achieving his long-awaited revenge. He descended the steps with a solid resolve to begin the first phase of the annihilation of his violent sexual predators.

His rental car was waiting out on the dark tarmac. The representative loaded his carry-ons in the trunk to allow Orion to whiz away promptly.

* * *

The sun had advanced in its circuit into the late afternoon, and its glare danced on the enamel of the late-model car.

Seated in a rental Cadillac, Orion was positioned across the street. His finger toyed with the trigger of his Galil micro assault rifle as he held the three perpetrators, Charlie Rock, Crisco, and Trip Six, under the surveillance of his keen eye.

They were hanging out, lollygagging, and nonchalantly conducting drugs sales on the streets. He observed as cars pulled up to the curb. He watched them alternate, leaning into the car windows to make sales. He viewed the penny-ante dope dealers with disdain as they crammed wadded up money into their pockets when the cars pulled away from the curb.

“If I get their ass now, they wouldn’t know what hit ’em,” he growled through clenched teeth. He abhorred their camaraderie. His plan was to separate them, claiming their lives one soul at a time.

Patiently, he watched for the opportune time. He waited until they finished smoking a fat blunt. They got nice and high, laughing at everything, oblivious to the danger that lurked nearby.

Orion chambered a bullet from the thirty-five-round clip. He could hardly wait to wipe those silly grins off their faces. He kept his eye on them as his fingers fumbled for the lever to release the door. He stepped out of the vehicle in a lightweight sports jacket to conceal his weapon. He converged on his prey with the agility of a panther. In stealth mode, he approached them with long, calculated strides, walking in the street parallel to the parked cars. He arrived virtually undetected.

When Charlie Rock spotted him, it was already too

late. Orion's gun was aimed at him. Sudden terror flashed in his eyes as Orion let off five rounds into his genitals. Immediately, his eyes crossed and his head tilted forward. Carefully, Orion raised his aim and unloaded lead into Charlie Rock's head until it exploded like a melon. He watched him crumple to the ground amid skull fragments and gruesome splatters of displaced brain matter.

Orion's peripheral vision detected Crisco sprinting from the scene. He quickly pivoted and purposely shot him in the leg. Crisco yelped out like a wounded dog when the bullet tore through his thigh. Painfully, he hobbled away from the scene to seek cover.

Traumatized, Trip Six ran down the street, screaming at the top of his lungs like a frightened woman. The commotion he incited drew undo attention to the bloody scene. Orion had a mind to put a bullet in the back of his head to silence him permanently, but he heard the wail of a siren from a distance. He quickly concealed his weapon and dashed to his car. He took one last glance at the scene and released a sigh of relief as he casually merged into the evening traffic.

Charlie Rock had to be already roasting in hell. He'd put a slug in Crisco's leg as a down payment until he was ready to claim his life in full. Trip Six could run, but Orion would find him. A smile of satisfaction curled on Orion's face. He turned up the sound system in the car and bobbed to the music as he headed toward the airport to fly back to Cali.

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