C.O.P

CHASTISEMENT OF PEACE

DEMITRIUS L. JONES
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

A special thanks to all my family, friends, and supporters. To Kaiyyia, my Bonita. And everyone who is in the struggle for justice. Keep your Head up, better days are coming. Thank you all!

All adulation be to the Almighty.
The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

-Isaiah 53:8
A beautiful BMW veered from the side street and skirted down the straightaway stretch of highway. The roar of the turbo-charged engine blended almost seamlessly with the trap music that bumped in the trunk of the coupe. Officer Cal set up in his police unit, he couldn’t believe his luck. He shifted his unit into gear and put all eight cylinders of his hemi to work in pursuit of the Beamer. Within seconds he was in sight. “Whoop! Whoop!” He made a couple of quick bumps to his siren as his car lit up in flashes of blue. The black BMW veered off the highway and onto the shoulder. Cal approached the car with caution, his hand was hovering slightly over his service weapon. He bumped the window twice before the driver finally let it down. “License and registration please.”

“Man, what I do?”

Cal reached for his gun holster, “License and registration please.”

The driver let out a deep sigh as he popped open his glove compartment box and handed over his information. “Jerome Johnson… is that your name?”
“Man, ain’t that what it say on my license? And why you ain’t in a regular police car, you pulling me over in a Dodge Challenger, how I know you a real police?”

Cal stared at Jerome momentarily, “Wait right here.”

Jerome let out another frustrated sigh as the officer walked back to his car. Several minutes went by before he finally exited his patrol unit and began walking in the direction of Jerome’s car. Jerome sat anxiously in the driver's seat and lit it up a menthol 100 as he watched Officer Cal approach in his rear view.

“You got any weapons, contraband, drugs, bodies, anything like that in your car, or on your person?”

“Yeah man, come to think of it, I picked your daughter up, she in the trunk,” Jerome replied sarcastically, as he blew smoke through both nostrils.

“Step out of the car.”

“Man, for what?”

“Step out of the car now!”

“Man, I ain’t even do nuthin!”

Cal grabbed Jerome and pulled him from the car forcefully.

“Alright, alright! Gotdamn man! You gonna fuck up my clothes!”

“Shut up!” Cal exclaimed, as he searched Jerome’s pockets and waistband.

“Man, why you frisking me? I ain’t do shit, and you still ain’t tell me why you pulled me over in the first place!”
“Face forward!” Cal demanded as he spun Jerome around and pulled his hands together.

“The hell!? Man, why you cuffing me?! I ain’t even do nothing!”

“Cause you got crack on the seat of your car.”

“What!” Jerome looked over his shoulder only to see the hard-white laying on his seat in plain view. “MAN, YOU PLANTED THAT SHIT! YOU JUST THREW IT THROUGH MY WINDOW WHEN MY BACK WAS TURNED!”

“Lower your voice now!”

Cal’s radio suddenly blurred to life, “Ten-eighty to dispatch, do you need any back-up assistance?”

“Negative dispatch,” Cal replied, as he bumped the button on side of the radio.

“Sit down!” Cal said firmly, as he shoved Jerome in the back of the unmarked unit.

He walked back to the BMW with his flashlight and rifled through everything; glove box, center consoles, beneath the seat, and finally the trunk. “Jackpot!” Cal said to himself as he removed an eight-ball of cocaine from beneath a speaker box. He walked back to his unit and dangled the coke in Jerome’s face, back and forward, the bag of coke swayed as Officer Cal stared at Jerome, with a huge smile on his face. “You was holding out on me Jerome, why wasn’t I invited to the party?”

Jerome sit back in the seat and hit his head against the headrest of the police car. “This is fucked up!” He voiced in frustration.

“Jerome, Jerome.” Cal said as he entered the backseat of his car and sat next to him. You in a tough spot amigo. You on paper lil’ baby, and you a two-time loser, you go to jail with this and you done!”
“Whatever man, jail ain’t new to me, do what you gotta do!”

“Yeah, but doing life is, I seen that burner you got stashed in your whip too. A felon with a gun and an eighth, psssh, boy you gonna be somebody ol’ lady for a long time. Jerome rolled his eyes and took a deep breath.

“But look, I’m a fair man, Jerome, and I’m willing to let you make amends.”

“Man, I don’t work with the po-po.”

“Think about it, Jerome, you got Jaqueenta fine ass back at home. How many brotha’s gone be pushing up on that if you go to jail, huh? You want another man raising your child, living in your house, tapping your woman? Be smart, drug dealer.” You do what I say, and you go home to yo baby momma and kids. But, if you refuse… well… I guess you’ll be acting like somebody’s baby momma in prison. It’s your choice; and I’m a busy man Jerome, you got thirty seconds to decide. I mean, drug dealers are like a dime a dozen in this city anyway, I can always find somebody else to flip.” Cal sat back and pushed the timer button on his military style watch.

Jerome leaned his head back and stared at the roof of the patrol car. “So, wait, man how you know my girl Jac—”

“Twenty seconds!”

“Psssh, man I—”

“Fifteen seconds!”

“Dude I told you I don’t work with—”

“Ten!”

“Nine!”
“Eight!”

“Clocks ticking Junior! Big Bubbas waiting! And hell, I might try to tap Jacqueenta myself.”

“You what—”

“Five,”

“Four,”

“Three,”

“Two,”

“One,”

“Zer—”

“Alright! Alright! What do you want me to do?”

“See Jerome, I knew you was smart.”

“Take me to your supplier, cop some big coke and we good, no arrest for you, and no jail time.”

“Cop some dope? Man is you crazy? I can’t just stroll in there and ask for work.”

“Yeah? And why not?”

“Well for one thang, that shit cost money. Big money, more than you can afford from your little undercover police job.” Cal stared at Jerome momentarily then let out a strong burst of laughter. “Whoo, hahaha, boy you something else.” In a split-second Cal’s face turned instantly serious. “So, how much them keys going for?”

“What?”
“Boy don’t what me?” Cal said smacking Jerome in the back of the head. “How much for a key?” Cal removed a pistol he had holstered to his ankle and sat it on his lap. Jerome squirmed around in the handcuffs and leaned forward. His eyes grew wide as he got a closer look at the gun. All the serial numbers had been scratched off the side of the weapon. “Now, why would you pull a gun on an undercover officer Jerome? Don’t you know that’ll get you killed? And damn, looks like you scratched all the serial numbers off too, you a cop killer, Jerome?”

“Dude, that’s yo gun, not mines! Man, ya’ll some crooked mother—” A quick jab met Jerome in the ribs taking his wind for several seconds as he hovered forward panting for breaths. Cal had been studying Judo for over ten years, officers could take some classes for free, but that wasn’t enough for Cal, he kept pursuing the art, he wanted to be a master of inflicting pain. “Who they gonna believe Jerome, you or me?”

“Man, c’mon bro, chill with that burner fam!” Jerome said, trembling at the sight of the pistol.

“Talk!” Cal exclaimed, as he leaned over and put the gun to Jerome’s stomach.

“Twelve-five man!” Jerome belted out, nervously.

“Twelve-five?”

“Yeah man… twelve… twelve-five a key.”

“Twelve five huh?” Cal leaned back as he put the dirty pistol under Jerome’s chin and used it to lift his head. “What’s your supplier’s name?”

“Snow… his name Snowdog, man.”

“And Snowdog wants twelve-five a key huh?”
“Yeah bruh, that’s his price, take it or leave it.” Jerome replied nervously.

“You know, it’s ridiculous what you boys charge for the cut-up trash ya’ll call dope. Cal opened the car door and stepped out. He leaned in and looked at Jerome, “Wait right here, and don’t you go nowhere,” he said with a sarcastic smirk. Cal walked around the back and popped the trunk of his car. Jerome could hear Cal shuffling through some things in his trunk, but he couldn't see through the black back window tint of Cal’s undercover unit. After a minute or so Cal returned to the backseat and sat down next to Jerome. "Here’s twenty-two grand, get me two keys." Jerome stared at the money as his eyes grew wide again.

“Man, the hell kinda police is you?”

“Don’t worry about what I am! You do what you need to do!”

Jerome grew frustrated, “Man, twenty-two ain’t gone be enough anyway. I told you they twelve-five a piece; that's twelve-thousand-five-hundred fam, which mean you three-thousand dollars short.”

“Well, no shit, Einstein.” Cal said, in a sarcastic voice. “I’m not giving him twenty-five thousand for two kilos. If he your boy, he should do it for twenty-two on the strength.”

“Man, you don’t know this dude, he a top dog, he dangerous as hell.”

Cal smiled at Jerome carelessly as he opened the door then stepped out the car. He walked around and opened the door to Jerome’s side and lifted him out of the car. “Hold still,” Cal said, as he unlocked the handcuffs and released Jerome’s hands. “Come on, we taking your car.”

“MY car?”
“Yeah genius, YOUR car! We want everything to seem normal. Now hop in, I’ll drive.”

“Man, how you gonna drive my car?”

“Official police business, I can commandeer your vehicle for the enactment of police duties, and seeing that this is an active investigation with consideration of a felonious crime committed by you, I don’t think you in any position to question my ethics.”

“What the hell does that even mean…?”

“Jerome, just get in the damn car!”

They hopped in the car, and Cal drove as Jerome gave him turn-by-turn directions on how to get to the dealer’s house. “Just keep straight like five miles, then we gone make a right, I’ll show you where when we get close.” The car grew momentarily silent. “You set me up, didn’t you?” Jerome said, looking straight ahead with keen focus. “You know my girl, and that we got kids together, you put that crack on my backseat, so you could search and arrest me. You already knew who I was, you sat me up.” Cal didn’t utter a word, he just kept driving, keeping his eyes focused on the road. “Turn right here,” Jerome said, reluctantly. Cal veered right and off the highway into a beautiful subdivision. He looked around in awe of the location that a petty peddler like Jerome was using to score all his drugs. “This the house right here.” Jerome said, pointing from the window. Cal brought the car to a stop and surveyed the area.

“Here, put this on.” Cal dangled a large jewel encrusted cross in front of Jerome.

“What’s that?”
“It’s bling, bling, boy, put it on, and don’t cover it up or let it get taken from you, you got it!”

“Yeah man, I guess…”

“You guess?”

“Alright man… yeah, I got it… damn.”

“And here, take this,” he said, as he handed Jerome the twenty-two thousand dollars in cash.

“Man, what if he want the whole twenty-five?”

“You a hustler, right? Figure it out… And oh, Jerome, don’t try no slick shit. I ran your plates and license number to dispatch, so anything foul happen to me, and they'll know you were the last perp that I pulled over.” Jerome’s nose flared as he gave a hard tug to his jacket and adjusted his clothes. “See you in a few, Romey, Rome.” Cal said, as he dug for his phone. Jerome walked up the driveway then disappeared into the house after a few knocks. Cal sat in his car and played with his cell phone until Jerome finally emerged from the front door. He canvased his surrounding left and right before walking back to the car and hopping in the passenger seat. Cal looked Jerome over as he adjusted himself in the seat.

“How’d it go?”

“Good man, it went good.”

“He took the twenty-two?”

“Yeah man, he was hesitant, but we golden.” Jerome replied, as he removed the two kilos from his jacket interior.

“Is it quality?”
“Hell yeah it's quality, man, what’s up with you?”

“Good, then let’s see you prove it.” Cal took a knife from his pocket and sliced into the duct tape and plastic, “Hit it.”

“What?”

“What you mean, what? I said, hit it!”

“Man, get the fuck outta here! I ain’t doing no lines with a cop in the car!”

“It’s just me and you, I need to see if this shit the real deal, now I said hit it.”

“Yeah right! Man, I snort this shit, then like thirty cops come running out the bushes and arrest me, my plug, and the whole hood, right? I mean… you the police, can’t you lab test the purity of this shit… I mean damn!”

Cal stared at Jerome for what felt like an eternity before taking the knife and putting it to his throat, it was so sharp that just the blade being pressed drew blood. “Nigga, I told you to snort!”

“Alright! Alright!” Jerome said, in panic as he gritted his teeth and stared down at the knife that was sinking deeper into his throat. Cal dipped the knife back in the coke. Blood stained the snow-white powder and the edges of the bag as he brought the knife back up to Jerome’s nose. “Sniff, sniff.” Jerome took two long inhales as he cleaned every gram of coca-i’na from the blade. He lay his head against the passenger window as the dope started to kick in, “Awhh shit!”

“Whoa boy, you alright? You hit that shit pretty hard!” Cal shined his light in Jerome’s eyes. They were fully dilated. “Good, this is good product.” he said to himself. “Alright, let’s get you home and me back to my unit. Jerome nodded at Cal, but you could tell he was still spun. They arrived back at Cal’s car, he stopped for a moment and surveyed the area for any watchful eyes or suspicious cars. Once
he knew the coast was clear. Cal reached inside his jacket pocket as he looked over at Jerome who was now completely zoned out. “Here, take this as a measure of good faith,” Cal placed the eight ball of cocaine he had confiscated back in Jerome’s hand. “I’ll take my cross back too,” he said, as he removed the jewel encrusted necklace from around Jerome’s neck. “Now you go straight home young man and stay out of trouble.” Cal uttered, sarcastically before getting out and walking over to his car.

CHAPTER 2

Cal threw the kilos on the seat and covered them with a jacket before cranking up and blazing down the highway. Moments later he was startled by the sound of sirens. He looked in his rear-view mirror. “Oh, I know this gotta be a joke, these motha-fuckas been watching me…” He pulled to the side of the road, put his car in park, then contemplated his next move. He knew if they were on to him his life was over. He thought about shooting his fellow officer or turning the gun on himself, but he hesitated at the notion and slid the gun back in his jacket.
A voice came from the loudspeaker of the officer’s patrol car, “Driver, turn off your engine, open your door, and step out of the car!” Cal let down his window and lifted his hands before shouting, “I’m a police officer!”

“Driver, turn off your engine, open your door, and step out of the car!” the voice echoed again. Cal shutoff the engine and stepped out the car. “Walk backwards toward me with your hands behind your head.” He continued to walk backwards step by careful step until he reached the front of the patrol car.

“You know this isn’t necessary, I told you I’m a police officer.” Deep down, Cal knew it didn’t matter. They had probably been following him for months and watching his every move. They had also probably seen the dirt he had done and marked him as a rogue cop. Cal knew it was all over for him if he didn’t take his fellow officers’ life. The voice came over the megaphone again “Now spread your legs shoulder length apart!” Cal complied broadly spacing his feet as the officer begin giving orders on the loudspeaker again. “Now… drop it like it’s hot, drop, drop it, like its hot, to the floor one time!”

“What the fuc—” Cal said, as he spun around to see the source of the voice. “RAYMOND!? YOU JACKASS, YOU SCARED THE SHIT OUTTA ME!” Raymond let out a big laugh as he ran from behind the door of his police car and gave Cal a big bear hug.

“Detective California Bridges, how’s it going brother?”

“Better! Now that I know I’m not gonna be arrested, shit.”

“Hahaha, man, I got you good”

“Yeah… you… did…”

“You wasn’t really worried about getting arrested was you?”
Cal hesitated. “Well… you know… it’s this undercover shit. I thought I was being profiled, with the car having tinted windows and all, I was just afraid of blowing my cover.”

“I can dig that. And oh, speaking of profiling, you know they got me testifying in that shooting, you know, the one with the unarmed black kid.”

“Yeah, I heard about that…”

“I gotta tell you the truth, California, I’m going through with this one. There’s just too much corruption on the force, too many senseless murders by rogue cops swept under the rug. I’m going to do the right thing by the people of this city.”

“I understand where you coming from Raymond, but do be careful who you discuss these matters with. It’s a touchy situation.”

“Oh, don’t worry California. I’m going straight to the top, I’m talking to the chief and commanding officers about it only.”

Cal tucked his bottom lip in and looked Raymond in the eyes. “That may still not be the best course of action for you Raymond…”

Raymond’s face grew very worried, “Cal… I don’t understand, I mean… just what are you saying brother…?”

“I’m saying you should let me talk to them first, on your behalf.”

“Nah, I can’t let you do that, this is on me Cal, besides, I’ve already talked to the chief, and he’s behind me one-hundred percent.

“Chuck? Chuck Harris told you he would back you?”

“Hell yeah he did! He wants what’s right! Just like you and me Cal, and he also said he wanted to see you today.”
“I really wish you would have come to me first, Ray.”

“Listen California, I know you a big shot detective now, and I’m just a lowly uniform officer, but I can handle talking to the chief.”

“You know it’s not that Ray.”

“I know it Cal… Funny thing is, I been trying to make detective the last three and a half years,” Raymond said, as he shook his head in dismay. “But they shoot me down every damn time, no matter how good I score.”

“You stick with it Ray, you’ll get it. You’re a damn good cop. The best I’ve seen in my sixteen years with the force, you’ll make it Ray.”

“Yeah, maybe you’re right Cal.”

The moment grew silent as Cal quickly shifted the subject, “So how’s the wife and kids?”

“Awwh man, Cal, are you kidding me? They’re great! Stephanie starts kindergarten this year, Jeff, just made it into middle school, and Jenny, my youngest, just took her first steps two days ago. And you know Marie, she keeps it all together for us, and still finds time to run that soup kitchen on 9th for the homeless every weekend.”

“That’s great Raymond! Glad to hear that brother.”

“What about you California, any kids for you yet?”

Cal grew silent for a moment, “Nah, not yet, haven’t met anyone as special as Marie yet.”

“Well, I’m sure you will.” Raymond replied, slapping Cal on the arm.
Cal placed his hand on Raymond’s shoulder. “I never told you this, and I know we said we would never discuss it but, thank you for saving my life back when we were partners, and thank you for being a good friend to me through all the ups and downs over the years.”

“Awwh man, c’mon Cal, I was just doing my job. Hell man, you would’ve done the same for me.” Cal nodded, and stared at Raymond in silence.

“Well Cal, I better get going, I’m still on the clock.”

“See you later Raymond.”

“Bye Cal, and don’t forget to go see Chuck.”

Cal hopped in his Challenger and headed to his apartment on the east-side of town, no one knew about it, which is exactly what he wanted. He sat down at his computer screen and took the jewel encrusted cross he had given Jerome from his pocket. He removed the bottom half of the cross to expose the hidden USB port, then plugged it into his computer. There it was, the whole transaction between Jerome and Snowdog, from start to finish. He uploaded a copy to his computer, one to his cellphone, and the other to his cloud storage, then hopped in his car and headed to Chief Harris’ office. He pulled up out front and smoothly walked into the huge precinct.

“California Bridges, the legend himself,” the officer at the front desk said, with a big smile. “The chiefs waiting to see ya. You want me to buzz ya in?”

“Nah, I wanna surprise him.” Cal walked to the back of the precinct and straight to the Chief's office. He strolled right in without knocking.

“Cal!” the chief exclaimed at the first sight of him. “My hardest working detective in the flesh.”
The captain, chief, and lieutenant were all in the room. Cal made his rounds speaking to each man respectively.

“So, how’s it going out there crime fighter?”

“Good, so far… I’m still fighting the good fight Captain Carlson.”

“That’s good to know,” Carlson said, nodding with approval.

The chief sat up in his chair. “So, what you got for me?”

“This…” Cal removed his phone from his pocket and plugged it into the chief’s computer, he played the video of Jerome and Snowdog conducting the drug transaction. The high-ranking officers all watched in anticipation, and there it was, all the incriminating evidence needed to procure a warrant.

“Wow!” The chief said, with excitement. “How did you get the perp to do the video?” He asked, confused. Cal grabbed at the cross around his neck, he wasn’t ready to reveal that it was a secret cam and audio recorder. He paused and thought momentarily, “Button camera, right in his shirt. The dealers never suspected a thing.”

“Damn, smart move Cal, Lieutenant Caldridge said as he reviewed the tape.

“Thanks Lieutenant,” Cal replied, with pride.”

The chief looked at Cal under-eyed, “Is that ALL you got for me?”

Cal flashed a sly smirk then reached in his jacket pockets and removed the two kilos of cocaine. “Whoo, hot damn! Now that’s what I’m talking about!” The chief exclaimed, as he looked among his fellow officers. “Push the door closed all the way and lock it for me Cal.”
“Yeah, sure chief.” Cal walked to the door and pushed it the rest of the way closed. He turned around just in time to see him chopping several lines across his desk. One hard sniff from the chief and an entire line disappeared from his desk.

“Oh, oh, yes! This is good shit. Gather round fellas and ride the wave.” They all sat one by one and did lines as they coughed and laughed up a storm. “You want a line Cal?”

“Nah, I’m good chief.”

“You sure? This is one hell of a girl.”

“I’m sure chief, I gotta stay off it, so I can work around it efficiently.”

“Smart man,” the chief said as he used his index finger to wipe powder across his teeth.

“Well chief, this is it. The kilos of coke on the recording are the last piece of evidence that we need to seal this case and put the boss of the Diego Cartel away forever.

“You’re damn right, once the Diego Cartel is under, we can put our own people in play. No one ever thought you could take these guys down by yourself Cal, but you not afraid to get dirty, and I like that! I’m going to write it up and were going to send the video to Judge Mabry. She’s a hard ass, but she’s tough on crime, and even she can’t deny how incriminating this video is. We’ll have the arrest warrant in no less than seventy-two hours.”

“Good deal,” Cal said, as he flopped down in one of the Chiefs comfortable office chairs.
“Now I got some information for you Cal,” Chief Harris said sitting back in his seat and laughing from his tweak. “Your guy Carlos Alejandro El Rio made bail today.”

“What!” Cal exclaimed as he instantly set up in his seat.

The chief was nodding but laughing too hard to formulate a sentence. After he finally calmed down from his hyper-activity he began to speak again. "He posted bail, he’s free till trial.”

“But he’s a flight risk!”

“They gave him an ankle bracelet and put cops outside his house twenty-four hours a day,” the chief said, with a nonchalant shrug.

“How did this… When did all this take place?”

“Oh, I don’t know Cal, a few weeks ago… son, you have really been too deep undercover, you need to get back to reality.”

Cal was noticeably disturbed. The truth is, he had ordered a hit on Carlos to be carried out when he made it to jail. He was supposed to be killed once he was allowed in the general population with the other inmates. Cal thought to himself for a moment, then looked back at the chief, “Well, no big deal,” he replied, “He’ll be right back in after we bust Snowdog, and there's no way they’ll give him bail after they see how many murders he was responsible for. Plus, I doubt he’ll make it long if he’s alone in prison anyway. He’s made a lot of enemies in the States. The chief started to chuckle as he scanned over Cal’s face.

“What’s so funny Chuck?” Cal asked the chief, confused.

“You really don’t know do you Cal?” Captain Carlson asked with a smirk on his face.”
“No! Know what?” Cal asked again, starting to show his frustration.

“Wait!” Chief Harris interjected, “I’ll tell him.” The chief’s face grew somewhat serious. “Our friend Carlos Alejandro Del Rio has flipped on us.”

“What!? He’s working with the feds?”

“Well not quite, you see, Carlos is no longer Car-los.” The chief replied slowly. “He’s actually, Car-là, now…” he said looking at his captain and lieutenant in a petty way.

“Huh? Carla? I don’t get it…”

“I’m saying, that your friend, Carlos El Rio, the Cartel boss is now a woman!”

“What the fuck!” Cal exclaimed, as he stood to his feet. The chief threw his head back in laughter, as the other officers laughed it up with him.

“What? How? When?”

“He had a sex change operation a couple weeks ago. He will now be entering the women’s prison as Carla Alejandro Santiago.”

“Cal dropped back in his seat and stared into space, he couldn’t believe it. After 12 years of chasing him, Carlos had found a way to evade him once again. The chief and surrounding officers’ words started to become garbled in his ears as Cal began to think more and more about the magnitude of his circumstances. “Fuck!” He thought to himself, as he pondered.

“Cal… Cal… CALIFORNIA!” The chief yelled, trying to get Cal’s attention. He was finally being serious again. ‘Maybe his high is wearing off,’ Cal thought, without responding.
“So, what are we going to do now?” The Chief asked looking at him with concern.

“You just secure the warrant, I’ll take care of everything else,” Cal said, as he started walking toward the door.

“Now Cal, this ain’t the Wild, Wild West anymore, there’s a new form of policing. They got them damn cameras everywhere. You can’t just go off and shoot nobody no more and get away with it if you a cop. Don’t try to take Carlos out, he’s protected by the police and the cartel now that he’s out of prison. We’ll have to find another way.”

“Speaking of finding another way, did you guys by chance talk to Raymond? Cal asked, as he looked back at the chief.

“Raymond…” the chief took a deep breath. “Raymond… yeah… I talked to him… Sit down Detective Bridges and let me talk to you. Now, I know Raymond’s your friend, you guys were partners for a number of years and seen each other through tough times… But… Raymond is a threat to everything we hold dearly here. I mean, he can single-handedly sink this entire department with his testimony. It’s not just about the case California, it’s about the entire department going down, for corruption, conspiracy, tampering and other things. Now I kno—”

“Listen chief,” Cal said interrupting. “With all due respect, out of all the officers on this force. Raymond is the most stand-up guy I know. He has a wife and three kids that love him very much, and I don’t think that he will do anything to jeopardize his career as an officer here. Give me a chance to talk to him. I’m sure I can get him to see our point of view.

“He’s bad for business, Cal.”
“I hear ya’ chief, but I been loyal to you, and this department for almost seventeen years, without asking for anything in return, but I’m asking you now to let me talk to my friend about all this, and see if I can get him to recant some of the things he was saying before.”

“Alright Cal, I’ll give you a chance to talk to him, but if that doesn’t work we’ll have to take more drastic measures.” Cal nodded his head at the chief, “okay…”

“I’ll have that warrant for Snowdog to you ASAP, in the meantime we gotta get this cocaine broken down and back on the streets. I’m telling you Cal, retirements going to be beautiful!”

Cal let off a faint smile then walked out the door. He wanted to relish in the moment, but there was too much else pressing on his mind. He had to figure out how he would take out Carlos now that he would be in a women’s prison.
The buzzing of his cellphone woke Cal out of his light sleep. He picked up the phone and read the message.

“Warrants ready for pickup.”

He was psyched. He drove down to the station and met with the other officers that would be helping to execute the warrant. There would be members of the DEA and ATF operating with them today, but Cal didn’t care, he had video footage from Jerome that showed him exactly where all the drugs, money, and weapons were. Cal’s people would go straight for it and haul it out the back door while the DEA and ATF were still making arrests. The plan went off without a hitch, there was over 10 million dollars’ worth of drugs and cash at Snowdogs location alone. Only three million of that ten was actually taken into federal lockup, because the rest went to the chief and his constituents. He was licking his chops when he witnessed all the dope and prescription pills being loaded into their hidden surplus.

Just like Cal suspected, Snowdog flipped on Carlos in exchange for a lesser sentence. He tied Carlos to conspiracy, robbery, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and murder. The new evidence caused Carlos' lawyers to enter a plea
bargain by having him plead guilty without the risk of facing the death penalty. Carlos, who was now Carla, had seen the last of her days as a free woman. She was being held at the women’s prison without the possibility of parole, but Cal would always be uneasy as long as “Carla” was alive.

To Cal's surprise, Carlos would be sent to Saccs Grant, instead of Heedon Heights Max Security Women’s Prison as a part of his plea bargain. The chess piece was now in place, and Cal felt confident he could make his move. He rode out to the Saccs Grant Women’s State Prison, to see an “old friend.”

He sat down at the table and waited anxiously for her to arrive. He wasn’t on her visitors list, but since he was an officer he didn’t have to be on the list to see her and ask questions. Several minutes went by before she finally arrived at the table. When she realized it was Cal she immediately rolled her eyes and demanded to be taken back to her cell.

“Bonita, please, I know you’re mad, but hear me out, I’m here to help.” Cal said, as he extended his hand to her.

“Help! Yeah right! Me locked up in this cage is an example of what happens when men like you, HELP!” She yelled as she pulled away from the guard. “Take me back to my cell NOW!” Bonita continued to yell as she began to kick and scream at the guards. “I refuse to talk to him, it’s my fifth amendment RIGHT!”

The guards started to take her back towards the door, per her wishes, when Cal suddenly shouted out, “El pájaro está en tu jaula!”

Bonita stop struggling and looked at Cal, “What did you just say?”

Cal looked deep into her eyes and repeated the phrase, “El pájaro está en tu jaula.” Bonita completely stopped struggling and stared at Cal, “Es verdad?”
“Si, yes, it is true mami.”

Bonita completely calmed down. "I’ll only sit with you if they un-cuff me."

The officers looked at Cal. “Sure, that’s fine with me.” He responded, with no hesitation. He sat down at the table and again looked her deep in the eyes.

“Bonita—”

“WOP!” She leaned across the table and socked Cal square in the face. The guards rushed the table. “No, no, no, it’s cool, leave her be, I deserved that.” Cal said, as he wiped a small trail of blood from his nose.

“Yeah, you damn right you deserve that, you got a lotta’ nerve coming here after all this time!”

“Bonita, I am so sorry I—”

“Is it true? What you said… El pájaro está en tu jaula. The bird is in my cage?”

“Yes, Bonita.”

“But how is that possible?”

Cal looked around and lowered his voice to a whisper. “He got a sex change and so they put him in a women’s prison.”

Bonita shook her head in disbelief. “And why exactly are you telling me this?”

“Because, I know, Bonita, how much this means to you.”

“No, BULLSHIT! IT’S NOT ABOUT ME, IT’S ABOUT YOU!” Bonita belted out in anger.

“Hey!” one of the guards yelled from the distance.
“Sorry, it’s cool, really.” Cal said, waving them off. “Bonita, I know you’re mad at me, but I still do genuinely care about you. I couldn’t come here because they had me deep undercover. And there was really nothing I could do that wouldn't jeopardize everything.”

“Three years, three years! I been in here California, and you haven't checked on me ONCE!”

“I am sorry Bonita, I swear to you, I am genuinely sorry, please forgive me.”

“So, you want me to kill Carlos for you, don’t you?”

“No Bonita, for you… I’m afraid of what he may do if he finds out you’re in here too.”

“Pendjeo…”

“Huh?” Cal asked confused.

“Stupid, as in, I must really be stupid to fall for your games again.”

“Bonita listen, I’m not just here for that. The fact of the matter is, is if you can kill Carlos, I can actually get you outta this place.

“What? Are you serious?”

“Yes Bonita! He’s the last piece of the puzzle, once he’s gone we can probably get you released.”

“Okay, okay, but what do you want me to do then? Kill him with my bare hands?”

“I can give you a shank or some poison if need be.” Cal whispered, as he led her eyes to look beneath the table.
“Nah, I want the shiv, this is personal, I want to feel the kill.”

“No, that’s the Bonita I know.” Cal reached under the table and handed her a razor-sharp shank which she tucked between the seams of her jumpsuit.

“Call me at this number when it’s done,” Cal said, as he slipped her a piece of paper with a cell number on it. Bonita nodded and stood to her feet as the guard approached. Cal slid a few hundred bucks into one of the guard’s hands and gave them a quick wink before exiting through the prison’s double-doors.

Bonita didn’t sleep that night. She laid on her cot and stared at the mundane surroundings of the melancholy prison. Echoes of screams suddenly erupted in her head like explosions as she covered both her ears with her pillow. Tears streamed down her face like rivers of water until she exhausted herself into a deep sleep.

Her eyes opened only to see her little brother anxiously staring at her. He was still as she remembered him, with big innocent brown eyes and an adorably round face. “Are the bad men going to hurt us like they did mom and dad?” He asked.

“Shhh, lower your voice,” Bonita said, in a whisper. “We’ll be fine, just stay still and keep quiet, Emilio.” Bonita wiped away a tear and looked through a crack in the folded blinds from the closet where her and her little brother hid. Suddenly a man burst through the bedroom door with an automatic assault rifle, screaming in Spanish. The suddenness of his entry sent Emilio into a panic causing him to cry out in fear.

The gunman instantly swung his weapon toward the closet, unleashing a rat-a-tat-tat of machine gun bursts that filled the room like the sound of hard rain on a tin roof. Bullets flew through the door of the closet and into Emilio’s adolescent body...
as Bonita dove under a pile of clothes in the corner of the closet. She screamed as loud as she could into one of her shirts which muted the sound of her cries. The gunman was soon met by another man in all black who had heard the shots. “Que paso’?” The man in black muttered as he walked in. The gunman shrugged as they eased toward the closet. They slowly approached as Bonita peered through a small opening in the pile of clothes where she hid. “Abrelo! Abrelo!” The man in black whispered anxiously in Spanish for the other gunman to open the closet door. He slowly slid the door back as both men aimed inside with their guns. The man in all black squatted down and reached forward removing some of the clothes that had fallen onto Emilio. Bonita noticed a unique tattoo of a bird on his wrist as he shuffled the clothes to the side. “A bird?” Bonita whispered to herself. The man in black stood to his feet and looked at the other gunman, “Un nin’o!” He exclaimed. “You stupid fuck! You killed a child!”

“I thought you didn’t care!”

“I don’t!” The man in black yelled, “But its bad press for us, a murdered child means more police will be involved, which is why I told you to just kill the parents and any other adults.”

“Sorry, it was an accident.”

“Let’s go, now, vamonos!” The man in black yelled as he slapped the gunman across the back of the head.

After hearing their cars speed away Bonita dove from behind the clothes and rushed to her brother’s aid. He was still breathing, but very shallowly. He stared at Bonita with his big brown eyes, “You said, we… would be safe…” he muttered as he took a very heavy breath a stared at his sister.
“Emilio! Emilio! EMILIO!” Bonita woke up screaming in her cell.

“Damn, girl you alright?” Her cellmate asked, as she shook her, “You woke me up out my sleep with your screams.”

“Damn, I’m sorry, Tyana.”

Tyana, was like caramel perfection, she had a shape like a coke bottle and natural curly, kinky hair, her body was slightly athletic and soft because she had run track in high school. She and Bonita had become like best friends since she had been locked up.

“Girl, I am so far from alright right now,” Bonita said, sobbing on the side of her bed.

“Damn girl, talk to me,” Tyana replied, as she handed Bonita some tissue and sat down at her side. The two women spent the rest of the night talking about Bonita’s heartbreaking past.
Bonita had turned her focus from her nightmares to reality now. She was on the inside with Carlos, but she had no idea what he would look like as “Carla.” She made her rounds through the prison trying to get girls to dish on any new women that they may have seen being brought into the prison, but she came up empty. She finally remembered what Cal had told her, “El pájaro está en tu jaula, ‘the bird is in your cage.’ 'El pa’jaro', 'the bird.' The bird tattoo on his wrist must still be there,” she muttered to herself. Cal had given her a way to find Carlos without her even realizing it. “The bird-man,” She said to herself. “He still
remembers the nickname I had given Carlos, after all these years.” ‘Maybe he does care,’ Bonita thought as she stared off into space.

She scanned the prison for a woman with a wrist tattoo while everyone was eating in the chow hall. Wrists up and wrists down, Bonita’s eyes followed each hand as dipped from the plate and rose to each mouth in search for the infamous bird tattoo. Tyana walked past in a hurry. “Anything?” Bonita asked, quickly.

“No girl, nothing.” Tyana replied, as she scurried off quickly before the guards noticed the two of them standing around and not eating.

Bonita slipped away from the chow hall to regather herself. She couldn’t believe it, Carlos was somewhere in this prison amongst the women, but neither she nor Tyana could find him. Bonita leaned against the wall and pressed her head against the cold bricks in frustration. “I give,” she said to herself reluctantly. Suddenly a door to one of the closet’s swung open and out popped a slightly curved woman with exaggerated plastic breasts, followed by a level two corrections officer. “What the….?” Bonita paused, as she dipped behind a raised part of the wall. She peeked around the corner and watched the woman wipe her mouth as she joked with the guard flirtatiously. She leaned forward and threw away food from a tray that only the officers eat from. Bonita squinted for a better look, “The tattoo,” she said to herself as she saw the woman dumping the food into the trashcan. She crept back into the chow hall and found Tyana who was sitting by herself. “I found him girl, I found him!” She said, in an excited whisper.

“For real? Girl where?” Tyana asked with a shocked look.

“Coming out the maintenance closet with a C.O.!”

“Whaaaaaat?” Tyanna replied, with a petty smile spanning across her face. “So, when are we gonna move?”
“Today!” Bonita replied, as her face grew gravely serious. A few hours had passed since their afternoon lunch and Bonita and a few other women walked down from their cell to the showers to clean up before lockdown. Ironically their escorts were the same correctional officers Cal had given the money to during visitation. She waited around letting people cut in front of her, so she could see everyone going in and out of the shower. Time seemed to move in slow-motion and Bonita could no longer delay entering the shower, as almost all of the girls had finished. She rocked impatiently, leaning on one leg as she looked over her shoulder and down the hall. Still no sign of Carlos. “Where the fuck is he, damnit!” She said, to herself. She turned to one of the guards, “Shoot, I accidentally left my soap in my cell.”

The guard let out a quick sigh, “I’ll go with you to get it.” She replied, as she led Bonita from the showers. On the way back to the cell Bonita saw Tyanna walking in the direction of the showers. She winked as she clinched her towel. Bonita didn’t say a word, she headed back in the cell and retrieved the soap. The guard walked back with her until the communal shower was in view. “I’m going to run to the restroom, and since all the other women are gone back to their cells, but you and your cellmate, I’m assuming I can trust you not to get in any trouble…” The guard said, with a questionable look on her face.

“Sure, of course you can Officer Young, I’ve never had any incidents in over three years.

Bonita walked up to the shower area and peeked in. She couldn’t believe it, there was Carlos and Tyanna, the only two people in the shower. Bonita stripped down, hanging her jumpsuit on the wall and sliding the shank underneath the towel she carried. She peeked in enough for Tyanna to notice her. Tyanna gave her a little nod acknowledging her presence. Carlos was oblivious to any of this, he was
too busy admiring Tyanna's curves. The water glistened off her bronzed caramel body and flowed effortlessly down her toned legs and thighs. She looked at Carlos flirtatiously, “So, you just gonna stand there staring? Or you gonna come soap my back?” Tyanna asked looking over her shoulder. Carlos stared at her in awe, then turned and signaled for the lone guard to leave the shower area. Bonita couldn’t believe her luck, Carlos’ power to pay off the prison had become his demise. He walked up behind Tyanna and ran his arms across her shoulders then down her back playing with her curvaceous body. Suddenly out of nowhere, Bonita crept in behind him stabbing him in his spine and slicing two gashes into the soft portion of the back of his legs. Carlos fell from his feet into the kneeling position.

He looked up at Tyanna. “Help me chica!” He cried out in pain.

Tyanna reared back and slapped Carlo’s so hard an imprint of her hand began to swell in his face. “Why should I help you murderer?!?” Tyanna exclaimed, as she stepped back for Bonita to walk around and face Carlos.

His face grew flush at her appearance. “Do you know who I am cabro’n?” Bonita asked as she bent down to look Carlos face to face.

“I… I can’t move!”

“No shit, your spines damaged idiota.”

“Please don’t kill me, por favor, I can give you millions of dollars U.S.

“Fuck your money!” Bonita screamed as she held the blade to Carlos’ neck. “Do you even know who I am?

“No lo se’, por favor, I’m sorry, please, you have the wrong woman, I don’t know you… I was born a man!”
“I know what you were born as; Carlos Alejandro El Rio.” Carlos’ face had a look of utter shock.

“My name is Bonita Rosa-Sanchez, daughter of murdered parents, and sister of a slaughtered little brother. Carlo’s eyes grew wide and dilated as the memory of murdering her family flooded his brain like a tidal wave.

“Por favor Bonita, please don’t kill me!” Carlos screamed as a last-ditch effort to her to spare his life. “Isn’t that what my mom and my dad said to you?” Bonita replied, as her memories again started to swirl. Suddenly, she saw red, the room felt like a sauna as she reflected on their screams. “This is for mi familia!” Bonita took the shank and cut two deep slices into Carlos’ ribs then grabbed him by the hair. “Where is that stupid smile you had when you were interviewed by the press the next day in Mexico about whether or not you had killed my family? Let’s see if I can recreate it,” she put her shank at each corner of his lips and cut a smile into his face from ear to ear as Carlos continued to cry out in pain. She stood there and stared at him for a moment as he sobbed. “I’ve been waiting my whole life for this moment. Cutthroat to cut throat!” She put her knife to his neck and slid a fine razor thin cut across his windpipe. Carlos dropped to the floor of the shower as he wheezed and gasped for air in his paralyzed state. Bonita put her foot on his neck as the warm blood gushed between her toes and down the showers drain until his body turned cold. She spat on him before dropping the shank down the drain and showering his blood from her body.

Tyanna kept watch at the door while Bonita finished her shower, “Let’s go girl,” she yelled, as she heard a door open down the hall. The two women dried themselves, threw on their jumpsuits, and ran to meet the guard at the bathroom.

“Alright ladies back to your cell,” she said, with a smirk on her face.
The two women returned to the cell and lay in their respective cots. Neither of them spoke a word about the incident. Bonita did not have any nightmares about her family that night.

CHAPTER 5

Three days later a phone call came in to the prison for Bonita Rosa-Sanchez, it was the governor. Bonita broke down into tears as he explained that he would be pardoning her crimes effective immediately thanks to new information that had come to light exonerating her from all wrong doing. She ran back to her cell after receiving the news and gave Tyanna the biggest hug imaginable before gathering her things. It would be bittersweet to be
away from her friend, but Tyanna only had six months remaining on her sentence and could be out in three.

Bonita walked to the prison gates where Cal was leaning against a beautiful convertible, waiting. “What are you doing here, California Bridges?”

“You’re what I’m doing here, Bonita Rosa-Sanchez. She was too happy to pretend to be angry with him. She fell into his arms and gave him a passionate hug. He opened the door and threw her things into the backseat, as they drove away from the prison, and all of the bad memories associated with it.

Cal stopped off at an upscale boutique in the downtown area and let Bonita pick out a few dresses she liked. When she had selected her favorite, he bought her the matching bag and shoes and told her to wear it all out of the store.

Next, he took her to Cuisine Du Monde, an upscale French restaurant frequented by a who’s, who list of celebrity’s and business tycoons in the area. They sat down at the eloquent dinner table and made small talk as they ate the finest of culinary dishes. Cal looked her deep in her eyes and asked, “So how does it feel to be a free woman?” She smirked and looked back at Cal. “I don’t know, I guess the same way it felt to be a free man all them years I was locked up.”

“Ohhh, ouch, burn, I guess I deserved that.”

“Yeah, you do deserve it.” Cal dropped his head momentarily and surveyed his plate.

Bonita tilted her head to the side, smiled, and stared, “Good California…”

“I’m sorry?” He replied, confused.

“I’m saying, good California, as in, it feels good to be out and free.”
Cal perked up and smiled. “You know, out of all the people I know, you are one of the only one’s who’s always called me by my full name…”

“Really?”

“Yes, really!”

“Well does it offend you?”

“No, I don’t guess…”

“You know, I’ve always wondered, how did you get the name California?” Cal paused for a moment and played between his fingers with a cloth napkin that rested on the table’s edge. “You know Cal, if it makes you uncomfortable you don’t have to—”

“No, no, it’s cool, ‘hah’” he let out half-hearted laugh before he began to speak.

“Before my mom got pregnant with me she was one of the best singers in the whole state of Louisiana, but since I was her first child she decided to put her singing career on hold and not be around big crowds of people, so it would be a healthy pregnancy. But singing was her passion, in fact, she loved it so much that my dad went out and bought mics and recording equipment just, so she could sing from home. He would record her, give people her tapes, and sell some as well. They were dirt poor, so he’d have to work some odd jobs just to be able to afford the equipment. Man, she told me he’d be washing cars, mowing lawns, doing just about anything to support her dream, and his family.”

“He believed in her that much?” Bonita said questionably.
“He believed in her that much,” Cal replied shaking his head, yes.

“Anyway, as fate would have it, one day my dad gave my mom’s tape to a man who said he didn’t have any money to buy it. Well, apparently that man was lying, because he turned out to be one of the top record executives in the world at the time, for Loveland records. He called the number my dad had left on the tape and told my mom if she could sing half as good in person as she did on that tape he would sign her to a recording contract on the spot, but they would need to get to California on their own. They were both so excited, and in disbelief, it was a dream come true. That week my dad was working harder than ever doing odd jobs from sun up to sun down and walking home at almost dark just to scrape up enough to get to Cali. Three days before they were scheduled to leave he was killed. [Bonita gasped,]

“I’m sorry,” she said, as she cupped both hands together.

“It’s okay… Cal replied, as Bonita reached for his hand.

“Anyway, my mom was determined to get to California, because it was both of their dreams at this point. As she was making final preparations for my dad, and to leave for California she began having complications with me in her womb. She was rushed to the hospital where they informed her that she would have to have a fifty-fifty emergency surgery if I was to have any chance at survival, or an abortion which would kill me, but save her. Its crazy cause aborting me seemed like the sensible choice. She could have easily made it to Cali that week if I was aborted, plus keeping me was endangering her life and her dream.” Cal tucked his bottom lip in and stared at the table. “But, she chose me… During the surgery everything went well, and though I was born a few months prematurely, miraculously we both survived. But, what they later found after delivery was that one of the newer
surgeons had inserted a tube into her throat the wrong way, damaging her vocal cords.” Cal paused, as Bonita leaned forward hanging on his every word.

“Although she was able to speak, she would never sing again due to the damage. The hospital denied all wrongdoing and lawyered up, so we couldn’t afford to fight it in court. She decided to give me my dad’s last name which was Bridges, and the first name California… cause… she said, I was her dream now.”

Bonita wiped away her tears and took Cal by the hand as tears welled up in his eyes. “That was the most beautiful and tragic story I have ever heard Cal,” she said, as she massaged his hand in-between her fingers. Is that why you came here to California?”

He didn’t respond. He sat for a moment and reminisced on the story until they were interrupted by a waitress.

“Here’s the check you two, no rush, just whenever you’re ready,” she said with a smile before walking away.

“Wow, I got so sidetracked I almost forgot we were at dinner,” Cal said, jokingly. Bonita looked at him and smiled as she shook her head. “Cal, you’re a mess.”

He paid the tab and they exited the restaurant then waited for the valet. Cal tipped the driver then opened Bonita’s door and let her in before accelerating down the pitch-black highway. The weather was perfect for a convertible. The wind blew a soothing mixture of cool and warm air through their hair and clothes as the lights of the city rushed around them igniting a feeling of calm between the two of them.
Before she knew it, Bonita found herself falling asleep on Cal’s arm as he drove through the business district of the city.

The slight squeak of the cars brakes awakened Bonita as she stretched and looked around her environment. “Where are we?” She asked before letting out a big yawn.

“Home,” Cal replied as he let up the top of the car and stepped out.

“Oh, this is nice Cal,” she said as she scanned over the condo briefly.

“I’ve been having it set aside for you here for some time,” he replied as they both stood and stared at the entrance. “This has to be expensive Cal, I can’t afford this, I ain’t even working yet.”

“No worries,” he said with a smile. “Everything’s already taken care of for you.” He handed her the key and began to walk back toward the car.

“Well, aren't you going to show me around?” She asked looking at him confused.

“Oh, sure, sorry, my minds on a million different things right now.” Bonita nodded, and Cal walked up and unlocked the door to the bottom floor.

He took her through room after room, “This is the guest bathroom, and this is the master bathroom, and this is laundry, and this is my favorite room in this whole place, the master bedroom. I got the Egyptian cotton sheets you love, and mink fur throw blankets for the top, just like you like. Bonita was speechless. She walked in the room in a daze and just stared. Cal walked up casually behind her trying to gauge her feelings about the condo.

“Wow Cal—” she spun around and was startled to realize he was standing so close. Their eyes locked into one another's, Bonita could feel the warmth of Cal’s breath coursing across the sensitive layers of skin on her lips.
“Sorry,” Cal said, leaning back slightly, “I didn’t mean to—”

Suddenly she leaned in, kissing Cal passionately on the lips, he met her with equal passion caressing her tongue with his. They tore violently at each other’s clothes causing them to fly whimsically through the air and land in various parts of the room. Cal worked his way down her neck; kissing, nibbling, and gently sucking until chills ran up and down her spine. He worked his way down further, massaging her firm breast and taking each one in his mouth, before moving past her stomach and reaching her prize. Her three lonely years in prison were now manifested through his never-ending search of her body. She jumped and flowed into his hand within seconds as he caressed and rubbed passionately between her legs.

She looked Cal deep in his eyes, “You know what I want!” She said, with a look of seduction. Cal pushed her on to the bed aggressively, and thrust deep inside her, as Bonita let out a loud passionate moan. They lost track of time throughout the night and found themselves falling fast asleep in each other’s arms a couple of hours before sunrise.

CHAPTER 6
Cal’s eyes slowly blurred to life as the rays of sunlight shined through the opened blinds of the high-rise. He moved about in the bed which eventually woke Bonita from her sleep. She smiled with her eyes still half closed as she ran her index fingers through the muscular grooves of Cal’s chest and abdomen.

“Stay…” she said, simply, staring at him with seductive eyes.

Cal smiled and leaned over causing his leg to hit the power button on the remote control. The hi-definition television suddenly came to life.

“Breaking news today as police are at the scene of an officer involved shooting.”

“Hey, turn that up,” Cal said, as he leaned forward to get a better look and listen to the broadcast. Bonita grabbed the remote and turned up the volume.

“Police are at the scene behind Carries Deli, where they are saying decorated Officer Raymond Hines has been shot and killed today, in pursuit of a dangerous felon. He is being hailed as a hero by his fellow officers who say…”

All of the sound in the room faded as Cal’s entire body went numb. He stared at the television with expressionless shock until Bonita’s pulling of his arm jolted him back to reality.

“Cal! Cal! What’s wrong with you?!”

“I gotta go!” He exclaimed, as he jumped from the bed and started throwing his clothes on. He stared at the screen trying to pinpoint the location of the news footage. “Starberry Lane,” he said to himself before darting out of the front door.

Cal accelerated and pushed the limits of the sport coupe, making it to Starberry in less than ten minutes. When he arrived police and reporters were still on the
scene. He ran up to the barricade and lifted the yellow tape as an officer rushed in his direction.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa! Official police crime scene, you can’t go through there.”

Cal flashed his badge and walked through without hesitation. His heart dropped at the sight of his friend’s bullet riddled body left in the alley like a stray dog. Cal could barely stand. It took every ounce of his strength not to vomit at the site of Raymond’s disfigured corpse.

“What happened here?” He asked the highest-ranking officer he could find.

“As far as we could tell, he got a call of an attempted burglary of this deli in progress and responded. When he got here he was fired upon by a suspect or suspects who then fled.”

“Where was his back-up?”

“We’re looking into that right now, but it seems they never arrived.”

Cal looked around on the ground. The bullets had come from both directions. “An ambush,” he said, to himself. He looked up at the backside of the building, all the cameras for the business had been turned away from the alley. “Hey Sergeant, you got any idea who owns this place?”

“Yeah, now that I do know, Officer Carmichael’s family owns this business. Ironically, they were all gone when everything happened. What are the odds right?”

“Yeah… what are the odds…” Cal replied as he stared off in deep thought. “One more question sarge.”

“Okay, what cha got?”
“Anybody get a look at the suspects?”
“Nah, and if they did, good luck getting someone in this neighborhood to talk.”
“Thanks for the updates, sergeant…?”
“Oh, sorry, Rheams is the name, Sergeant, Ronald Rheams.
“Sergeant Rheams, I’m Detective California Bridges, sorry I didn’t introduce myself sooner.”
“Hey, yeah, I heard of you. You’re like an urban legend around here, some people said you didn’t even exist.”

Cal studied Rheams’ face for a moment, “You be careful out here officer.” He said, before walking back to his car.

Cal didn’t have to worry about trying to find someone to talk, he knew just the person. He pulled up outside Jerome’s house and honked the horn. No response. Cal hopped out, walked to his front door, and gave it three aggressive knocks. Suddenly he heard a creak that sounded like sliding glass. Cal sprinted to the back of the house and saw Jerome trying to sneak out the window. “Wop,” he threw a solid punch to Jerome as he attempted to flee, dropping him to the ground below.

“The fuck man?! What’s wrong with you?!” Jerome yelled, as he tried to pick himself up.

“Why are you climbing out the window and trying to run?”

“Man, this my house, this how I like to leave. You use your front door, I use my back window!”

“Yeah right!” Cal replied pulling Jerome to his feet. “I need information.”

“Man, you got a warrant? Cause if not, you can fuck off, I got rights!”
“Nope, no warrant, I mean, I figured since you and a couple of your friends killed that cop up the road on Starberry you might need some counseling. Wanna talk about it?”

“Man, you got the wrong guy my dude, cause I ain’t kilt nobody today, and that’s on my momma.”

“Yeah, well, who did it, Jerome?”

“Man, I-on-know.”

Cal gave Jerome a frustrated look, “You not gonna tell me what I wanna know?”

“Nope! I-on-know shit!” Jerome exclaimed, as he folded his arms.

“That’s interesting Jerome, cause I happen to know a lot. One of the things I know, is that you been laying low since we busted your boy’s, you know, the ones you ratted out!”

“Yo man, cool it with that shit bruh! Lower your voice, you gonna get me killed out cheer!”

“Tell me what I want to know, or I’m blabbing it to the whole hood, Jerome!”

“ALRIGHT! Man, damn! There was a few cats came through a couple days ago trying to see if any old-heads or gang-bangers were willing to knock somebody off for em’”

“So…”

“So, nothing, we sent them fools packing, they looked like squares. Clean cut ass niggas, we figured they was probably po-po’s, so nobody would even talk to em’.”

“What does that have to do with my friend Jerome?”
“That’s what I’m trying to tell you, we seen them same clowns riding down the block real slow disguised in gang clothes trying to blend in. They headed toward that sandwich shop up the block before we heard shots.”

“You not lying to me, are you, Jerome?”

“Man, I put that on my dead homie’s!”

“Alright, thanks man,” Cal said reaching out to shake Jerome’s hand. Jerome hesitated.

“So, this mean we good man?”

“Yeah, we good Jerome.”

Cal walked back to his car and dialed the chief as he pulled away from Jerome’s house. He had conceived it in his mind that some trigger-happy cop had jumped the gun and killed Raymond out of fear he would talk to the press.

The chief finally picked up. “Chief!”

“Hey Cal,” the chief said in a saddened tone. “I’m assuming you already heard about Raymond…”

“Yeah, I just left. Chief I’m going to do everything in my power to find out who did thi—”

“We did what we had to do,” the chief replied, interrupting Cal’s sentence.

Cal switched his cell to speakerphone. “Wait, what did you say?”

“We did what we had to do. He was a liability Cal, it was only a matter of time before he turned on us all and sank this whole division.” Cal took a deep breath and rocked in his seat as he held the phone.
“So, wait, chief, you had Raymond killed?”

The chief became silent for a moment, “I had to do it California, for the sake of all the other decorated officers on this force. I know Raymond had a wife and kids, but think about how many husband-less wives and fatherless children there would have been if over half the precinct went to jail…”

Cal tried to steady his breath as tears streamed down his hard face and plopped onto the sturdy exterior of his jeans. “You told me you would let me talk to him first… you lied to me, you lied to—”

“It wouldn’t have mattered Cal, we both know Raymond was as stubborn as a mule. Nothing I said, or you, or anybody else other than Jesus Christ, would have mattered to Ray once his mind was made up. Look, I know he was your friend Cal, but so are we. Now that Carlo’s is dead we can take the drugs we got and give it to our own distributors. Once our guys are running the show we’ll be richer than we could have ever imagined, and it’s all thanks to you. We’re finally going to get our due.”

“Yes, we are…” Cal said in a somber tone.
The next few days were a blur as Cal and Bonita decided to move in together. He had prepared his speech for Raymond’s funeral and kept doing his detective work as if he didn’t know the killers were right under the same roof as the ones who should be arresting them. A couple weeks after Raymond’s service the chief reached out to him again.

“Hey Cal, the eagle has landed.”

He knew what it meant. The drugs were in. He threw on his all black and grabbed a duffle bag from his closet. He walked over to Bonita, she looked almost as if she was glowing. He leaned down and kissed her and placed a debit card and a letter in her hand.

“What is this California?” Bonita asked, surprised.

“Just read it when you get time,” he said as he turned to leave.

“Cal, I have to tell you something,” she said, as he approached the door.

“It will have to wait this time, love.” Cal replied, as he exited the condo.

He hopped in his vehicle and drove to the undisclosed location. When he arrived, the other officers were already there.
“Glad to see you could join us, the chief said sarcastically as he walked in.

“Good to see you fellas.” Cal walked around and shook each man’s hand greeting them customarily by their name and title.

“Now that, we’ve got our hellos in order let’s get down to business,” the chief said. “We’ve all got California to thank for this, his hard work is the reason we were able to get all of this surplus and make these moves that will make us all millionaires. I gotta be honest, I didn’t think Cal had it in him, and for a while I thought he was too goody-two-shoes to be a NARC, but today I can say proudly he is a man after my own heart. Hear, hear,” he said, as he raised a glass of whiskey in the air. “Hear, hear!” the other officers in attendance replied in unison.

“Gentlemen, we have currently, a shipment of forty-four kilos of, as our Mexican friends would say, coc’a’ ina,” the chief said, with a chuckle. “And before this shipment is completely sold, we will have over a hundred more at our disposal every month going forward. My friends that is a lot of money. And hey, every good businessman knows his product, right?” He said holding up a brick of coke.” The chief laughed so hard at his own joke that he shook. He slammed the brick on the table and sliced into it with a knife. “C’mon California, I know you’re going to partake this time. You never have to work undercover again.”

“No thanks, he said, waving it off. I’ll take another shot of that whiskey though.” The chief poured him another shot and slid it in his direction. “Cal palmed the glass and raised it over his head, “To Raymond!” Cal exclaimed, as he looked at the officers from left to right. The officers in the room grew momentarily silent. “To Raymond!” they all suddenly erupted in unison. The chief didn’t respond, he just dipped his nose in the coke and passed it around.
“FREEZE!” A voice echoed out of nowhere as the door to the warehouse flew off the hinges. “FBI! NOBODY MOVE!” The man who led the charge screamed as he looked from person to person.

“What the hell is going on here? Just what is the meaning of this?” The chief belted out, looking at his comrades.

“This is the meaning.” The fed replied, as he walked over and presented the chief with a no-knock warrant. "Chief Charles "Chuck" Harris, you are under arrest for the illegal sale, and distribution of illegal narcotics.” The agent said, as he effortlessly cuffed his hands behind him.

Every man’s face was in pure shock as one-by-one they were put in handcuffs and hauled off in separate cars. Cal was still in a daze as the agents put the cuffs on him.

“Detective California, do you need to be read your rights?” He didn’t respond, he just shook his head as they lowered him into a car. It was all over. Cal wasn’t as surprised as his peers. He had been working undercover most of his career. For the first time he got to feel what all of the people that he busted felt, that gut-wrenching feeling of being caught. It would be a long ride to the jail just because of the circumstances, he tried not to think about it. Suddenly his phone vibrated in his pocket. He managed to shift his arms enough in the cuffs to get it to fall from his pocket to the seat of the car. He held his finger on the home-screen button until the phone recognized his fingerprint and unlocked. It was a message from Bonita.

Cal, I know you said it would have to wait till later, but I just feel like I have to tell you now. I’m pregnant!
Cal pressed his head against the backseat as a cluster of emotions, and thoughts swirled through his mind at a million miles per second. He thought about nothing else for the entire ride to the precinct.

CHAPTER 8

Once they were processed everything moved quickly. It was a room full of cops, so everyone knew how to work the system. They hired the best lawyers and waived the preliminary hearing so that they could go straight to arraignment. The feds seized over forty kilos of cocaine from the warehouse with all of them present. Cal knew there was no way they were getting out of this mess, but he was wrong. The lawyers that were representing them compiled a defense that the officers were all working secretly undercover to unearth a bigger drug operation that was going on in the inner-city. The corruption had run so deep that they had even gotten members of City Hall to back their claims. Everyone was afraid of taking a black-eye this big in front of the public, as
the media was already turning the entire matter into a circus. Things were starting to shift in favor of the officers.

The chief used his connections to get himself and the other involved officers out of their cells and called a meeting. They met in the chow hall after hours, so there would be no outsiders. Cal, the chief, and all the implicated constituents sat down to discuss the matter at hand. He looked every man over before he spoke. “I don’t think I have to tell you men how serious of a matter this is.” He stopped and lit a Cuban Cigar and began again, “I’ve been talking to the lawyers every day, and they are nearly one-hundred percent sure that we can beat this case. As long as everyone keeps their mouth shut, we should get out of this without even a wrinkle in our sleeves. Everybody got it?” Nods went around the whole room. “Good! Meeting adjourned.” The chief said, as he walked for the exit.

Finally, the arraignment came. As the chief had promised the lawyers brought their A-game. The attorneys were slick and smooth, you would have thought the officers were actually innocent the way they went after the prosecution to defend them. The chief wore a huge smile on his face the entire time, he knew the case was only seconds away from never making it to trial. The judge had a look of frustration all over his face, as he listened to the defense rip apart the prosecution’s case.

“Are there any other witnesses you have?” He asked the prosecution. The prosecutor looked down and shook his head. The judge began again. “Well, with the lack of evidence tying the activity to actual corruption, the court has to accept the word of the officers; saying that the drugs were a part of an undercover sting operation. I have no choice but to dismiss—”

“Your honor, if I may?” Cal said, as he stood to his feet.
“Objection your honor!” the defense attorney immediately said, standing and raising his hand.

“Overruled, these men can speak on their own behalf. Approach.” The judge said, as he looked at Cal with laser focus.

Cal collected himself and walked to the front of the courtroom. He took a deep breath and began to speak. “I have been working with this precinct for sixteen, almost seventeen years. During my time there I was witness to almost every crime imaginable; from misdemeanors to violent felonies. But nothing that I have witnessed has been more atrocious, and more disturbing, than the wrongs committed by my fellow officers.” Gasps went throughout the entire courtroom.

“Objection, your honor!” the defense attorney bellowed out again.

“Overruled,” the judge replied, without a flinch. The judge looked at Cal confused.

“Just what are you saying, Detective Bridges?”

Cal took another deep breath. “All of the drugs seized in the FBI raid was ours.”

The courtroom grew completely silent. The officers looked at their lawyers with confusion as Cal started to speak again. “I personally know of several officers who are still actively involved in crimes including robbery, drug trafficking, bribery, extortion, and even murder. Like the murder of unarmed sixteen-year-old Jaquice Roberts, who was shot several times in his back while fleeing in fear of his life, or Officer Raymond Hines, who was killed to cover up the murder of Roberts, and other corruption.”

“Objection your honor, speculation!” the defense screamed in frustration.

“Overruled.” the judge said, dismissing the defense.
“Your honor, if I can testify against these men, I will prove that not only have they been involved in felonious and violent crimes since I was a uniformed officer, but that they still continue to dabble in crimes in syndicate with officers in my home state of Louisiana, and as far reaching as Mexico; having the politician Hurerra Rosa-Sanchez and his entire family, with the exception of Bonita Rosa-Sanchez, murdered in cold blood. It was the price he paid when he vowed to come forward with connections between U.S. law enforcement, and the drug cartel.”

“These are very strong accusations Mr. Bridges. How do you propose you can prove to this court that any of what you are saying is true?” The judge asked, as he lowered his glasses to his nose.

“Because I have been recording it the whole entire time. The necklace around my neck, was the same one used to take out the Diego Cartel, it’s a camera. I have audio and video confessions from both high and low-ranking officers to all of the crimes I have mentioned and more; including Chief Chuck Harris, snorting cocaine and admitting to initiating the murder for hire transaction that claimed the life of decorated Officer, Raymond Hines. And since I am an officer working undercover, it was granted to me by the courts to use all audio and video to document all crimes that occurred while I was working undercover, including those committed by law enforcement officials.”

“Okay, but why now after the FBI raid did you decide to come forth and bring this information to light?” The judge asked, with a skeptical look on his face.

Cal let out a deep sigh, “I called the FBI,” he replied, as he looked back up at the judge. “I was the one that tipped them off to the location and activity that was taking place that night. If you check the records you will see that the call came
from the number 555-227-1956. No one would have that info except the caller and the FBI.”

“Cal, you slithering snake! You son-of-a-bitch! I’ll kill you!” The chief yelled as he jumped from his seat and charged in the direction of Cal, before being tackled by two bailiffs.

“Remove this man from my courtroom, and hold him in contempt! And let the record show that a threat was made on the life of the witness.” The judge spouted, as they removed a crying Chief Harris from the court room. The other officers watched in horror as Cal destroyed their criminal empire brick by brick.

The judge looked at Cal in shock. “Detective Bridges, you do realize the implications here right? What I’m saying is, if what you’re saying is true, then you will also be found guilty of at minimum accessory to these crimes.”

“I fully understand that judge. I always have. This is my sacrifice. For my people, for the innocents who were murdered. For the voiceless mothers who have cried out about their dead sons and daughters with little recourse. For the good cops who work in fear every day that they may not come home to their family if they rat out their fellow brothers in brass. This is my sacrifice. I will allow myself this chastisement so that my brothers and sisters in this city, and maybe even the world may have peace. I came to this force to prove something, something that I never could have from the outside looking in. Having to grow up without a father, whose body lay cold on the hot Louisiana soil because he fit a description. He was gunned down by the police in the dark while holding tools he used to do odd jobs to support his family. I spent four years on the Louisiana police force just to bring those men to justice before coming here. It took me almost twenty years, but I can finally say I have made our voices heard.”
The news broke quickly across the airwaves about a rogue detective who had turned on his fellow officers. At home Bonita was watching her favorite soaps and trying to take her mind off things when the news flashed across the screen interrupting her show.

*In this breaking news story: A Detective by the name of California Bridges has pleaded guilty to numerous crimes over a span of sixteen years. He is indicating over one-hundred-thirty-four other officers who are foreseen to be arrested for their involvement in corrupt activities, including, but not limited to, drug smuggling, and capital murder. We’ll have more details for you as they become available.*

Bonita jumped from her seat and ran over to her desk. She dug frantically and found the envelope Cal had given her the night he was arrested. She ripped open the seal and read the enclosed letter out-loud.
My dearest Bonita,

You are as lovely as the day I first lay eyes on you. I have never stop loving you since the moment we met. If you are reading this, the world that we shared is becoming unraveled due to truths that could no longer be ignored. And I want you to know that no matter what happens to me you will always have my whole heart. Please find enclosed below, the PIN number to the bank card I gave you. There is about six-hundred- and forty-seven thousand dollars in the account. This money is legitimate, and was earned by me over the years through hard work and savings. Please see that Marie Hines, wife of Officer Raymond Hines, gets at least one-hundred-thousand dollars of the money. The rest is yours, I know you will do the right thing with it. I love you always.

-California