

“Yo Trip make that phone call to your connect right now. If dude don’t have my money, him and I are gonna have some serious problems! That’s on my life!”

“I got you. Don’t even sweat it. I left son a message like three hours ago. I know him. He’s not stupid to try and play me like that. He knows better than to mess around with your money.”

“Oh so now you’re holding him down? You gonna cover for him if I don’t get my cash?”

“I mean...”

“That’s what I thought! Get me my money! Or else I’m holding you personally responsible!”

That was my brother Innocent and his right-hand man Trip having a “friendly debate” over some money owed from a local business associate. If it’s one thing my brother has never tolerated, it’s not having all of his money on time. I’m not a betting man, but I would give all the money in my pocket that Innocent had all of his money before the day was over. I can remember an occasion several of years ago when someone came up short with his money. My brother made a spectacle out of the individual by making him walk home butt-a** naked! And the man was only short by ten dollars!

“How much money came in today?” Innocent questioned.

“At least three thousand...give or take.”

“Give or take? Man you better count that money again and give me an exact amount!”

“My fault. I’ll count it right now.”

“You’re starting to worry me Trip. You’re slacking. I can’t be having that from my first in command! Do I need to replace you with one of these cats out here on the block hungry for a job promotion?”

Doing as he was instructed, Trip counted up all the money that was made so far that day on a very cold and windy afternoon. Trip and Innocent were inside Trip’s apartment but they still found themselves rubbing their hands together for warmth. It was beginning to get colder and for someone who considered himself a “baller” the least Trip could do was pay his Con Ed bill!

“Three thousand one hundred and seventy dollars just like I said.”

“Don’t play with me Trip! I want everything accounted for down to the very last cent. I got people to pay off and mouths to feed. If it’s one thing I’ve learned in this business, it’s to never cheat anybody! That’s why my rep is so on point!”

“I hear you loud and clear. It won’t happen again.”

“It better not.”

While Innocent instructed Trip to count the money for the second straight time, he pulled out a razor blade from a drawer in the kitchen and began to cut up his product into cube-size shapes and place them into a tiny envelope ready for sale. From there, each envelope was personally stamped by Innocent so the fiends in the neighborhood knew that the product they were getting from my brother’s team was official.

Thirty minutes went by and because his last count was off by ten dollars, Innocent made Trip count their stash once again. And then again for one hundred percent accuracy. A word of caution...my brother never did take kindly with his money being funny. He had already made it painfully clear to Trip on more than one occasion that neither one of them were going anywhere until all of the money added up correctly.

Both Trip and my brother spent the next forty five minutes counting up their money to make sure everything added up in the freezing cold apartment, but knowing my brother, things would begin to heat up soon enough.



I was a little more than halfway through the fall semester and had three papers to complete in less than a week. I had gotten to that point in my studies by procrastinating until the last minute so why change what worked? As long as I was able to maintain at least a “B” average, I qualified for advanced standing and would be able to begin my Masters program as long as I was able to obtain a passing grade in my remaining papers that were due.

Yep you guessed it. I was the nerd of the family. The one who never took a risk and played it safe his entire life. While Innocent and the rest of my family were slinging drugs throughout the five boroughs of New York and beyond, I had my head buried in the books. Even my father had mixed emotion when I told him about my plans to attend college and study psychology. But then what could you expect from a man who went by the moniker of “Crime?”

My father Forrester “Crime” Mitchell was a bonafide living legend in the neighborhood that I grew up in. Always a force to be reckoned with the other hustlers that idolized him. Although he moved out to Greenwich, Connecticut several years ago when things began getting hot for him, he has always kept his ears to the street. That’s how things were done in my family. He ran the ‘hood with an iron fist, and even after a self-imposed “semi-retirement” from the drug business, he proudly handed the title over to my brother Innocent.

“We need to find us some chicks to type our paper for us. That is the only way we’re going to get through this semester.”

That was my boy Tyrone talking. He and I met freshman year and had been in almost every class together.

“Nah that ain’t my style. Anything I do, I do myself.”

“Whatever. You won’t be talking that mess after you’ve been up all night working on that twenty page report for clinical psychology.”

“You’re right. This is one paper I’m not gonna wait to do until the last minute. I’m heading to the library right now to get started on it.”

So that was my life at the time. Writing papers for school and once a week, playing football for the Brooklyn Cyclones. While I was busy trying to graduate and maybe getting a tryout with an NFL team down the line, my brother and the rest of my family were grossing close to twenty thousand dollars a week. I really began to wonder if I was in the right business!

November 16th. It was my born day and instead of cradling a beer somewhere in a club with my closest friends, I was contemplating my classmate Tyrone’s suggestion on getting a female in my class to write my paper. A few hours earlier, I was dead set against it, but as I ran the track with three more laps to go, it was beginning to make a lot more sense.

I had just finished stomach crunches, catching drills with the wide receivers’ coach, and running the stairs under the bleachers. I’m a loner by nature and most of my teammates never did pay me too much attention except for a couple of the fellas on offense - my homeboys Felix and Big Mike. Felix was a speedy Hispanic cat who if given an open lane in the backfield, would go the distance before the blink of an eye. Big Mike was a behemoth. Six-foot-four and three hundred pounds of raw strength. He was committed to getting an NFL tryout by any means necessary, and probably will eventually on just his tenacity alone. There was a rumor from within the team that he had experimented with steroids, but he had sworn that there was absolutely no truth to the rumor. He had never been tested because there was no testing for illegal substances at

that level of football. To his credit, he had never displayed any of the well-known signs of steroid abuse: mood swings, loss of hair, or outbursts of “roid rage.”

“What do you think of that quarterback we’re going up against Saturday?” Felix questioned.

“I think we’re in trouble if our defense don’t step up and do their thing,” Big Mike responded.

“You just protect your side of the line and buy me some time to get open. I’ll make ‘em pay!” I assured both of my teammates.

Coach Stevens was a defensive-minded man so our defensive teammates were often the last ones to leave the field. Each of the offensive players, including myself privately waved at them as we exited the field and headed to our cars in order to get home and take a refreshing hot shower. I told myself the current semester would be over in a little over a month and I would be able to focus on football a little bit more. Hell by that time the following year, I may even have had the chance to be working in my field and working on my Masters Degree...maybe even my Doctorate. Those types of aspirations were a rarity for a kid who bolted out of high school for two and a half years to work as a delivery man for a mid-size messenger company.

Before that day ended, I had promised to treat myself to something special. Even though none of my family called to wish me happy birthday, I was in too much of a high-spirited mood to hold it against them. It’s not every day a man in my neighborhood got to celebrate his twenty-first birthday without having at least one foot in the grave.