

The busy streets of Flatbush, Brooklyn, are lined with teenage hormones waiting anxiously to get into the Oasis Club tonight. Underachievers with rimmed-out rides, shallow-ass hoochies in their high-heeled shoes, and wannabe playboys hover near the corner of Flatbush and Church Avenue. Most of the pedestrians just want to sneak a peek at a possible rap star that may show up tonight to promote their upcoming album or to add to their collection of skeezers.

The Oasis Club is notorious for selling liquor to underage teens, and undercover drug raids are the norm during any given weekend. Lennox, the club deejay, shows up in a hooked-up Honda Accord, with metallic five-star rims and a matching metallic undercoat underneath his car that reads "DJ Fresh." Lennox is a neighborhood ghetto celebrity and is the center of everyone's attention as he gets out of the driver's side of his custom ride. Lennox's homeboy, Twan, or "Twitch" as he is commonly referred to due to his annoying eye twitch when he talks, gets out of the passenger side. The teenage crowd vastly ignores Twitch as all eyes are on Lennox. The man mainly known to the eager club goers as DJ Fresh is adorned in a burgundy velour Todd One suit, matching suede pinstripe Adidas, a furry burgundy Kangol hat, and a gold tooth smile with a playboy bunny gold cap on his front tooth. The crowd remains buzzed with excitement as Lennox and Twitch disappear into the darkness of the Oasis Club.

Tamika, Marsha, and I become increasingly antsy by the long wait, and Marsha is the first to reiterate the obvious.

"We ain't getting in 'cause you ain't got no hookup," she says, staring directly into the irritated eyes of mine.

"Chill! I got this!" I declare. "Why you invite her anyway?" I whisper to Tamika. "You know I can't stand her ass."

There is no response, but you could cut the tension with a knife. In what seems like an eternity, a hefty, baldheaded man in his late twenties walks past us and I reach over to grab his burly arm in order to get his attention.

"What's going on, Reggie? Do you think you can hook me and my girls up and get us up in the club tonight?"

Reggie stares at me for several seconds trying to remember where he recognizes me from. Yeah, I admit...it was a little embarrassing. But, after a couple of seconds, he figures it out.

"I know you, right?"

"Yeah--don't you remember? I used to talk to your boy Markie last summer!"

"Yeah, yeah, I remember you now!" Reggie loudly declares. "Markie got bagged by five-0 about three months ago over by the VIM. He's lookin' at a year or so up north- at least."

"Damn! That's messed up for Markie. So do you think you can get me and my homegirls up in here?"

My response was unfeeling and totally void of emotion. But so what? Markie broke my heart by cheating on me right before our thirty-day anniversary. I can

remember it all too well, catching Markie with another girl tongue-wrestling in the back seat of his car one day during our summer fling. It's a secret I never told anyone else...not even Tamika.

Reggie looks us up and down a couple of times and smiles indiscreetly to himself for no particular reason.

"Let me see some I.D.!" Reggie says with his hand out, waving it side to side.

Marsha and Tamika both look at me to see what my response is going to be.

"I.D.?"

I was obviously caught totally off guard. No way did I think he was going to try and play me like that.

"You know we ain't got any I.D. I won't be eighteen until next month."

I have my poker face on full blast tonight. Marsha and Tamika know that I won't be eighteen for several months. There is a momentary silence while everyone waits to see how Reggie is going to respond to my comment.

"I'll let you all in tonight if your girl right there lets me in," Reggie says with a sarcastic overtone in his voice. "If you know what I mean!"

Reggie winks at Tamika, but she is not having it tonight. Instead of crushing our chances of getting inside, Tamika smiles at Reggie and responds to his subliminal advances.

"Well, Reggie, it depends on how much fun we have up in the club tonight," Tamika jokingly responds.

Reggie motions to the equally burly man at the door to let the three of us in, as he moves the rope in front of us that previously impeded our entrance into the club. Angry onlookers wonder to themselves what was said that got us in before them.

Tonight, the hot spot for the moment is the Oasis Club. It's a fire code nightmare waiting to happen and an overzealous cop's wet dream. Literally hundreds of teenage boys and girls and other twenty-something year olds crowd the dance floor grooving to the latest hits. Eric B and Rakim's "Eric B for President" is presently blaring out of the club's four six-foot speakers, while almost ear-deafening bass roars from the sub-woofers that are positioned strategically at each corner of the dance floor. The late-night atmosphere is heavily scented with perspiration from teenagers doing "The Wop" and the "Cabbage Patch." The stench of Polo cologne from eager teenagers trying to get lucky is almost overbearing. We are in awe as we enter the Oasis Club.

"This place sure is packed tonight!" I say to Tamika, as she wipes her sweated brow.

There is an obvious sense of tension and discontent between Marsha and me, as we each try to gain the complete attention and affection of Tamika.

"You and I need to come out here every Friday night, girl!" Marsha says to Tamika with an obvious sarcastic undertone.

Sensing a future brawl between two antagonists, Tamika calls for an immediate end to our senseless bickering.

"Each of you go to your corners! Are we here to chill at the club and have a good time or argue like a bunch of little kids?"

There is a simultaneous silence, signifying that a momentary truce is in effect, and we proceed to a table. However, I am stopped by an old, familiar face from my troubled past.

"What up, Kayla? I didn't think I'd see you up in here!"

The voice belongs to Sammy--better known to others around town as "Slim." It is an appropriate nickname due to his imposing stature. Slim is a twenty-something, six-foot-seven ex-athlete who never truly realized his full potential for stardom. Slim broke every record imaginable while playing on his local high school's basketball team. However, he had an obsession with marijuana, as well as other illegal substances. Slim's obsession with marijuana eventually graduated to hard liquor and crack cocaine.

Slim and I were an undercover item approximately four summers ago. Slim was a senior for the third time and I was merely thirteen years young. Slim was supposed to be my first, but he ended up doing a minor bid for robbing a local grocery store one night after returning home from a club.

As irony would prevail tonight, I would be the subject of stares from eager patrons at the club, while Slim is the forgotten hero receiving nothing more than some random stares of disgust and contempt from his peers in his immediate vicinity.

"Am I gonna get a dance from you tonight or what?"

"I don't know, Slim. Maybe later, okay?"

Slim grabs my arm to exaggerate his request. With a look of contempt, I pretend to be paying attention to his advances.

"I'm gonna be lookin' for you," Slim responds.

"I'm sure you will be."

Slim's breath is blanketed with cheap booze, and his eyes are glossy from years of hypodermic needles and Brass Monkey liquor. Slim's once imposing figure is now nothing more than a distant memory from those that remember his dominance on the hardwood floor.

As the Fat Boy's "Can You Feel It?" blares out of the loud speakers, the three of us settle on holding up a nearby wall, as all the tables in the club are taken.

"Your future baby daddy kept us from getting that last table over there!" Tamika jokingly says to me, referring to Slim.

"I'll be right back, y'all!" Marsha says.

"Where you think you're going? Tamika asks Marsha, with a look of surprise on her sweated brow.

"I gotta use the ladies' room. My makeup is coming off!"

"You know you lyin', Marsha! Where are you really going?" I question.

"Well, if you gotta be all up in my business, I gotta go use the payphone across the street. I just got a page from Jimmy."

Both Tamika and I have an exaggerated smirk on our faces. However, in the

darkened club, Marsha does not notice.

"That friend of yours is something else!" I say to Tamika. "She knows she's trifling!"

"Marsha is alright. You just gotta give her a chance, that's all."

"Oh no, I don't! I didn't like her in elementary school; I didn't like her in junior high school; and I sure as hell don't like her now that we're in high school together."

"Well, I'm cool with her, so let her be...at least for me, alright?"

"I'm gonna go get a drink at the bar. Do you want one?" I ask Tamika, ignoring her request.

"Nah, I'm alright. You don't need to be drinking no ways! You know how you get to acting when you start drinking."

"Please...I've been drinkin' since I was in the eighth grade! Get with the program!"

Tamika's words fall on deaf ears as I make my way over to the bar. I'm searching diligently for some singles to pay for my rum and coke from William, the bartender. William, or "White Willy" as he is affectionately referred to, is a cool-ass white dude in his late forties who listens to rap music and rides around town with his twenty-something year old Black girlfriend.

"What's it gonna be?" asks White Willy.

"Lemme get a rum and coke with no ice, please."

"You look kinda young there, sweetheart. You sure you're twenty one?"

"Of course, I am! I'm gonna be twenty-two in a couple of weeks. So, you should give me my first drink for free as an early birthday present."

"Yeah, sure you are! You must think I was born yesterday or something! If you get nabbed by undercover up in here, you didn't get any drinks from me. Do we understand one another?"

"You got yourself a deal! Now please bring me my drink - with no ice."

Now in deep thought, I fail to notice a brown-skinned, green-eyed, and very well-built brother who comes over to the bar and takes a seat beside me. I am way too busy envisioning myself dancing in the middle of the dance floor, while the old-school jam "Between the Sheets" by the Isley Brothers plays out of the club's speakers. The Isley Brothers is one of my favorite groups of all time, and I have been dying to go to one of their concerts for a very long time. I remain in a trance-like state for several more moments before being startled by a strange voice.

"Can I get that?"

The question is once again asked before I ponder my thoughts to respond.

"Can I get that next to you?"

"That" is the ashtray in front of where I am sitting that the voice is referring to.

"The ashtray...mind if I take it?"

The voice belongs to a brother I've never seen before. As he motions to the

ashtray, I reach over to slide it to him.

"Damn! My fault," I say in response to my obvious lapse of reality.

"That's all right. You must be in deep thought about something...or someone. So what's his name?"

"There you go--just like a man to think it's always about another dude," I reply with a sly expression.

"So then, what are you so deep in thought about? Or maybe it's none of my business," he says, while lighting up a Newport cigarette.

"Well, if you gotta know, I was wondering about one of my girls that I came here with tonight. I'm tryin' to get her to loosen up, but all she can think about is her boyfriend, Donovan."

"And what's wrong with that?"

"Oh, nothing, but sometimes, I think she gets caught up too much with him. It ain't like he's the most loyal brother in the world!"

"Yeah, but you still didn't tell me why you're sitting here worrying about it. Let your girl do her thing and you do yours. In the end, if he ain't the one for her, she'll figure it out."

He has this unique look that could cut through glass, and at the same time, tame the wildest beast. It is a rare combination of tenacity and tenderness. I can tell that he is impressed with my pretentious attitude and charm just as much as I am enamored with his stunning charm and charisma. White Willy returns with my rum and coke, and as I reach for my purse, this drop-dead stranger stops me as I attempt to pay for my drink.

"I got it," he says to Willy, taking another drag from his cigarette. "Just put it on my tab," he adds, winking at Willy.

His smile is a gold-toothed smile with a star embedded in the front. I simply wink and acknowledge the gentlemanly gesture.

"You still haven't told me your name yet. I'm Ellis."

"That's because you haven't asked me yet," is my instantaneous response.

My grin is devilish in nature and my composure is astute. I am used to getting hit on, and tonight is no different. Truth is, I can probably pass for twenty-one on any given night, and in this darkened club, anything is possible.

"So are you gonna tell me your name or am I gonna have to buy you another drink first?"

"You'll know before I leave outta the club tonight. Trust me - it will be worth the wait!"

"I'm sure it will be!" he responds as I take my rum and coke from off of its coaster and leave the bar.