

PRELUDE

“Niggers die everyday in this country!” Governor Busch yelled into his telephone. “That boy was no damn saint, so why’s everybody acting like he’s the second coming of baby Jesus?” He paused to hear the response from the man on the other line.

“Ted, the kid was *unarmed*-“

“So what!” the Governor’s face was starting to turn fire engine red. “Do you know *why* we introduced the ‘Stand Your Ground’ law?” he quizzed the man in Washington.

“Of course I know *why*-“

“Well let me refresh your memory anyway, dammit!” Ted Busch interrupted once again. “That law is the only thing that protects the tax paying, law abiding citizens in this state from the *animals!*” he explained harshly. “Now you’re telling me that I have to sit by and watch an innocent man be prosecuted in a courtroom because he killed a nigger in a hoodie, who was *probably up to no good anyway!*”

“Ted, this has the potential to be a disaster. The blacks are *furious*, the President, the NAACP, the Rainbow Coalition and the list goes on. We can’t afford to have another situation like in the 90’s with the LA riots-“

“This *isn’t* California! This is Florida, there won’t be any riots-“

“There will be if Zenner doesn’t *at least* stand trial.” The man responded quickly.

The Governor sat down in his chair and began to massage his temples using two fingers. This was not how he’d expected to spend his weekend. His mistress Terrica was waiting for him at his cabin on Martha’s Vineyard, and his private plane was scheduled for take off in less than an hour. But the press was waiting for a statement from the District Attorney of Broward County, and she couldn’t speak without his permission so he would have to contact her immediately.

“This is bullshit,” he muttered out loud to himself. “When OJ Simpson got acquitted the blacks partied like it was New Years Eve 1999. When Obama got elected, they partied even more,” he vented. “Hundreds of them die in Chicago every year and they don’t even blink. But *one* nigger takes a bullet in *my* state, a *justified* bullet at that and these monkeys complain like MLK got killed all over again! Trayvon Martin was a street thug, plain and simple. Nothing *more*, nothing *less*.”

There was a pause, and the line was silent. “I agree, but we *have* to smooth this over,” the man finally spoke. “There *was* a murder, and we can’t just act like it never happened.”

The Governor scoffed. “And you think that putting Zenner, the neighborhood watchman in front of a jury will smooth things over?” Gov. Busch asked in disbelief. “Did you guys in Washington ever stop to think what might happen if this Zenner guy gets convicted? Don’t you understand how a *guilty* verdict will affect everything that we’ve built? Not only will the ‘Stand Your Ground’ law be in jeopardy, but *all* of our gun

laws! Next thing you know that kids family will be advocating for gun reform, they'll sue the city, county, and the state! Hell who knows, they may even try to sue the manufacturers of Jorge Zenner's pistol. Won't that be something? How will our friends at the NRA feel about *that*?"

The man chuckled. "We have thought about what would happen if Zenner was arrested and that's *exactly* what needs to happen. Now, as far as him being *convicted*, I have faith that *you* won't let that happen-"

"I'm confused," the Governor interrupted. "What exactly are you saying?"

"What I'm *saying* is, don't forget who put *you* in office," the man answered bluntly. "*We* did, your family in Washington. Now I'm giving you a job to do, and your job is to clean this up. It's about time for you to get your hands dirty like the rest of us."

Governor Busch closed his eyes. "So let me get this straight? You want me to force the DA's office to indict this guy Zenner, *and then* you want me to make sure that he gets *acquitted*?" He was astonished, and to him it still didn't make any sense.

There was another long pause before any words were spoken, but finally the silence was broken. "That's what's best for this country," the man told him smugly. "*I'm so glad* that you were paying attention, I guess you're not as *dumb* as you look, maybe that apple didn't fall too far from the tree after all." He said sarcastically right before disconnecting the phone call.

When the line went dead, the Governor dropped the phone back onto his desk. His weekend plans were ruined, and now suddenly things had taken a drastic turn. It didn't look as if he'd make his flight to Nantucket this weekend, because now he had work to do. He let out a deep sigh, and the stress was beginning to set in because he didn't even know where to start. All he knew was that first he needed a drink. He stood up, went

straight for the mini-bar in his office and started to pour himself a shot. As he held the bottle he reconsidered, and instead of using the shot glass, he tilted his head back and took a long gulp of whiskey straight from the bottle.

He couldn't believe his luck.

CHAPTER ONE

I hate this country, but I'd die for it. You see, most people are on the outside looking in, but I'm in the midst of the madness. I'm observing this nation from a soldier's perspective, from a warrior's standpoint. From across seas on a battleground, it's easier to see things much clearer. Everyday I risk my life for a country that doesn't want me. A place that kidnapped then enslaved my ancestors. A nation that carefully hand crafted a Constitution just to keep one specific race of

people down. *My* people. So whom am I fighting for? Why am I in Iraq, wearing Kevlar in 110-degree weather? Why do I find myself ducking AK-47 ammunition, sidestepping landmines, all in the name of freedom, just to come home and live scared? Scared to walk the streets, or drive my car because I'll be racially profiled, harassed or even worse...end up like Sean Bell or the host of other innocent men who resemble me.

Freedom is an illusion. The American dream is bullshit. It's nothing short of a false sense of hope, marketed and promoted to those gullible enough to believe it. The word *Democracy* should be outlawed, and banned from the American dictionary. The use of that word especially by any politician should be deemed blasphemous and considered a prosecutable offense. Our judicial system is just a *joke*, a mockery even. Nothing tips the scales of justice like money or skin tone. Good Ole' America. A place where PETA is feared, simply because animal's rights outweigh the rights of any man or woman bearing a dark skin complexion. Kill a black man in America and get a slap on the wrist. Kill a dog, and get a year in federal prison. Just ask Michael Vick. Land of the free? Well, maybe for *some*. Home of the brave? You've never met a man braver than a black man. Black men are courageous enough to leave home every morning knowing that the odds are completely stacked against them. It's a heavy cross to bear. Unless you're a black man living in this country, this is something that you wouldn't understand.

God Bless America, the home of crack cocaine. The infamous drug that happened to magically appear just as African Americans were beginning to rise up. I've always wondered which black chemist created it, then reality hit home. It *wasn't* created *by* us. But it was definitely created *for* us. To *destroy* us. Cocaine was imported into this country to serve a purpose, and it was a masterfully crafted plan. Perhaps even more genius than the way the guns appeared. You can't manufacture a

firearm in the basement of your house in the 'hood. So how did these two main ingredients for disaster just happen to end up in our inner city streets across America at a time so crucial?

I'm not pointing a finger at anyone, I'm just stating the obvious. I'm sharing these things because I want you to know why I hate this country. The country I've chosen to protect with my own blood, blood passed down through generations of slaves. My name is Luxor Kismaayo, that's my African name. A name that represents my Egyptian and Somali heritage, and one I'm *extremely* proud of. I'm an officer in the United States Navy, with the official rank of Lieutenant Commander. I'm a part of the most elite unit the US military has to offer, I'm a Navy SEAL. I've been trained by the best, and I own a very unique skill set that makes me very dangerous. I've given ten years of my life to defending this country, and I've parachuted into deserts all over the globe, while bearing the American flag on my left shoulder. Not saying that I should be labeled a hero, but dammit America show me some gratitude, or at the least some respect. Is that too much to ask? Even if I'm just a *regular* black man, not the star athlete on your favorite NBA team, or your teenage child's favorite rapper.

This is my story, and a story that *needs* to be told. This is a story that will open your eyes and shed light on *our* great nation. The place *we all* call home. If you're living under a rock, come from under it and witness what happens in the *real* world. If you've been sheltered from reality, let your guard down and be vulnerable. Take a walk with me, and wear a pair of my shoes. See the world how *I* see it, from *my* eyes, living inside this dark skin. Witness what people will do for thirty pieces of silver and watch how they'll sell their morals for self-gratification. I pray for every soul that my words reach, may Allah forgive you for your iniquities. As I pray he'll forgive me for my own.

CHAPTER TWO

There were no patriotic thoughts circling my mind as I maneuvered my way through the forever crowded Buffalo-Niagara Airport. It was Christmas Eve and I should've been happy and excited, or at the very least in a semi pleasant mood. But I wasn't, and actually, very far from it. People smiled at me as I hurried towards the luggage carousel. Complete strangers waved at me, others nodded in admiration. For the benefit of the women and children, I forced a smile. The civilian men, I ignored. Women and children needed to be protected, but civilian men were cowards. I feel every man in this country should serve at least one year in the military, it's only right that we all share the task of protecting this soil. How else can you call yourself a man?

My BDU's, or desert fatigues always seemed to attract people's interest, but especially in airports. The insignia's, the patches and that American flag on my shoulder were attention magnets. Suddenly people treated me with respect. Same airport, different day, had I been dressed in jeans and a hoodie, women would clutch their purses and turn up their noses. But today, dressed like a war hero, they asked me to take pictures with them and their children. *Amazing.*

My posture, and my swagger are very militant. I'd been trained that way. My vocabulary changes depending on whom I'm conversing with. I speak both military jargon and street lingo fluently. I can adapt to any situation, any environment, because my life depends on it. My survival skills are something that I cherish deeply, because without them, I would've been dead a long time ago.

As I stood at the luggage carousel with my carry-on bag in hand, people continued to wish me a Merry Christmas, but I never wished them one back. I'm not a Christian. Currently, I don't practice any faith, but I was raised Sunni Muslim and Christmas is not something I celebrate. Religion is a very confusing topic for me. It's hard for me to grasp the entire

concept. I do believe in a higher power, a God. I call him Allah, and I do pray to him occasionally. I'm just not *over* religious. Probably because I've experienced more than enough tragedy in my lifetime to create some serious doubts about anything spiritually related.

I was relieved when I spotted my military issued olive green draft bag riding on top the carousel in my direction. Fortunately, today I wouldn't have to worry about a loss of property being added to my already long list of worries.

Thank you, Delta Airlines.

I grabbed the draft bag, slung it over my shoulder and proceeded towards the traffic loop. Fishing my iPhone from my cargo pocket, I powered it on to check my messages. Apparently, my younger brother Ahmed was waiting for me outside, so I hurried towards the long row of glass doors.

The one thing about Buffalo winters you can always count on, is the snow. And there it was, coming down by the truckloads. Less than 72 hours ago I'd been in Iraq, a completely opposite climate and my body was about to go through some changes. I didn't have a coat, so I waited at the doors and scanned the traffic loop. Only taxis were allowed to park at the curbs, all other personal vehicles could only stop long enough to load or unload passengers or luggage. Because of this, cars circled the loop repeatedly until they spotted who they were looking for, or were flagged down. In this case, I didn't know what Ahmed was driving or if he would even recognize me, so I just decided to call.

"Hello?" he answered on the first ring, but his voice was being drowned out by the sound of loud music in the background.

"I'm at the doors-"

"I'm coming around right now." He said quickly before clicking the line dead. For some reason the sound of his voice gave me butterflies in my stomach. It had been years since I'd

seen him, and I missed him dearly. But the person I was most excited to see was my son, Kenyo. I had so much catching up to do with my family and the anticipation was killing me.

I pushed open the glass door and stepped out into the dry, frigid air. The lake effect snow was being blown in several different directions by irrational wind gusts. There were no parking spots available at the curb, so I stood beside a yellow cab and closely watched the oncoming traffic. To my surprise, a shiny black Lexus with the music blasting came to a screeching halt right in front of me as it double-parked beside a taxicab. The trunk popped open, and then my little brother emerged from the drivers seat wearing a timid smile. He watched my eyes widen as I looked back and forth between him and the brand new ride.

“What’s up, bro?” Ahmed walked up to me, and shockingly enough I had to look upwards to see his eyes. In the thirty months since the last time I’d seen him, he’d grown at least six inches. It was unbelievable, so much that I had to look down at his feet just to make sure he wasn’t wearing stilts. I’m 6’2” even, but at the age of eighteen, my brother had now outgrown me by about three inches. He was a *huge*.

An awkward smile crept across my face. “What happened to you?” I grinned at him. “What’s mommy been feeding you? *People?*” I joked, as I looked him up and down in amazement. I grabbed his arms and became shocked at how solid they were. On top of the height, he packed on some serious muscle.

“I’ve been working out.” his face was showing pride. “I’m going Division 1 next year, I’ve been lifting weights so I can bang with the big boys.”

I dropped my draft bag onto the snow-covered pavement. “*I’m a big boy, think you can bang wit’ me?*” I put my hands up, the same fists that had earned me golden gloves when I was his age.

He laughed at my joke. "I don't beat up senior citizens." He continued to smile while showing me his palms in the gesture of surrender.

I chuckled. "Fine, then just stand there and get your ass kicked." In a swift motion I pounced on him like a cheetah, and in less than a split second later I had him in a headlock. We began to tangle and lock horns like two bulls. Right there in public we began to wrestle like two kids at a playground. I'd be lying if I said I couldn't feel the new strength Ahmed had built since the last time we'd tussled, but it wasn't quite enough. I had SEAL strength, one thousand pushups a day for the past ten years, and he wasn't quite ready for this challenge. I run at least a mile each day, and do endless core exercises for stamina and endurance. The weights he'd been lifting were no match for my warrior lifestyle, so I put him on the ground just to show him. He needed to be reminded that he'd always be the *little* brother, no matter how *big* he grew.

"Okay!... Okay!..." he submitted. "You got it..." Ahmed was already out of breath, and now he was lying on his back next to my bags looking up at the sky. A few nosy people had begun to stop and stare, they acted like they'd never seen two brothers reunite with mild violence before. "You still got it." He conceded with a smile as his chest heaved up and down showing that he was out of breath.

I winked at him, and then extended my hand to help pull him up from the ground. "I had to show you that I'm *still* the boss, that way things will go smooth while I'm home." we both laughed together, then I helped him to his feet and gave him a rough bear hug. "I missed you kid, you look good. Handsome, just like me." I joked continuing to keep the mood light.

"I guess you still got your sense of humor, huh?" he asked sarcastically.

"That much hasn't changed." I replied, finally dropping my arms to let him go. As we stood face to face and looked each

other over, I realized my little brother had done some serious growing up. These days he even had a little facial hair, a light mustache with a hint of peach fuzz under his chin. It was like staring at one of my high school photos. But as I looked closer into his eyes, something was different. I checked his body language and realized two things. First, he couldn't maintain eye contact with me for too long, he kept looking away like he was nervous about something. Secondly, I could sense that he'd lost his innocence. His conscience was dirty, this I knew for certain. I'd been gone for three years and missed a huge chunk of his life. I just hoped that he hadn't been brainwashed by the streets, the last thing I wanted was for him to become a product of his environment.

Finally after an awkward half a minute, Ahmed reached down and picked up my bags. He tossed them into the trunk, and then we both climbed into the Lexus. As he pulled off from the curb, I reclined my seat a little and exhaled, I was finally able to close my eyes. It had been a long while since I'd been in my comfort zone, the war zone was all I knew. Bombs exploding. Machine gun fire. Military convoy's, tent cities. Grenades, M-16's. Deserts, mountains, and combat boots. Fighter jets, cargo planes and snipers. The call of duty. But for the next thirty days of leave time, I could relax and forget about the rescue missions overseas in enemy territory.

I opened my eyes. "Where's Kenyo?" I looked over at Ahmed as he sped towards the highway that would take us into the city. My son had been heavy on my mind these last few days, even more than usual.

He looked over to face me, "I'm taking you to see him right now, but..." Then he broke eye contact to pay attention to the snowy road ahead of him.

"...But you know, Lux. Things aren't-" Ahmed had started to speak again but stopped himself. I watched him contemplating his words, and he didn't seem to know what to

say. "A *lot* has changed..." that was all he was able to say, it sounded bleak and that made my heart drop. Things had *already* been complicated before I went off to Iraq. My ex-wife Kenya and I had finalized our divorce, our relationship had soured, and it had affected how much time I spent with my son. As much as I love Kenyo, we barely knew each other. It had been ages since we were a family, because I'd spent the majority of my career overseas, which was the biggest reason why my marriage to his mother failed.

"*What?*" I asked him. "Did Kenya get remarried or something?" I wanted to know. "Is another man raising my son?"

"Nah, bro. That's not it-"

"Then what is it?" I pressed him for a straight answer.

My brother didn't respond, and he just kept driving, as my last question continued to hang in the air. My conscious made me jump to a conclusion and it stung. I'd endured so much, but I'd never be able to live with myself if my son didn't want to see me. If I had a dollar for every soldier who's lost his family while being away defending this country, I'd be rich. I never wanted to leave my family behind, I joined the military to escape the hood, and be able to provide for them. But in hindsight, the money I sent home each month couldn't make up for the fact that I was five thousand miles away, chasing terrorist through the desert while my son was back home in desperate need of a father.

"I *wanted* to be a good father," I mumbled, as I turned my head away from Ahmed to look out the window. "I *wanted* to be a better brother," I added just loud enough for him to hear me. "But I had to make a choice, and if I would've stayed here I would've ended up in prison. I did the only thing I could, and I went to the Navy because I didn't have any other options. I wasn't good at anything except getting into trouble, what else was I supposed to do?"

"Lux," I felt Ahmed grab my shoulder. "Nobody's angry at you for being gone. If anything, everyone is *proud*-"

“So what did you mean by, ‘a lot has changed’?” I asked him. “You made it sound like Kenyo wouldn’t be happy to see me or something.”

There was a slight pause. “Lux, I came to pick you up because I need to tell you something.”

“Tell me *what?*” I looked at him intensely.

“I’ll tell you when we get there.” He replied. “You have to see it with your own eyes.” I detected seriousness in his tone, so whatever he needed me to see couldn’t be good. I left it alone, sat back in my seat and we rode in silence. It was dark outside, and I watched the street lamps fly by as we drove through the city. My thoughts bounced around for almost another ten minutes until Ahmed finally pulled over to the curb. Even though it was dark outside I could still see the sign identifying the cemetery, and it made me shiver. This was the exact same place where we’d buried our father almost twelve years ago. Ahmed got out the car, he’d cut the ignition so I guessed he’d intended for me to follow.

When I climbed out into the cold, my little brother faced me with a sad look. “Lux, I’m sorry man...” Ahmed’s eyes were glossed over, his lips trembling, and a tear had begun to fall.

“Sorry about *what?*” I was completely oblivious.

“Lux, Kenyo’s *here.*” He looked away while motioning towards the cemetery.

It took a few seconds for what he was saying to register, but when it did I grabbed him by the front of his jacket almost lifting him off the ground. “Ahmed, what are you talking about, what do you mean? Are you saying, what I think you’re saying?” I asked him angrily.

His body went limp, and he fell into my arms and cried like a baby. “It’s what I’ve been trying to tell you...” he held on tightly to my uniform and wept. “Kenyo is *gone.* He’s *dead.* We buried him *months* ago, right next to dad.”

The revelation was almost too much for me to handle, and it took every ounce of strength in me not to break down.

And that's how my vacation started.