

A
Mother's Hustle
Family Always First

By: Yunus Abdul Wahid


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D e d i c a t i o n

First, I would like to give praise to Allah for allowing me and blessing me with a way to earn my money legally while in prison after so many years. Second, I would like to dedicate this book to the following people: my mother, Charlene Lay (May Allah have mercy on her soul), R.I.P. Mama, your death still hurts after so many years. My father, Jonah Lay, for being the man of all men. Thank you Daddy and I love you so much. My babies: LaShae Sowell, Tabitha South, JaQuiesha Lay Crawford, Akilah Heard, and Jarvis Heard, and my beautiful grandkids De'Andre Miller, Aniyah Shepard, Malik South, Elijah South, David Crawford Jr., Avery Sowell, and the whole Laiboi Ent family-you know who you are. My sisters and my brothers, I love ya'll so much. Last but not least, the two women who gave me my kids and my grandkids: LaQuncia M. Heard and Erica South. To the ones who counted me out---I'm still here LOL

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Chapter 1

“**M**ama, dats too much weed you putting in

them bags. What is them you making up anyway?” Punkin asked his mama, Cha-Cha.

“I’m sacking up some nicks and some dimes, but why is you questioning me about my damn business anyway, boy?” Cha-Cha asked.

“Because you givin ’em too much in these yellow envelopes for five and ten dollars,” Punkin explained as he held the sacks of weed in his hand while looking at them.

“Boy, let me run my own shit! You don’t know nut’n ‘bout sacking up no damn weed, and put my shit down,” ChaCha scolded him, watching him as he held the envelopes.

“Uh huh, yes I do. Much as I done watched you? And I know this too much you puttin in these yellow envelopes, Mama,” Punkin explained to her.

“Now Mama, dat boy ain’t got no business in here round all this stuff.” Sheila explained as she put her hand on her hip, “he ain’t nothin’ but 10 years old goin’ on 20, and plus he already knows too much as it is,” Sheila commented as she shook her head side to side.

“Don’t be worrying ‘bout my damn baby. He ok. Shit, what do you expect when everybody ‘round him is selling this shit,” Cha-Cha replied?

“Come on Punkin baby, go on and sack you up some of that weed right there,” Cha-Cha said while pointing to a pile of weed on the bed, “let me see what you know, since your sister wanna run her damn mouth.”

“Mama,” Sheila cried out, “don’t be letting dat boy touch dat stuff.”

“Shut the hell up! Plus, you don’t tell me what the fuck to do and not do! And I wanna see if he really do know what he’s doing. Just in case he has to take over the business one day.” Cha-Cha went on to explain, “Shit, your brother Smooth ain’t trying to do nut’n but shoot up all da cocaine he can find in Atlanta with his junkie ass. Shit, he ain’t done nut’n but bring hurt on this family anyway. He don’t care nut’n ‘bout nobody but himself, and the only thing he wanna do is get high.”

Sheila couldn’t do anything but just stand there shaking her head from side to side as she listened to her mama telling the truth about her oldest brother. And now here was her lil brother, who she loved so much, being made into a man and a drug dealer at such an early age. Punkin was so smart and yet bad as hell all at the same time. Sheila realized there wasn’t anything she could do about it but sit there and watch her tenyear-old brother sack up weed with their mama. At first, she was kind of angry about it, but then, she realized there was nothing she could do but go with the flow.

“Mama’s right, he might have to run dis one day,” Sheila thought to herself.

While she was deep in thought, she heard her mama say, “Dis damn boy really do know what he’s doing.”

“Let me see,” Sheila said as she reached for the 3 nicks and dimes Punkin just finished sacking up.

“Dis nigga really do know what he’s doing, huh? I can’t wait to tell Samantha and Baby Girl about dis.” Sheila replied, looking at Punkin.

“Mama, you gonna let me help you sack up all the rest of them too?” Punkin asked, while pointing to more weed he saw on the floor, in front of the closet.

“Boy, dat’s 5 pounds right there.”

“Sooo?!! I don’t care. I still wanna help you do it,” Punkin responded.

“Alright, I'll think about letting you help me when I get ready to sack it up. But right now, I want you to go check on your little brother and see what he's doing,” Cha-Cha explained.

“Yes, ma'am,” Punkin responded and headed downstairs.

Enos is Punkin's baby brother and the youngest child of six. They were born six years apart. Since their mama used to drink and get drunk a lot, Enos was born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. So as a baby, he required a lot of extra attention from the family. Punkin was his closest brother.

Neither Punkin nor Enos cared for their oldest brother, Smooth. That was because of his drug habit and the way he mistreated the family. He continually put the family in danger with his drug habit. Plus, he was always stealing and lying about it.

“Enos!” Punkin called out to his lil brother from the top of the steps in their four-bedroom apartment in Carver Homes Projects.

“Huh, big bwudda?” Enos answered from downstairs.

“Whatcha doin' boy? You ain't down there gettin' into nothin' is you?” Enos yelled.

“Nuh-uh. Big bwudda, Um hawngry.” Enos said while trying to climb the stairs.

“Okay, stay right there. Here I come. And what you want to eat?” Punkin asked. As he walked downstairs, he could hear Sheila on the phone with their sister, Samantha. Sheila was telling Samantha about him sacking up his first sack of weed. Now with a big smile on his face, Punkin thought, “*Yep, and one day I'll have all that plus much more and be real rich with a lot of money.*”

As he got to the bottom of the stairs, he took Enos's hand and said, “Come on lil bruh, let's go fix you something to eat.”

“O-tay big bwudda, luh ou,” Enos told him.

“I love you too lil bruh. What you wanna eat 'til Mama finish handling her business and come cook us something?” Punkin asked.

“Uhhmm, dem bickles and hot dawse. What ou gon' eat?” Enos asked.

“I dunno. I might fix me a couple of grilled cheese sandwiches. Why? You want one too?” Punkin inquired.

Enos just looked at his big brother with a big smile on his face. He shook his head up and down to tell his big brother, “YES!” Punkin went to the fridge and grabbed a long brown box that had a big block of what everyone referred to as “government cheese”. After he put that on the counter, he turned around and grabbed the butter. Punkin gave the butter to Enos to hold while he pulled a chair from the kitchen table over to the fridge. Standing on the chair, he grabbed the loaf of Colonial bread from the top of the fridge. He put the bread, butter, and cheese on the counter and went to get the big black skillet from under the kitchen sink. After rinsing out the skillet, he put it on the stove. He then tore off a piece of the brown paper bag that was in the corner and rolled it up. He stuck it inside the gas stove until it caught fire from the pilot light. He then turned on the front left eye on the stovetop and lit the eye for the skillet.

Chapter 2

“**B**oy, what the hell is y’all two bad-asses down

there doing in my damn kitchen,” their mama, Cha-Cha, screamed from the top of the steps.

“Cooking me and my lil brutha some’n to eat, mama. He told me he was hungry,” Punkin yelled back from the kitchen.

“Who in the hell told you to cook anything down there in MY damn kitchen, huh? And anyway, what do you call yourself down there cooking? You better not burn my motherfuckin’ apartment down,” she yelled.

“Yes, ma’am. I’m cooking us some grilled cheese sandwiches. You know when my lil brutha told me he was hungry, I had to feed him Mama,” Punkin explained.

“Big bwudda, is we gon’ git in twouble?” Enos asked, looking up at Punkin with fear in his eyes, because he didn’t want to get a whoopin.

“Naw, we ain’t gonna get in no trouble,” Punkin answered as he hugged Enos to make his lil brutha feel better. “You better make sure you clean up whatever the fuck you fucked up in that kitchen, because I still gotta cook before Droup get his ass home from work. You know how his drunk ass is, and I ain’t trying to hear his damn mouth ‘bout me not having his food ready. Matter of fact, while you’re down there, go on ahead and take out that chicken that’s in the freezer, and run some cold water on it for dinner,” Cha-Cha instructed Punkin.

Droup is Punkin’s and Enos’s real daddy, but as far as all six of them were concerned, he was daddy to all of them. When Cha-Cha and Droup first met, Cha-Cha already had

four kids of her own. Their father was nowhere to be found, therefore, not in their lives at all. So as any real man would do when he got with a woman who had kids, he raised all six of them as if they were his own. He never mistreated any of them. He loved them all and would do anything he could to make sure they were happy.

Even though Droup liked to drink his liquor and beer 'til he got drunk, he was a very hard-working man and a damn good husband and father to his kids. No matter how cold it was, how sick he was, or how far he had to walk, he made sure he went to work five days a week; sometimes, he went all seven. He wouldn't even cash his check before coming home. Rather he would come home and pick up ChaCha, and they would go together, cash it, then he would allow her to manage all the money. He would make sure that he gave her nearly his whole check to make sure all the bills in the apartment were paid, food was in the apartment, and that his kids were taken care of. He would only keep 50 dollars for himself to carry him to the next Friday. As long as he had something to drink when he got off work and a home-cooked meal when he got home, he was straight.

"Yes, ma'am," Punkin said as he went to the fridge and opened the top where the chicken was. He grabbed a bag of leg quarters and placed them in the sink. He turned on the cold water to thaw the chicken.

"Come on lil bruh, let's get ready to eat. Go on and sit at the table while I grab our sandwiches outta the skillet," Punkin said, as he and grabbed some plates for them.

Enos took off running to the kitchen table, pulled out a chair, jumped up in it, and turned around while standing in the chair. He was waiting on his grilled cheese sandwich and pickles with hot sauce.

"Sit down, Enos, before you fall and hurt yourself," Punkin warned.

"I ain' gonna fall big bwudda," Enos fired back

"A'ight now, if you fall your butt outta that chair, you better not start no crying," Punkin explained.

"Awight. Big bwudda, you gon' make us sum Koo-aid?" Enos asked.

"Yeah, I will fix us some Kool-Aid, but you gotta sit down in your chair first."

"O-tay," Enos replied as he turned around and sat down.

Punkin grabbed two small plates, two glasses, and then got a butter knife and a spatula from the drawer. He fumbled as he used the spatula to turn the grilled cheese sandwiches to cook evenly on both sides. After he scooped the third sandwich from the skillet, he turned off the eye and put the hot skillet in the sink and ran cold water on it while it sizzled and smoked up the kitchen.

He cut one of the three grilled cheese sandwiches in half, so he could share it with his brother, so they both had one and a half sandwiches. Then he put pickles and hot sauce on Enos's plate. He set the plates on the table and then went and got a pitcher of watermelon Kool-Aid from the fridge and poured them each a glass of it. He put the pitcher of Kool-Aid back in the fridge and grabbed their glasses and brought them to the table. He sat down, and they began to eat. As soon as they had taken a bite, they heard *knock, knock, knock, knock* at the door.

"Dumboly at da doe big bwudda," Enos said, turning his body in the direction of the knock on the door.

"I know. Stay right there while I go get Mama." Punkin replied.

"Who is it?" They both heard Sheila inquire before Punkin got a chance to get out of the kitchen.

"Girl, open up this damn door!" They heard their other big sister, Baby Girl, say from the other side of the door.

"Big sista, that's Baby Girl at the door." Punkin said as he met Sheila at the entrance to the kitchen, which was next to the front door. Sheila opened the front door to let her little sister, Baby Girl, in. Baby Girl stepped inside wearing some Adidas shorts and an Adidas shirt with a pair of green and white Stan Smith Adidas tennis shoes. She also wore a pair of big, gold, hoop earrings with a diamond stud in the hole next to the hoop. Her hair was cut short in a style that showed she was feeling fresh. Sheila stood looking at her little sister in admiration.

"Where my mama at? And why is you standing there wit yo' stank ass lookin' at me like that?" Baby Girl asked with a smile on her face.

"She's upstairs, and who in the hell did your red ass trick to dress you all up and shit? And don't you sit there and tell me nobody, cuz your red ass is too dang jazzy for you to

sit up here and try to even think about telling me a lie,” Sheila said with a smile on her face as she joked with her baby sister.

“Bitch, go to hell. I ain’t tricked no-damn-body. Me and one of my niggas just came back from shopping downtown. He hit a big ass lick last night, so you know I had to put this pussy on him like I hadn’t fucked in a hundred damn months,” Baby Girl spit back while moving her head from side to side as she laughed.

“Bitch, you so damn stupid. And which one, hell, you got so many mens to choose from? Naw forget that, let me tell you ‘bout this lil brutha of yours standing here with his bad ass,” Sheila replied.

“What the hell his grown ass done did now?” Baby Girl asked while looking at her little brother, who was just standing there with a smile on his face. Punkin waited for Sheila to tell Baby Girl the news of him sacking up his first bags of weed. Right as Sheila was about to tell the story, Enos came running in the room and jumped into Baby Girl’s arms.

“Heeeeyyyyy big susta,” Enos yelled jumping in her arms.

“Hey baby! What you been eating boy?” Baby Girl asked as she picked him up and hugged.

“My big bwudda, Punkin, cook us dum gwill teeee dammiches; ou wan' dum?” Enos asked.

“Naw, baby. I’m ok. I just finished eating. Now what was you finna say 'bout this bad ass right here?” Baby Girl asked while moving Enos to her hip.

“Girl, do you know Mama let this lil fucka sack up some damn weed with her not too long ago,” Sheila told her.

“No, the hell she didn’t. What the fuck is wrong with Mama, has she lost her damn mind? Why in the hell didn’t you beat his lil ass?” Baby Girl inquired.

“Who?! Shiit, you know how Mama is about that damn boy. You know can’t nobody touch him without getting cursed out. She cursed me out when I tried to say somethin’ about it,” Sheila responded.

“That’s why his lil ass is so damn grown and bad as hell now, 'cause can’t nobody whoop’m. What the hell you standing there smiling at me for?! You know you ain’t got no

damn business putting your hands on that shit. I oughta beat yo' ass myself," Baby Girl told him.

Just as Baby Girl was talking, their mama walked around the corner into the kitchen after standing there listening to them.

"Hell naw, I ain't lost my fucking mind, and you of all people ain't gonna put your fucking hands on him. Just like I told Sheila's ass, shit, all of us sell this shit right in front of him every damn day. If he go'n do it, I rather it be me teachin' him than the punk ass niggas in these streets. Shit, somebody's go'n have to take over what I am trying to build one day when I'm tired. And it damn sure can't be y'all or that damn nogood Smooth," Cha-Cha explained.

"Mama, you know that boy is too damn young to be messin' with that stuff," Baby Girl explained with Enos on her hip as she pointed at Punkin with her free hand.

At that point Sheila told them to stop it and told Baby Girl to come on upstairs with her, because no matter what any of them had to say to their mama, it wasn't going to do any good, because her mind was already made up.

"Come on girl, let's go on upstairs," Sheila said to Baby Girl.

"Yeah, you better get that lil red-ass bitch before I kill her ass. Fuck she think she is anyway, comin' in my damn apartment running her mouth?" Cha-Cha asked.

Baby Girl was just about to say something when Sheila put her hand over her mouth to keep her quiet.

"Just shut up, Baby Girl, please. Don't say nothin' back, because you know how she is. So come on, let's just go on upstairs," Sheila begged wisely.

Baby Girl was about to buck up to her mama, but what Sheila said made her think twice, and she went upstairs with her.

"I know that's right. You better take her mother-fucking ass upstairs if you know what's good for her ass," Cha-Cha yelled after them.

"Mama, leave the girl alone now. She gone upstairs," Sheila replied.

Baby Girl and her mama rarely got along, because they were so much alike. The only real difference between the two was their mama had brown skin, whereas Baby Girl's skin had a reddish tint to it. But as far as height, weight, size, attitude, and facial features, they were exactly the same. They acted so much alike that they couldn't stand each other, yet they loved each other to death at the same time.

"Punkin come here! I thought I told you to clean up this dam mess when you were finished fuckin' it up." Cha-Cha scolded him.

"Oh, yes ma'am, I ain't forgot. I'ma do it right now." said Punkin.

"Alright now, don't let me have to got on yo ass, too." warned Cha-Cha.

"I got this mama," Punkin said as he and Enos finished eating, and started cleaning the kitchen right away.