

PUSHED

By

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*[This story dedicated to my childhood and old neighborhood in Brooklyn, East New York.]*

Death and dying never crossed Warren's mind as much as it did tonight. His cell phone read 9:37pm before Crystal covered the screen with her hand.

"Why do you keep checking your phone? Waiting on some other chick to call you?" She smiled up at him.

"Nah," he grinned. "Just checking the time." He stuffed the phone into the front pocket of his jeans, and a pang of guilt pulsed through his chest. This was the last time they'd be together, and he wasn't paying her any attention. Knowing he was about to die made it hard to focus on anything at all.

"You in a rush to leave me or something?" She prodded. She wore a gray hooded sweatshirt and her favorite navy-blue and white polka-dot pajama pants. With arms folded, she tapped a white socked foot and waited for an answer.

"In a rush to leave *you*? Nah, not at all." He chuckled.

"Oh, okay, cause I was about to say." She tried to play stern, but the slight smirk on her face foiled all attempts.

They stood in the hallway, just outside of her apartment, as they always did before he left. Her mother proclaimed it time for him to leave about an hour ago, but Warren and Crystal always found a way to stretch their time. Standing in the hallway was only the second phase of three when he visited. Tonight though, he wished he could stop time and stay with her in this moment forever.

Their voices echoed off the tan brick walls in the hallway, and though he was fully clothed in a camouflaged fatigue jacket, red hooded sweatshirt, baggy blue jeans, and brown boots, Warren still felt the cold draft blowing from the terrace down the hall. He wondered if it was still snowing.

Suddenly, he noticed Crystal glaring at him.

“Well?” she cocked an eyebrow.

He searched her face for the answer but was left clueless. He cocked an eyebrow of his own. “Well what?”

“See? You’re not even listening to me. Did you hear anything I just said? What ‘s wrong with you tonight?” her gaze pierced his.

“Nothing’s wrong.” He shook his head. “I was just wondering if it was still snowing. I do have to wait for the bus you know.” He hoped she believed him.

“Even still,” She frowned. “You’ve been zoning out all day. What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong.” He laughed it off. Deep down, he wanted to tell her the truth, but he didn’t know how she’d take it. She’d try to stop him for sure.

“You ready for your track meet tomorrow?” he attempted a diversion.

The furrows in her brow softened at first, and then completely gave way.

“Yes, I’m ready, a little nervous too.” She reached up to play with draw strings of his hoddie.

“Why are you nervous? You’ll do fine. You always do.”

“Yeah, I know,” she smiled bashfully. “But there’s going to be so many people at this one, and...”

Warren watched her talk. Her wavy micro-braids were parted down the middle and hung just below her shoulders. Cinnamon eyes sparkled behind thin black-rimmed glasses that framed

her cheek bones perfectly. A small round nose centered her face, and her moist full lips never needed gloss. She was so beautiful.

He loved the way her face lit up when she got excited, the way her dimples pitted her cheeks softly when she smiled, the way her lips curled around certain words, and how soft they felt when she kissed him.

He was going to miss her so much.

The metal slab of a door to Crystal's apartment opened just a crack, and her mother peered out.

"Crystal?" Her Jamaican accent was thick. "It's time to come inside."

"Okay," Crystal replied over her shoulder. "I'm going to walk Warren to the elevator."

He always thought it was funny how Crystal didn't have an accent, though both her parents did.

Her mother sucked her teeth. "Hurry up and come inside. It's too late to be standin' out in the hallway now," she warned, then closed the door.

Crystal rolled her eyes. "God!" she sighed. "It's too late to be standin' in the hallway now." She mocked her mother safely under her breath, accent and all.

Warren laughed, "Alright, I better get out of here before you get in trouble."

He started down the hallway of green apartment doors, and his boots echoed with each step. Crystal tugged on his red backpack, as she followed like a child. He wished she would let go. He didn't want her to find out what was inside the bag. He was amazed she hadn't questioned why it was so full. The zippers bulged as if they'd give way at any moment.

"I don't want you to go." She purred.

"Yeah, well, I don't want go, trust me. But I'm not about to take on your moms and pops. They'd hem me up quick. Have me balled up in a corner somewhere."

"Yeah, no doubt," she laughed.

Passing the staircase, and the rusty incinerator, Warren stopped at the terrace door just across from the elevator. The battered hunk of metal screeched on its hinges as he pushed it open and stepped through. It was pitch black outside save for the lights of the grimy streets below. Snowflakes fought each other on the wind, and a carpet of white covered the terrace floor.

“Shit, its cold as hell!” Crystal complained behind him.

He looked back to see her standing just outside the doorway trying to hide a shiver. She was so cute. He looked down off the terrace, through the metal fence that caged it in, and amongst the bare tree branches and snow covered benches eight floors below, Warren could see three figures loitering in front of the building.

He knew they’d be there. They were always there.

“Are they downstairs?” Crystal asked from the doorway. She knew what he was looking for.

“You know it.” He nodded. “Amazing what people do when they ain’t got shit else to do, huh?”

She shook her head and sucked her teeth. “I can’t stand them! You want me to go to the bus stop with you?”

That was a knife to the heart of his pride. *She* was trying to protect *him*.

“What? Nah,” he shook his head. “I’ll be all right. Besides, your mom would kill you if you went downstairs right now.”

Crystal stepped aside from the door as Warren walked back into the hallway. He pressed the button for the elevator and invited her into his warmth by holding his jacket open. She smiled and wrapped her slender arms around his waist and laid her head on his chest. He enveloped her in his camouflage and held her tight. She felt like heaven pressed up against his body. She was so soft and smelled so good.

She looked up at him. “Maybe they won’t mess with you tonight, it’s too cold for that anyway.”

*Yeah, right!* He shrugged and pretended not to care. “Well, we’ll see. Don’t worry about it,” He pressed for the elevator again.

She pulled back to look into his eyes. “What do you mean don’t worry about it? How am I supposed to do that?” When he didn’t answer, she laid her head back on his chest. “I’m tired of them messing with you.”

“I know, but shit, I really can’t do anything other than avoid them, right?” he pressed for the elevator once more. “So don’t worry about it.”

They were E, Ty, and Marco, and they did more than just mess with him. Whenever they could catch him alone, they'd harass him, rob him, or beat him down. He wished they would just "mess with him". Some days, good days, he could avoid them, but good days were far and few in between.

"So, what am I supposed to do? Act like I don't care?" Crystal asked.

Warren frowned. "What? No."

"Then what am I supposed to do?"

He sighed and shook his head. *Shit! I don't know!*

"Ok, fine, don't answer me then!" Crystal scowled. She pushed him away and folded her arms. Her glare burned right through his skull.

If this was the last time he was going to see her, Warren didn't want it to end it with an argument.

"Look, they're in front of the building. I'll just go out the back." He offered.

Her scowl softened a bit, but he could still feel the heat from her gaze.

With an electrical hum and laboring of old gears, the elevator finally arrived, and the door slid open on squeaky wheels. Warren wedged a foot in front of the door so it wouldn't close.

The pained expression on Crystal's face tugged at something in his chest. He took her by the arms and drew her close. "Look, don't worry about it. I'll be fine."

The fire in her eyes dimmed. "You sure?"

Even angry she was beautiful. "Yes."

She huffed, and he could feel the tension drain from her.

"Okay." She wrapped her arms around his neck. "I just don't want anything to happen to you. I wished they'd go away or get arrested or die or...something. All they do is hangout on the block and start trouble."

He put his hands on her hips, "I know, I know, but what can you do?"

She tip-toed and kissed him on the lips. He held tight and slipped his tongue into her mouth. She responded with a soft moan and let him get just a taste before she pulled away.

"Stop," she giggled. "Why are you so bad?"

He savored her taste. He wanted to be more than *bad*, but there was no time.

“Crystal!” her mother’s voice shot down the hallway.

Crystal backed away from him like he was on fire.

“Didn’t I tell you to get in the house?”

“Yeah, I’m coming!” she rolled her eyes. “Call me when you get home.” She gave Warren a peck on the cheek, and then hurried down the hall to her mother’s waiting glare.

Warren watched her go and remembered the first time they met. They were freshmen at South Shore High School. He couldn’t help but notice her, because she was in all of his classes. She was so smart and outgoing. She spoke to everybody and just seemed fit in everywhere even though she was just a freshman.

One day, after building his courage, he caught her at the bus stop after school. He talked to her, made her laugh, and most importantly, got her number. They talked on the phone a lot and for hours. She told him she was going to try out for the track team, and he told her of his love for music. He could play the drums, keyboard, and bass guitar. Of course, she didn’t believe him at first, but after he finally coaxed her into coming over to his apartment, he won her over with a song he wrote for her. There weren’t any words to the song, but he wrote the music especially for her. She was so impressed. She didn’t know anyone that could play live instruments.

The elevator door tried to close on his foot.

Crystal slipped through the green door of her apartment and it slammed shut.

Warren stood alone in the hallway.

He was going to miss her so much.

Warren entered the elevator and hit the button for the first floor.

As the door closed, he noticed a small puddle of urine in the far right corner. The green walls were covered in black marker graffiti. Some of the tags swirled in a wild scrawl, others were jagged and angry, but all were barely legible. In the shaft above him, the gears squeaked and hummed as the elevator began its decent.

Alone, Warren wondered if he had to go through with his plan. He knew that no matter what happened, once it was set in motion, he’d end up dead. What was the point? What was he going to prove? What would his mother do without him? He was her only child. She’d be destroyed, alone, and heartbroken, but he really didn’t know what else to do. He was tired of

being a victim.

Was there another way to handle this?

He tried to talk it out with E and his boys before, and he wound up getting beat up. They just wouldn't listen to reason. Things were at point to where Crystal was starting to feel like *she* had to protect *him*.

*Shit, what the fuck does that make me look like?* Warren got angry.

The elevator just passed the fourth floor, so he hit the button for the third. A moment later, the machine jerked to a halt, and the door squealed open.

He had to go through with it. He had to fight back.

Warren stepped into the third floor hallway. It was dim, empty, and quite, but he couldn't change there. Someone could exit their apartment or the staircase at any moment without warning. If he had any chance of surviving, he couldn't afford to be seen. He slipped into the staircase next to the incinerator.

The ceiling light in the staircase flickered angrily at him, and there he decided to change amongst discarded cigarette butts and blunt wrappers that littered the steps. He tore off his backpack, unzipped it, and pulled out a second set of clothes. He stripped down to his thermals as fast as he could. Then, he pulled on a pair of black cargo pants, a black hooded sweatshirt, a black fatigue jacket, and finally, he laced up a pair of black boots.

Outside, the wind moaned as if it knew what he had planned.

He stuffed his first set of clothes into his backpack, and out of the thigh pockets of his cargo pants, he pulled a pair of black baseball gloves. He slid them over his hands and flexed his fingers within the snug fit.

The weight of the weapon waiting in his right jacket pocket beckoned to him, and he pulled it out. A .44 revolver gleamed at him in the flickering light. Warren saved up money from his part time job to buy it. He told the guy he bought it from that he wanted something to drop somebody quick. It was called a Ruger Alaskan, and Warren stared down at it in his hands for a moment. The revolver was stainless steel with a short, two and a half inch barrel, and a black hand-grip. There was an odd weight to it. He pushed its smooth cylinder open with his thumb and stared through six empty chambers.

Along with the gun, he also bought a brown paper bag full of loose bullets, magnum rounds. Out of his left jacket pocket, he dug out six bullets. He rolled the slick shards around in the palm of his hand for a second before he loaded each one into a waiting chamber. He pushed the cylinder closed and held the weapon out in front of him. For a moment, he felt a tingle of something. It felt like a surge of power course through his body. He felt invincible. Holding the gun seemed to wash away all of his fear and anxiety.

A loud bang shot through the staircase, and for a second, Warren thought the .44 had gone off, but realized that somebody had slammed a staircase door on one of the upper floors. He shoved the .44 back into his pocket, pulled on his backpack, and started down to the first floor.

Warren's heart pounded with anticipation. Maybe he wouldn't have to use the gun. He hoped he wouldn't have to. He really didn't want to. He was not a thug and definitely not a killer. The gun wouldn't stop E and his boys. It wouldn't scare them off. The way things worked, if he pulled a gun on them, he'd have to use it. If not, they'd be out to kill him on general principle.

If he could make it out the back of the building while they were in the front, just as he told Crystal, he could postpone this for another day, maybe indefinitely.

As he hit the second floor landing, he could hear E and the others in the lobby.

"Shit!" Warren cursed his luck. It looked like tonight would be the night after all. The night he would die.

He stopped on the steps and listened to them for a moment. E was talking about some girls he and a few other guys ran a train on the other day at his house. They were laughing and making a bunch of noise. E was in his early twenties and out of school, but everybody knew that he preyed on high school girls. For some reason Warren couldn't understand, the young girls were infatuated with E. Crystal once told him that E even tried to mess with her a few times before they got together, but she said nothing ever happened.

Warren was ashamed to wonder if that was completely true now.

In order for this not to go down, Warren would have to get passed everybody in the lobby and make it to the back door without them noticing it was him. If he walked fast enough and kept his head down, maybe he could do it.

He pulled his iPod out of one of the side pockets of his backpack. The ear buds were a

tangled mess of white wires. He straightened them out, popped them into his ears, and pressed play. “De-Lux” by Lush blared into his ears. He was listening to it on the bus ride over to see Crystal, but he wasn’t in the mood for it now.

He hit next on the iPod and “Ghetto Rock” by Mos Def came on. That would do. He pulled the black hood of his sweatshirt over his head and started down the last flight of stairs.

Mos Def spoke to him through the ear buds: *Black Jack Johnson, N.Y.C., R-O-C-K-I-N-G – Sun and the moon, earth, stars, the planets, before song done y’all gon’ all understand it!*

When Warren pushed through the stair case door, E and his boys were still in conversation. He turned right and headed straight for the back door. He kept his eyes forward, but in his peripheral view, he thought he saw Ty eying him as he walked passed.

Just a few more feet and he’d be out the back door. He was half expecting one of them to call his name. Who knows, maybe they did. He couldn’t really hear anything above Ghetto Rock’s baseline.

After another right turn, Warren was out the back door. The cold night air found its way under his hood and down his neck. Crystal was right, it was cold as hell. He turned up Van Siclen Avenue and heard the back door slam shut above the music. The B20 Bus Stop was just at the end of the block, across the street.

White flakes peppered his black uniform, and every breath he took left his mouth like a puff of smoke. The cold was biting, and his cheeks were already starting to go numb.

He thought he heard the back door slam shut a second time.

E and his boys were probably following him. Warren hoped they weren’t. He concentrated on Mos Def’s words, while the heavy baseline pumped adrenaline through his veins. He was expecting to be hit or tackled any minute.

Nothing happened.

At the end of the block he waited for a car to roll by before cutting a left across the street. Mos Def was still talking to him: *Who stay holdin’ it for Brooklyn? You know its Mos, ha! - Jack pot, I gotta go for broke, cause this the only way the Smith family know to go!*

Warren made his way to the slanted pole that held a twisted sign for the B20 bus. He leaned back against the pole and chanced a backward glance. E, Ty, and Marco were walking across the

street towards him.

*Shit! Okay, this is it!* He took a deep breath and let it smoke from his mouth. Instincts told him to run, but he held his ground as they approached. If he ran today, they'd still be around tomorrow, and the next day, and everyday next week. He had to make a stand.

He pretended that he didn't care they were coming for him.

The thugs came around to stand in front of Warren. E and Ty were Black. Marco was Puerto Rican. Ty, who wore a red hooded coat and black baseball cap, tapped E on his arm and pointed at Warren with smile. E, in a black leather jacket and a knit scarf, nodded and replied with a wide grin under his skull cap.

Warren eyed the thugs and nodded his head to the beginning of Mos Def's second verse: *Ha, I am a fighter and a lover – I'm the freaky baby daddy, I'm bad motherfu—*

E reached up and yanked the ear buds out of Warren ears. "Yo, what the deal is, Warren?" he grinned. "You like bringin' us gifts, right?"

"Son, look, he got another iPod." Ty grabbed a handful of Warren's jacket so he couldn't run.

Warren sighed and shook his head. "Look, man, come on. Ya'll like me or something? Don't ya'll have some girls to go grab on?" His heart pounded.

"Yo, son got jokes." Marco flicked ashes from his cigarette into the wind. He wore a puffy blue coat and ear warmers.

"I know, right?" E nodded. He followed the wire of the ear buds to Warren's hand and snatched the iPod away. He put the bud's to his ears and frowned. "Yo, what the fuck you listenin' to, son? This some white boy shit!"

Mos Def must've gone off.

"You like listenin' to that white boy shit, huh?" Ty pulled on Warren's jacket.

Warren's hand jerk for what was in his right pocket, but he knew now was not the time or place. The bus stop was too out in the open. He had a plan to stick to.

Marco took a long pull on his cigarette and exhaled. "Yo, he got any money, son?"

"If he do, it ain't much, but he gonna give it up anyway like he always do." E reached out for Warren's pocket--

Warren pushed Ty back and pulled away from his grip, then took off across the street at a dead run.

“Yo! What the fuck you runnin’ for, son?” One of them yelled, in pursuit.

Warren charged up Van Sicien Avenue and took the path he planned out weeks ago. He just had to make it to the park. His black boots pounded the pavement. He stumbled twice and nearly fell in the ice and snow, but he refused to go down.

He raced towards George Gershwin, the junior high school, at the end of the block across the street.

He cut through the empty yard behind the school to the park area just beyond. To his left and right were tennis and handball courts caged in by chain link fences.

E and his boys were still in pursuit, cursing him as they chased.

Warren ran through the open gate of the basketball courts just passed the handball courts and stopped at a brick wall just under one of the hoops. He leaned against the wall panting. His lungs burned from running in the snow. The spot he picked was dark. Most of the lamp posts around the courts had not worked in over a year.

It was cold, dark, and desolate. It was perfect.

His pursuers were close. Their boots rumbled behind him. He took a deep breath of icy air and pulled the .44 out of his pocket. He turned to face the three thugs and hid the weapon close to his body, down by his right leg.

E, Ty, and Marco panted as they approached. In the darkness, they were faceless silhouettes, but Warren could still make out which one was which.

“You know we gonna fuck you up, right?” E warned.

“Shit, the last time we got him was on this same fuckin’ court, son.” Marco circled to the right.

“Why don’t ya’ll just leave me the fuck alone, man?” Warren shouted. With his back to the brick wall of the courts, he was surrounded. E stood in front of him, Ty to his left, and Marco to his right.

“What? Shut the fuck up, pussy!” Ty snarled.

“If I’m such a pussy, why do y’all have to jump me then?” Warren retorted. The .44 in his

hand reinforced his anger.

“Ain’t no fair ones here, son!” E smiled.

Warren wished he could have a fair fight, just one with each of them. He knew he could beat the piss out of them if they were alone, but they always ran in a group. They were cowards.

“Come on, son. You know the deal. Just hand over whatever loot you got, and we might not fuck you up too bad.” Marco stepped up. He grabbed Warren by his jacket collar and reeled back a fist--

Warren reacted. Fast.

He shoved the short barrel of the .44 between Marco’s eyes and squeezed the trigger. There was a small explosion. A bright flash of white lit the court. Warm liquid splattered across Warren’s face. Marco’s face was gone.

“Oh, shit!” Someone exclaimed.

Warren aimed for the voice.

E and Ty jumped on him.

The three figures fought for the gun while Marco’s blood colored the snow. They grunted and cursed as they wrestled each other. A small explosion lit the court again, but no one was hit. Another explosion bit into the ground at their shuffling feet. E and Ty pulled at Warren’s fingers and tried to pry the gun from his grip, but Warren knew if they got hold of the weapon, he was dead. With his free limbs, Warren punched, kneed, and kicked the two thugs. He fought for his life.

E slipped behind Warren and wrapped his arms around his neck in a powerful choke hold. Warren gagged. He couldn’t breathe. E’s hold was like a vice on his throat.

In that moment of weakness, Ty knocked the gun out of Warren’s hand. The weapon hit the ground with a dull clank of metal, and Ty reached down for it.

Using E to brace himself, Warren kicked Ty away from the weapon.

E lost his balance and staggered back. He tripped over Marco’s body and fell on his back hard and brought Warren’s weight crashing down on top of him.

Warren broke out of E’s choke hold and scrambled to his feet.

Ty was going for the gun again.

Warren dug his other weapon out of the right thigh pocket of his cargo pants.

As Ty scooped the .44 off the ground, Warren flicked the lever on the back of his folding knife. A three and a half inch serrated blade clicked into place.

Ty turned to aim.

Warren grabbed him by the jacket collar and knifed him in the side of the neck.

An explosion flared beside Warren's head from the .44, and by reflex, he knifed Ty in the throat again just above the Adams Apple. Blood gushed from Ty's throat and painted the front of Warren's black jacket.

Ty dropped the gun and collapsed to the floor grabbing at the gouges in his neck. With his ears ringing from the gun blast, Warren stood over Ty as he gurgled on the blood filling his throat and gasped for breath. Ty coughed up blood and went limp. His eyes stared out in to space.

Warren was tackled from behind. He dropped his knife as he tumbled over Ty's body and hit the cold ground. E was on him instantly raining down blows with his fists.

"What the fuck you think you doin', son? Think you gonna kill me?" E growled.

Warren turned over on his back and covered up with his arm, but E's fists were like sledge hammers. Warren lashed out with a fist and caught E in the nose. Bone crunched under his knuckles.

E clamped a hand around Warren's throat and smashed a fist across his jaw.

"Don't worry, son. I'll make sure Crystal won't be lonely after you're gone." E mocked. "I'll take good care of her little ass, okay?"

All Warren could imagine was E raping Crystal. His mind flashed with dark images, images that made him cringe inside; images of E forcing himself on Crystal, and of Crystal being forced to do things to E and a bunch of other guys who waited for their turn.

Warren erupted.

He dug his fingers up into E's eyes. The thug screamed out, and Warren pushed him off to the side into the snow. Before E could recover, Warren rushed him, climbed on top of him, and pummeled him with his fists. He rammed E's head into the ground over and over and over. Even after E stopped fighting back, Warren continued pounding his face. Only after blood spilled from E's eyes and nose, and teeth were missing from his gaping jaws, did Warren stop.

It was silent. It stopped snowing.

Warren panted into the cold wind. He looked down at his shaking hands. The fingers and backs of his baseball gloves were bloodied and torn. He staggered to his feet and looked around. He stood in the center of three bodies. E was the only one not laying under a bed of bloody snow.

*I did it. He was numb. I did it!*

His heart pounded in his ears. He was certain that he was going to die tonight. He laughed at his luck, and then realization set in.

*I've got to get the fuck out of here!*

He searched the ground for his weapons. He found his knife nearly buried in the snow, and the .44 lay just out of reach of Ty's lifeless hand. He snatched the gun up and shoved it into his right jacket pocket.

He noticed the wires of his ear buds hanging out of Marco's jacket. He kneeled over the body and made sure that he didn't look at what was left of Marco's face. He dug into the jacket pocket and retrieved his iPod.

Warren stood, looked at the twisted bodies one last time, and then turned to leave--

A labored moan stopped him in his tracks.

He turned around. *What the hell?*

E was moving. He stirred sluggishly, as if drunk. He was trying to get up.

*Shit, shit, shit, he's not dead!* Warren was hit with a rush of adrenaline.

What was he going to do now? He couldn't let E live. If not thrown in jail for the rest of his life, he'd have to watch his back in fear of the pay back E would be out to get.

*Shit, he might to do something to Crystal!*

Dread washed over Warren. He had to finish what he started. He pulled the .44 out of his pocket again. He was more aware of its weight now than before. He walked up to the squirming thug, stood right above him, and aimed.

He couldn't pull the trigger.

It was hard to pull the trigger. He realized how much easier it was to kill someone when he was fighting for his life versus what he was about to do now, kill in cold blood. But it had to be done. There was no way around it. No way out. He took a deep breath, turned his head away, and

squeezed the trigger...twice.

Bam! Bam! Two explosions lit the court.

A third squeeze of the trigger resulted in a hollow click.

Empty.

Warren looked down at his handy work, what was left of E's head. Bile churned in his stomach and up to his throat. He dropped to his knees and vomited all over his bloody victim. He heaved until his throat burned and his eyes watered, until there was nothing left in him to spew.

Warren wiped his mouth with a gloved hand, stuffed the .44 into his jacket pocket, and ran off the basketball court.

He ran through the park, passed the green picnic tables, the swings, and the monkey bars in the children's play area. He ran to the side of the bleachers near the track field.

He stopped to catch his breath and within the darkness behind the bleachers, he stripped again. He changed back into the clothes he wore earlier. He exchanged his black, blood-stained executioner's garb, for his red hooded sweatshirt, baggy blue jeans, brown boots, and camouflaged fatigue jacket.

His plan was to catch the bus home so he could account for his whereabouts in case he was questioned about tonight, but he did not want to be around people right now.

He exited the park opposite the way he came in and started down Linden Blvd. Despite the cold and the snow, he'd walk home tonight.

He pulled his hood over his head as he crossed Van Sicten Avenue and continued down Linden Blvd. The streets were empty save for random cars cutting their black tracks through the snow covered streets. Most people had more sense than to be out right now. He followed the path of crowded footsteps in the snow down the sidewalks.

He took out his iPod and pushed the speaker buds into his ears. It was still playing from when E took it from him. "My Own Worst Enemy" by Lit screeched into his ears, and he chuckled at how fitting that song would be if things didn't go as he planned.

He welcomed the desolation of the streets. He wanted to be alone with his thoughts and with the memory of what he did. He still couldn't believe it; couldn't believe he wasn't dead. He was certain he'd be the one laying in the snow bleeding out tonight. The most he hoped for was

to take somebody out with him, mainly E. Instead, he killed E, Ty, and Marco, all three. Their bloody faces flashed in his mind. He shivered, more so from the visions in his head than the cold creeping into his coat.

The way he saw it, no one would suspect him of the crime, the murders. E and his boys had a ton of enemies, enemies who fit the profile to murder them much more so than he did. Warren had never been in any real trouble as far as the streets were concerned. Especially not anything that would involve the police. He just wasn't that type of person.

He chuckled at that thought now.

An overwhelming sense of freedom gripped him. He didn't have to worry about those three thugs anymore, and he was pretty damn sure a bunch of other people would be relieved to find out about their deaths too. He did the world a favor. Well, if not the world, at least a couple of blocks in Brooklyn, East New York.

What he had done, he felt he was forced to do. He was pushed to do it. E would never have stopped harassing him, robbing him, beating him. People like E just took what they wanted and leeches off of society. He tried to talk to them, he tried to reason with them, but thugs like E never listen. They never learn.

"They don't get the message 'til they're reading it in a coffin." He said under his breath.

As far as he could tell, no one would be able to pin anything on him either. There were no witnesses. He wore gloves so there shouldn't be any fingerprints. He made sure not to handle the bullets with his bare hands as well, so the slugs that would be pulled from E and Marco's body would not point to him either. He wore different clothing and different boots, which he would dispose of and burn in due time.

It was a perfect plan as far as he was concerned.

Before he knew it, Warren was walking into his building and Jill Scott sung to him through his iPod. He pulled the buds from his ears and stuffed the device in his pocket. His boot steps echoed as he moved through the empty lobby. The stark white ceiling lights hummed with electricity. The elevator was broken as usual, so he climbed the stairs to his apartment on the third floor. As he unlocked his door, he wondered if his mother was still up.

When he stepped into the apartment all the lights were off. Down the hallway to his right, a

soft glow painted the wall across from his mother's room. He gently closed and locked the front door, and slid the chain latch into place. He made his way to his mother's room to find her softly snoring under the covers. Some infomercial was on the television, but the sound was turned down low.

"Ma," He called.

She didn't stir.

"Ma!" he spoke louder.

She jerked out of her sleep and looked upon him with foggy eyes. The TV lit her face with a slight glow.

"I'm home. You can turn the TV off now."

She took a deep breath and cleared her throat. "Umm...oh, okay." She wiped a hand across her face. "You better get to bed. You see how late it is? You know you have school tomorrow."

He nodded and turned for his room. "Okay, I will."

"How's Crystal?" she called after him.

He stopped in the doorway to his bedroom. "She's fine. She told me to tell you Hi." He listened for a response but only heard his mother snoring again.

He flicked on the lights in his room and closed the door. It never felt so good to be home. He pulled off his backpack and tossed it on his unmade bed in the far right corner. He peeled himself out of his coat and tossed it onto an old recliner next to his bed. His drum set and bass guitar stood in the far left corner beside his closet.

His cluttered dresser stood across from his bed, and he looked at himself in the mirror. Streaks of blood stained his face, Marco's blood. An odd tingle shot through his gut. He snatched a random sock off the dresser top and wiped his face. The right side of his jaw was red and showed signs of swelling. It was sensitive to the touch. If it didn't get any worse than it was, he'd be able to explain away the bruise with no problem if someone asked about it.

He plopped down on his bed beside his backpack and laid back.

His right pants pocket started to vibrate. He pulled out his cell phone to see Crystal's face on the screen.

It was 11:42pm.

“Hey, what’s up?” he answered.

“Warren? Are you ok?” she was whispered.

“Yeah, I’m fine, why?” He noticed that his hands were still shaking.

“It’s been over an hour since you left. I told you to call me when you got home! I thought something happened to you.”

“Oh, no, I’m fine. I’m sorry. Soon as I got home, I had to help my mom with something. By the time I got done, it was so late I thought you’d be sleep. I didn’t want to wake you.”

She was silent for a moment, as if considering his words. “Oh, okay. Well, I fell asleep waiting for you to call.” She was still whispering. “Did you have any problems with E?”

If he wasn’t expecting the question, he wouldn’t have be so quick to lie, but, “Nah, I didn’t see them. By the time I got downstairs they were already gone. I guess they had enough sense to get out of the snow.” His hands were starting to throb. There were a number of small, red cuts on his knuckles. They stung.

“Good,” She sounded relieved. “I was hoping they wouldn’t mess with you. Well, let me get off this phone before my parents catch me.”

“Alright.”

“I’ll see you in school tomorrow.”

“Okay.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Crystal hangs up.

Warren tosses his phone to the side. Tomorrow, he’d have to act surprised and shocked about the deaths of E, Ty, and Marco. Everybody that knew them would be talking about it, even Crystal. It’d be on the news for sure. The police would be scouring Crystal’s neighborhood. Everyone would be wondering who did it, and nobody would even think twice about him.

He actually felt good about himself.

His mother was right though, it was late, and he had school in the morning, but Warren could not sleep. He wasn’t anywhere near tired. He opened his backpack and dug out his bloody knife, and the empty .44. He held the gun in his hand, and that familiar surge of power, of

invincibility, coursed through his body once again.

Staring at the weapon in his hand, Warren's mind started racing. He thought about the other people who gave him a hard time, other people who caused trouble and pushed his buttons. He cocked back the hammer on the Ruger Alaskan and wondered who else he could kill?