

DON'T LOOK BACK

PROGRESS LOYD

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CHAPTER ONE

“Always remember Allah no matter what, and he will always remember you. Allah is closer to us than our jugular vein,” Ramus said, praying his friend was taking heed to his words, but knew Shaime still had a lust for the fast life that he once enjoyed.

“Keep you head up, kiddo.”

“Smoke an L for me, nigga!”

“Take it slow out there.”

“Fuck all the pussy you can.”

“Send me some flicks.”

“Stay in touch, fam!”

“I got you, that’s my word! Just give me a chance to get on my feet!” Shaime said in response to the comments uttered by his soon to be ex-cellmates as he walked to R & D (Receiving and Discharge).

“Yo, Shaime! You don’t have time for a Grammy award winning speech,” Officer Johnson called out from the door.

“Here I come yo! Can I parlay for a minute?” Shaime yelled back.

“As-Salaamu Alaikum,” Ramus said as he ran up and bear hugged Shaime.

“Wa Laikum As-Salaam,” Shaime returned the greeting.

“Thanks, Ahki, but you know I’m going out there to do the damn thing. I will always remember Allah, but I got to eat and a nine to five ain’t in me,” Shaime said to Ramus.

The two men embraced again before Shaime disappeared through the first door to freedom.

“Shaime is a real good brother, from a good family, but he is blinded by the streets. Oh, Allah! Please take care of the brother. You know his heart, Allah. Don’t allow the devil to steal the soul of the brother,” was Ramus’ silent prayer before walking away.

“Man, would you please get dressed and bounce! Your mother was outside in the parking lot at six this morning when

I came to work,” Officer Johnson said.

Nothing like Ummi, always on point! Shaime thought as he opened the box to see what his mom sent him to wear home.

Officer Johnson was a young guy like Shaime, about twenty-six/seven, about five foot eleven, a solid 205lbs, and real gutter. The only real difference between Shaime aka Looks and Johnson is that Johnson never got caught. He took an early exit and avoided the roadblocks that have lead so many others to imprisonment.

“Damn... that Rocawear velour sweatsuit is hot. I’m feeling those colors and you can never go wrong with the all white Air Force Ones,” Johnson said as Shaime empty the contents on to the changing table.

“Come on nigga, put on your gear and get out of here,” Johnson continued. “Yo! Remember don’t rush the game, let it come to you. Think of it like a basketball game and what wins games?” he added.

“Defense,” Shaime answered.

“Right! So pay attention and analyze your surroundings to the fullest. Every play is not a fast break! Here’s my number, so get at me.”

It seem like it took Shaime an hour to walk up the hall leading to the front entrance. As he walked past the visiting area it was empty, but he visually filled it up, reflecting on years and years of visits. One visit in particular would always replay in his mind as if it was yesterday.

One day Shaime was on the weight pile and heard his name being called to the visiting area. He knew something was wrong, because he always stayed on point with visits so that his shorties wouldn’t bump heads. When he arrived in the visiting room, his feeling was confirmed. There sat his oldest brother, Johnny, who lived upstate New York, his brother, Eddie, who was in the Air Force currently stationed in Germany, and his moms. Now, we all know the only time you can get black people to come together was a funeral or a cookout, and he knew a prison cook-

out was definitely out the question.

"Hey, my favorite girl!" he said as he hugged and kissed his mother. "What gives me the honor of this surprise visit?" he asked, giving his brothers a hug as well.

"Well, baby, I wish I could say we came solely because we miss you, but that's not the case," his mother said as tears started streaming down her face. "Your father has passed away. He got infected with HIV from a dirty needle."

"What do you mean a dirty needle? I mean, did this happen in a hospital or blood clinic?" Shaime asked because he didn't want to accept his dad was a drug user.

"No. Son, your father was addicted to heroin and had been for at least thirty five years," she replied.

"What? What did you just say?" he asked. He thought his ears were deceiving him. "Why you never told me? Why you never told me my dad was a dopefiend? A weak ass..." He was cut off by his mom slapping him like E. Honda from the street fighter video game.

She said, "Don't you ever disrespect your father in front of me. To disrespect him is to disrespect me. He helped me create six beautiful children, I will not allow no disrespect."

Somewhere between the ringing in his ears and the tears, his mom explained to him that before he was born his dad was a pimp and a real gangsta.

Shaime's mom went on to tell him more about his dad. "He did his dirt in the streets, but he made sure home was taken care of. He was sixteen when I got pregnant with Johnny. Every two years after that, I got pregnant again until Yusuf and Inez, which are four years apart. You was our special baby because you came eleven years after Inez. Things were good, your father had finally gotten his life back on track. But, when you were nine something pulled him back. A lot of people used coke and heroin in the sixties and seventies, some kicked the habit and some didn't. Your father was one of them that didn't."

"Damn, I used to really look up to him," Shaime said, starting off into space. Shaime's father was his idol. Billy D. Williams didn't have anything on his dad and he spoke with the confidence, knowledge, and respect like that of Malcolm X. He was so laid back and smooth and at the same time, people feared him, and he let a drug, an addiction, take him under.

"You alright, man?" Officer Johnson asked, breaking Shaime out of his trance.

Shaime didn't even realize he had stopped and was staring in the visiting room. "Yeah! Yeah, I'm good, playboy," he answered as he wiped the tears from his face.

"Full name, date of birth, prison number," the officer in the booth yelled out.

"Shaime Bilal Rankin, 6-29-73, 16930-057," Shaime said.

The officer in the booth waved his hand to Officer Johnson and the first gate to freedom slid open.

"This my stop, take care. Remember what I said," Johnson said, patting him on the back.

Shaime stepped through and didn't look back as the gate behind him closed and the one in front of him opened. His heart was pounding, he didn't know whether to laugh now or cry later, jump or run.

Almost seconds later, he could see his mother running towards him. "We made it," Shaime said, hugging, then lifting and spinning her around, "we made it!"

"Thank God! Thank God! My prayers have been answered. The chains have been lifted off my baby king," his mother said, lifting her hands to the sky.

Shaime never thought about it, but at that moment he realized how much his mother suffered from his incarceration. He used to think he was the only one suffering and everybody was out there, they didn't know how he felt. But, when his mother said those words, it made him reflect on slavery and how we were separated at the auction block; the same way we are separated on sentencing day in court. A lot of times, he thought we did put ourselves in certain predicaments so he couldn't blame everything on the white man, but he was the culprit behind a lot of situations that lead us to the irrational ways and actions.

CHAPTER TWO

It was about an hour ride home from Butner to Greensboro. While they were driving, Looks mother began speaking.

"Baby, I'm not going to lecture you, but listen to what I have to say. The world don't owe you nothing, but you owe the world. You owe the world your heart and soul, your ambitions, your dreams. You are a strong, intelligent, black man. You can do anything you set your mind to. Always remember, a man is at his lowest point when he loses his freedom, freedom of mind, freedom of body, freedom of spirit. Parts of you will always be locked up, parts of me have been angry since the sixties and having to endure segregation. But I've learned to use I over E. Intellect over emotion! So take your anger and make it positive energy, let your success be your get back, feel me, Dunni?"

"I can see you've stepped your ebonics up." Shaime said laughing. "I'm coming home to do me, ma. I'm not on no Rambo type shit, you know what I mean?"

"Remember, a check beats no check. You can't get illegal money and be safe with no way to clean it up. I don't condone drugs or violence, and I'm not an advocate of jails, prisons, or continued ignorance. If you're going to risk your freedom and your life for money, know what you're going to do once you obtain it. I need you out here, not in jail, or a pine box," she said with authority, but also with concern.

"I got you, ma! Don't worry about nothing. I'm going to take care of you in a big way. You kept it all the way gangsta while I was doing my bid, it's my turn to spoil you," Looks replied. "Just do me one favor, don't ask a question you can't take the truth to, 'cause I will never lie to you, ma."

Looks loved his mother. When his main man got killed and his kids' mother jumped ship, his mother held him all the way down for the rest of his remaining six years. She got him subscriptions to all the hottest magazines; Source, XXL, F.E.D.S, Don Diva, King, Smooth, Black Enterprise and Entrepreneurs. She also sent him \$250.00 every month, so he didn't want for anything.

When they arrived in Greensboro, Looks could tell not much had changed. As they drove up Martin Luther King Drive, he saw crackhead prostitutes working various corners, while the dope boys kept it moving on mountain bikes. A thought came to mind and he wondered if other Martin Luther King Drives, Boulevards, Roads, and Streets in other cities were located in a drug-infested area of town.

As they turned off Martin Luther King onto Burtner Street, a warm sensation came over Looks. The bid was really over and

he was home. He got out of the car and looked around the good old "Dust Bowl," the name given to the area due to the abstract bowl shaped park.

"Welcome home, baby! Welcome home!" his mother said, retrieving a bag of clothes and a sneaker box out of the trunk. "Here, I brought another sweatsuit and some Air Max. Also, here's some pocket change," she said as she handed him the clothes and an envelope.

As they walked hand in hand to the door, Looks could see people inside the house and began to wonder who they were. Just as Looks was about to say something, the door flew wide open. "Surprise, welcome home!" All of his family and friends were there. They had traveled from all over the world; New York, California, South Carolina, Baltimore, Texas, and some even as far as Trinidad, Barbados, Jamaica, and Panama. Some he could remember, some he didn't know from a hole in the wall, but if they said "they family" so be it, especially today.

His nostrils were immediately filled with the smell of all types of West Indian dishes; Curry chicken, peas and rice, salmon patties, crab cakes, plantains, yams, three cheese macaroni, sweet potato pie, coconut pie, and rum cake. They had it all laid out like an all you can eat buffet.

Damn, my fam really put it down for me! It's a must I take pictures so I can send back to my peeps in the struggle, Shaime thought as he observed they lay out of goodies.

"Daddy, daddy!" His daughters, Atlantia and Christina, came running.

"Oooh! My babies, my queens, my life after death," he said as he embraced his daughters giving them the kissy face. Christina was three when he left and Monique was still pregnant with Atlantia when he caught his time.

"Here, baby, let's pop the cork and get things jumpin'" Looks mother said, handing him one of the bottles of Ciroc she had in her had.

They talked, ate, drank, and danced as they talked about the past, present, and future. Looks could not help but reflect on his eight year bid.

"Where the hell was all my so call family when I needed them? Why did they alienate themselves from me? All the holidays, birthdays, all the days, and years period?" He felt a sudden surge of anger.

"Hey, Boo-Boo!" his sister Inez said, plopping down beside him on the couch.

Inez was the baby girl and Looks was the baby boy. Inez was eleven years older, but Looks treated her like he was the oldest.

"Whats the deal, babygirl?" Looks asked, putting an arm around his lil' big sister.

"Man, I'm so glad you home! I know I have somebody I can talk to that understands me. I'm not perfect, I make my mistakes, but I am so sick and tired of people trying to judge me," she said, putting her head on his shoulder.

"Don't sweat the small things. I'm here now and you know shit is about to pop off," Looks said, rubbing her head."

"Daddy, daddy." Christina and Atlantia came running out on the back deck. "Can we go with you shopping?" they asked.

"I'm not going anywhere anytime soon, but when I do, yes, okay?" Looks told them, squatting down to tie Christina's sneaker.

"Okay, but your friend outside said he was about to take you shopping," Christina said.

"My friend, who?" Looks said, surprised because no one was suppose to know he was home.

"What's the deal-ly, Dun?" Zay walked in giving Looks, a pound, then a hug. "Damn, nigga, I saw the flicks, but they don't give it to you like in person. You brolic as fuck, dawg."

"Watch your language, fam!" Looks said, rubbing his daughters on their backs as they hugged him on each side of his legs. "What's good with you, fam? How you know I was home?" Looks asked, not really feeling his presence.

"My fault, fam. Your moms saw me at East to West Fashion. I picked out the sweatsuit for you and scooped the Air Max off the Internet. Those Air Max 90s in the box are custom made. When she told me you was coming home, it was a must I show love out the gate," Zay said, while pulling out a wad of hundred dollar bills. He then gave the girls two a piece and their eyes lit up like a Christmas tree. They snatched the money and tried to make a get-a-way, but Looks snatched them both by the back of their shirts.

"What are you suppose to say?" Looks asked.

"Thank you, Mr. Daddy's homeboy," they said in unison.

"Don't run around flashing your money. Never tell nobody how much money you have," Looks instructed them before letting them run off, knowing they wasn't going to take heed to his words.

"Schooling them already, I feel you, Dun," Zay said laughing. "Yo, sun, we need to build. I must bring you up to date on something," Zay added with that, 'let's get this money' look in his eyes.

"Let me parlay with the fam for a couple of hours. Come back through about seven and we'll hit the mall," Looks said, giving Zay a pound.

When Zay shook his hand, he gave him three G's on the low. "A little something for the pocket. I'll be back at seven sharp. That will give me enough time to handle some business and change whips," Zay said between bites of Curry chicken...



An excerpt from "Don't Look Back"
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