

PHASE I

***THE BEGINNING OF THE
BEGINNINGS***

*When I discover who
I am, I'll be free.*

-Ralph Ellison

PROLOGUE

Donald Albert Jones was raised in Detroit at a time when black folk were starting to figure out who they were. It was the fifties and sixties; civil tension was in the air. Black folk were tired of being maids, butlers, sharecroppers, and bowing down to men who put their pants on the same way everyone else did.

Don was sitting in the passenger's seat of his father's year old 1954 sunshine-orange Fleetwood when Sweet Peter, a rival pimp from the Westside, drove up beside them and, without a word, stuck his arm out the window and fired three shots into the Fleetwood.

Don was a sixteen-year-old boy; the most important thing on his mind was chasing after girls at Washington High. At least that was the case until he sat in his father's ride wearing his daddy's blood and brain matter.

Zenobia's Pool Hall was the spot to be on a Thursday night where players came to hang-out, drink, and gamble. From the outside, Zenobia's looked like an old abandoned warehouse. The front entrance had been boarded up long ago, and all the windows were spray painted black.

It was still daylight when Don limped down the narrow alley leading to the pool hall's back door entrance.

"Youngblood, I heard about Smooth," an older plain looking brotha leaving the pool hall said, as he approached Don. "Me and your old man go way back, Lord knows he was a good nigga."

Don took off his shades, and nodded. Although, his pops was gunned down less than four hours ago on the Eastside, Don wasn't surprised that word had already spread to the Westside. Smooth, the street name his daddy went by, was one of the best dressed, smoothest talking hustlers on the Eastside.

Seeing that Don, wasn't in the mood to talk, the old man kept walking.

Suddenly an idea hit Don. "Say, old man," Don called out.

The old man turned around.

"Let me put a bug in your ear," Don said, signaling the man to come to him. A minute later a deal had been struck. It cost Don a C-note of his daddy's money, but he figured it would be worth it.

A couple hours later, the hot July Detroit sun was replaced by a clear blue-black night sky. The kings of Detroit's black underground began filing their way down the alley and up the loading dock stairs to enter the pool hall.

The old man must've been relieved. Sweet Peter's loud high-pitched voice saved him from having to tap

on the 55 gallon rusted-out barrel, he was leaned up against.

As Sweet Peter walked up the last step, Don stood up.

Surprised as anyone, the old mans eyes about popped out of his head.

“Shit,” someone said, before Don fired two shots from the double barreled sawed off, sending Sweet Peter flying off the stairs onto the cool concrete ground.

Don climbed out of the barrel jumped off the loading dock, and quickly walked over to where Sweet Peter was gasping for air and spitting up blood.

Don pulled down his pants and pissed in Sweet Peters face, before strapping the sawed-off back to his leg. Without a word, Don pulled up his pants and limped away.

It was the act of what was done to his father and what Don had done in retribution that gave him the resolve to make a vow to run the streets, instead of the streets running him.

He tried his hand at running women. It was too much trouble, and since he thought of himself as a romantic, pimping just wasn't his scene, even though like his father, he possessed one of the smoothest mouthpieces in the Motor City. He dabbled and dabbled with selling a little heroin and weed. But however, he didn't have the patience to be a heroin dealer.

A couple years later, early one breezy spring morning, Don packed a bag and went to the Greyhound bus station. He'd decided it was time to move on. Detroit was just too fast, too cut-throat. He didn't have any destination, so he decided to get a ticket for the next bus heading south.

It was a cool April night when Don got off the Greyhound in downtown Atlanta. He had a tattered brown suitcase in one hand and the wind in the other. The shiny gray, sharkskin suit he took off a dead man in a casket at Grundy's Funeral Home, back in Detroit, covered his coal black skin. The slicked-back conk hairdo Don wore rivaled that of Nat King Cole's. The man was sharper than a new straight razor.

He looked like chocolate money as he stood frozen in the middle of the street like a misplaced light post. His eyes were glued to the rear end of this healthy, big butt red-bone getting out of a fairly new Buick. A minute later a speeding oncoming car brought him back to reality. In no time he was on the sidewalk, one hand in his pocket and one on his suitcase. He broke out into a cool double-step-hop-jog to catch up to the voluptuous red satin-dress-wearing, big-legged, big-breasted, heart-booty, cherub-faced, red-haired goddess who'd almost cost him his life a few moments ago.

"Must be butter cause skin ain't that smooth." Massaging the back of her hand, leaning at an angle, licking his brown weed, stained lips as if she were a pork chop and he a hungry fat man, he continued, "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Detroit Don. That is the Detroit Don, the one, the only, in ten dimensions, live and uncensored. You may have heard of me; now you see me; soon you'll want me; later you'll need me. Baby, babygirl, call me Don for shawt not for naught." He extended his manicured ringless hand, showing all thirty-two of his baking-soda whites, and they were white, despite all the refer he smoked. He continued when her hand was in his.

"I am fresh off the Greyhound as you can ascertain. I am a friendless man in your fair city. Would you please be so kind as to let a lonely brother escort you to lunch?" He pointed a finger in the air,

“That is, after I extricate myself from these tired clothes, bathe, and refurbish myself in some more fitting attriments and locate a boarding house. Miss?”

Don was a man of many words, and sometimes he made up words that sounded like they could have been real.

Kat smiled as she astutely listened to Don’s tired, rambling tirade.

“I’m Katrice Scott, but my friends call me Kat. I might have a spare room for you if you want work.” She had one hand on her hip as she looked him up and down. “A pretty Black man like yourself might do me just fine,” she said. “Well, are you coming or not?” she asked while hip-dancing back to her car.

It didn’t take long for Don to lose control of the situation. Hell, he didn’t even ask what kind of job. He would find out soon enough. Later that night, Don started work as an enforcer for the biggest cathouse on the Eastside. Katrice Scott was nine years older than him. She was into everything from dope to numbers to vice. Don was more than eager to learn and learning the game came easy. Don didn’t use nor drink; his only problems were the kitty-kats on the sweet, young nubile kittens that were ripe for the plucking. Kat cured his addiction--at least for a while.

Whenever he went to shave, painful memories assaulted his consciousness. Memories of that horrible morning when Kat caught him reviewing the quality of the services that her girls provided. There would always be a mark at the top of his neck where Kat tried to slit his throat with a four-inch stainless steel, pearl-handled switchblade. I mean she worked that blade like a Ginsu chef and would have had perfect aim if it weren’t for one of her girls grabbing her arm.

The girls did not fear Kat’s wrath. They knew Kat would never turn on them in favor of a man. One of

Kat's rules to live by: Don't bite the hand that makes you money, but when that hand stops putting money in yours, then bite the shit out of it.

In fear of losing his cash cow, Don decided to get some real life insurance. He married Kat two weeks later. Everything was fine for the next five years, then Kat popped up pregnant.

Kat was a completely different woman while she was pregnant. She became immersed in books. The more she read, the more she started to think that the games she was playing were the wrong games, and she didn't want her child exposed to the type of lifestyle she and Don had grown accustomed to. Kat was being enriched by the likes of Dubois, Hughes, Hurston, Barnett, Ellison, and many more. Her mentality had been transformed in such a short time that Don had no idea what the heck was going down. He didn't know if she was getting religion on him, squaring up, or coming up with a new scheme. And frankly he didn't care.

The more Kat read, the further Don fled. No longer just Kat's man, he'd established his own identity, had grown into a seasoned hustler, and was known around town as a mover and shaker. A man who could make anything happen for the right price. But, like most young men, money and the poo-nanny was his kryptonite.

Before the baby came, Kat closed the cathouse; her heart just wasn't in it. She even turned to the church and, worst of all, she blew up like a sumo wrestler on steroids. Mind you, she was never small. But she was as big as a house now. I mean a mansion. And she got bigger by the bon-bon.

After the birth of their daughter, La-Shae, Don started to stay in the streets more and more. He hustled stolen goods that he took off trucks at night and sold

weed by day. The girlfriends he acquired on the side, as well as his other activities, helped to support Kat and La-Shae.

One day in '68, while cat-daddy strolling down the block, a man with a voice almost as smooth as Don's drew him into the local record store. David Ruffin was talkin' bout having sunshine on a cloudy day, being cold outside in the month of May. And then, he made a smooth transition from the weather to his girl. You already know Don had a weakness for big, pretty, shapely redbone women. He called them fat-fine. Sure enough, one was behind the cash register, lip-synching along with the vinyl on the record player.

She was one of those uppity college girls. She wouldn't give Don the time of day...at least not at first. He slowly wore her down. He brought her roses, compliments of Theresa Grant, May 18, 1932--June 3, 1968--that's what the headstone read at Crown cemetery. He even brought her the good Spumante wine, fresh off the truck he'd helped hi-jack. He talked a local band into playing in front of the store while he crooned his own rendition of *My Girl*. For some reason, both times the band had played, Berry Gordy didn't show as Don had promised he would.

When Don sang, it was all over. The man was more a poet than a singer. He made words dance. They came to life when they were released from his baritone voice. He invented words such as 'beautiful' and 'organasmic' and brought them to life. They were his creations and they rolled off his tongue with the style and grace of a ballerina walking a tightrope.

Jill Andrews, music major at Marion Anderson School of Performing Arts, had never heard anything like the velvety smooth, silk-tongued voice. She was hooked.

One year later

“Don, I ain’t gon’ make it,” Jill screamed from the back seat of Don’s new Fleetwood.

“Baby, calm down, we’ll be at the hospital in less than ten minutes,” Don said, as he sped through the streets of Atlanta.

“The baby’s coming. Oh sweet Jesus,” Jill screamed as she stuck her nails into Don’s arm.

“Woman?” he shouted. The car swerved. Don got control of the wheel as he barely missed hitting a garbage truck in the next lane.

Jill still had her nails in Don’s arm minutes later as he headed towards the emergency room double doors.

“The baby, damn you Don, ahhhhh,” Jill cursed and screamed.

Out of nowhere a black car jumped the curb, and drove through the flower bed at the Emergency room entrance. Don slammed on his brakes, but not before the black car knocked the left head light off the Cadi.

“You son of a, I’ll be damned,” Don shouted as he jumped out of his car and walked towards the black car.

“Brother man, I’m sorry my wife is having my...”

“Do I look like your brother, cracka’.”

The man could see the rage in Don’s eyes.

“You could a killed us fool.”

The man nodded. “I know.” The man said, while reaching into his suit jacket pocket.”

“Don, no,” Jill shouted, right before Don pulled out his switchblade.

“Here’s my card. Whatever the damage I’ll pay. Forgive me. Truly, I am sorry, the man said as he got up and fled into the hospital.

“Dalton Parker, Attorney at Law,” Don read aloud as he rushed to the passenger side of his Fleetwood.

AN HOUR EARLIER

“Law offices of Brown-ah-low, St-Stone and ah-ah-Associates. May I help you?” The new intern secretary stuttered.

“Dalton Parker, please. Emergency,” Mary grunted.

“Oh, hi, Mrs.-Mrs. Parker. Hold on one second.” Covering the phone with her hand, still spread eagle, and bent over the reception desk, she held the phone up, and mouthed the words, “It’s your wife.”

The new intern had not been at the firm a week before Dalton was taking advantage of the benefits her body had to offer.

She was a college student trying to earn extra credit hours anyway she could. Betty was two ticks from five feet, a slimmy with two mountainous, prickly, ripe melons up top and an ironing board back.

Dalton Parker towered over her at six two, two hundred plus pounds. Betty handed him the phone and resumed her former position, bent over Dalton’s desk with nothing but some cheap red heels on. Dalton wiped the sweat pouring from his face onto Betty’s behind before grabbing the phone.

“Honey, Me and Gina were in Atlanta doing some last minute baby shopping, when my water broke. We’re on our way to Crawford Long. Don’t worry Dr. Monroe is on his way from Rome.”

“I’ll, uh-uh-oh-oh, um, me-meet you there,” Dalton stuttered as he gave the phone back to Betty,

then he and his wife contracted at the same time--one in pain, one in pleasure.

Marionette Fenton was the daughter of Douglas G. Fenton, sole owner of Fenton Industries. Dalton Parker and Marionette Elizabeth Fenton's marriage was more so a business merger, arranged by their fathers. It was a repositioning of strength, wealth, and power. Dalton was made to understand this early on in the courtship. After seeing the big picture through his father's eyes, he became a willing co-conspirator.

Mary was in love. She had no idea of what had been arranged.

Dalton, like his father, was a planner, a schemer, and an opportunist. Mary was opportunity manifest in the form of a woman. She was but one of many conquests Dalton would conquer. Nothing or no one would stand in his way. If an obstacle dared venture into his path he would not walk around nor step over it. He'd stomp all over it.

Dalton never liked to leave a job unfinished, and Betty was no exception. Such a perfect 180 degree angle, bent over his desk. Her legs forming a pyramid as her heeled feet touched the white tiled office floor. So what if she was in pain? So what if she was scared? Dalton would be there. After he came, then he would come--that is, to the hospital.

