

Part 1

The Beginning

She got out of a black, four-door, 1961 Buick Electra 225. She wasn't alone. She had distractions, four of them...in front of the CNN Center, sitting inside a black 1960 vintage Lincoln Continental Mach III watching her every move. Moments later, an extremely tall well-dressed man and a very attractive woman, just as tall wearing a white leather pantsuit with matching gloves and boots, got out of the Electra. Both turned and looked right at the Lincoln.

While this was happening, another woman, just as tall, appeared. This one oozed with confidence strutting her stuff down the sidewalk past everyone ignoring their constant stares and whispers. The black leather pantsuit she had on, an identical match to the one the lady in white was wearing, fit her body so well she could have been born wearing it.

When she reached the entrance to one of Atlanta, Georgia's finest restaurants, she stopped walking, glanced back at the Lincoln. Seconds later, she opened the door to the restaurant and went inside.

From the jump, there was something unusual about the black Lincoln Continental with the black vinyl top and Gansta' white walls. Something...that the average person was either too busy to see, didn't want to see or just wasn't trained to notice. For starters, the windows were cracked about two inches and if you looked closely, you could see four men sitting inside the vehicle.

Things took a different twist when a cop car pulled up to the stoplight facing the Lincoln, its right turn signal blinking. When the light turned green, instead of making a right turn, the cop drove through the light, slowed down enough for the driver and the rest of the men sitting inside the Lincoln to believe that the cop saw the picture in the frame.

Did he suspect that they were up to something? They had a hunch that he knew that they knew what he knew or...did he know what they thought he knew? As complicated as this may sound, the men knew that they were dealing with the police who even when they're off duty...they're working. You know what I mean...? And, if nothing else, they figured, Atlanta's finest...even on their worse day have their game tight.

As the cop car cruised through the intersection below the normal speed limit, they could see that the cop was a white man... had coal black hair, a crew cut...white wall sides close on the top.

There was something else about the cop that made them tighten their grip. When he slowed down, pulled alongside the Lincoln, they couldn't help but notice the tattoo of ole' Dixie on his left forearm. There was no doubt in their minds when he looked right at them, through the black sunglasses he had on, that he would stop the patrol car, engage them.

The curious cop had no way of knowing it but the notorious Puerto Rican thug Carrillo El Duque Sanchez and three of his low-life hit men were just waiting for the right opportunity to do whatever it is they were going to do.

Watching him drive slowly away was, for the moment, the only thing they could focus on. Keeping their wits about them, they remained very still doing whatever they could to make sure that he didn't stop. He made a right turn at the next intersection and disappeared.

As soon as he was out of sight, El Duque threw his left arm across the back of the front seat. He snapped his finger and when one of the men in the back seat looked up and made eye contact, El Duque grinned slyly and said. "You ready to do your part, bro...?"

Staring out the window on his side of the car, the man didn't say a word when El Duque glanced at the driver then turned and faced the windshield.

"What we 'bout to do is very important." El Duque said never looking back. "I give the word then...you git out and walk across the street, stop in front of the restaurant." He said, pointing.

The man didn't respond. He just kept staring out the window until El Duque narrowed his eyes and said. "Ahhhhhhh, you ignorin' El Duque, eh...?" *I hope you know quiet man, I already peep yo game, baby.*

Undaunted, the quiet man continued to deliberately ignore El Duque, that is until he suddenly realized that he had overplayed his hand. Retribution is always a means to an end for Carrillo El Duque Sanchez. It wouldn't be unlike him to distract the quiet man while one of his other Goons, sitting inside the Lincoln acting on a hunch, took it upon themselves to splatter his brains all over the back seat.

El Duque looked at him. "Go on..." He gestured. "Git out the car, git." He said waving his right hand. "Gon', git...go handle your business, bro."

And just like that the quiet man opened the door and got out of the car.

Unlike everyone else in the car, El Duque and the driver had a bit of history, together. They didn't necessarily know each other but they knew of each other. You dig? Now...as far as this *New School Crew* along for the ride, the one-eyed man, the quiet man, well...these two were a new breed of criminal whose work ethic, especially the quiet man, was cause for alarm.

None of the men along for the ride had a clue what El Duque was capable of. That he couldn't be trusted. They didn't know while they were riding and leaning in the vintage, Lincoln Continental Mach III, that as a calculated precaution, El Duque had already planned from the start to make sure that they knew absolutely nothing about each other.

He figured the less they knew, the better chance he had of anyone knowing he was involved. And, if by chance, things went sideways and one of them just happened to get caught then that posse member could discuss only his small insignificant part which, to Carrillo El Duque Sanchez, amounts to absolutely...nothing.

But...there was another bend in the river.

A twisted, abnormal distraction that only Carrillo El Duque Sanchez could devise. By design, the other two men knew him only as El Duque...a name the cops knew nothing of. The cops, on the other hand...knew of him only under the name of Carrillo Sanchez, well that is, the ones, especially in the ATL, that weren't on the take.

El Duque nodded and to the one-eyed man sitting in the back seat, he said. "You and me, we gon' raise up outta heah, walk over to the restaurant. Our man 'cross the street...when he see us comin' he gon' go in the joint. You with me so far...?"

The one-eyed man nodded.

"Now listen carefully... It is important that you understand that the owners of the joint go to the bank once a day, which means there is always a lot of..."

"Loot...cash on hand."

"And the house safe is where?"

"Under the fake water drain in the storage room behind the kitchen...!"

"We gon' Jack 'em up...hit da house, da safe an' da customer's all at once an' there ain't a damn thang they can do to stop us."

"Sounds like a plan to me!"

It's damn good plan! El Duque nodded. *An', if you screw it up, I got something for you, too.*

Part 2

The Disease of More

She had only been in the restaurant a few minutes. Suffering from the *Disease of More*, she had a clear, unobstructed view of the intersection, the Georgia Aquarium to her immediate left, the CNN Center just to her right.

Then...she saw *HIM*.

She could tell when he climbed out of the Lincoln that his patronizingly haughty ass knew that he was, without a doubt...the *Shit!*

When he crossed the street, stepped up on the sidewalk, two more men climbed out of the Lincoln...one from the back, the other from the front. Her suspicious eyes watched them closely...carefully that is until the driver rolled the windows down halfway, turned his head and when he looked right at the joint...she slumped down in the booth, by the window, to avoid being seen.

Is he on to me? She wondered, her eyes darting back and forth. *He shouldn't be able to see me sitting here. And, what if he did...? What does he know? If I tip my hand too soon, give away my advantage...everyone here will know what I know. And I can't let that happen. I should just get up and just walk out of the joint. But, I can't let go.*

What she saw next truly aroused her curiosity especially when the one that crossed the street turned around, took one step then stopped abruptly when a homeless man riding a red ten-speed bicycle, appeared from out of nowhere! For reasons she couldn't understand, he slammed the bicycle to the sidewalk, violently, turned around and shouted. "You tryin' to act like you don' see me...like I don' exist! Ain' got nothin' to say, huh? You one of dem quiet one's...huh? You know wat..." He nodded. "I got a name for you! Da quiet man...dat's wat I'm 'on call you when I see you from now on! Yeah, da quiet man!"

Trying to act normal taking deep breaths, nervous obviously, her curiosity aroused...she was just itching to get a closer look at the quiet man. But, something in the back of her mind kept telling her to stop rolling the dice, to...avoid this *ONE*.

But...she couldn't!

Trapped by her own curiosity and the *Disease of More*, she wanted desperately to know what he and the others were up to.

There was another tricky situation that was shaping up to be cause for concern...the *Homeless Man*. She hadn't completely ruled him out of the equation. He, she figured, could possibly be in with them, part of the same scheme. A deceptive tag team, maybe? It wouldn't be unlike El Duque to use the homeless man as a new distraction. He's done this type of thing before, so why not now?

Despite the twisted scenarios facing her...the quiet man, she believed, was just a lookout, a decoy, nothing more than a small part of a bigger puzzle that she was racing against time trying to sort out.

She thought she had it all figured out until the homeless man picked up the ten-speed bicycle, looked at the quiet man and to him he yelled. "That's it! I'm done with you!"

As she watched the homeless man ride away, a tall, full breasted, physically fit waitress, had to be over six feet tall, walked past her booth. Very attractive, she had that Café au lait skin color and coal black hair pulled back off her face in a tight ponytail. She looked right at the booth, smiled inwardly then went about her way to another part of the restaurant.

Part 3

No Mercy

She was cute...baby doll, breath smell like carnation milk, cute...*Pretty!* She had something else going for her. That secret weapon of hers, that infectious smile and can-do attitude was her hook. It was her job, greeting Antoine's upscale patrons with a smile while providing world famous Red-Carpet Service.

Persistent, she stepped closer to him, smiled graciously and said. "Welcome to Antoine's..." *Hmmm...my kind of man for sho'...so handsome. Soooooooo, quiet yet...withdrawn.* She looked down then back up at him "Sir...are you dining alone, today?"

He paid her no mind...looked right through her like she was a plate glass window, like...she didn't even exist. Persistent, she looked at the quiet man and smiled. He didn't respond...still daydreaming. He blinked, darted his eyes back and forth, up and down. He was back, now...back to reality. His focus, now on the cute hostess and her infectious personality.

Look at 'er such a perky lil thang. Gon' be a shame when I have to kill 'er later...but I gotta do wat I gots to do.

Meanwhile, she kept flashing that friendly smile at him. But he would have nothing to do with her kindness. He turned away, walked over, stood in the corner by the main bar where he had a clear view of the restaurant. *Ohhhooooo yeah...* He glanced around nonchalantly committing to memory every inch of the place. *I like this joint...classy as hell.*

She knew it was just a matter of time before something bad went down. She could sense it, feel it... smell its bad sent lingering in the air. Her suspicions became reality when the two men, that got out of the Lincoln, walked across the street and took up positions in front of Antoine's.

Again, she should have got up and walked out!

But she couldn't...!

The anticipation of what might be coupled with what might happen challenged her sense of logic. She continued assessing the situation that is until one of the men slipped past a group of unsuspecting patrons who were lucky enough to be leaving the restaurant, just at the right time.

She was lucky...he didn't see her as he eased through the crowd of people making sure to keep his head down while avoiding direct eye contact. But, she sure as hell saw him...saw his face, clearly...vividly. He was Gringo...a white man, an ugly bastard with a pug nose. He had a black leather patch over his left eye. The large diamond earring in his left ear...had to be at least two karats or more...had to be.

Although he wasn't the most handsome fellow in the place, he did have one trait that she would never forget. He was cool, smooth...like the Ice Man, Jerry Butler. He had a certain flare about him as he stood at the entrance watching the cute little hostess like he was just waiting for her to turn her back, then cat quick...POW!

He'd strike!

When she turned her back to help someone else, he coolly slipped right past her, walked over and stood at the main bar. Seconds later, the front door swung open wide and the third man entered, one more distraction for her to contend with as she adjusted her position in the booth.

He was looking right at her.

He couldn't see her.

She knew this. Yet, from where she was sitting...she had a hunch that this Hollywood Fashion Plate, had to be the ringleader.

He was Puerto Rican...tall, muscular, good looking and she suspected that he knew it, too. The way that this one stood at the entrance to Antoine's, she could tell he knew that he was...*THE MAN, THE ONE!*

Unlike the other two, the Puerto Rican didn't walk into the main dining area. Instead, he stood in the foyer watching the waitresses' come and go, checking out the bartenders, looking for any signs of possible in-house security.

The cute little hostess saw him. "Welcome to Antoine's." She said smiling. "Are you dining alone today, Sir?"

He quickly waived her off then turned and looked toward the back of the restaurant.

Part 4

Killing Time

She had a hunch the quiet man was packing heat but the other two, she couldn't tell if they were strapped or not. Amazingly, they didn't see her nor did they noticed that she was watching their every move. They wouldn't see her, anyway. She did have an advantage that none of them would ever detect in their lifetimes.

Meanwhile, the Puerto Rican, stood at the front entrance with both hands in the pockets of his leather jacket, watching the patrons...particularly the ones that made direct eye contact. He would remember them when the time comes.

Like a panther stalking its prey, his dangerous eyes followed the cute little hostess as she went about her business. She didn't know it but he was just waiting for when she would be most vulnerable, when she would least expect...the unexpected.

Then...without warning, he struck with the swiftness of a rattlesnake!

She had no time to react!

Heart beating at a ferocious pace, her hair clutched tight in his hand, she reached up with both hands trying to break free from his death grip!

But she couldn't!

He pulled her to him lifting her petite body off the floor and into the air. Violently, he shoved her in front of him forcing her, against her will, to walk deeper into the restaurant past unsuspecting customers!

Stunned, petrified...she grimaced in pain and agony in a desperate attempt to free herself from the clutches of the ruthless, merciless Puerto Rican who would not be denied. With his left hand, he pulled from his leather jacket a nickel-plated, pearl handled .45 Automatic, fired one shot into the 40-inch Sony flat screen television above the main bar. The television exploded spraying glass and debris throughout the area surrounding the bar.

"Alright, everybody...!" He shouted in his fast, high pitch Puerto Rican accent. "Look at me, look at me, look at me...gotdammit and don' say nothin', allofya'!

The notorious, cold-blooded career criminal...Carrillo El Duque Sanchez, aka...El Duque, most of the time known as Carrillo Sanchez but when it's *Killing Time*...he is known as...*EL DUQUE*!

He had everyone's attention, now. Their escape options blocked, people were running back and forth, screaming obscenities when at about the same time, a tall middle-aged female darted past him. "Somebody help us, please!" She said then grinned.

"Gotdamn...!" A voice cried out from the back of the restaurant.

"Call 911...!" A female voice shouted.

"Shut up!" The one-eyed man screamed.

KAPOW, KAPOW, KAPOW! The quiet man fired multiple shots into the ceiling. “Y’all heard ’im! Shut the hell up an’ look at ’im!

“Listen up...!” El Duque shouted. “Everybody to da front!” He commanded. “C’mon, c’mon, c’mon...!”

Time seemed to stand still as the frightened patrons made their way one by one, reluctantly, hesitantly to the front of the restaurant.

“Where is the manager?” El Duque asked impatiently. “C’mon...!” He paced back and forth dragging the hostess with him against her will. “Speak up, goddammit...!”

An impatient, unsympathetic thug, he didn’t give a damn about none of ’em! And, to prove he meant business, El Duque pointed the .45 at her head!

Everyone took a deep breath expecting the obvious...her brains to be cherry pie, soon. Then something unexpected happened, something...truly divine.

A defining moment...?

An act of kindness...?

El Duque didn’t shoot her!

Instead...he pulled her closer. Nose to nose, now, he could feel her hot, frighten breath against his face while looking deep into her crying eyes to the very depths of her soul.

“Pleasezzzzz...” She grimaced as he breathed his hot violent breath in her face. “Just let me...” She started to say in her southern accent but was cut off when he pointed the .45 at her face, again, this time cocking the hammer...ready to pull the trigger.

“Ain’ got much time!” He cocked his head, rolled his eyes. “Three seconds, my friends. One, two, three, that’s all! The manager betta git heah or the smilin’ lil girl with so much promise...dies!”

KAPOW! He shot one of the cooks in the leg and laughed as his body bounced off the bar and on to the floor.

“He ain’ playin’...!” The one-eyed man shouted.

“I start to count...!” El Duque barked. “One...!” He licked his lips looking at everyone through dark narrow eyes. “Two...!” He tightened his grip on the .45 forcing it snug against her head then laughed when she cringed then reached up with both hands to cover her face.

As he and his CREW continued tormenting everyone, in the first booth by the window...a new distraction caught El Duque’s eye. He froze momentarily, cocked his head, as he suddenly felt the strange sensation of being pulled, against his will, toward the booth.

Twitching uncontrollably, still maintaining his grip on the little hostess, El Duque blinked his eyes repeatedly in rapid fashion. *Whew, hold on, heah...El Duque, 'bout to pass out!* He shook his head side-to-side, closed then opened his eyes.

Seconds later, he didn't know how or why...but suddenly, miraculously...he was himself again. "That cook..." He hissed. He bowed his head, blinked his eyes then twitched, again. "He bleedin' all over the place...!"

"Yeah..." The one-eyed man smirked. "Somebody move 'im fo' I kill 'im."

"What about da little waitress girl...?" The quiet man pointed.

El Duque frowned. "Little girl..." He breathed. "...time to die."

"Please no!" She shouted her voice trembling. "Not like this...!" She begged. "It's not my time to go...not this way, pleasezzz!"

"Don't...shoot her, pleasezzzz...!" A male voice shouted from somewhere in the crowd. "Pleasezz! Sir, don't do it! I'm begging you...pleasezz!"

El Duque looked back and forth straining to see who had just spoken. "Who say that...?" He narrowed his eyes, still twitching trying to recover from the distraction in the booth by the window. "Git up heah! I count to three, ONE...!"

"My Gawd...!" The middle-aged female screamed. "Get up there...! The last time he started counting, he shot the damn cook!"

A short pudgy white man with a receding hairline...had to be the manager, inched his way through the frightened crowd. He was sweating profusely. Nervous, the fear on his face and in his eyes, was palpable.

Fi-nal-ly! El Duque glared at him. "What took you so long to speak up...fat boy?" He said waving the .45 at him. "Me and you...we goin' back to the storage room... You gon' give me what's in the safe...ok, alright?"

"I don't understand what you mean?" The manager said avoiding direct eye contact. *Jesus, Lord all mighty! I can't believe this is happening!*

"Ok, ok, ok...!" El Duque shouted then struck the manager across the face with the 45. "Now..." He laughed. "You listen to me...!" He went on as the manger tried to maintain his balance, stumbling and wincing in obvious pain, blood trickling down one side of his face.

Meanwhile, the cute lil hostess wasn't putting up much of a fight. Her spirit broken, she was ready to do, now, whatever El Duque commanded to save herself, trust me...whatever.

Part 5

Don't Ever Wonder

U.S. Army Special Operations Command

3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment (Airborne)

Fort Benning, Georgia

0400 hours, company headquarters. When Major Tyrone Street walked into his office...a brown envelope was sitting on his desk. On the front of the envelope in bold black letters were the words, PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL. He had every intention of opening the envelope...that is until the double glass doors to his office opened and his secretary, Storora Conchita Gonzalez walked in.

With legs that seemed to go on forever connected to an ass you couldn't stop looking at, Storora Conchita Gonzalez is a materialistic, tall, tan and lovely Latina, glamor girl with a broken English accent and a seriously, serious GRITS (Girls Raised in the South) attitude. When she walked over and stood in front of his desk, she appeared...edgy. Tapping her foot in a precipitous manner, she was determined that he open the envelope almost to the point where she was on the verge of being pushy.

Curious, Major Street looked at the envelope and back again at Storora who was on her way back to her desk when she suddenly stopped walking, half-turned and to him she said. "Major, you better open dat envelope. It could 'b somep'n very, very important."

On impulse, he glanced at her. Their eyes met. *Humph...* He raised an eyebrow as she walked away. *She never leaves my office without having the last word. I refuse to let her Lawrence O'Donnell me! The only reason I keep her around is because she helps me deal with the many lessons the School of Life has to offer like...understanding human behavior.*

"Hey...!" He shouted. "Since you're leaving...don't forget to close the door!"

With her right foot, she forced the doorstep down intentionally leaving the door open. When the phone in his office rang. She turned around. "I bet..." She grinned mischievously and continued. "Dat's your boss, no...?"

He sat up straight in his executive chair, picked up the receiver and placed it to his ear. "Seconds later, he hung up the phone, looked at Storora who grinned slyly when he stood up and walked over to the entrance to his office.

That brown envelope has a couple of fans, now. He narrowed his eyes. First, she's pushing me to open the damn thing and now the Regiment Commander calls. Something smells funny up in heah.