

## Master of the Neighborhood

David ran his neighborhood with an iron fist and everyone knew it. At six feet tall and a lean two hundred pounds with a light coffee skin tone, he was a good-looking man in a tough sort of way. As judge, jury and executioner of anyone and everyone who lived or worked in this little corner of Atlanta he maintained a ruthless approach to all matters brought to his attention. He had to because he got to this position through ruthlessness. In fact, it took killing his own father to get to where he was and to show any weakness now, meant inviting someone else to take over in the same manner. Therefore, when he learned that a meth head called Skinny Jack was talking trash about him he decided to act appropriately.

The next day, David sat on a bench outside the grocery store. The old people were here buying food and the predators were waiting in the vacant lot across the street for any who wandered by alone. The situation was almost laughable to David. A predator would jump out and make a threat with a knife or a club. The oldsters or prey as he called them would hand over the cash and waddle on down the road poor but healthy. Unfortunately, a few of the old people would put up a fuss and get a knockdown a notch for their troubles.

David smiled watching the scene play out as he felt it should. When he first got here, he spent his days and nights hanging out in the lot waiting for a chance to score some quick cash. Those days were spent waiting, watching, and then fighting the other hoodlums for the cash he took. It was there that he learned that the top dog got the meat. Soon he ran that lot and collected a tax from the other thugs. From there he used his muscle and took control of the rest of the neighborhood.

However he wasn't here to watch this and reminisce, he was here for business and he didn't have long to wait. A shout drew his attention to his left. Just outside the store, a skinny white dude was wailing away on some old lady. He held her purse in one hand and smashed her face with the other. David

knew immediately that this was Skinny Jack. Like most meth heads, he had a long drawn face with rotting teeth. Extremely thin, he looked more like a corpse than anything.

Standing up David asked. "Yo Jack, what's the deal?"

"What's the deal?" Jack asked with a snarl. "Is this your mama?"

David stopped and smiled. No one knew for sure who his mama was but everyone knew this was a subject that could set him off in an instant. Some speculated that he killed her when he was a kid. Others thought that maybe he saw his old man kill her. Whatever the reason talking about her in front of him could cost you your life. True to form, David's eyes went wide with murderous rage. Stepping forward with his shoulders back he roared. "No, she ain't anything to me!"

"So what's the deal?" Jack asked with an irritating smile. "Are you being a hero? You become a cop now?"

"No, I run this neighborhood!" David answered through clenched teeth. "That's the deal!"

Jack laughed and spit on the bleeding old lady lying at his feet and said. "Not for long, I hear we may have a new boss soon."

"You think you are tough enough?" David shouted. "Then come and take it!"

"I think I just might!"

That did it as far as David was concerned. Skinny Jack needed to die and soon. Smiling he pulled a straight razor from his pocket. Flipping the silver steel blade up, he said. "I'm going to gut you like a fish."

Jack stared hard at David and licked his lips. He tried to keep his face emotionless. Yet no matter how hard he tried, a twitch erupted over his left eye betraying his fear. Then without another moment's hesitation, he turned and ran.

David leaped over the old lady and chased after Jack. He wanted this guy bad. Chasing him down the road, he saw Jack turn down an ally between two old warehouse buildings. David smiled at this. There was nothing down here and the alley was a dead end. He had him now!

Stopping at the entrance of the alley David shouted. "You just made your last mistake! My old man and I used to come here and steal pipes out of these buildings for liquor money!"

"You aren't your old man!" A voice shouted back. "You're his little boy!"

"All right," David bellowed back. "You are going to wish I was a little boy!"

Holding the straight razor in a ready stance, he trotted down the alley. Trash and the smell of rotting garbage filled this place. He remembered his first night after his old man tossed him out on the street. They argued over something what he could not remember but in the end, he was homeless. He spent that night in this alley huddled in a corner for warmth.

A few yards down, he came upon a pile of trash in the center of the alley. This made David stop. The heap was normal enough looking. A dozen black green trash bags and some crates all covered with flies. To the untrained eye, it was nothing but to a street-smart man like him it was a danger to avoid. This was a bum's roost. It was a place to ambush anyone that followed him in here.

"Nice try," David said with a grin. "Unfortunately I know this alley better than you."

Jack didn't reply. Instead, he stood up, smiled and threw an empty bottle at David. He then leaped through an open doorway to the left.

This last bit didn't faze David in the least. These buildings were a hangout for the trash people. Addicts, hookers, and dealers with a taste for their own product hung out in these buildings. Moving up to the door, he saw the dark room dimly lit by filthy and cracked skylights. The sounds of pigeons cooing and the flutter of wings in the distance, he saw Jack standing his ground.

"You're a bigger fool than I thought." David said walking toward Jack. With each step, his anger grew toward rage.

"Why?"

"Because, I know this building better than my apartment, in fact my old man's bones are buried somewhere in here." David said between with an evil smile.

"I know." Jack said with a grin. "I found them and with some help brought him back."

"He's dead," David said with a sneer. "And you ain't Jesus."

"I don't work for him." Jack replied. "I serve someone else."

"What kind of voodoo crap is this?" David asked. "You ain't got any powers. You're a dumb white trash junkie and you're all alone and you're going to die that way."

"No he won't." A familiar voice said from behind.

Spinning around he saw a man with a misshapen head walking toward him. A big hulking man he looked like a cross of a bear and a man. Dressed in clothes from a decade ago he almost didn't recognize him.

"Pop?" David said in a whisper.

"You waste of a man!" Pop replied in a hollow voice. "You let a junkie lead you into a trap!"

"You're dead, I killed you myself!" David said standing up.

"You forgot who and what we are." He replied with a smirk. "We can't kill each other."

As his father got closer, he saw that his eyes were just dim sparks in deep empty sockets. The light in them somehow drew his attention away from his danger and made his mind wander. He saw a deep cold in these pits in this skull. Cold lonely places worse than the rat infested alleys and the damp cellars he

slept in as a kid. Then he felt his arms fall to his sides and the razor slip from his fingers. His father reached out and grabbed David's shoulder.

He felt the coldness of his grasp. Then like a popping bubble somewhere in his head, memories rushed in. He remembered his home on the gulf. Living and feeding on the people who trespassed on their land. Then the storm came and the people were gone. He and Pop made their way here where the eating was good.

"See I brought you back to your senses." Pop said with a grin. "Now you can rest in peace and I will run the neighborhood."

"Rest? How can I rest? We have a neighborhood to run." David replied.

"What about me?" Jack asked. "I thought we had a deal? I lure your son here and I get my due!"

"I don't make deals with food." The old man replied taking hold of Jack's shoulder.

A few passersby heard the high-pitched scream in the warehouse. They assumed that Skinny Jack was getting some street justice for his stupidity. Some assumed David was getting his. Whatever the event most felt that tonight would herald great changes for the neighborhood and that a new day was coming. Unfortunately they would soon learn of the new night that was about to fall on them.