

Dangerous Games No Love No Loyalty

By Kawand S. Crawford

Today was a turning point in my life. I was feeling emotions I'd only felt a couple of times before in my life. I'd learned a great deal in the last week. One of my partners died and there wasn't anything I could do about it.

It was late in the afternoon when I arrived home from the funeral. Although it was late September it felt like winter had already begun.

The cold air of the fall had my neck hurting. A familiar feeling I was trying to get use to since my injury. I'd injured my spinal cord and cold weather always seemed to affect my nerves. There's always a sharp pain in my neck and cold chills shoot through my entire body. My teeth would be chattering while I went through hot and cold spells.

I went through the routine that would ease the pain and knock away the cold chills, as soon as possible. I would have to get underneath a thick blanket and place a pillow on both sides of my face. My face dripped with sweat while I drank a hot cup of chocolate or tea to warm my inside.

It takes at least two or three hours before my body returned to normal. The doctor said it was because my nervous system was damaged during the accident. After covering myself with heavy blankets I couldn't stop thinking about the funeral I just attended.

There were quite a few people from the projects paying their respects. I saw Lil' Sha and some other cats that I wasn't feeling. We spoke to one another but it was faker than a three-dollar bill.

There were rumors that someone might try to shoot up the funeral, so OD took me. Rocky followed us back to my crib afterwards to make sure I got home safe.

OD had to take care of some things and Jon-Jon was at this chick's spot he'd been seeing since the pool party. Jon-Jon never spoke about the chick but claimed to be with her whenever I couldn't find him.

Ms. Walker, my weekend home attendant knew about the situation so when I wasn't back by two o'clock she waited for me in the lobby of my building. She sat in the living room while Rocky and I reminisced on the loss we'd just taken. Rocky was younger than I but he'd watched how we got down. It was a real mess that Rocky wanted to follow, at the time.

"I can't believe he's gone," Rocky said while twisting up a blunt.

"Yeh I know. I'm gonna miss that nigga," I said between my chattering teeth.

"I told Lil' Sha to holla at you later," Rocky said.

"To hell with him!"

"I was surprised they even came," Rocky said as he lit a blunt.

"I can't believe Supreme is gone," I said finally being able to say his name.

Saying Supreme's name and the image of him in the casket elevated the pain. I probably would have gone out the same way. Supreme was dead but he took Black with him.

Supreme caught Black and one of his "man's" at a red light and opened fire. If it wasn't for an off-duty police officer he might have gotten away with it. The officer only interfered because he was there when it went down. Po-po couldn't care less about the murder of niggas on the street.

They investigated for about a week and then move on to the next crime. You're on your own in the hood. It's either kill or be killed.

I was in crazy pain so I took a hit of the killa. I already had a little liquor in my system since I took a drink during the ride home from the funeral. I hoped that smoking a blunt would take away my emotional pain as it had so many times before.

"I need to call Jasmine or Destiny before you leave. I need a warm body next to me to take my mind off of all this," I told Rocky.

"Po-po is gettin' vicious these days. They're not playin' no games. They're shooting first and asking questions later."

"I know Supreme was my man." I responded.

"Yeh I know. But if you need anything I gotcha, my nigga." Rocky continued extending his friendship.

Rocky and I smoked and reflected on some of the things I'd gone through with Supreme. The killa kicked in as I started telling Rocky about the incident that bonded Supreme and me together for life. It was a situation I would never forget.

We were both about 16 years old when our mom's gave us doe to cop winter coats. We were going to Delancey St., a strip of stores in Manhattan where you can get a fly jacket at a discount, to get a couple of leather jackets. The stores were owned by Jewish people that you could haggle if you had cash.

Supreme and I had drunk a couple of 40 ounces on the train ride from Brooklyn to Manhattan. By the time we reached the city we were both feeling right. After going to a couple of stores to see what they had, we ran into this Spanish dude.

The Spanish dude was playing three-card monte, a street game played on a cardboard box with three cards on top. The man shuffles the three cards, one black and two red, over each other offering you a chance to double your change. The three cards remained face down until you place your bet. If you can pick which card is the black one you double your money.

The game is designed to make you think you can win. It's usually three people involved, the one shuffling the cards and two people betting and winning like its easy. Although Supreme and I knew the hustle it was tempting.

Supreme knew the hands were quicker than the eyes but he decided to play anyway. It all happened quickly. Supreme place \$20 on the card he thought would be the black one. After flipping the card and realizing it was red, the Spanish dude snatched his doe. He then offered Supreme a chance to triple his money. The offer was tempting and there were only two remaining cards face down. Supreme quickly threw \$40 on the cardboard and flipped over another card.

He flipped the next card and again it was a red card. The Spanish dude quickly snatched the \$40. The trick to the hustle is that the Spanish dude would bend the corner of the black card. This makes you think that any card that has been bent had to be the black one.

While he's shuffling the cards face down he quickly unbends the corner and bends the corner of a red one. It all happens so fast that you barely even notice.

Supreme was out of \$60 and I couldn't stop laughing. Supreme played a couple more times before losing a buck-50. This was no longer a laughing matter. The Spanish dude had proven that the con was exactly what it was. Supreme was heated about his loss.

After a couple of minutes of debating off to the side, Supreme convinced me to lend him some doe. Supreme sold me with the idea that if the loss, we would rob the Spanish dude. Although we knew he wasn't alone it was a risk we were going to take.

The next couple of attempts bared no fruit. In a matter of minutes we had lost almost \$300. Before we knew it someone screamed, "The police is coming!" I remember looking around before I noticed the Spanish dude halfway down the block.

Delancey St. was extremely crowded and it took only seconds to lose sight of the Spanish dude. The con had me feeling like I was standing in a crowded room with my pants down.

Neither one of us had enough to buy anything, so we bought a 40 ounce of Old English and jumped back on the train to Brooklyn. Halfway home our tempers were flaring. It was Saturday and the trains were packed. I became agitated with people bumping into me. I'd felt one too many and before I knew it I was in beef with this middle-aged African looking man.

At the next train stop the man got off and I was right behind him. It wasn't my stop but I was looking to catch wreck on someone. As soon as we got off the train we were fighting. Two other men immediately came to his defense.

Before I knew it, all four of us were falling on to the train tracks on the opposite side of the platform. I lied at the bottom of the pile feeling dizzy from the fall. Almost immediately, I could feel the weight of everyone getting lighter.

Supreme had jumped down on the tracks and started pulling them off of me. He was tussling with two of them as I tried to stand up. When I got on my feet the dude I was scrapping with snuffed me in the face. The blows staggered me and I realized that I was in the fight of my life.

Supreme put the man that punched me in the face in a choke hold. I could see the other two men pulling and grabbing on Supreme as he squeezed tightly around the man's neck. The choke hold gave me time to recuperate and retaliate with a few hammers of my own. I could feel the gristle in his nose twist on my knuckle from a right cross. People were yelling and screaming as none of us gave any thought to the danger we were in.

Supreme had to let the African man go and deal with the other two. When he let the African man go, he fell to the ground from a combination of my blows and the choke hold. I stepped over him to help Supreme, as the other two started backing up.

Supreme and I scrambled to get back on the platform. The African man that punched me in the face was stretched out on the train tracks when we fled the scene. It was a fight that had gotten totally out of control.

Once we reached the sidewalk I felt something wet running down my leg. I couldn't take another step as the sound of sirens grew nearer. Supreme told me to grab him around the neck and get on his back. He ran with me on his back for about 10 blocks before flagging down a cab.

The brawl was one of the most ferocious fights I'd ever encountered in my life. It was also the day Supreme and I earned each other's respect. We were only 16 when it happened but it built a bond between two young gangsters. Supreme's death came down on me like a ton of bricks.

Death is a part of the game. It doesn't affect you until it hit close to home. It's something you don't think about when you're blazing at other niggas.

I'd made decisions in my life that ended someone's life but it had no effect on me. This is one of the three worst moments in my life. The first time I felt this kind of pain was the day I woke up in the hospital and discovered I was paralyzed. The second time was when I found out that my accident wasn't in accident. The two prior incidents were just as emotional as losing my man.

The death of Supreme made me analyze my life. Thoughts of suicide were a thing of the past. I was beginning to care about living. Going to Supreme's funeral made me realize how selfish risking my life on the streets really was. I hadn't considered the way people around me would feel if death fell upon me.

Most of my life I'd put myself in dangerous situations without thinking of the people I would hurt. The conversation I had with my brother crossed my mind. And for

the first time I truly understood what it felt like to see someone close to you messed up. The pain builds as you try to hold on to any piece of sanity.

I felt nothing when I sat in the car just a few feet away from watching my ex being murdered. Revenge was the only thing on my mind after that Christmas Eve. Thinking about that night and others allowed guilt to kick in as I realized how my revenge probably had hurt dozens of people. I finally discovered the power of the mind and ignorance of revenge.

Although I was unable to personally murder someone, it was my thoughts and appetite for revenge that made it happen. I found myself in the same situation with Black.

I had decisions to make. I had to choose between living and dying or killing and risking my freedom. Either way my conscience began to pull me toward doing what was right. Somewhere between the streets and what my family had been telling me all my life became tangled. We all have a choice but the choices we make affect the people around us. I'd been in the game long enough to convince myself that it was all I knew. I was physically paralyzed but mentally blind to what was real.

The dangerous games I was involved in came with a high price, one I was beginning to understand that I couldn't afford. The game I was playing came with no love or loyalty. Running the streets and selling drugs were an illusion of life I'd created. It was an illusion that drinking and doing drugs made easy for me to believe was reality.

I remember my mother telling me when I was a young man that there is no honor among thieves. Words like loyalty, keeping it real and friends mean different things on the streets. Loyalty meant being true to someone as long as they're doing something for you. Keeping it real, meant corrupting the hood with drugs, while convincing yourself it's something you would die or kill him for. Friends are people who envy you, while waiting for the opportunity to take your place. It's easy to be somebody in a room full of nobodies, but it takes a real nigga to step out of the room and become somebody in a world with millions.

After everything I was going through the death of Supreme sent me spiraling down head first. Supreme had lived by the streets and had died by the streets.

Although Rocky and I were having problems he'd been coming through for me since Supreme died. He initiated the first call and came to holla at me like a man. - Something I'll always respect. We spent the day Supreme died working out our differences like live wires. We both spoke our mind and vowed to respect one another as men.

Rocky was a couple of years younger, and I didn't respect his gangsta. He told me who said what, and he admitted what he said. We both apologized for our reckless comments and his realness took the respect I had for him to another level.

The day Rocky came to my crib was definitely real. Black almost killed Rocky in his Jeep and wanted me dead. What happened to Supreme could have happened to Rocky or myself.

Although Rocky was heated with me he was trying to find a way to squash the beef. Unfortunately it took the death of Supreme to force us to get up with each other.

We also talked about getting some real doe. I told him about my man Big Ty and the cats I'd met at the pool party. Getting in the music business didn't seem like a bad idea.

I knew it was going to be rough but if I pulled it off my change would be right. Rocky found out his shorty was pregnant and was also looking for a way out. We discussed the pros and cons of the move we were considering. One of the first obstacles we had to deal with was the reality of our addictions.

The first one we had to work on was smoking and drinking which kept us stagnated. The second addiction was to break loose from the illusion of the streets. We had to learn the true meaning of loyalty, keeping it real and friends. To average working people the words and phrases took on new meanings.

Loyalty is being committed to a legitimate project that you can be proud of. A project that you could promote and discuss without looking over your shoulder. Keeping it real is hanging with real people, doing real things. Politicking with the big boys and chasing the bonus is what's real. A friend is anyone that's supportive and inspiring to your dreams. Someone who is willing to ride or die with you for a cause.

The move I was considering was going to be a true test for anyone I considered to be "fam". I knew in my mind that the first thing I had to do was kick my biggest addiction, selling drugs.

Selling drugs made my drinking and drug problem more accessible. I knew once I was able to mentally get away from selling drugs that I would be able to handle my other addictions.

A change was taking place in my mind. I had to wake up tomorrow with a completely different thought process; because the poison I was putting in my body contributed to the mental illusion of what was real, according to the streets. Life was bigger than the streets.

Going legitimate and chasing the bonus wasn't as threatening to me like the streets. I knew it was a heavy challenge but one I was willing to face. I needed to mentally convince myself that, if I could survive the streets, I could survive anything.

Rocky had came through for me when I needed him the most. He was the only one to remain in my circle after our falling out. Rocky and I also tried to figure out who was working with the Feds and after we found out, what would be our next move.