

Song about Another Man's Kids

MY BROTHER TERRENCE came by to see me the night I came home. He asked me about Grandma's funeral, about the food and the weather, about who would take over her house and her dogs, if I found any pictures of us as children there, if I would ever go back. He was only twenty-one, but he'd become more like an uncle or a dad or whatever in the last couple of years. He'd been out there for as long as I could remember, always catching beatings from Mom for getting caught with dime bags and shit, but he was always the star of the family, and he just kept hustling, and even she came around, eventually. I mean, she worked but we still ate rice and gravy every night, and we still wore the same clothes to church, whenever Mom decided to drag us there. It was just, like, Terrence was one of those people who was just *good*. Everybody appreciated the shit he did for the family. He gave Mom scratch ticket money, *and* the nigga paid for cable. Homeboy even went back to school and got his GED. Said he wanted to be an example to the rest of us.

I got kicked out of my high school in the spring for feeding pot to a blind teacher's dog. It started puking and this freshman girl snitched on me. Terrence had moved in with his girl, and I got sent to live with my grandmother in Louisiana as kind of a fresh start, and shit was going all right until she passed away. Then everything got fucked up. There was nobody there to hold us together. The night of her funeral, we opened up a bottle of Hennessy at her kitchen table, and a few hours later my cousin Gerald pistol-whipped our cousin Damon because he thought Damon stole his cell phone. Then he drove off into the night and never came back. Turned out he dropped the phone behind the toilet on accident. Then Aunt Trudy and Uncle Horace got into a fight over which church they should've had the service in, and then half of the family stopped talking to the other half, and I got sent back to Westview to give everybody some space.

Terrence asked me how it was back in West Orleans, what the racial situation was like after that dude got shot by the cops in Baton Rouge.

I told him the truth, that I only saw white people at the airport and at Walmart, and they were nice enough, I guessed, no matter what might've been in their hearts. He told me he was going to bring me over to meet his girlfriend, and I started to feel sick to my stomach. My brother was a smooth, good-looking dude, but one thing that had always been fucked up about him was his taste in women. At the heart of it, he thought he could save them, no matter what bus depot he found them at. I knew she was gonna be fucked up. That night he took me to meet her. When she went to the bathroom, I asked him if she was a dopehead, and he said, "How'd you know?" I just shook my head. Stupid motherfucker.

Of course Terrence knocked her up, and him being him, he just had to be the hero. I broke it down as raw as I could to him: "She's trying to get an eighteen-year meal ticket off your dumb ass, bro." But all he said was, "I gotta step up and be a man." I called her a scheming ho, told him a man would make that bitch get an abortion, but you couldn't say anything to him. A year and a half later, she's trying to get sole custody with no visitation, and Terrence is back living at home and crying in the fucking shower. He took me to their crib one night to see his daughter. We walked in and baby mom was sitting on the couch, watching TV and smoking a pill. Terrence says, "Where the fuck is my daughter," and she looks at us all like *why are you yelling at me?* We found the kid in the bathroom, playing in the fucking toilet, and we took her and left. A week later, she got a restraining order out on his ass, going around talking all this shit to everybody like he was some kind of deadbeat. And everybody knew he wasn't. He was just dumb as fuck. All he ever did was give her money. Come to find out, she had some new motherfucker living in his crib, and she wanted *that nigga* to be the new daddy.

Don't get me wrong, there's a lot of niggas out there that need to take care of their business. I've seen some niggas do some grimy shit, and I ain't down with that, like cutting off child support *cause your bitch is acting up*. But if the dude is paying, you gotta let him see his kids, even if he *is* a lying, cheatin-ass motherfucker. It's fucked up, 'cause this drama only starts with these kids. And it's gonna go on for eighteen years. Unhappy motherfuckers everywhere. I started hearing all kinds of crazy shit, like this new nigga was writing songs and shit like that for Terrence's daughter. I mean, songs about another man's kids? What type of weird nigga does some shit like that?

I finally got Terrence to leave her alone. Business had been good. We had been taxing white boys on everything from Kwik Stop to Price

Chopper, and it finally seemed like he was starting to relax. He paid her and shut the fuck up. Shut the fuck up and paid her. Then one night he got a text from her asking him to come over. He asked me what he should do. I told him he fucked up, that he never should've let that bitch have a kid in the first place, but that if he actually wanted to take care of his daughter, then he better work it out with her mom, at least until he got legit and was able to get custody. Otherwise, I said, leave her the fuck alone. He went over there that night and fucked her. The next night, we were at the strip club for my dude Tony's birthday when the police walked in and surrounded us. They were picking him up for a restraining order violation. He looked at the police and then at me. They kind of apologized in a halfhearted sort of way, said that they hated doing it but they had to do what they had to do. Terrence left with them, and I couldn't help but feel like that shit was my fault.

The cops came back in a few minutes later, asked if I know where he might be. I asked what they were talking about, and they said that he ran. All of us had the same look, and I finally said it out loud. "In handcuffs?" The cops looked embarrassed. They forgot. And we all laughed, even the cops, and I couldn't help it. I said, "Bet you won't do that shit again, huh?" Then the cops stopped laughing, and then I did, and I took a deep breath and exhaled. The cops left, and we all just sat there. We didn't even look around.

Terrence turned himself in at the end of the weekend. When I asked him why he ran, he said he didn't know, that he just wasn't ready yet. All those years of fucking around and that was the first time he got popped. That shit changed him. He started losing weight, and I was starting to feel like he might be on that shit, too. I almost had to stop fucking with him. It seemed like every week he was getting popped for some shit, and it was *never* for drugs. Everything but, and it seemed more and more like it was for domestics. I came home one day and he was blowing an OC pill on the coffee table, watching a *First Take* rerun, and I realized that the iPhone I thought I lost and the random cash that had gone missing had been stolen from me. I tried to walk away before Terrence heard me but he said my name and told me to come back there for a minute. When I walked into the room, he gestured toward the lines on the coffee table.

"Do you want one?" he asked.

"No thanks," I said.

"What's going on, little bro?"

"Nothing, just got home."

“Is everything okay?”

“Yeah, big bro.”

“Okay, then,” he said, and he did another line off the table.

I left the room and went upstairs. I sat on my bed and looked out the window. The super next door was painting the fire escapes red, and the sky above was completely cloudless. I took out my phone and looked at it for a moment. Our boy Jimmy sent me a text telling me that he had to talk to me about my brother, and I started to feel this tight feeling in my chest. I looked out the window and listened to the wind, and the sound of the kids on the street, and after another minute or whatever, I went back downstairs to watch TV.