

Chapter 1

Krewe of da Mansion

Dense exhaust billowed from the tailpipe, almost engulfing the white fifteen-seat passenger van parked at the gate of the Louisiana State Police inmate barracks, and then quietly disappeared, its gray wisps swallowed up in the pitch-blackness of the predawn hours. Parked on white seashells and facing an open storm-fence gate, the van had on its running lights. The driver was Slim, a tall, thirty-something black man with a round, small head. He nervously stared down a lighted walkway between a half-dome-shaped military barracks on the left and an eighty-foot trailer office on the right. Slim's right hand rested uneasily on the gear lever. He revved the engine, signaling he was ready to go. A purple, green, and gold Mardi Gras emblem on the driver's door read, *KREWE OF DA MANSION*. Below it in fine print appeared: State of Louisiana—Department of Public Safety and Corrections—Executive Department.

A disc jockey howled over WXOK, a local black radio station, "It's the last day of the last month of the last year of the seventies decade; you figure out the date. It's twenty-six degrees here in the capital city. For those of you who have to work today, I'm sorry, but happy New Year anyway. If you were due to clock in at five, you're already ten minutes late. People, dress warm and drink your hot chocolate because it's freezing outside."

Two black males, one tall and one short, rushed through the gate, opened the double side doors of the van, and jumped inside to escape the cold. Slim looked in his rearview mirror and counted heads. On the rear seat and to the far right sat Bobby. Forty-eight, husky, and of average height, he was the executive chef at the governor's mansion, currently occupied by Edwin Edwards and family. He had worked there for nearly eight years. A huge pair of sunglasses covered Bobby's face despite the darkness of the hour. Draped on his head was an oversized colorful knit hat—a fashionable piece of the early-1970s Sly Stone era. Two orange puffy knit balls dangled

on strings and rested on his shoulders like pillows about his neck. His eyes kept moving behind the dark lenses, watching everyone, though no one could tell. For all anyone knew, Bobby was asleep.

Sally sat on the seat in front of Bobby. The stern, solid frame of the fifty-five-year-old mansion dishwasher was coal black with snow-white teeth and red eyes. A white sailor's cap complemented the heavy, dark-blue jacket, giving the appearance that he was in the navy. A French-speaking native of Opelousas, Sally had his customary toothpick hanging out of the left side of his mouth. He looked around shaking his head in disgust at the younger men asleep in their seats. They had staggered into the van as if by instinct alone. Heads covered with caps, they leaned against each other or the cold windows. They were exhausted, unable to open their eyes. They had just gotten out of the van two hours earlier from a forty-eight-hours-straight shift. Next to Sally was Francis, the quiet assistant chef who always had a neatly folded clean towel on his shoulder.

Ross, a short black man in his forties, worked alone in the mansion's basement laundry. He dry-cleaned the executive family's entire wardrobe, including the clothes of the first couple's children, Anna, Stephen, Victoria, and big David, the youngest. Ross also dry-cleaned the three-piece suits and blue state-police uniforms of nine mansion security intelligence officers (MSIOs) and the governor's four drivers, who were also his bodyguards.

Ross's eyes were always red, as if he'd been drinking, but that was strictly prohibited. Ross worked from sunup to sundown and never damaged one piece of laundry. He was a New Orleans thug/dropout turned street hustler. He was destined by fate and a felony murder charge to be a member of the Krewe of da Mansion. Ross knew the governor's favorite suits and the order in which he wore them. "Pops never wears the same suit twice in a month," Ross would declare, flaunting his knowledge of the governor's habits that the others didn't possess.

Ellis, whom everyone called BigOne, sat in the front passenger seat with his feet propped up against the dashboard. He was asleep. He and Slim helped park cars and directed mansion-guest traffic during huge luncheons, a daily occurrence when the legislature was in session. He washed all executive vehicles and the first couple's family cars, vans, and trucks, including those of the governor's children, and of mansion employees. He, Slim, Vic, and Ross wore dark-green uniforms indicative of their positions at the mansion as

field niggers—not allowed in the house. If they were ever caught on the first floor by the first lady, it was back to Africa for them, as she so eloquently alluded to the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola during her initial interview with each convict. At lunch and dinnertime, the field niggers' meals were sent down on the dumbwaiter. They ate in the basement, sitting on milk crates.

Frank LeBlanc, or "Jughead," a butler, was forty-five and a former drug dealer and hustler from New Orleans. He was extremely nervous, repeatedly brushing his face with his palm. Jughead cleaned all the state's silverware daily. When he had been arrested, a New Orleans policeman fired his .357 magnum next to his ear, damaging his hearing. Because of that, Jughead talked in a loud voice and always double-checked instructions from mansion personnel. He was called "Two Times" because everything had to be said to him twice.

"All right, wake up in here!" Slim said, raising his voice a bit and disturbing his sleeping passengers. "I got fourteen and I need fifteen. Whoever's not in here, speak up." The sleeping passengers, most of whom were in their late twenties, refused to open their eyes, because to do so would interrupt precious seconds of sleep they needed to make it through the day.

Roy Lee, a butler who was also a baseball coach in Angola, was from Baton Rouge. His assigned area was the entrance foyer and sitting and drawing rooms. He had reserved the only vacant seat for his homeboy, who had not come in yet.

Larry "Sugar Bear" Allen, a butler from New Orleans, sat in the first seat behind Slim, with big, tall, baritone-voiced Vic. Sugar Bear was Anna's babysitter. Watching the governor's grandson, John Todd, during the food-service rush hours got him out of lots of menial housework in his assigned area of the state dining room and guest restrooms off the entrance foyer. The other butlers were always angry with him.

Butler Tommy Mason was short, dark skinned, clean cut, and articulate. He was the assistant editor of the *Angolite*, the nationally renowned prison magazine whose editor, Wilbert Rideau, was a high-profile, ex-death-row convict from Lake Charles. Tommy was assigned to the first couple's bedroom and bathrooms.

The sneakiest butler in the mansion was Phillip. Barely six feet tall, he was skinny and of a color that made him appear to be of Asian extraction. He had curly hair and a baritone voice. Also from New Orleans, he aspired to be a ladies' man. His assigned area

was the governor's office and elevator foyer, where the governor's appointments waited to see him.

Devold, the oldest butler, was forty-six. He was from Eunice, near Opelousas. Devold spoke French fluently. He was nervous and paranoid and consumed coffee all day. Keeping fresh Community coffee for the governor and making sure drinks were in the cooler in the butler's station were his primary duties.

Everyone except Bobby and Sally was insecure in his hopes of being pardoned by the governor. Their fears, for the most part, were groundless but sufficient to make them paranoid about any mansion transgressions. The Krewe of da Mansion was comprised of fifteen felons who ran the governor's mansion and made it all happen. All of them had been Angola inmates serving life sentences for murder before being transferred to the state police barracks to work at the mansion. All except Bobby and Sally had been working at the mansion for nearly four years. If they lasted until the governor finished his term in office on March 20, 1980, without getting into trouble, they would be pardoned by the governor.

"Whoever ain't in here yet, speak up!" Slim yelled. Bobby chuckled. Sally uttered words in French, shaking his head. Devold replied in French without opening his eyes.

"What was that, Sally?" Bobby asked, chuckling.

Mr. Williams, a correctional officer in plain clothes, burst out of the main barracks door and walked swiftly towards the van, wearing his big parka and blowing in his hands to keep them warm. Slim waited until he arrived at the driver's-side door before lowering the window an inch so he could hear him.

"Y'all better come quick! It's Hammond! He said he's not going today. He said he's off!" Williams shouted. Slim closed the window. He stared at the dashboard clock. It was five twenty.

"Man, I got a five-mile drive to make in ten minutes!" Slim shouted. "Mrs. Elaine gonna be looking out her window upstairs at that driveway at five thirty. I ain't gonna be late. Y'all better go get that niggah." Slim put the van in reverse and backed into the street headed north, revving the engine as he did so. The name "Elaine" had the power to raise the dead, prompting those sleeping to open their eyes and look around, fully conscious as if they had eight hours worth of sleep.

Sally finally answered Bobby's question, in English. "I said I never seen such a sorry-a-- bunch of young niggahs in all my life,

I swear before God. You young niggahs is suppose to look out for one another.”

Bobby, Francis, Sally, and Roy Lee exited the van. “Close the door, niggah! It’s cold!” Sugar Bear exclaimed. Roy Lee kept walking, ignoring him, but looked back and rolled his eyes as Sugar Bear closed the doors. Slim watched the four convicts follow Williams down the walkway and back inside the barracks.

Once past the office, Williams turned his flashlight on and entered the dark, warm dormitory through double doors, the other four men following close behind. At the first top bunk in the left corner, the light was shone towards Saint’s head. Saint was naked except for a worn and faded pair of red and gold Capitol High Lions gym shorts. An array of legal documents was strewn amidst the blanket and sheets on his bunk. Other documents were torn or balled up on the floor.

“Damn!” Roy Lee exclaimed, shaking his head.

Where You At, God?

Roy Lee, Francis, and Sally stood waiting for Bobby’s orders. Bobby observed the paperwork and breadbox at the foot of Saint’s bunk. He chuckled again. “Say, Saint, come on, man—let’s go. You know what you gotta do. Let’s go get it over with, Champ,” Bobby said with the tone of a compassionate counselor.

“I’m off today,” Saint mumbled from under a pillow. “The good white folks said I could take the day off. I ain’t gotta go in. I got to fight tonight.” Bobby smiled, having experienced years of what Saint was going through for the first time.

Saint had come to the mansion in February 1979—eleven months earlier. This was his first holiday season. Bobby knew he just needed to hold out for less than three months and he’d be freed. Bobby, who often read his little New Testament half-a-Bible, likened Saint’s situation to the parable about the laborers who early one morning agreed to work all day for a penny. Then a laborer came in at the eleventh hour, worked only one hour, and got the same penny. Saint hadn’t worked at the mansion a full year and was about to get the same penny for which Bobby and others had labored hard for years: freedom.

Saint had been a special, highly volatile case from the first day Bobby saw him. In less than a year, Saint was just as valuable to the governor as Bobby was as executive chef. He was twenty-four and the youngest of the Krewe of da Mansion. The other convicts

were expendable, but Bobby and Saint were viable commodities. Saint was a boxer, but not just any boxer; otherwise Edwards would never have sent for Detective Joe Whitmore to bring Saint from Angola to the mansion. Edwards and some wealthy businessmen had taken a serious interest in Saint's fighting abilities. Saint was the light-heavyweight champion in Angola. News of how he dominated the boxing ring reached Edwards through a former pro boxer and trainer named Billy Roth. Roth had taken his boxing team from the Baton Rouge Police Training Academy to Angola to fight exhibitions against prison fight clubs, to tune up his young team for the upcoming National A.A.U. Championship Tournament in the free world. A recent federal suit had resulted in a federal court order banning inmates from A.A.U. competitions.

Tom Landry from Lake Charles, the ninth-ranked U.S. Golden Gloves light heavyweight, was present to get a tune-up fight, but at 197 pounds, he was overweight. His trainer didn't want him to fight an Angola heavyweight. Saint, who weighed in perfectly at 173 pounds, had been unmatched for months because no one would get in the ring with him, not even for a workout. Cheyenne, Saint's boxing trainer and the best fight trainer in Angola, offered him to fight five three-minute rounds with Landry. When Roth saw the speed with which Saint fought, his Muhammad Ali dance and boxing style, and his devastating combinations, combined with the fact that Landry never landed one punch to Saint's head, he visualized lots of money. He spoke with Saint after the fight. When Saint told Roth of his criminal charges, Roth said, "I knew Billy Middleton. He was a good friend of mine. I also know Governor Edwards. He's a good friend of mine, too."

"You know, Mr. Roth, when I got in trouble, I had a football scholarship," Saint said. "I lost that. Now, I'm the light-heavyweight champion, and I haven't had a fight in eight months. No one will get in the ring with me. With the right food, rest, and Cheyenne in my corner, no professional fighter out there in my weight class can beat me." Saint spoke with so much confidence that Roth believed him. He'd witnessed the proof in the ring.

"I'll see what I can do, okay?" Roth shook Saint's hand.

"Grab his legs," Bobby ordered. Roy Lee and Sally grabbed Saint's legs while Bobby grabbed his left wrist. Saint jerked away and held the iron rail of the bed.

"Come on, Saint, man. Let's get it over with, man," Bobby repeated.

"Leave me alone, Bobby. I'm telling you. Leave me alone."

Bobby was unable to pull Saint's handgrip free. A white inmate named Coleman in the bunk below Saint awakened and yelled in fear of being attacked. Not knowing what was happening, he fled the dorm.

"Say, Roy Lee, he must t'ink somebody was after that a--," Sally said in his French accent and chuckled.

Roy Lee grinned as he pulled the mattress from under Saint, causing the breadbox containing clothes and files to fall and scatter on the floor. Williams kept his flashlight on Saint's face. Inmates in the immediate area sat up, watching.

"Come on, Saint! Let's go, man," Roy Lee pleaded. "You know what this means? Mrs. Elaine gonna send your a-- back to Africa, boy. Now get up!"

After jerking him free, the four men carried Saint by his four limbs. Shouting obscenities, he twisted and struggled to get loose but couldn't. They carried him out through the double doors and the activity room. Williams stood in the cold, holding the door open.

"I ain't going!" Saint screamed. "Let me go! Turn me loose, Bobby! Roy Lee, let me go! I don't care no more! Send me back! I object! I need some rest! I can't fight like this. I'm tired. I need a typewriter, law books. This a setup. They set me up. This ain't 'bout boxing. That b---- Polozola dismissed my case."

Saint yielded to fatigue and fell asleep cursing. He was delirious and dead tired. Even the freezing weather had no effect upon him.

"Y'all hurry. I'll put all his stuff back in his box," Williams said.

"All right, Mr. Williams. Thanks," Roy Lee said.

They carried Saint down the walkway. Slim revved the engine, creating another cloud of exhaust.

"Put him down," Bobby ordered. Sally and Roy Lee gently lowered Saint's bare feet as Bobby and Francis lowered his head and arms onto the cold street.

"Ain't this niggah gonna freeze, Bobby?" Roy Lee asked, mildly protesting.

Bobby opened the van door and got in, saying nothing. The others followed.

Slim pulled off slowly, observing the five-mile-per-hour speed-limit signs posted every twenty feet in the Department of Public Safety and Corrections complex.

Inside the dormitory, Williams reset the mattress on the bunk with the blanket, sheets, and pillow. He unwrapped a bundle of foil

and found it full of delicious pecan brownies from the mansion. He stuck one halfway in his mouth, holding it with his lips, while closing the foil and placing it under Saint's pillow. He put all of Saint's papers in the breadbox, with his clothes and red Bible on top.

"He usually keeps his box slid right here under my head on the floor," said Coleman, who had by now returned to his bunk and saw that Williams was about to place the box on top of the bunk. He slid the breadbox where Coleman suggested. Williams noticed a huge ball of several sheets of paper on the floor at the edge of the light coming through the windows of the double door from the activity room. When he opened them, he saw the papers were from the United States District Court, Middle District of Louisiana, and signed by U.S. District Judge E. Gordon West. Ten pages consisted of the magistrate's report, signed by Magistrate Frank J. Polozola. Another sheet contained the heading, "Judgment and Order." The document read: "IT IS ORDERED that petitioner's application for a writ of habeas corpus be, and it is hereby DENIED, and this suit is hereby DISMISSED. Baton Rouge, Louisiana, November 26, 1979."

Saint, meanwhile, eyes wide open, was lying on his back in the freezing street, still clad only in his old red Capitol High gym shorts. He stared into the clear winter sky at millions of stars. Shivering uncontrollably, he finally lifted his head. He saw the van 400 feet down the street. "What the f---?" Saint sprang to his feet and began sprinting. *Come on, Saint. You got to do it*, he thought. "Aw, damn!" he exclaimed aloud. A white seashell had cut into his foot. He limped a few steps before stopping. He raised his foot and pulled out a blood-covered shell.

"Where you at, God?" Saint shouted as he stood in the cold. *How in the world did I ever get in this s---?* he thought again, as he had done every day that he'd been locked up. This question had been his daily companion for nearly seven years.

Thanks to a good memory, answers had always come to him in the form of flashbacks. *Where is this one coming from? What will it show? What does it want me know?*

If the State violates your constitutional rights, you can appeal to the State Supreme Court. If they deny you, you can appeal to the federal court. If the federal court denies you, you have to appeal to the good Lord. He was desperate. Listening within, he waited for a response through his conscience, but none came forth. Behind bars and inside Angola, he felt reprobated by the

world. It had been a long time since he'd heard from his friend.

The latest duplicity by the Louisiana criminal-justice system had Saint running in pitch-black darkness through the woods with a tiny keychain flashlight. He felt that Mr. Anding, his federal-court-appointed lawyer, had sold him out, or the federal clerk of court did not send him notice so that an objection could be filed in his case. Either way, his case was now dead. He was stuck with serving a life sentence for a crime of which he was never convicted and to which he did not plead guilty. He now struggled with the realization that he might be working at the mansion for four additional years, serving Republican governor-elect David C. Treen.

"If they think I'm gonna work four years for Treen, they got another thought coming."

In nanoseconds, a phantasmagoria of Saint's days of growing up in Baton Rouge's Zion City neighborhood through his last days in high school culminated on April 10, 1973.