**Book Outline Rough Draft** – “The Hood”

INTRO… “The Creed of Law”

1. Detail the culture, community, and creed that shape Lawrence, aka “Law.” Readers see Law’s world… his friends, his habits, his Chicago neighborhood.
2. Loyalty is the undertone of most of Law’s behaviors. His firsthand experience taught him that when loyalty is broken, people either end up in jail like his father, Bill (aka Rogue), or dead like his brother, John.
3. At the same time, like most teenagers, Law thinks he’s invincible. He thinks he’s smarter than his father and brother were and is willing to play the game of life.
4. “Deeper Than That”
5. Law’s mom, Sheila, is a God-fearing hardworking nurse. Law was 11 and already introduced to his ‘hood creed by the time Sheila “found the Lord.”
6. However, she’s spent the past five years trying to teach him that life is deeper than what he’s come to know.
7. The two have ongoing debates on whether a ‘hood creed can be true loyalty to black people if it’s underlined outcome is hate.
8. “I Hate U”
9. Bill asks to see Law before his 17th birthday. He’s been trying in his own way to parent him from prison.
10. Sheila’s brother is stern and has been reinforcement in Law’s life. There are glimmers of hope for Law from those who try to fill-in the parenting gaps, but it’s not the same.
11. During the visit, Bill confronts Law about his behaviors that mirror what landed him behind bars. (“I hate you, Rogue…” “No, son. You hate yourself. It’s like you’re a student at Hate University.”)
12. “Warning Shots”
13. Law’s sitting on the porch with friends. They know he’s not as streetwise as he thinks, but he’s learning.
14. A cousin says Law’s at a crossroads. Either he goes deeper and up the ranks with more risks, or he retreats.
15. Does Law heed the warning or stay the course?
16. “Far from the Tree”
17. Law displays behaviors too close to his father’s past. (“Apples don’t fall too far from the tree.”)
18. A near-death encounter pushes his mom to her last resort.
19. Law is sent to live with relatives in rural Tennessee. (Old lynching tree territory.)
20. “Too Big for Your Britches”
21. Law reluctantly moves to Tennessee to save his own life.
22. He quickly experiences culture shock but plans to lay low just for a while until he can return home.
23. Another cousin takes Law under his wing. (Flipped image of the other cousin.)
24. “The Hood Has Two Faces”
25. Relatives warn Law to leave some of his “city ways” back home. They reveal that they live just 25-miles shy of a town historically known for lynching, and still home to Confederate flag-flying Klansmen in the 21st century.
26. A local news tragedy sparks debate on race relations.
27. Law is confronted by the deadly combination of loyalty and hate from another “hood;” the one worn by the KKK.
28. “What’s the Difference?”
29. Law finds himself angry and offended.
30. He’s questioned about why he’s mad when he’s on the receiving end of loyalty and hate from racist whites in Tennessee, when he often used the same deadly combo against other blacks in Chicago.
31. His internal conflict that has been slowly emerging finally comes to a head.

VIII.

IX.

X.

* Reminisce
* Different environments can lead to different perspectives.
* Someone has to be the catalyst for change. Someone has to break the cycle in our community.

**INTRODUCTION** (who, what, when, where, why, how?)

My name is Law, but I never follow rules. I've always been told I'm a natural born leader, but the only thing leading me is surviving the streets of Chicago. I'm six months from seventeen, but everyone in my family is afraid I won't make it. All I can say is I'm here today. At least I've already outlived four of my boys; and I've never been in jail. That's more than I can say for my older brother, John, and the stories I hear about my dad. The last time I saw him on the street, I was nine years old. So part of me doesn't even remember the everyday, Bill. Why does everybody think it's my responsibility to break the mold? How can I when the mold around me is rock solid concrete? Anyway, I'm the type who lives in the moment. So if my moment's up, then fine. But me, me... I AM the Law! I set the course for my own path. I live by my own creed: My people; my hood.

I’ve always set my own tone, and I like it that way. My 79th Street Corridor is my set. The four-block radius of Marshfield Avenue to Wood Street are now black and blue, but cross the invisible boundary line to the other side of the (Ashland) and that color combo will get you bleeding the same crimson those boys represent. It’s like an imaginary chess board. One wrong move in the wrong box, in the wrong color can get you killed. That’s what happened to Dwayne last summer and Joe the winter before last. I guess they were just trying to live an ordinary day and forgot to toe the invisible lines. Ride by low and quick? Yes, you can survive that on a good day. But low and slow, either you’re on a mission to equal a score or must be looking for trouble. Either way, that’s how they both got gat.

Dwayne was trying to flex for some girl and forgot where he was at the same time. Turns out, he was tryin’ to holler at dude’s girl who runs that whole pocket of the hood. He didn’t know. Or knowing D, maybe he didn’t care.

Joe, on the other hand, was all about the rims. He had just got a new pair of 20” dubs and wanted to sport them on his new Dodge Charger. Everybody knew it was him from the blue ghost lights he installed to the undercarriage and custom iridescent paint job across the hood. Yeah, everybody knew it was him. So the one time he decided to forget the invisible lines, thinking he was invincible and nobody was trying to do anything crazy a week from Thanksgiving, he got caught in a cross fire. They set him up. Shame, though.

Me, I’m not stupid enough to get caught up like that. And I’m not scared none either though, if I do. I carry at all times and roll with those who do the same. Ain’t nothing out there stronger than my hood.

My Mom keeps asking me if I’m in a gang. I always say, no. She wouldn’t understand. I know she loves me. I can tell she’s mad and scared for me all at the same time. The way she yells my name from the porch if she sees me at the corner with Tré is classic, “Lawrence Trenton Davis!” I get teased when my whole government name gets called out. She just doesn’t understand. They’re just as much family as she is to me. John and Pop’s ain’t out here to watch my back on these streets. Somebody has to do it. I figure, it might as well be them.

Mom’s so worried about me being lock up. But heck, we’ve all been on locked down for the past year and some change. It took some dumb mark named George Floyd to get these fools to remember to come outside and live their lives. Now they’re out here in the streets shouting, Black Lives Matter. Since when? They didn’t matter when folks popped D last summer. And where were the protestors when they got my boy Joe? I ain’t seen none of ‘em then, not even to pay their last respects.

Blacks been killing Blacks all my life in one way or another. I don’t think I’ve ever known a time when it wasn’t that way, at least not in my hood. It’s the survival of the fittest out there. So now just because this white cop put his knee on a brother, we all worked up. Now we woke! Ya’ll can miss me with that.

To me, George was weak. How you just let anybody pin you to the ground like some caught wild animal? He was just a dumb mark. Marked by the police before he even stepped foot out his door. We all are. That’s why I don’t roll out in these streets alone. Somebody’s watching my back at all times, and I’ve got theirs ‘til I can’t anymore.

**Chapter 1** ---

*No one could’ve ever told me that in 2020 I’d wake up to a cross burning in my cousin’s front yard. I would’ve said you were lying, hallucinating, or having a bad dream. I was having a bad dream, right?*

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“Law. Law? Are you up?

“Ma,” Law slurred, still groggy and half annoyed.

“Are you?”

“Ma?”

“Are you dressed for school?”

“Mom, why are you checking on me like I’m still a little boy?”

“Because sometimes you still act like one,” Sheila said. “Besides, I don’t want another call from that school saying you were tardy for first period class. It’s the first day of the week, so you can get off to a fresh start.”

“It’s just a study hall, Ma,” Law said, emerging fully dressed out of his bedroom. “Who needs a study hall first thing in the morning?”

“Someone like you who didn’t finish his homework the night before, that’s who.”

“Look Ma, we’re doing good that I even still go to school. Do you know how many of my boys don’t even show their faces there no more?”

“They’re not my concern. You are, Law.

“Don’t you have any other clean clothes to wear? You used to wear all kinds of colored shirts, all the fancy name brands, too. Now, if it’s not a crisp clean white T-shirt and them sad sagging jeans, it’s not a part of your wardrobe. What’s that all about?”

“Ma, it’s nothing. It’s just what all my friends in my crew like to wear. Do we have any Fruit Loops left,” Law asks while opening the kitchen cabinet doors?

“Your crew, huh. I’m watching you, Lawrence, and you better not be in a gang!”

“So now just because I wear a white shirt and some blue jeans, I’m in a gang? What makes you assume that about your only son?”

“What makes me assume it is that you’re my youngest son, not my only one. Little John may not be with us anymore, but he’s always in my heart. And I know full well what took him away from me, and it started with something as simple as a white T-shirt, Law.”

“Okay, why our talks gotta be so heavy first thing in the morning? Ma, don’t worry so much. I’m good.”

“I hope so. I just know that when I’m looking in your hooded brown eyes they’re just as mysterious as your father’s. And all he seemed to know how to do was keep secrets from me. I just don’t want that for you...”

“I get it, but I’m my own person. His mistakes were his to make, and I’ve got my own.”

“But what I’m saying is that some mistakes are a waste of time when the outcome has already been proven.”

“You starting to sound like Grandma.”

“As much as I hate to admit it, you’re not wrong. Some of the things she used to say to me make sense now. So I’m passing them on to you the best I can.

“I wish I would have learned some lessons from schoolbooks and family talks rather than feeling the need to try everything myself. That’s all I’m saying. You don’t have to follow everyone else’s lifestyle like it’s the blueprint for your life. Not even if it’s your father’s.”

“Then we’re on the same page. I have no intention on following his blueprint. Like I said, I have my own life any own plan,” Law recanted. “That’s all that should concern you.”

“Boy, until you are full grown and taking care of yourself, I’ll concern myself with anything and everything that concerns you. Now finish that cereal so you won’t miss your bus. The next one should be pulling up to the light in another fifteen minutes or so.”

“Ma, I haven’t been on the CTA all semester. I told you Tré has his own car now. I’m riding with him.”

“And I told you I don’t like you riding in that car with him all the time. He’s not the same boy I watched grow up, Law. Besides, how’d a seventeen-year-old end up with a new car anyway? I know for darn sure his mama can’t afford it.”

“Ma, you know he works at McDonald’s.”

“And what boy do you know can afford a new car on a hamburger salary? I’m not stupid, Law.”

“You worry too much about stuff not worth worrying over. I’ll be fine. I always am.”

The old window panes suddenly begin to rattle from the vibration of sound.

I know those woofer speakers anywhere, even from our third-floor apartment. I can’t be too careful though, so I need to be sure. Growing up in the hood teaches you to peek through windows. Mom hates me touching her dainty chiffon curtains, always saying I watch too many *Chicago PD* episodes. I’m actually more of a *Law and Order* guy, of course. Either way, I see a glimpse of who I want to be. I want my independence and own money. I want enough to buy my own car and take care of Mom. I want enough to have anything I want. At least I still want. Most mo’s my age just take and take. They skip the wanting and wishing stage all together. They just take.

“Who is making all that noise this early in the morning?” Sheila asked.

“Okay Mom, I’m up. Tré’s outside.”

“That’s him making all that racket? It’s that black Camry with tinted windows, right?” Sheila asked, now peeking out the corner of the window herself. “So he just pulls up like some *Knight Rider* from an old TV show, huh? And since when does Tré come to his big Cousin Sheila’s house and not even come in to speak?”

“Since you don’t want us to be late for school, that’s when.”

“Boy, where did you get that mouth?”

“Word on the street is that I got it from you!”

“Just hush!”

“You know you were ‘Sassy Shay’ back in the day. I heard the stories from your old crew. So don’t go acting all brand new up in here.”

“Boy, if you don’t get out of my face.”

“Alright, I’ve gotta go for real,” Law said, grabbing his black hoodie and half-empty backpack from the kitchen chair. He slings the bag over one should as he heads towards the apartment door.

“Wait, didn’t you forget something?”

“I got you, girl…slow your roll.”

“Boy, I will still put you over my knee and wear you out,” Shelia said sternly yet lovingly.

“I’ve got you, Ma. How could I forget my favorite girl,” Law said, planting a goodbye kiss on his mother’s cheek.

Law jogs down the dominos of stairs from apartment 3E and opens the creaking glass inset door before him. He takes a minute to breathe in the fresh air and freedom from the tower of red bricks that shielded him through the night. He walks towards the car, grabbing the handle and sliding into the front seat in a seamless motion.

“What up, cuz?”

“Hey, what’s up.”

“Nothing much,” Tré said, scanning the street before quickly pulling away from the curb.

“I hit you up last night, man?”

“I know shorty. I was with my girl and uh… didn’t see your text until this morning.”

“I bet you didn’t. Ha!”

“Stay out of grown folks’ business, youngster,” Tré said, taunting and bragging at the same time.

“Youngster? You got all of one year over me, that’s it. You only get away with half the stuff you pull because your mom works nights,” Law clapped back. “You’re over there talkin’ like you got the keys to your own crib or something.”

“I basically do have my own spot. She ain’t hardly ever there.”

“That’s because she’s out there holding down two jobs trying to keep a roof over ya’ll heads.”

“I know. Trust me. All jokes aside, I know she’s busting her butt for me and my lil’ sisters.

“My mom’s always asking about you. Wondering why you don’t come in and say hi no more.”

“I know. I just don’t want to be feeling no kinda’ way around her, you know? It’s like, she knows stuff without me ever saying it. I don’t want to have to lie to her or have to hide her body if she accidently finds something out,” Tré said.

“You ain’t hiding no bodies, especially my Mom’s. She gets on my last nerve too sometimes, but that’s still my girl.”

“I know that’s your girl. She’s good people. I’m just glad I don’t have to live with her and hear that mouth all the time. ‘Jesus this; come to church with me that…’ She be doing the most at all times!”

“Don’t worry about Mom, worry about yours and what she’s gonna do when she realizes your girl been in her bedroom! She’s gonna kill you and I hope I’m there to see it.”

“There you go hating. I got mad respect for my Mom. It’s those chicken-heads out here who I couldn’t care less for.”

“Oh, sounds like your girlfriend just got downgraded.”

“Nah, she’s cool and all. I’m just not locked in on her. It’s not like I’m ready to settle down. I’m still young.”

“*Now* who’s the youngster?” Law asked.

“Hey…looks like you missed your last turn.”

“Nah, I need you to make a run with me before I drop you off.”

“Alright. Where to?”

“Just on the other side of Stoney Island. I told my co-worker I’d meet him there around eight o’clock. It’s right up here on the next block,” Tré said.

I don’t know where we’re going or who his co-worker is, but I trust Tré with my life. He’s not just my hood. He’s blood. I’ve heard that some of them who run with him out of McDonald’s live in this pocket. Can’t be mad at a brother for starting a side hustle. Even Mom knows you can’t afford the finer things in life on a hamburger salary.

They’re only running light stuff anyway. It’s all natural pharmaceuticals if you ask me. At some point, everything he sales started out as a plant, a tree, or a seed or came from a plant, a tree, or a seed. So if God didn’t want it in the Earth, He wouldn’t have placed it in the ground. I’ve been running lightweight jobs at school here and there. But I’m ready for something more. Maybe this is a test run to see if I’m ready to pull more weight. I’ve got to act chill, though. I don’t want to come off too eager. I need Tré and the crew to know that I’m down for whatever…

“Law. Law? Law!”

“What man?”

“*What?* I’ve been calling your name for a minute. I parked and everything and you never even flinched. You daydreaming or something?”

“Naw, that’s because I don’t flinch. I heard you.” Law said, trying to regain his iron-like composure. “What’s up?”

“Come to the door with me and watch my back and the car. I don’t want anybody knowing where my spot is in case they looking to start something later.”

“I got you.”

“And give me your backpack. I need it for a few.”

“Yeah, whatever.”

Red car. Blue car. Green car. Go! I feel like I’m playing a round of “that’s my car,” like when I was a kid. But, I’ve got to watch these cars like a memory game just in case one tries to circle back on me. I have to keep watch. Keep my head on a swivel. Be mindful of my surroundings. It’s like counting cards in a game of Spades. If I remember what’s already been played, and know the number of cards already played, I’m less likely to get caught short-handed later.

So far so good.

That’s a fine honey right there…

No, I’ve got to stay focused. There’s a method to my madness. I need to help my Mom; prove I can be the man of the house. Truth be told, that’s why Tré has these extra-curricular job activities. He talks about me being a mama’s boy, boy he’s out here hustling so he can help his own. All his mom knows is that Tré put the lights and gas in his name, and he pays for his sisters’ cellphones, too. Now if she wants to believe a Happy Meal check covers all of that each month, then fine.

I still think it’s admirable for him to try that hard. I plan to do the same thing for Mom. I don’t want her out here worrying on her own, while folks either locked up or buried six-feet under and can’t help her none. I want to be the one who makes a difference. I’m gonna make her life easier. I just gotta prove myself to Tré.

A while later, Tré emerges with a backpack now filled and fully zipped. The two head back to the car and drive in silence a short distance away. Tré takes another pit stop in an alley, pops the trunk, and grabs the backpack he’d instinctively tossed in the back seat before. Law gestures to get out too, but Tré’s extended hand was enough for Law to know to be still. Tré returns the once again deflated backpack to Law.

“Now let’s get your butt to school,” Tré said, pulling out onto the main thoroughfare.

“Me? What about you?”

“I’m good. I’m already in my senior year. You’ve got to get there.”

“You’re barely there. Being a senior, and being a graduating senior are two different things. Besides, what are you gonna do with that product you just picked up?”

“I’m gonna do what any good business man would do, sell it.”

“Don’t you need my help?”

“Naw, man, I don’t.”

“Wait. So you pick me up to make the ride with you, use my backpack for your pick up, and then leave me out of it completely?”

“I don’t ever leave you out completely,” Tré recanted. “You just said everything I let you be a part of with the whole thing. You just too needy, man. Chill. You can’t just jump out here like that. You’ll end up getting somebody killed.

“You’ve got to learn this business in baby steps,” Tré added. “You should be glad I care enough not to make you my runner since you’re still a juvie. You know how many mo’s out here would have you as their human body armor. I’m trying to bring you up in the game right.”

“Man, I’m trying to come up, that’s all,” Law said. “I’m not a baby. I just want you to see that I’ve got just as much heart as you do.”

“I get all that. What I’m trying to make you see is how to be smart while you’re at it. I’m gonna put you on, but you gotta chill.”

“I’m ready, Tré. I’m telling you. Stop holding me back!”

**Chapter 2 Notes**….

* Law misses first period study hall again, but makes it to school just in time for homeroom to avoid being marked absent the entire day. His ride from Tré took another turn and before he knows it, he’s the lookout for a drug run that took almost two hours.
* Law makes it home from school. He looks in his backpack for the first time all day and realizes that Tré left a stash inside of it. Instead of asking him if it was an accident or otherwise returning it, he decides to use it as his chance to breakout and make some real cash on his own.
* Sheila gets home from work and asks how his day went. He blows off what he really did, but Sheila discerns that Tré has Law up to no good. She talks to him about church… what the minister said at church the day before, which was Sunday.
* Sheila also mentions that Law’s dad, Bill aka “Rouge” wants him to visit him in jail before his 17th birthday. Seventeen is significant for Bill because it’s when he became “rouge” buck wild, careless, and headed on a downward spiral of being Law-less figuratively and literally. He named him Law-rence/Law hoping it would have some sort of redemption power over his life.
* In spite of the deep talk Sheila just had with Law, Tré calls him, asking him to sneak out for just one more run.
* After his mom falls asleep, and even after their heart-to-heart talk, he still leaves.
* Turns out it was actually a retaliation run/drive-by and Law was in the back seat.
* Guns are blazing… They get away. (Does he shoot at the group, too? If yes, he doesn’t even know if or who he may have hit with the bullets he released, but he goes home feeling like he did something to represent his hood.)
* Law slips back into the apartment before his mom ever knew he was gone.
* Sometime after the retaliation hit, Law decides to sell the packages that were “accidently” left in his bag by Tré. He thinks that if he goes to another pocket of town, Tré will never find out what he has done. But what he’s too green to realize is that each packet has a watermark identifying Tré’s supplier. So by selling in another area, he unfortunately crossed the “invisible lines” that set them all up for the tragedy that takes place in Chapter 3.

**Chapter 3 Notes …**

One night while out with friends, the friend’s porch is sprayed with bullets. Everyone ran for the front door to enter the home. Everyone made it except for Law’s best friend \_\_\_\_\_\_.

The friend who survives tells the story. (Lawrence happened to be sitting on the horizontal beam of the porch closet to the door, so he ran into the house first, then the guy recanting the story, followed by Law’s best friend who dies.

\_\_\_\_ is in the ER. Law is one of the few back there because he was being observed for a graze wound… His wound was superficial. So they patched him up, and his mother Sheila is there to take him home. They happen to walk past the partly opened curtain in the ER bay for his friend \_\_\_\_\_, who recants his version of the story.

(Law lives it out. But the reader will only see it through his eyes. How he came on the porch after stepping in for a minute. How he had just come back out and saw the blaze of fire coming out of the black barrel perched on the open window frame of a black sedan. So by the time they hear \_\_\_\_’s story, it will give them a total view of what actually took place.)

\_\_\_ is bragging…

“Man, them mo’s then tried to make me a mark before and fail every time. I’ve already been shot eleven times before this. This ain’t nothing. They can’t take me out before it’s time. I’m damn near Super Man. Bullets bounce right off me, man.”

Sheila, half concerned for this young man lying on a gurney before her but more petrified for her son Law, asks \_\_\_\_ what actually happened.

“Me and \_\_\_\_ had just got back from Harold’s. Law, I had just sat down on the step and tore the bag open, got settled in good, too.”

“What, did you get your six wings?” Law asked, hoping to lighten the impact of what his mother was about to hear.

“Bro, you know it. Fried hard with salt and pepper. I had only taken one bite, just one, when all of a sudden I noticed this car slowly circling the block a second time.”

“That black sedan that usually rolls over East, right?”

“Yeah that one, with the janky rims.

“Anyway, by the time they circle back a few doors away the second time, they open fire on us. Everyone on the porch ran for the door. Law got in first ‘cause he was the closest, then \_\_\_\_, then me. I saw \_\_\_\_ turn to come right after me. I made it into the hallway. I turned back for \_\_\_\_ only to see him cross the threshold behind me. I know he made it into the doorway, but he collapsed looking lifeless on the floor.

I know if I got hit once, he had to have taken at least two or three rounds. I still don’t know if he made it or not. Law, can you find out?

* Law finds out that it was actually his cousin, Tré, who didn’t survive.
* He plans to retaliate, but also finds out it was his fault that they got set up in the first place.
* He’s more devastated by it being his fault that Tré is gone, that he hears his mother’s plea for him to just leave.
* He’s leaving out of shame. She’s begging him to leave so he can live.