



The Hip-Hop Series

*Word Works by, for and in the Language of the
New Urban Generation*

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BILLION DOLLAR
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A novel
by
A. P. Jones



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my children,
Alessandra and Austin
for their
patience and understanding
as I worked on this
labor of love.

Author's Note

This book contains references to many communities that comprise the area known as the West Side of Chicago. But for those of us who live in those communities, we call our community the WestSide and ourselves WestSiders. I have purposely eliminated the space between those words not only for the WestSide, but for any references to the SouthSide and NorthSide as well. I take full responsibility for that otherwise grammatical error. It was done with love for all the sides of Chicago, and an acknowledgment of my being a proud resident and homeowner on the great WestSide of Chicago.

PROLOGUE

~2007~

“Senators,” Val said loudly, “This is the pain of my community.” With that, Val held up a brand new crisp fifty-dollar bill. She continued, “Far too many poor people in my community, because of the new multi-state *Lotto-50* lottery game, are spending at least this very amount every time there is a drawing!”

Val had just begun her testimony in the Illinois Senate chamber. Located on the third floor of the State Capitol Building, the room is a cavernous wood-paneled structure with large oval-topped windows and archways. The rich architectural details of the heavily gilded ceiling and crystal adorned chandeliers were a beautiful contrast to the sky-blue painted areas. The senate seating arrangement was designed to allow each senator to sit facing the main podium of the Senate President. Hidden behind each senator’s roll-top desk were the microphones, laptops and push-buttons that they could use to vote or request assistance from the senate pages.

Val’s eyes scanned the senate chamber. As she looked at the faces of the members in attendance, she was hoping to attract the attention of at least one senator. She looked from seat-to-seat. Surely, she thought, one senator would be interested in what she had to say. Yet, as her eyes focused on each legislator, their composure was unmoving. Their faces were blank, as if each one were in a trance.

Val had expected that she would meet with some resistance to her testimony. But to see even the African-American senators gazing off into space was frustrating to her. Val decided she wouldn’t let their indifferences deter her. She had been given ten minutes to speak before the Special Session of the Illinois General Assembly regarding the newest lottery game. Val was adamant, more than ever, to be heard.

Val raised her voice a notch louder. The silence in the room battled against every word as it came out of her mouth. If ever there was a time that each person’s body language gave off the I-don’t-want-to-hear-it vibe, it was now. But Val wouldn’t be swayed. She

calculatedly spoke her next words distinctly and deliberately, expecting that the sound of her voice would sink into the subconscious of each senator.

“Senators, in the report that I have prepared for you and I might add; contrary to what others have previously stated...the data will show that prior to the new *Lotto-50* game, there were three zip codes in the Chicagoland area where the greatest amounts of money was spent on lottery tickets as compared to anywhere else in the state. Now that the *Lotto-50* game is available, there have been eight more zip codes added to the report. In those newest zip codes, they have in the past few months equaled or exceeded the previous three zip codes sales amount . . . ten fold!”

Val paused a second and took in a deep breath before continuing, “It is also not a coincidence that those newest zip codes are in some of the poorest communities in the state. In those areas, people believe that if they buy the *Lotto-50* ticket with a fifty-dollar bill, they will increase their chances of winning. So rather than buy a single one-dollar ticket with a fifty-dollar bill, they are spending the entire fifty dollars on the game. They are buying fifty tickets. Some of the people believe that if one fifty-dollar bill will bring them luck, then two fifty-dollar bills will double their luck. People are spending more and more money everyday to play this newest lottery game. They are spending more money on it than what anyone could have ever imagined!”

Val stressed each fifty louder than the last. There was the fifty in the name of the game. Then there was the fifty in the money. Even more ironic was that nine senators had opted out of being at the Special Session so that left exactly fifty senate seats filled!

Val could hear with each tick of the clock her time coming to an end. She turned her head very slowly as her eyes panned the room. Val was now desperately looking to connect with at least one female senator.

Surely, there is a woman senator who would have some sympathy for people spending fifty dollars on lottery tickets, Val thought. Sadly, even though one fifth of the Illinois Senate was female, Val was unable to connect with a single woman who would meet her

glance.

I'm not going to win this one, Val acknowledged mentally to herself. But Val was a fighter who didn't give up easily. Val broke her stare just long enough to take a brief glance down at her watch. She saw that she had less than two minutes before her testimony time would be up. Val didn't mind losing a battle. She just couldn't and wouldn't let the lottery game and these stubborn state officials win the war. So she stood up. All five feet seven inches of her.

Val pointed her finger at the senators in the room, "Tonight's drawing of *Lotto-50* is worth one billion dollars! There are parents buying tickets for it and not milk for their children. I've heard of wives and husbands who are missing making the mortgage payment to buy those damn tickets. I have workers pooling their entire paychecks to buy tickets. Yet...I can tell from the lack of a response that I am getting from you folks here today is that...you don't care! You just don't care! You... just... don't... care!" Val's voice began to crack from the pain of realizing that the senators didn't care. Val had with each mouthing of the word "care," pointed a finger at the senators who represented the various areas of Illinois. She had a "don't care" for the Chicago senators. She had a "don't care" for the downstate senators. She had a "don't care" for the ones from the collar counties surrounding Chicago. But even with the personal accusation ringing in their ears, the Illinois state senators remained stone-faced.

Just as Val was turning toward Senate President Charmaine Tyson's seat to point her finger at her and get in one last "don't care," the Senate President's microphone boomed even louder than expected. "Thank you for your testimony. This Special Session is adjourned!"

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