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AHGOTTAHANDLEONIT BY DONOVAN MIXON

“Aw, man,” Victor mumbled as he jumped up to tend to a pot that was boiling over. “Tim, I didn’t leave you or your sister. Your mama and me couldn’t make it no more. All that stuff I said ’bout being free was just trash talk in the middle of arguing. Ain’t got nothin’ to do with ya’ll kids. What I need you to do is to concentrate on your studies ’cause that’s the only thing that will get you up and out of here, out of this life. You hear me, boy? Don’t you worry ’bout me. I’ll be all right. Just need to get my head straight and...” His voice dropped off. He stared at his hands.

Tim slapped the table. “How you going to do that, Dad—with whiskey or whatever that stuff is? Please don’t go down that road again!”

Recently, Tim had learned that the name Victor meant victorious. But the guy sitting at the table with him, pondering his question, looked anything but a winner: pantless, bloodshot eyes so gorged with hurt and shame that Tim had to look away.

More than a minute passed before Tim looked up at his dad. When he did, he found a familiar scene. The corners of Victor’s mouth had turned downward, his right eyebrow arched as he glanced at the back of his left hand. Tim’s heart sank because his dad always made the same moves whenever he was about to lie to him. Tim waited and let him do it anyway.

“Ahgottahandleonit, son...”

An existential examination of the cycle of violence.

—Kirkus Reviews



DONOVAN MIXON, a musician, is a former Berklee College of Music professor. He moved to Chicago in 2010 after an extended sojourn performing and teaching in Italy and Turkey. *Ahgottahandleonit* is his first novel.

 **Cinco Puntos Press**
El Paso, Texas



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PROPOSITION

Dang! *The boy is handsome*, Sheila thought when Darryl came out of the darkened building. Having waited an hour outside the service exit of the library, she had begun to feel a little stupid. Especially since she saw him just the day before with Rene. Only now she remembered the odd look on his face when they all spotted Tim on the street across the intersection. Determined to get down to business, she took heart in the fact that no gangbangers were in sight and most importantly—no Maurice! He didn't have a basketball with him, so there was no game to rush off to—he couldn't just blow her off. *Take a big breath*, she thought. *Game on!*

"Hi, Darryl!" she sang out across the parking lot, hot with embarrassment. *What, he's not going to stop?* "Hey...Darryl Campbell, wait up! I know you can hear me!"

Darryl turned around slowly, left hand in his pocket, right hand brushing his upper lip as if he had bristles to play with, jeans halfway down his butt. "Yo, what's up, cuz?" he said, words sounding like they were stretched out in a hammock.

"Don't *cuz* me, Darryl," Sheila said with one hand on her hip. "We both know that you don't really talk like that. And why don't you pull up those stupid pants. Your boys aren't around. No need for *street-out* here."

Darryl pinched his nose and looked down the street in each direction to see if anyone had heard. Holding his head off to the side, he reached out to touch her shoulder.

"Yo, girl, why you bustin' on me like that? What did I do to you?" he said with that smile of his, with those perfect teeth.

Ohh, she thought. But it was more of a deep down feeling than a thought and for a moment, it caused her to hesitate, even reconsider what she'd come to do. The boy had smiled at her after all. "Darryl, I know you were there day before yesterday when Maurice beat up my brother in the park. And I know you knew he was my brother too."

The flash of panic in his eyes told her that it was true. "Whoa-whoa...hold up, hold up, girl. What are you talking about?"

"No, I'm not going to *bold up*. I don't care if you want to continue with this clown act. Knock yourself out. But you're going to listen to this!" she insisted, pointing at him as she spoke.

Darryl half laughed through a loud snort, shifted his weight onto the other foot and looked around. They were alone on the street. Only a curious dog stared at them from a window. It was beginning to get dark. He took a step towards her. "Listen to this, b—"

Sheila took a step in as well. Standing nose-to-nose, it was clear that they were about the same height and she had the weight advantage by about twenty pounds. "I wouldn't go there if I were you," she growled.

"Okay, okay, sister," he said, taking a step backwards, chuckling softly as if there was some joke between them. "What do I have to listen to that's so important? Besides, I didn't touch him. Look, I'm sorry about what happened, but I was totally on the side, not a part of it. Yeah, I don't even think the dude saw me. I mean like, did he say something?"

"No, he hasn't said a thing. And don't call me *sister*, okay? Stop that!" she said, batting his hand away. He had tried to pinch her cheek as she spoke. "Anyway, I know for a fact that you were there, and I'm pretty sure he didn't see you. So, he doesn't know you were there—but I do! And since you did nothing to help him then, you have to do something for him now!" She liked her tone now.

Darryl scoffed. "Huh? Like what?"

"I know that you try to keep your good grades a secret so you can hang out with those silly friends of yours," she said, poking him in the chest with two fingers.