

ONE

She came along the alley and up the back steps the way

she always used to. Doc hadn't seen her for over a year. Nobody had. Back then it was always sandals, bottom half of a flower- print bikini, faded Country Joe & the Fish T- shirt. Tonight she was all in flatland gear, hair a lot shorter than he remembered, looking just like she swore she'd never look.

"That you, Shasta?"

"Thinks he's hallucinating."

"Just the new package I guess."

They stood in the street light through the kitchen window there'd never been much point putting curtains over and listened to the thumping of the surf from down the hill. Some nights, when the wind was right, you could hear the surf all over town.

"Need your help, Doc."

"You know I have an office now? just like a day job and everything?"

"I looked in the phone book, almost went over there. But then I thought, better for everybody if this looks like a secret rendezvous."

Okay, nothing romantic tonight. Bummer. But it still might be a paying gig. "Somebody's keepin a close eye?"

"Just spent an hour on surface streets trying to make it look good."

"How about a beer?" He went to the fridge, pulled two cans out of the case he kept inside, handed one to Shasta.

"There's this guy," she was saying.

There would be, but why get emotional? If he had a nickel for every time he'd heard a client start off this way, he could be over in Hawaii now, loaded day and night, digging the waves at Waimea, or better yet hiring somebody to dig them for him . . . "Gentleman of the straightworld persuasion," he beamed.

"Okay, Doc. He's married."

"Some . . . money situation."

She shook back hair that wasn't there and raised her eyebrows *so what*.

Groovy with Doc. "And the wife— she knows about you?"

Shasta nodded. "But she's seeing somebody too. Only it isn't just the usual— they're working together on some creepy little scheme."

"To make off with hubby's fortune, yeah, I think I heard of that happenin once or twice around L.A. And . . . you want me to do what, exactly?" He found the paper bag he'd brought his supper home in and got busy pretending to scribble notes on it, because straight- chick uniform, makeup supposed to look like no makeup or whatever, here came that old well- known hardon Shasta was always good for sooner or later. Does it ever end, he wondered. Of course it does. It did.

They went in the front room and Doc laid down on the couch and Shasta stayed on her feet and sort of drifted around the place.

"Is, they want me in on it," she said. "They think I'm the one who can reach him when he's vulnerable, or as much as he ever gets."

“Bareass and asleep.”

“I knew you’d understand.”

“You’re still trying to figure out if it’s right or wrong, Shasta?”

“Worse than that.” She drilled him with that gaze he remembered so well. When he remembered. “How much loyalty I owe him.”

“I hope you’re not asking me. Beyond the usual boilerplate people owe anybody they’re fucking steady— ”

“Thanks, Dear Abby said about the same thing.”

“Groovy. Emotions aside, then, let’s look at the money. How much of the rent’s he been picking up?”

“All of it.” Just for a second, he caught the old narrow-eyed defiant grin.

“Pretty hefty?”

“For Hancock Park.”

Doc whistled the title notes from “Can’t Buy Me Love,” ignoring the look on her face. “You’re givin him IOUs for everything, o’ course.”

“You fucker, if I’d known you were still this bitter— ”

“Me? Trying to be professional here, is all. How much were wifey and the b.f. offering to cut you in for?”

Shasta named a sum. Doc had outrun souped-up Rollsies full of indignant smack dealers on the Pasadena Freeway, doing a hundred in the fog and trying to steer through all those crudely engineered curves, he’d walked up back alleys east of the L.A. River with nothing but a borrowed ’fro pick in his baggies for protection, been in and out of the Hall of Justice while holding a small fortune in Vietnamese weed, and these days had nearly convinced himself all that reckless era was over with, but now he was beginning to feel deeply nervous again. “This . . .” carefully now, “this isn’t just a couple of X-rated Polaroids, then. Dope planted in the glove compartment, nothin like ’at . . .”

Back when, she could go weeks without anything more complicated than a pout. Now she was laying some heavy combination of face ingredients on him that he couldn’t read at all. Maybe something she’d picked up at acting school. “It isn’t what you’re thinking, Doc.”

“Don’t worry, thinking comes later. What else?”

“I’m not sure but it sounds like they want to commit him to some loony bin.”

“You mean legally? or a snatch of some kind?”

“Nobody’s telling me, Doc, I’m just the bait.” Come to think of it, there’d never been this much sorrow in her voice either. “I heard you’re seeing somebody downtown?”

Seeing. Well, “Oh, you mean Penny? nice flatland chick, out in search of secret hippie love thrills basically— ”

“Also some kind of junior DA in Evelle Younger’s shop?”

Doc gave it some thought. “You think somebody there can stop this before it happens?”

“Not too many places I can go with this, Doc.”

“Okay, I’ll talk to Penny, see what we can see. Your happy couple— they have names, addresses?”

When he heard her older gent’s name he said, “This is the same

Mickey Wolfmann who's always in the paper? The real- estate big shot?"

"You can't tell anybody about this, Doc."

"Deaf and dumb, part of the job. Any phone numbers you'd like to share?"

She shrugged, scowled, gave him one number. "Try to never use it."

"Groovy, and how do I reach you?"

"You don't. I moved out of the old place, staying where I can anymore, don't ask."

He almost said, "There's room here," which in fact there wasn't, but he'd seen her looking around at everything that hadn't changed, the authentic English Pub Dartboard up on the wagon wheel and the whorehouse swag lamp with the purple psychedelic bulb with the vibrating filament, the collection of model hot rods made entirely of Coors cans, the beach volleyball autographed by Wilt Chamberlain in Day- Glo felt marker, the velvet painting and so forth, with an expression of, you would have to say, distaste.

He walked her down the hill to where she was parked. Weeknights out here weren't too different from weekends, so this end of town was already all afoot with funseekers, drinkers and surfers screaming in the alleys, dopers out on food errands, flatland guys in for a night of hustling stewardesses, flatland ladies with all- too- grounded day jobs hoping to be mistaken for stewardesses. Uphill and invisible, traffic out on the boulevard to and from the freeway uttered tuneful exhaust phrases which went echoing out to sea, where the crews of oil tankers sliding along, hearing them, could have figured it for wildlife taking care of nighttime business on an exotic coast.

In the last pocket of darkness before the glare of Beachfront Drive, they came to a pause, a timeless pedestrian gesture in these parts that usually announced a kiss or at least a grabbed ass. But she said, "Don't come any further, somebody might be watching by now."

"Call me or something."

"You never did let me down, Doc."

"Don't worry. I'll—"

"No, I mean really ever."

"Oh . . . sure I did."

"You were always true."

It had been dark at the beach for hours, he hadn't been smoking much and it wasn't headlights— but before she turned away, he could swear he saw light falling on her face, the orange light just after sunset that catches a face turned to the west, watching the ocean for someone to come in on the last wave of the day, in to shore and safety.

At least her car was the same, the Cadillac ragtop she'd had forever, a '59 Eldorado Biarritz bought used at one of the lots over on Western where they stand out close to the traffic so it'll sweep away the smell of whatever they're smoking. After she drove away, Doc sat on a bench down on the Esplanade, a long slopeful of lighted windows ascending behind him, and watched the luminous blooms of surf and the lights of late commuter traffic zigzagging up the distant hillside of Palos Verdes. He ran through things he hadn't asked, like how much she'd come to

depend on Wolfmann's guaranteed level of ease and power, and how ready was she to go back to the bikini and T-shirt lifestyle, and how free of regrets? And least askable of all, how passionately did she really feel about old Mickey? Doc knew the likely reply—"I love him," what else? With the unspoken footnote that the word these days was being way too overused. Anybody with any claim to hipness "loved" everybody, not to mention other useful applications, like hustling people into sex activities they might not, given the choice, much care to engage in.

Back at his place, Doc stood for a while gazing at a velvet painting from one of the Mexican families who set up their weekend pitches along the boulevards through the green flatland where people still rode horses, between Gordita and the freeway. Out of the vans and into the calm early mornings would come sofa-width Crucifixions and Last Suppers, outlaw bikers on elaborately detailed Harleys, superhero bad-asses in Special Forces gear packing M16s and so forth. This picture of Doc's showed a Southern California beach that never was—palms, bikini babes, surfboards, the works. He thought of it as a window to look out of when he couldn't deal with looking out of the traditional glass-type one in the other room. Sometimes in the shadows the view would light up, usually when he was smoking weed, as if the contrast knob of Creation had been messed with just enough to give everything an underglow, a luminous edge, and promise that the night was about to turn epic somehow.

Except for tonight, which only looked more like work. He got on the telephone and tried to call Penny, but she was out, probably Watusi-ing the night away opposite some shorthaired attorney with a promising career. Cool with Doc. Next he rang up his Aunt Reet, who lived down the boulevard on the other side of the dunes in a more suburban part of town with houses, yards, and trees, because of which it had become known as the Tree Section. A few years ago, after divorcing a lapsed Missouri Synod Lutheran with a T-Bird agency and a fatality for the restless homemakers one meets at bars in bowling alleys, Reet had moved down here from the San Joaquin with the kids and started selling real estate, and before long she had her own agency, which she now ran out of a bungalow on the same oversize lot as her house. Whenever Doc needed to know anything touching on the world of property, Aunt Reet, with her phenomenal lot-by-lot grasp of land use from the desert to the sea, as they liked to say on the evening news, was the one he went to. "Someday," she prophesied, "there will be computers for this, all you'll have to do's type in what you're looking for, or even better just talk it in—like that HAL in *2001: A Space Odyssey*?—and it'll be right back at you with more information than you'd ever want to know, any lot in the L.A. Basin, all the way back to the Spanish land grants—water rights, encumbrances, mortgage histories, whatever you want, trust me, it's coming." Till then, in the real non-sci-fi world, there was Aunt Reet's bordering-on-the-supernatural sense of the land, the stories that seldom appeared in deeds or contracts, especially matrimonial, the generations of family hatreds big and small, the way the water flowed, or used to.

She picked up on the sixth ring. The TV set was loud in the

background.

“Make it quick, Doc, I’ve got a live one tonight and a quarter ton of makeup to put on yet.”

“What can you tell me about Mickey Wolfmann?”

If she took even a second to breathe, Doc didn’t notice. “Westside Hochdeutsch mafi a, biggest of the big, construction, savings and loans, untaxed billions stashed under an Alp someplace, technically Jewish but wants to be a Nazi, becomes exercised often to the point of violence at those who forget to spell his name with two *n*’s. What’s he to you?”

Doc gave her a rundown on Shasta’s visit and her account of the plot against the Wolfmann fortune.

“In the real- estate business,” Reet remarked, “God knows, few of us are strangers to moral ambiguity. But some of these developers, they make Godzilla look like a conservationist, and you might not care to get into this, Larry. Who’s paying you?”

“Well . . .”

“All on spec, eh? big surprise. Listen, if Shasta can’t pay you, maybe that means Mickey’s dumped her, and she’s blaming the wife and wants revenge.”

“Possible. But say I just wanted to hang out and rap with this Wolfmann dude?”

Was that an exasperated sigh? “I wouldn’t recommend your usual approach. He goes around with a dozen bikers, mostly Aryan Brotherhood alumni, to watch his back, all court- certified badasses. Try making an appointment for once.”

“Wait a minute, I ditched social- studies class a lot, but . . . Jews and the AB . . . Isn’t there . . . something about, I forget . . . hatred?”

“The book on Mickey is, is he’s unpredictable. More and more lately. Some would say eccentric. I would say stoned out of his fuckin mind, nothing personal.”

“And this goon squad, they’re loyal to him, even if when they were in the place they took some oath with maybe a anti- Semitic clause in it here and there?”

“Drive within ten blocks of the man, they’ll lie down in front of your car. Keep coming, they’ll roll a grenade. You want to talk to Mickey, don’t be spontaneous, don’t even be cute. Go through channels.”

“Yeah, but I also don’t want to get Shasta in trouble. Where do you think I could run into him, like, accidentally?”

“I promised my kid sister I’d never put her baby in the way of danger.”

“I’m cool with the Brotherhood, Aunt Reet, know the handshake and everything.”

“All right, it’s your ass, kid, I have major liquid- liner issues to deal with here, but I’m told Mickey’s been spending time out at his latest assault on the environment— some chipboard horror known as Channel View Estates?”

“Oh yeah, that. Bigfoot Bjornsen does commercials for them. Interrupting strange movies you’ve never heard of.”

“Well, maybe your old cop buddy’s the one who should be taking

care of this. Have you been in touch with the LAPD?"

"I did think of going to Bigfoot," Doc said, "but just as I was reaching for the phone I remembered how, being Bigfoot and all, he'd probably try to pop *me* for the whole thing."

"Maybe you're better off with the Nazis, I don't envy you the choice. Be careful, Larry. Check in now and then just so I can reassure Elmina that you're still alive."

Fucking Bigfoot. Well, wouldn't you know. On some extrasensory impulse, Doc reached for the tube, switched it on and flipped to one of the off-network channels dedicated to long-ago TV movies and unsold pilots, and sure enough, there was the old hippie-hating mad dog himself, moonlighting live, after a busy day of civil-rights violation, as pitchman for Channel View Estates. "A Michael Wolfmann Concept," it read underneath the logo.

Like many L.A. cops, Bigfoot, named for his entry method of choice, harbored show-business yearnings and in fact had already appeared in enough character parts, from comical Mexicans on *The Flying Nun* to assistant psychopaths on *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, to be paying SAG dues and receiving residual checks. Maybe the producers of these Channel View spots were desperate enough to be counting on some audience recognition—maybe, as Doc suspected, Bigfoot was somehow duked into whatever the underlying real-estate deal was. Whatever, personal dignity didn't come into it much. Bigfoot showed up on camera wearing getups that would have embarrassed the most unironical hippie in California, tonight's being an ankle-length velvet cape in a paisley print of so many jangling "psychedelic" hues that Doc's tube, a low-end affair purchased in Zody's parking lot at a Moonlight Madness sale a couple years ago, couldn't really keep up. Bigfoot had accessorized his outfit with love beads, shades with peace symbols on the lenses, and a gigantic Afro wig striped in Chinese red, chartreuse, and indigo. Bigfoot often reminded viewers of legendary used-car figure Cal Worthington—except where Cal was famous for including live animals in his pitch, Bigfoot's scripts featured a relentless terror squad of small children, who climbed all over the model-home furniture, performed insubordinate cannonballs into the backyard pools, whooped and hollered and pretended to shoot Bigfoot down, screaming "Freak Power!" and "Death to the Pig!" Viewers were ecstatic. "Those li'l kids," they would cry, "wow, they're really something, huh!" No overfed leopard ever got up Cal Worthington's nose the way these kids did Bigfoot's, but he was a pro, wasn't he, and by God he would soldier through, closely studying old W. C. Fields and Bette Davis movies whenever they came on to see what tips he could pick up for sharing the frame with kids whose cuteness, for him, was never better than problematical. "We'll be chums," he would croak as if to himself, pretending to puff compulsively on a cigarette, "we'll be *chums*."

There was now sudden hammering on the front door, and briefly Doc flashed that it had to be Bigfoot in person, about to kick his way in once again as in days of old. But instead it was Denis from down the hill, whose name everybody pronounced to rhyme with "penis," appearing

even more disoriented than usual.

“So Doc, I’m up on Dunecrest, you know the drugstore there, and like I noticed their sign, ‘Drug’? ‘Store’? Okay? Walked past it a thousand times, never *really* saw it— Drug, Store! man, far out, so I went in and Smilin Steve was at the counter and I said, like, ‘Yes, hi, I’d like some drugs, please?’— oh, here, finish this up if you want.”

“Thanks, all’s ’at’ll do ’s just burn my lip.”

Denis by now had drifted into the kitchen and started looking through the fridge.

“You’re hungry, Denis?”

“Really. Hey, like Godzilla always sez to Mothra— why don’t we go eat some place?”

They walked up to Dunecrest and turned left into the honky-tonk part of town. Pipeline Pizza was jumping, the smoke so thick inside you couldn’t see from one end of the bar to the other. The jukebox, audible all the way to El Porto and beyond, was playing “Sugar, Sugar” by the Archies. Denis threaded his way back to the kitchen to see about a pizza, and Doc watched Ensenada Slim working one of the Gottlieb machines in the corner. Slim owned and operated a head shop just up the street called the Screaming Ultraviolet Brain and was a sort of village elder around here. After he’d won a dozen free games, he took a break, saw Doc and nodded.

“Buy you a beer, Slim?”

“Was that Shasta’s car I saw down on the Drive? That big old ragtop?”

“She stuck her head in for a couple minutes,” Doc said. “Kind of weird seeing her again. Always figured when I did, it’d be on the tube, not in person.”

“Really. Sometimes I think I see her at the edge of the screen? but it’s always some look- alike. And never as easy on the eyes, of course.”

Sad but true, as Dion always sez. At Playa Vista High, Shasta made Class Beauty in the yearbook four years running, always got to be the ingenue in school plays, fantasized like everybody else about getting into the movies, and soon as she could manage it was off up the freeway looking for some low- rent living space in Hollywood. Doc, aside from being just about the only dooper she knew who didn’t use heroin, which freed up a lot of time for both of them, had never figured out what else she might’ve seen in him. Not that they were even together that long. Soon enough she was answering casting calls and getting some theater work, onstage and off, and Doc was into his own apprenticeship as a skip tracer, and each, gradually locating a different karmic thermal above the megalopolis, had watched the other glide away into a different fate.

Denis came back with his pizza. “I forget what I asked for on it.” This happened at the Pipeline every Tuesday or Cheap Pizza Nite, when any size pizza, with anything on it, cost a fl at \$1.35. Denis now sat watching this one intently, like it was about to do something.

“That’s a papaya chunk,” Slim guessed, “and these . . . are these pork rinds?”

“And boysenberry yogurt on pizza, Denis? Frankly, eeeww.” It was

Sortilège, who used to work in Doc's office before her boyfriend Spike came back from Vietnam and she decided love was more important than a day job, or that's how Doc thought he remembered her explaining it. Her gifts were elsewhere, in any case. She was in touch with invisible forces and could diagnose and solve all manner of problems, emotional and physical, which she did mostly for free but in some cases accepted weed or acid in lieu of cash. She had never been wrong that Doc knew about. At the moment she was examining his hair, and as usual he had a spasm of defensive panic. Finally, with an energetic nod, "Better do something about that."

"Again?"

"Can't say it often enough— change your hair, change your life."

"What do you recommend?"

"Up to you. Follow your intuition. Would you mind, Denis, actually, if I just took this piece of tofu?"

"That's a marshmallow," Denis said.

Back at his place again, Doc rolled a number, put on a late movie, found an old T- shirt, and sat tearing it up into short strips about a half inch wide till he had a pile of maybe a hundred of these, then went in the shower for a while and with his hair still wet took narrow lengths of it and rolled each one around a strip of T- shirt, tying it in place with an overhand knot, repeating this southern- plantation style all over his head, and then after maybe half an hour with the hair dryer, during which he may or may not have fallen asleep, untying the knots again and brushing it all out upside down into what seemed to him a fairly presentable foot- and- a- half- diameter white- guy Afro. Inserting his head carefully into a liquor- store carton to preserve the shape, Doc lay down on the couch and this time really did fall asleep, and toward dawn he dreamed about Shasta. It wasn't that they were fucking, exactly, but it was something like that. They had both fl own from their other lives, the way you tend to fl y in early- morning dreams, to rendezvous at a strange motel which seemed to be also a hair salon. She kept insisting she "loved" some guy whose name she never mentioned, though when Doc finally woke up, he fi gured she must've been talking about Mickey Wolfmann.

No point sleeping anymore. He stumbled up the hill to Wavos and had breakfast with the hard- core surfers who were always there. Flaco the Bad came over. "Hey man, that cop was around looking for you again. What's that on your head?"

"Cop? When was this?"

"Last night. He was at your place, but you were out. Detective from downtown Homicide in a really dinged- up El Camino, the one with the 396?"

"That was Bigfoot Bjornsen. Why didn't he just kick my door down like he usually does?"

"He might've been thinking about it but said something like 'Tomorrow is another day' . . . which would be today, right?"

“Not if I can help it.”

Doc's office was located near the airport, off East Imperial. He shared the place with a Dr. Buddy Tubeside, whose practice consisted largely of injecting people with “vitamin B₁₂,” a euphemism for the physician's own blend of amphetamines. Today, early as it was, Doc still had to edge his way past a line of “B₁₂”- deficient customers which already stretched back to the parking lot, beachtown housewives of a certain melancholy index, actors with casting calls to show up at, deeply tanned geezers looking ahead to an active day of schmoozing in the sun, stewardii just in off some high- stress red- eye, even a few legit cases of pernicious anemia or vegetarian pregnancy, all shuffling along half asleep, chain- smoking, talking to themselves, sliding one by one into the lobby of the little cinder- block building through a turnstile, next to which, holding a clipboard and checking them in, stood Petunia Leeway, a stunner in a starched cap and micro- length medical outfit, not so much an actual nurse uniform as a lascivious commentary on one, which Dr. Tubeside claimed to've bought a truckload of from Frederick's of Hollywood, in a variety of fashion pastels, today's being aqua, at close to wholesale.

“Morning, Doc.” Petunia managed to put a lounge- singer lilt onto it, the vocal equivalent of batting mink eyelashes at him. “Love your 'fro.”

“Howdy, Petunia. Still married to what's- his- name?”

“Oh, Doc . . .”

On first signing the lease, the two tenants, like bunkmates at summer camp, had tossed a coin for who'd get the upstairs suite, and Doc had lost or, as he liked to think of it, won. The sign on his door read LSD Investigations, LSD, as he explained when people asked, which was not often, standing for “Location, Surveillance, Detection.” Beneath this was a rendering of a giant bloodshot eyeball in the psychedelic favorites green and magenta, the detailing of whose literally thousands of frenzied capillaries had been subcontracted out to a commune of speed freaks who had long since migrated up to Sonoma. Potential clients had been known to spend hours gazing at the ocular maze, often forgetting what they'd come here for.

A visitor was here already, in fact, waiting for Doc. What made him unusual was, was he was a black guy. To be sure, black folks were occasionally spotted west of the Harbor Freeway, but to see one this far out of the usual range, practically by the ocean, was pretty rare. Last time anybody could remember a black motorist in Gordita Beach, for example, anxious calls for backup went out on all the police bands, a small task force of cop vehicles assembled, and roadblocks were set up all along Pacific Coast Highway. An old Gordita refl ex, dating back to shortly after the Second World War, when a black family had actually tried to move into town and the citizens, with helpful advice from the Ku Klux Klan, had burned the place to the ground and then, as if some ancient curse had come into effect, refused to allow another house ever to be built on the site. The lot stood empty until the town finally confiscated it

and turned it into a park, where the youth of Gordita Beach, by the laws of karmic adjustment, were soon gathering at night to drink, dope, and fuck, depressing their parents, though not property values particularly.

“Say,” Doc greeted his visitor, “what it is, my brother.”

“Never mind that shit,” replied the black guy, introducing himself as Tariq Khalil and staring for a while, under different circumstances offensively, at Doc’s Afro.

“Well. Come on in.”

In Doc’s office were a pair of high-backed banquettes covered in padded fuchsia plastic, facing each other across a Formica table in a pleasant tropical green. This was in fact a modular coffee-shop booth, which Doc had scavenged from a renovation in Hawthorne. He waved Tariq into one of the seats and sat down across from him. It was cozy. The tabletop between them was littered with phone books, pencils, three-by-five index cards boxed and loose, road maps, cigarette ashes, a transistor radio, roach clips, coffee cups, and an Olivetti Lettera 22, into which Doc, mumbling, “Just start a ticket on this,” inserted a sheet of paper which appeared to have been used repeatedly for some strange compulsive origami.

Tariq watched skeptically. “Secretary’s off today?”

“Something like that. But I’ll take some notes here, and it’ll all get typed up later.”

“Okay, so there’s this guy I was in the joint with. White guy. Aryan Bro, as a matter of fact. We did some business, now we’re both out, he still owes me. I mean, it’s a lot of money. I can’t give you details, I swore a oath I wouldn’t tell.”

“How about just his name?”

“Glen Charlock.”

Sometimes the way somebody says a name, you get a vibration. Tariq was talking like a man whose heart had been broken. “You know where he’s staying now?”

“Only who he works for. He’s a bodyguard for a builder named Wolfmann.”

Doc had a moment of faintheadedness, drug-induced no doubt. He came out of it on paranoia alert, not enough, he hoped, for Tariq to notice. He pretended to study the ticket he was making out. “If you don’t mind my asking, Mr. Khalil, how did you hear about this agency?”

“Sledge Poteet.”

“Wow. Blast from the past.”

“Said you helped him out of a situation back in ’67.”

“First time I ever got shot at. You guys know each other from the place?”

“They were teachin us both how to cook. Sledge still has about maybe a year more in there.”

“I remember him when he couldn’t boil water.”

“Should see him now, he can boil tap water, Arrowhead Springs water, club soda, Perrier, you name it. He the Boilerman.”

“So if you don’t mind an obvious question— you know where Glen Charlock works now, why not just go over there and look him up directly,

why hire some go- between?"

"Because this Wolfmann is surrounded day and night with some Aryan Brotherhood army, and outside of Glen I have never enjoyed cordial relations with those Nazi- ass motherfuckers."

"Oh— so send some white guy in to get *his* head hammered."

"More or less. I would of p'ferred somebody a little more convincing."

"What I lack in *al*-titude," Doc explained for the million or so - th time in his career, "I make up for in *at*-titude."

"Okay . . . that's possible . . . I seen that on the yard now and then."

"When you were inside— were you in a gang?"

"Black Guerrilla Family."

"George Jackson's outfit. And you say you did business with who now, the Aryan Brotherhood?"

"We found we shared many of the same opinions about the U.S. government."

"Mmm, that racial harmony, I can dig it."

Tariq was looking at Doc with a peculiar intensity, and his eyes had grown yellow and pointed.

"There's something else," Doc guessed.

"My old street gang. Artesia Crips. When I got out of Chino I went looking for some of them and found it ain't just them gone, but the turf itself."

"Far out. What do you mean, gone?"

"Not there. Grindit up into li'l pieces. Seagulls all pickin at it. Figure I must be trippin, drive around for a while, come back, everything's still gone."

"Uh- huh." Doc typed, *Not hallucinating.*

"Nobody and nothing. Ghost town. Except for this big sign, 'Coming Soon on This Site,' houses for peckerwood prices, shopping mall, some shit. Guess who the builder on it."

"Wolfmann again."

"That's it."

On the wall Doc had a map of the region. "Show me." The area Tariq pointed to looked to be a fairly straight shot from here eastward down Artesia Boulevard, and Doc realized after a minute and a half of mapreading that it had to be the site of Channel View Estates. He pretended to run an ethnicity scan on Tariq. "You're, like, what again, Japanese?"

"Uh, how long you been doing this?"

"Looks closer to Gardena than Compton, 's all I'm saying."

"WW Two," said Tariq. "Before the war, a lot of South Central was still a Japanese neighborhood. Those people got sent to camps, we come on in to be the next Japs."

"And now it's your turn to get moved along."

"More white man's revenge. Freeway up by the airport wasn't enough."

"Revenge for . . . ?"

"Watts."

"The riots."

“Some of us say ‘insurrection.’ The Man, he just waits for his moment.”

Long, sad history of L.A. land use, as Aunt Reet never tired of pointing out. Mexican families bounced out of Chavez Ravine to build Dodger Stadium, American Indians swept out of Bunker Hill for the Music Center, Tariq’s neighborhood bulldozed aside for Channel View Estates.

“If I can get ahold of your prison buddy, will he honor his debt to you?”

“I can’t tell you what it is.”

“No need.”

“Oh and the other thing is I can’t give you nothin in front.”

“Groovy with that.”

“Sledge was right, you are one crazy white motherfucker.”

“How can you tell?”

“I counted.”