

WHITE  
SISTER

STEPHEN J.  
CANNELL

ST. MARTIN'S PRESS  NEW YORK

Shane is lucky to have Alexa  
But I'm blessed to have Marcia  
This one's for you, babe

# 1

**I**T WAS EARLY evening on Thursday the first week of July and Alexa and I were walking through San Julian Park in Skid Row, on our way back from the LAPD Central Division Jail. Homeless men in tattered coats swung blood-shot eyes in our direction, tracking us like government radar. We were returning from a training day in jail transport procedures.

The retraining had been mandated after a Mara Salvatrucha gang-banger named Hector Morales got bludgeoned to death while shuffling on a drag line through the underground tunnel that connects the jail to the Fifth Street courthouse. A rival Hispanic gang-banger had done the work by somehow slipping out of his waist restraints and hitting Hector in the head with a cut-down chair leg from the jail cafeteria. He'd been hiding the weapon inside the leg of his orange jumpsuit.

The Professional Standards Bureau, our new, media-friendly name for the Internal Affairs Division, investigated. All supervisors and detectives above grade two were ordered to undergo a re-

STEPHEN J. CANNELL

fresher day on incarceration and transfer tactics. Alexa and I were dressed in grubbies—jeans and old sweatshirts—but before we were twenty feet into the park, everybody there had made us for cops anyway.

“Tony says this surgery is no sweat, but you can tell he’s scared,” Alexa was saying as we stepped carefully around some dog shit, a pile of trash, and a sleeping homeless couple. She was talking about the upcoming heart surgery our Chief of Police was scheduled to have tomorrow morning.

“Bypass surgery is getting to be pretty common,” I offered. “It’s natural to be scared, but he’ll be okay.”

Hollow words, considering Tony Filosianni was getting a complete coronary makeover. The surgeons were cutting his chest open, taking both mammary arteries, and grafting them around the four blocked arteries in his heart. Any way you looked at it, he was in for a tough ten days and wasn’t scheduled back on the job for a couple of months.

“Is it me, or does this park smell worse than ever?” Alexa said, changing the subject. “Like a big outdoor latrine.”

“July heat,” I answered. “It always smells worse in the summer.”

We walked past a line of portable toilets, which were called Al-ices by the people on the Row, because Alice Callahan of the Las Familias del Pueblo Community Center had badgered the city council until they finally funded their installation. In a vengeful act of municipal retaliation, the toilets were rarely cleaned out but nonetheless served both physical and commercial needs. A lot of drug and prostitution deals were consummated within the smelly three-foot confines of those portable johns.

“I’m gonna check my messages, see if I have a meeting that was supposed to be set up tonight,” Alexa said. “Then if there’s time, I’d like to run over to the hospital and see Tony on the way home.” She stepped over a well-known park character named Horizontal Joe. He was huddled under a blanket stenciled with a W—a sure sign it was stolen from the Weingart Center on South San Pedro Street.

“Watch where you’re goin’,” Joe growled, without bothering to look up.

Parker Center loomed before us like a drifting glass iceberg; a

## WHITE SISTER

huge box of a building with absolutely no architectural significance. One of the strange anomalies of Los Angeles was that the Central Division Jail and the Police Administration Building were contiguous to the city's fifty-square-block section of blight known as Skid Row. Some Parker Center cops felt it was easier to take the seven-block walk if you were headed toward the lock-up, rather than move your car out of the Glass House garage and look for non-existent parking by the jail. As a result, the cops and homeless spent countless hours in mutual distrust as we shared the urine-soaked walkways and broken drinking fountains in San Julian Park.

Alexa and I stepped off the curb where an ageless man wearing tennis shoes with no laces and a greasy brown poncho was ranching quarters out of a parking meter, a practice known as spanging. He didn't even bother to stop. Most of these people had discovered by now that no cop worth his wage would waste two hours booking a guy at the jail over a twenty-five-cent misdemeanor.

"I hope Tony gets back on the job before two months," I groused. "I can't stand the thought of Great White Mike being in charge of the department." I had a recent and unrewarding history with Deputy Chief Michael Ramsey, who I viewed as little more than an ambitious power junkie in a braided hat.

"Mike's okay. Just a little jacked up," Alexa said, smiling slightly.

My wife is the head of the Detective Services Group. I'm a Detective III assigned to Homicide Special, so technically she's my boss. She's about to make captain and is three layers above me on the department flow chart. All of which means I get to put out the garbage on the job, as well as at home. Just kidding.

We finally left the squalor of Fifth Street, known as the Nickel, and headed toward the air-conditioned sanctuary of the Glass House. Brown burlap slowly gave way to starched blue as we entered the marble lobby. We got on the elevator, and since it was empty, I gave my beautiful wife a kiss. She has long black hair, high cheekbones, and is one of the most striking women I have ever come across. She could easily have made her living doing fashion shoots. I, on the other hand, look like I got emptied out of a vacuum cleaner. I'm five-eleven and a half, lean, and gristly. Topping this unholy collection of scars and medical mistakes is a hammered

## STEPHEN J. CANNELL

flat nose and short black hair that never quite lies down. All of this makes me resemble a club fighter who's stayed in the ring too long. It's a miracle Alexa ever agreed to marry me. But then, if Julia Roberts could once marry Lyle Lovett, I guess anything is possible.

The door opened on four and two young patrolmen got on, so we cut the funny stuff and I said good-bye.

"See you at home in about an hour and a half," Alexa said as I got off on that random floor and pushed the Down button for the parking garage.

Five minutes later I was in my freshly leased, silver Acura MDX, enjoying the new car smell as I headed out of the administration-building parking garage on my way home. A bleak landscape of urban blight and human misery passed by outside, but I was oblivious with the windows up and the AC on. I was in my sweet-smelling automotive capsule, immune to the reek and cries of the Row, thinking about Tony Filosianni.

In the last decade or so, the LAPD had experienced a run of disasters, from the Rodney King case to the Rampart scandal. Recently, we had been cleaning up the mess, and that was mostly because of Tony. Our chief arrived from Brooklyn four years ago and was known by the troops as the Day-Glo Dago because of his colorful, somewhat out-there personality and management style. I was worried about him and would have liked to go over to USC Medical Center where he was being prepped for surgery to let him know he was in my thoughts. But I'm just a Detective III, and somewhere deep in the reptilian part of my brain that processes police protocol, it felt like an ass-kiss, so I didn't go. It was different for Alexa. She was a division commander.

I was in a silent argument with myself over this dilemma when I took my eyes off the road to reach in my glove box and turn on my police scanner, which is mandated off-duty protocol.

As I switched to Tac One, I heard a loud crash and a thump. I jerked my eyes up just in time to see a Safeway shopping cart full of junk skitter across the street in front of me, spilling empty Evian bottles and useless debris everywhere. I stood on the brake pedal as I heard screaming.

## WHITE SISTER

I'd hit someone.

I piled out of the Acura and started to look for the pedestrian. Nothing in front. Nothing in back. Where the hell was he?

"Under here, you stupid muthafucka!" a man shrieked.

I kneeled down and looked. Wedged under my oil pan was one of the scrawniest, scruffiest men I have ever seen. Dusty black skin, dreadlocks, and a greasy, brown coat that looked like it had been used as the drop cloth under a lube rack.

"Look what you've done, you asshole!" the man screamed, holding his wrist. "Can't you watch where you're going?"

"You okay?" I stammered.

I reached under the car and tried to grab him by the shoulder to drag him out, but when I touched him, he started screaming louder.

"Whatta you want me to do?" I asked helplessly, wondering how to get him out from under there.

"Just get away from me, ya dumb muthafucka."

Then he slowly started to worm his way out from beneath my car. It was hard to guess his age under the tangled beard and layer of grime, but if I had to, I'd say around thirty-five. He had a cut on his head and scrapes all over the side of his face. His right wrist looked broken. How I had not killed him was a miracle.

Once he got out, he spent several moments moaning and cradling his wrist before he stumbled over, sat on the curb and glared malevolently. It took him about ten more seconds to figure me out. "Cop," he finally growled.