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HIS NAME WAS Jonathan Bodine, and he was a sidewalk sleeper from Julian Street where the hard-core homeless lived in cardboard condos—old shipping crates covered with Saran wrap to keep the rain out. He smelled worse than a tuna boat, had tobacco-stained teeth and a colorful vocabulary.

“You just another drives-too-fast-don’t-give-a-shit-half-stepper,” he growled at me, cradling his broken right wrist with his left hand, glaring with enough hatred to start a race riot.

I felt guilty and offered up my excuse: “I didn’t see you.” The defense rests.

“Jus’ ’cause you a cop, don’t mean you can go an’ plow poor folks down.”

“You were jaywalking. You’re supposed to cross in the crosswalks. Section P-dash-one-oh-six of the motor vehicle code. Look it up.” The last thing I needed was a frivolous lawsuit from this guy.

“You just an A-train hard-ass out here gorillin’ and Godzillin’.

WHITE SISTER

But you ain't helpin' nobody. Hit my black ass and now *I'm* the damn problem?"

He tried to stand up, but he was half lit and fell to his right, instinctively putting his bad wrist down to break his fall. He shrieked when his hand touched the ground, falling awkwardly onto his shoulder. Again, I tried to help him, but he knocked me back with the sleeve of his good arm, then whined and moaned for about two more minutes.

"I'll take you to the hospital."

"They ain't gonna do nothin'. One look at me and I get the nigga chute."

"I'll pay for it. We'll get your wrist set. It looks broken."

"Damn right, it's broken." And now a crafty look crept up onto his face, filling his dark eyes like bilge water. "Think you can just plow folks down, then back over twice to finish the job. But this here kinda brutality got big economic consequences."

"I didn't back over you twice. And you were breaking the law. You can't cross in the middle of the block, buddy."

"Who cares what you say? You jus' talkin' shit an' swallowin' spit."

Quality discourse. Next, we had an extensive discussion over what to do with his Safeway cart.

"I leave it out here it gets jack-rolled by them Quality-of-Life criminals from the Nickel," he whined.

"I'm not putting all that junk in the back of my clean car," I defended.

He got to his feet without answering and started to wander across the street toward the shopping cart, which was tipped over at the far curb. A yellow cab with its roof light on was speeding down Sixth and didn't see him either. The cabbie hit the binders and went sideways in a desperate slide, accompanied by the squeal of tortured rubber.

"Watch where you're goin' you blind-ass-piece-a-shit!" Jonathan Bodine screamed drunkenly at the cabbie, who had missed him by scant inches before straightening up and powering on.

I crossed the street and reluctantly helped him load his grubby

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possessions back into the shopping cart, thinking I was going to need a tetanus shot when this was over. We pushed the cart back across the street, and after another argument, which I lost, loaded it all into my car, filling my brand-new Acura SUV like a Skid Row dumpster.

“Stick the schooner in the back,” Jonathan ordered.

“Unless your name is John *Safeway*, we’re not stealing this shopping cart,” I declared.

Five minutes later, with the Safeway cart wedged in behind the front seat, we took off toward the hospital. Along the way, I was forced to endure my first Jonathan Bodine hard-luck rant.

“You think it’s tough on the Row, you should try it in the Bassaland. Your lily-white ass wouldn’t last ten seconds in that African rainforest,” he rambled.

I tried to tune him out by focusing on the steady stream of social mistakes bubbling from my police radio. But I couldn’t do it. He was relentless.

“I hadda survive almost a year in that jungle. Couldn’t a lasted ’cept I was wearin’ the purple robes a the royal house, an’ I got the Third Eye of tribal wisdom.” He rattled like a tambourine, delusional, craziness spewing out of him. “I got people in my head talkin’ to me—dead people from all the way back to the Black Holocaust. These half-steppers is all the time tellin’ me how slaves from the Bassaland got exiled from the tribe and sold to do all kinda mystical work and what all. When I was growin’ up in Cameroon, ’fore I got my commission in the Royal Navy, these voices was tellin’ me desperate stories about how tribal brothers was being sold to slavers in the *Kon* where their souls got sucked out by the walking dead who live there. Walking dead make all these assholes on the Nickel look like prissy faggots with their twenty-eight-day shuffle hotels an’ shopping cart elections for a dumb-ass seat on the neighborhood council. All a that ain’t nothin’ up against a rainforest where you got dead people suckin’ out your soul an’ shit.”

I decided to take him to County-USC instead of the closer Queen of Angels Hospital. I made my decision mostly because

WHITE SISTER

Tony was at USC Medical Center. I glanced over at Bodine. He seemed totally unplugged from reality.

A few months ago, I'd read a flyer about the homeless passed out by Administrative Affairs. The one-sheet was supposed to better acclimate us so that we as law enforcement officers would understand the problems faced by our neighbors on the Row. It said that half the people there were alcoholics and one-third were mentally ill. The rest were just holding on to the bottom rung of society, hoping to survive one day at a time. I looked over at my passenger. Jonathan Bodine's eyes flashed in the dimly lit car possessed by ideas as he listened to voices only he could hear.

We pulled up to the emergency room entrance and I parked my car in a red zone, left the flashers on, and hung my cuffs over the steering wheel, a universal cop signal identifying a plain-clothes car. Then I led him inside.

ER admitting rooms in gang areas serviced by hospitals like County-USC are quickly becoming L.A.'s strange new nightmare. More and more, these facilities are degenerating into desperate war zones where rival bangers bring their wounded homies, frequently resuming hostilities in the pastel waiting rooms. MAC-10s would suddenly begin chattering, chewing up plaster divides and vinyl sofas. As a result, bulletproof glass and lead wall security were being installed on a priority basis.

With the help of my badge, Bodine was processed quickly. I really wanted to get him patched up and out of my life. I talked to Admitting and signed a payment voucher. After he was signed in, a pretty African-American nurse escorted the disheveled Mr. Bodine into one of the small observation cubicles. I could hear him complaining through the curtained wall, em-effing his way through a preliminary orthopedic exam.

I decided since I was here, what the hell, might as well go up and wish Tony luck. Maybe I'd run into Alexa. I needed advice about what to do with Bodine. I wasn't sure how far my responsibility to him extended. I had run him over. No argument there. But he *was* jaywalking. I didn't want to get wrapped up in a lawsuit, but I felt guilty. Mostly, I just wanted to mail the package to somebody else.

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I hoped Alexa would advise me that after his wrist was set, my obligation to him was over.

When I arrived in the coronary care unit, the floor nurse informed me that they had just given Tony a sedative and he was already asleep. Surgery was scheduled for seven A.M. tomorrow.

"Did Lieutenant Scully show up, by any chance?" I asked.

The nurse checked her clipboard and shook her head.

"It would probably have been less than thirty minutes ago."

"Nobody by that name has been here."

I had a momentary inkling that something was wrong. I called Alexa's office and got her assistant Ellen.

"She left here almost an hour ago," Ellen said. "She was going to see Tony at the hospital. You could try there."

"That's where I am. She didn't show up. Tony is already sedated and asleep."

"Maybe that's it," Ellen said. "Alexa said something about trying to fit in a short appointment. She could've called from the car, found out he was asleep, and gone to the meeting instead."

"You're probably right."

I hung up and dialed our house. The phone rang ten times before the machine picked up.

I tried her cell. It went straight to voice mail.

I wondered where she was.