

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Suicide Hill

James Ellroy

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About the Book

Joe caught Klein flush in the stomach and ripped upward with both hands. Blood spurted from his mouth...

It was simple... and diabolical. Simply select a bank manager, kidnap his girlfriend, then hold her hostage until you've cleaned out the bank.

At first, it was almost a game. But it turned into an orgy of violence, rape and insane revenge.

Investigating is Sergeant Lloyd Hopkins, eager for a chance to clear his tarnished reputation.

But what Hopkins doesn't know is that this time, the enemy is within.

About the Author

James Ellroy was born in Los Angeles in 1948. He is the author of the acclaimed 'LA Quartet': *The Black Dahlia*, *The Big Nowhere*, *LA Confidential* and *White Jazz*. His most recent novel, *Blood's a Rover*, completes the magisterial 'Underworld USA Trilogy' - the first two volumes of which (*American Tabloid* and *The Cold Six Thousand*) were both *Sunday Times* bestsellers.

ALSO BY JAMES ELLROY

THE UNDERWORLD U.S.A. TRILOGY

American Tabloid
The Cold Six Thousand
Blood's a Rover

THE L.A. QUARTET

The Black Dahlia
The Big Nowhere
L.A. Confidential
White Jazz

MEMOIR

My Dark Places
The Hilliker Curse

SHORT STORIES

Hollywood Nocturnes

JOURNALISM/SHORT FICTION

Crime Wave
Destination: Morgue!

EARLY NOVELS

Brown's Requiem
Clandestine
Blood on the Moon
Because the Night
Killer on the Road

SUICIDE HILL

James Ellroy



arrow books

To Meg Ruley

You're alone and you know a few things.
The stars are pinholes; slits in the hangman's mask

Them, rats, snakes;
the chased and chasers—

Thomas Lux

Psychiatric Evaluation Memorandum

From: Alan D. Kurland, M.D., Psychiatrist, Personnel Division;
To: Deputy Chief T. R. Braverton, Commander, Detective Division;
Captain John A. McManus, Robbery-Homicide Division;
Subject: Hopkins, Lloyd W., Sergeant, Robbery-Homicide Division.

Gentlemen:

As requested, I evaluated Sergeant Hopkins at my private office, in a series of five one-hour counseling sessions, conducted from 6 November to 10 November 1984. I found him to be a physically healthy and mentally alert man of genius-level intelligence. He was a willing, almost eager, participant in these sessions, belying your initial fears about his cooperation. His response to intimate questions and "attack" queries was unwaveringly honest and candid.

Evaluation: Sergeant Hopkins is a violence-prone obsessive-compulsive personality, this personality disorder chiefly manifesting itself in acts of excessive physical force throughout his nineteen-year career as a policeman. Following secondarily but directly in this overall behavior pattern is a strong sexual drive, which he rationalizes as a "counterbalancing effort" aimed at allaying his violent impulses. Intellectually, both of these drives have been justified by the exigencies of "the Job" and by his desire to uphold his reputation as a uniquely brilliant and celebrated homicide detective; in reality both derive from a strident pragmatism of the type seen in emotionally arrested

sociopathic personalities—quite simply, a preadolescent selfishness.

Symptomatically, Sergeant Hopkins, a self-described “hot-dog cop” and admitted sybarite, has followed both his violent impulses and his sexual desires with the heedless fervor of a true sociopath. However, throughout the years he has felt deep guilt over his outbursts of violence and extramarital womanizing. This awareness has been gradual, resulting in both the resistance to eschew old behavior patterns and the desire to abandon them and thus gain peace of mind. This emotional dilemma is the salient fact of his neuroses, yet it is unlikely that it alone, by its long-term nature, could have produced Sergeant Hopkins’ current state of near nervous collapse.

Hopkins himself attributes his present state of extreme anxiety, despondency, episodes of weeping and highly uncharacteristic doubts about his abilities as a policeman to his participation in two disturbing homicide investigations.

In January of 1983, Sergeant Hopkins was involved in the “Hollywood Slaughterer” case, a case that remains officially unsolved, although Hopkins claims that he and another officer killed the perpetrator, a psychopath believed to have murdered three people in the Hollywood area. Sergeant Hopkins (who estimated the Hollywood Slaughterer’s victims to include an additional sixteen young women) was intimately involved with the psychopath’s third victim, a woman named Joan Pratt. Feeling responsible for Miss Pratt’s death, and the death of another woman named Sherry Lynn Shroeder, who was connected to the Havilland/Goff series of killings (May 1984), Hopkins has transferred that sense of guilt to twin obsessions of “protecting” innocent women and “getting back” his estranged wife and three daughters, currently residing in San Francisco. These obsessions, which represent delusional thinking of the type common to emotionally

disturbed superior intellects, were at the core of the professional blunders which led to Sergeant Hopkins' present suspension from duty.

On October 17 of this year, Sergeant Hopkins had succeeded in locating a third Havilland/Goff suspect, Richard Oldfield, in New Orleans. Believing Oldfield to be armed and dangerous, he requested officers from the New Orleans P.D. to aid him in the arrest. Told to remain at a safe distance while the team of N.O.P.D. plainclothesmen apprehended the suspect, Hopkins disobeyed that order and kicked down Oldfield's door, hesitating when he saw that Oldfield was with a partially clothed woman. After screaming at the woman to get dressed and get out, Hopkins fired at Oldfield, missing him and allowing him to escape out the back way while he attempted to comfort the woman. The New Orleans officers apprehended Oldfield some minutes later. Two plainclothesmen were injured, one seriously, while making the arrest. Sergeant Hopkins said that his episodes of weeping began shortly after this incident.

At Oldfield's arraignment, Sergeant Hopkins was caught prevaricating on the witness stand by Oldfield's attorney. During our second session, he admitted that he faked evidence to obtain an extradition warrant for Oldfield, and that the reason for his courtroom lies was a desire to protect a woman involved in the Havilland/Goff/Oldfield case—a woman he was intimately involved with during the investigation. Sergeant Hopkins became verbally abusive at this point, bragging that he would never relinquish the woman's name to the district attorney or any police agency.

Conclusions: Sergeant Hopkins, forty-two, is experiencing cumulative stress reaction, severe type; is suffering severe nervous exhaustion, exacerbated by an intransigent determination to solve his problems himself—a resolve that implicitly reinforces his personality disorder and makes continued counseling untenable. As of this date

I deem it impossible for Sergeant Hopkins to conduct homicide investigations without exploiting them in some social or sexual context. It is highly improbable that he can effectively supervise other officers; it is equally improbable that, given his grandiose self-image, he would ever submit to the performing of nonfield duties. His emotional stability is seriously impaired; his stress instincts disturbed to the point where his armed presence makes him at best ineffective, at worst highly dangerous as a Robbery/Homicide detective. It is my opinion that Sergeant Hopkins should be given early retirement and a full pension, the result of a service-connected disability, and that the administrative processes involving his separation from the L.A.P.D. should be expedited with all due speed.

Sincerely,
Alan D. Kurland, M.D.
Psychiatrist

1

THE SHERIFF'S TRANSPORT bus pulled out of the gate of Malibu Fire Camp #7, its cargo sixteen inmates awaiting release, work furlough and sentence modification, its destination the L.A. County Main Jail. Fifteen of the men shouted joyous obscenities, pounded the windows and rattled their leg manacles. The sixteenth, left unencumbered by iron as a nod to his status as a "Class A" fire fighter, sat up front with the driver/deputy and stared at a photo cube containing a snapshot of a woman in punk-rock attire.

The deputy shifted into second and nudged the man. "You got a hard-on for Cyndi Lauper?"

Duane Rice said, "No, Officer. Do you?"

The deputy smiled. "No, but then I don't carry her picture around with me."

Thinking, fall back—he's just a dumb cop making conversation—Rice said, "My girlfriend. She's a singer. She was singing backup for a lounge act in Vegas when I took this picture."

"What's her name?"

"Vandy."

"Vandy? She got one name, like 'Cher'?"

Rice looked at the driver, then around at the denim-clad inmates, most of whom would be back in the slam in a month or two tops. He remembered a ditty from the jive-rhyming poet who'd bunked below him: "L.A.—come on vacation, go home on probation." Knowing he could outthink, outgame and outmaneuver any cop, judge or P.O. he got hit with and that his destiny was the dead opposite of every man in the bus, he said, "No, Anne Atwater

Vanderlinden. I made her shorten it. Her full name was too long. No marquee value."

"She do everything you tell her to?"

Rice then gave the deputy a mirror-perfected "That's right."

"Just asking," the deputy said. "Chicks like that are hard to come by these days."

With banter effectively shitcanned, Rice leaned back and stared out the window, taking cursory notice of Pacific Coast Highway and winter deserted beaches, but *feeling* the hum of the bus's engine and the distance it was racking up between his six months of digging firebreaks and breathing flames and watching mentally impoverished lowlifes get fucked up on raisinjack, and his coming two weeks of time at the New County, where his sentence reduction for bravery as an inmate fireman would get him a job as a blue trusty, with unlimited contact visits. He looked at the plastic band on his right wrist: name, eight-digit booking number, the California Penal Code abbreviation for grand theft auto and his release date—11/30/84. The last three numbers made him think of Vandy. In reflex, he fondled the photo cube.

The bus hit East L.A. and the Main County Jail an hour later. Rice walked toward the receiving area beside the driver/deputy, who unholstered his service revolver and used it as a pointer to steer the inmates to the electric doors. Once they were inside, with the doors shut behind them, the driver handed his gun to the deputy inside the Plexiglas control booth and said, "Homeboy here is going to trusty classification. He's Cyndi Lauper's boyfriend, so no skin search; Cyndi wouldn't want us looking up his boodie. The other guys are roll-up's for work furlough and weekend release. Full processing, available modules."

The control booth officer pointed at Rice and spoke into a desk-mounted microphone. "Walk, Blue. Number four, fourth tank on your right."

Rice complied. Placing the photo cube in his flapped breast pocket, he walked down the corridor, working his gait into a modified jailhouse strut that allowed him to keep his dignity *and* look like he fit in. With the correct walk accomplished, he made his eyes burn into his brain a scene that he would never again relinquish himself to:

Prisoners packed like sardines into holding tanks fronted by floor-to-ceiling cadmium-steel bars; shouted and muffled conversations bursting from within their confines, the word “fuck” predominating. Trusties wearing slit-bottomed khakis listlessly pushing brooms down the corridor, a group of them standing outside the fruit tank, cooing at the drag queens inside. The screech and clang of barred doors jerking open and shut. Business as usual for institutionalized bulls and cons who didn’t know they’d be shit out of luck without each other. Death.

The door to #4 slid open. Rice did a quick pivot and walked in, his eyes settling on the only other inmate in the tank, a burly biker type sitting on the commode reading a paperback western. When the door slammed shut, the man looked up and said, “Yo, fish. You going to classification?”

Rice decided to be civil.

“I guess so. I was hoping for a blue trusty gig, but the bulls have obviously got other ideas.”

The biker laid his book on the floor and scratched his razor stubble. “Obviously, huh? Just be glad you ain’t big like me. I’m going to Trash and Freight sure as shit. I’ll be hauling laundry bags with niggers while you’re pushing a broom somewhere. What you in for?”

Rice leaned against the bars. “G.T.A. I got sentenced to a bullet, did six months at fire camp and got a modification.”

The biker looked at Rice with eyes both wary and eager for information. Deciding to dig for his own information, Rice said, “You know a guy named Stan Klein? White guy about forty? He would have hit here about six and a half, seven months ago. Popped for possession and sale of

cocaine, lowered to some kind of misdemeanor. He's probably out by now."

The biker stood up, stretched, and scratched his stomach. Rice saw that he was at least six-three, and felt a warning light flash in his head. "He a friend of yours?"

Rice caught a belated recognition of the intelligence in his eyes. Too smart to bullshit. "Not really."

"Not really?" The big man boomed the words. "Not really? *Obviously* you think I'm stupid. *Obviously* you think I don't know how to put two and two together or count. *Obviously* you think I don't know that this guy Klein ratted on you, made a deal with the fuzz and walked around the same time you got busted. *Obviously* you do not know that you are in the presence of a superior jailhouse intellect that does not enjoy being gamed."

Rice swallowed dry, holding eye contact with the big man, waiting for his right shoulder to drop. When the biker took a step backward and laughed, Rice stepped back and forced a smile. "I'm used to dealing with dumbfucks," he said. "After a while you start gearing your thinking to their level."

The biker chuckled. "This guy Klein fuck your woman?"

Rice saw everything go red. He forgot his teacher's warnings about never initiating an attack and he forgot the ritual shouts as he swung up and out with his right leg and felt the biker's jaw crack under his foot. Blood sprayed the air as the big man crashed into the bars; shouts rose from the adjoining tanks. Rice kicked again as the biker hit the floor; through his red curtain he heard a rib cage snap. The shouts grew louder as the electric door slammed open. Rice swiveled to see a half dozen billy clubs arcing toward him. Brief thoughts of Vandy kept him from attacking. Then everything went dark red and black.

Module 2700 of the Los Angeles Main County Jail is known as the Ding Tank. Comprised of three tiers of one-man

security cells linked together by narrow catwalks and stairways, it is the facility for nonviolent prisoners too mentally disturbed to exist in the general inmate population: droolers, babblers, public masturbators, Jesus shriekers and mind-blown acidhead mystics awaiting lunacy hearings and eventual shipment to Camarillo and county-sponsored board-and-care homes. Although the "ding" inmates are kept nominally placid through the forced ingestion of high-powered tranquilizers, at night, when their dosages wear down, they spring verbally to life and create a din heard throughout the entire jail. When he returned to consciousness in a cell smack in the middle of Tier #2, Module 2700, Duane Rice thought he was dead and in hell.

It took him long moments to discover that he wasn't; that the tortured shouts and weeping noises were not blows causing the aches and throbs all over his torso. As full consciousness dawned, the pain started for real and it *all* came back, drowning out a nearby voice screaming, "Ronald Reagan sucks cock!" Reflexively, Rice ran his hands over his face and neck. No blood; no lumps; no bruises. Only a swelling around his carotid artery. Choked out and thrown in with the dings, but spared the ass-kicking the jailers usually gave brawlers. Why?

Rice took a quick inventory of his person, satisfying himself that his genitals were unharmed and that no ribs were broken. Taking off his shirt, he probed the welts and bruises on his torso. Painful, but probably no internal damage.

It was then that he remembered the photo cube and felt his first burst of panic, grabbing the shirt off the floor, slamming the wall when plastic shards fell from the wad of denim. His fists were honing in on the cell bars when the intact photo of Anne Atwater Vanderlinden dropped out of the right pocket and landed faceup on his mattress. Vandy.

Safe. Rice spoke the words out loud, and the Ding Tank cacophony receded to a hush.

Her hush.

Rice sat down on the edge of the mattress and moved his eyes back and forth between the photograph and the scratched-on graffiti that covered the cells walls. Obscenities and Black Power slogans took up most of the print space, but near the wadded-up rags that served as a pillow laboriously carved declarations of love took over: Tyrone and Lucy; Big Phil & Lil Nancy; Raul y Inez por vida. Running his fingers over the words, Rice held the aches in his body to a low ebb by concentrating on the story of Duane and Vandy.

He was working as pit boss at a Midas Muffler franchise in the Valley, pilfering parts from the warehouse and selling them to Louie Calderon at half pop, twenty-six and on Y.A. parole for vehicular manslaughter, going nowhere and waiting for something to happen. Louie threw a party at his pad in Silverlake, promising three-to-one women, and invited him. Vandy was there. He and Louie stood by the door and critiqued the arriving females, concluding that for pure sex the skinny girl in the threadbare preppy clothes was near the bottom of the list, but that she had *something*. When Louie fumbled for words to explain it, Rice said, "Charisma." Louie snapped his fingers and agreed, then pointed out her shabby threads and runny nose and said, "Snowbird. I never seen her before. She just sees the open door and walks in, maybe she thinks she can glom some blow. Maybe she got charisma, but she got no fucking control."

Louie's last word held. Rice walked over to the girl, who smiled at him, her face alive with little tics. Her instant vulnerability ate him up. It was over as soon as it started.

They talked for twelve hours straight. He told her about growing up in the projects in Hawaiian Gardens, his

boozehound parents and how they drove to the liquor store one night and never returned, his ability with cars and how his parents' weakness had given him a resolve never to touch booze or dope. She scoffed at this, saying that she and her brother were dopers because their parents were so uptight and controlled. Their rapport wavered until he told her the *full* truth about his manslaughter bust, wrapping up both their defiances with a bright red ribbon.

When he was twenty-two, he had a job tuning sports cars at a Maserati dealership in Beverly Hills. The other mechanics were loadies who were always ragging him about his disdain for dope. One night they fashioned a speedball out of pharmacy meth and Percodan and slipped it into his coffee, right before he went out to test the idle on a customer's Ferrari. The speedball kicked in as he was driving down Doheny. He immediately realized what was happening and pulled to the curb, determined to wait the high out and do some serious ass-kicking.

Then it got really bad. He started hallucinating and thought he saw the dope-slippers walking across the street a half block down. He gunned the engine, speed-shifted into second and plowed into them at seventy. The front bumper was torn off, the grille caved in, and a severed arm flew across the windshield. He downshifted, turned the corner onto Wilshire, got out and ran like hell, an incredible adrenaline jolt obliterating the dope rush. By the time he had run out of Beverly Hills, he felt in control. He knew that he had gotten his revenge, and now he had to play the game with the law and get off cheap.

A two-hour steam bath at the Hollywood Y sweated the rest of the speedball out of his system. He took a cab to the Beverly Hills police station, gouged his arm with a penknife to induce crocodile tears and turned himself in. He was charged with two counts of third-degree manslaughter and hit and run. Bail was set at \$20,000, and arraignment was set for the following morning.

At arraignment, he learned that the two people he had killed were not the dope-slipping mechanics, but a solid-citizen husband and wife. He pleaded guilty anyway, expecting a deuce maximum, back on the street in eighteen months tops.

The judge, a kindly-looking old geezer, gave him a ten-minute lecture, five years state time suspended and his sentence: one thousand hours of picking up paper refuse from the gutters of Doheny Avenue between Beverly Boulevard on the north and Pico Boulevard on the south. After courtroom spectators applauded the decree, the judge asked him if he had anything to say. He said, "Yes," then went on to tell the judge that his mother sucked giant donkey dicks in a Tijuana whorehouse and that his wife turned tricks with the gorillas in the Griffith Park Zoo. The judge recanted his sentence suspension and hit him with five years in the California Youth Authority Facility at Soledad—the "Baby Joint" and "Gladiator School."

When Rice finished his story, Anne Vanderlinden doubled over with laughter and launched *her* rap, chain-smoking two full packs, until all the guests had either split or were coupled off in Louie's upstairs bedrooms. She told him about growing up rich in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, and her hard-ass tax lawyer father, Valium addict mother and religious crackpot brother, who got bombed on acid and stared at the sun seeking mystical synergy until he went totally blind. She told him how she dropped out of college because it was boring and how she blew her \$50,000 trust fund on coke and friends, and how she liked blow, but wasn't strung out. Rice found her use of street argot naive, but pretty well done. Knowing she was on the skids and probably sleeping around for a place to stay, he steered her talk away from the present and into the future. *What did she really want to do?*

Anne Vanderlinden's little facial tics exploded as she tripped over words to explain her love of music and her

plans to spotlight her singing and dancing talents in a series of rock videos: one for punk, one for ballads, one for disco. Rice watched her features contort as she spoke, wanting to grab her head and smooth her face until she was perfectly soft and pretty. Finally he clutched her lank blond hair and drew it back into a bun that tightened the skin around her eyes and cheeks, whispering, "Babe, you won't have shit until you quit sticking that garbage up your nose, and you find someone to look after you."

She fell sobbing into his arms. Later, after they made love, she told him it was the first time she'd cried since her brother went blind.

It was over the next few weeks, after Anne Atwater Vanderlinden had moved in with him and become Vandy, that he figured it out: you don't wait for things to happen—you make them happen. If your woman wants to become a rock star, you regulate her coke use and buy her a sexy wardrobe and cultivate music business connections who can do her some good. Vandy could sing and dance as well as a half dozen female rock stars he knew of, and she was too good to go the tried-and-untrue route of demo tapes, backup gigs and lackluster club dates. She had an ace in the hole. She had him.

And *he* had a chump change job at Midas Muffler, a parole officer who looked at him like he was something that crawled out from under a rock and an overpriced apartment with world-class cockroaches. With his debits cataloged, Rice figured out his credits: he was a great mechanic, he knew how to deactivate automobile alarm systems and bore steering columns for a forty-second start, any car, anywhere, anytime; he knew enough industrial chemistry to compound corrosive solutions that would eat the serial numbers off engine blocks. He had solid Soledad connections who would fix him up with good fences. He would *make* it happen: become a world-class car thief, set up Vandy's career and get out clean.

For a year and a half, it worked.

With three strategically located storage garages rented, and armed with a battery-powered ignition drill, he stole late model Japanese imports and sold them at two-thirds their resale value to a buddy he'd known in the joint, supervising the engine block dips that rendered the cars untraceable, rotating his rip-off territory throughout L.A. and Ventura counties to avoid the scrutiny of individual auto theft details. In two months he had the down payment for a classy West L.A. condo. In three months he had Vandy primed for stardom with a health food diet, daily aerobics, coke as an occasional reward and three-walk-in closets stuffed with designer threads. In four months he had the feedback of two high-priced voice teachers: Vandy was a weak, near tone-deaf soprano with virtually no range. She had a decent vibrato growl that could be jazzed up with a good amplifier, and gave great microphone head. She had the haunted sex look of a punk-rock star—and very limited talent.

Rice accepted the appraisals—they made him love Vandy more. He altered his game plan for crashing the L.A. rock music scene and took Vandy to Vegas, where he dug up three out-of-work musicians and paid them two bills a week to serve as her backup group. Next he bribed the owner of a slot machine arcade/bar/convenience store into featuring Vandy and the Vandals as his lounge act.

Four shows a night, seven days a week, Vandy's vibrato growled the punk lyrics of the group's drummer. She drew wolf whistles when she sang and wild applause when she humped the air and sucked the microphone. After a month of watching his woman perform, Rice knew she was *ready*.

Back in L.A., armed with professional photographs, bribed press raves and a doctored demo tape, he tried to find Vandy an agent. One brick wall after another greeted him. When he got past secretaries, he got straight brush-offs and "I'll call you"; and when he got past them and

whipped out Vandy's photos, he got comments like "interesting," "nice bod" and "foxy chick." Finally, in the Sunset Strip office of an agent named Jeffrey Jason Rifkin, his frustration came to a head. When Rifkin handed back the photos and said, "Cute, but I have enough clients right now," Rice called his fists and took a bead on the man's head. Then inspiration struck, and he said, "Jew boy, how'd you like a brand-new silver gray Mercedes 450 SL absolutely *free*?"

A week later, after he picked up his car, Rifkin told Rice that he could introduce him to a lot of people who might help Vandy's career, and that her idea of showcasing her talent via a series of rock videos was an excellent "high-exposure breakthrough strategy," albeit expensive: \$150-200 K minimum. *He* would do what he could with *his* contacts, but in the meantime he also knew a lot of people who would pay hard cash for discount Benzs and other status cars—people in the "Industry."

Rice smiled. Use and be used—an arrangement he could trust. He and Vandy went Hollywood.

Rifkin was partially good to his word. He never procured any recording or club gigs, but he did introduce them to a large crowd of semisuccessful TV actors, directors, coke dealers and lower-echelon movie executives, many of whom were interested in high-line cars with Mexican license plates at tremendous discounts. Over the next year, paperwork aided by an Ensenada D.M.V. employed cousin of his old Soledad buddy Chula Medina, Rice stole 206 high-liners, banking close to a hundred fifty thou toward the production of Vandy's rock videos. And then just as he was about to drill the column of a chocolate-brown Benz ragtop, four L.A.P.D. auto theft dicks drew down on him with shotguns, and one of them whispered, "Freeze or die, motherfucker."

Out on \$16,000 bail, his show biz attorney gave him the word: for the right amount of cash, his bank account would

not be seized, and he would get a year county time. If the money were *not* paid, it would be a parole violation and probable indictments on at least another fifteen counts of grant theft auto. The L.A.P.D. had an informant by the balls, and they were squeezing him hard. He could only buy the judge if he acted now. If he were quickly sentenced, the L.A.P.D. would most likely drop its investigation.

Rice agreed. The decision cost him an even \$100,000. His attorney's fees cost him an additional forty. Ten K for Vandy and bribe money his lawyer slipped to an L.A.P.D. records clerk to learn the identity of the informant had eaten up the rest of his bank account, and had not yielded the name of the snitch. Rice suspected the reason for this was that the shyster pocketed the bread because he knew that the snitch was Stan Klein, a coke dealer/entrepreneur in the Hollywood crowd they ran with. When he learned Klein had been popped for conspiracy to sell dangerous drugs and that it was later dropped to a misdemeanor, he became the number one suspect. But he had to be sure, and the decision to be sure had cost him his last dime and gotten him zilch.

And two weeks away from the release date he'd eaten smoke, fire and bullshit to earn, he'd fucked it up and probably earned himself a first-degree assault charge and *at least* another ninety days of county time.

And Vandy hadn't written to him or visited him in a month.

"On your feet, Blue. Wristband count."

Rice jerked his head in the direction of the words. "I won't let you medicate me," he said. "I'll fight you and the whole L.A. County Sheriff's Department before I let you zone me out on that Prolixin shit."

"Nobody wants to medicate you, Blue," the voice said. "A few of L.A. County's finest might wanta shake your hand, but that's about it. Besides, I can *sell* that goose juice on the street, make a few bucks *and* serve law and order by

keeping the Negro element sedated. Let's try this again: wristband count. Walk over to the bars, stick your right wrist out to me, tell me your name and booking number."

Rice got up, walked to the front of the cell and stuck his right arm through the bars. The owner of the voice came into focus on the catwalk, a pudgy deputy with thin gray hair blown out in a razor cut. His name tag read: *G. Meyers*.

"Rice, Duane Richard, 19842040. When do I get arraigned on the new charge?"

Deputy G. Meyers laughed. "What new charge? That scumbag you wasted was in for assault on a police officer with a half dozen priors, and you carried three L.A. County firemen to safety during the Agoura fire. Are you fucking serious? The watch commander read your record, then scumbag's, and made scumbag a deal: he presses charges on you, then the county presses charges on him for grabbing your shlong. Not wanting a fruit jacket, he agreed. He gets to spend the rest of his sentence in the hospital ward, and you get to serve as blue trusty here in the Rubber Ramada, where hopefully you will not get the urge to whip any more ass. Where did you learn that kung fu shit?"

Rice kicked the news around in his head, sizing up the man who'd delivered it. Friendly and harmless, he decided; probably close to retirement, with no good guys/bad guys left in him. "Soledad," he said. "There was a Jap corrections officer who taught classes. He gave us a lot of spiritual stuff along with it, but nobody listened. The warden finally got wise to the fact that he was teaching violent junior criminals to be better violent junior criminals, and stopped it. What's a ding trusty do?"

Meyers took a key from his Sam Browne belt and unlocked the cell. "Come on, we'll go down to my office. I've got a bottle. We'll belt a few and I'll tell you about the job."

"I don't drink."

"Yeah? What the fuck kind of criminal are you?"

"The smart kind. You booze on duty?"

Meyers laughed and tapped his badge. "Turned my papers in yesterday. Twenty years and nine days on the job, iron-clad civil service pension. I'm only sticking around until they rotate in a new man to fill my spot. Ten days from now I am adios, motherfucker, so till then I'm playing catch-up."

As Gordon Meyers explained it, the job was simple. Sleep all day while the dings were dinged out on their "medication," eat leftovers from the officers' dining room, have free run of his collection of *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, be cool with the daywatch jailer. At night, his duties began: feed the dings their one meal per day, move them out of their cells one at a time and mop the floors, get them to the showers once a week.

The most important thing was to keep them reasonably quiet at night, Meyers emphasized. He would be using his on-duty time to read the classified ads and write out job applications, and he did not want the dings dinging his concentration. Talk softly to them if they started to scream, and if that failed, scream back and make them scared of you. If worse came to worse, give them a spritz of the fire hose. And any ding who smeared shit on his cell walls got five whacks in the ass with the lead-filled "ding-donger" Meyers carried. Rice promised to do a good job, and decided to wait five days before manipulating the fat-mouthed cop for favors.

The job was simple.

Rice slept six hours a day, ate the high-quality institutional fare the jailers ate, and did a minimum of one thousand push-ups daily. At night, he would bring the dings their chow, G.I. their cells and stroll the catwalk exchanging words with them through the bars. He found that if he kept up a continuous line of cell-to-cell

communication, the dings screamed less and he thought of Vandy less. After a few days he got to know some of the guys and tailored his spiels to fit their individual boogeymen.

A-14 was a black guy popped for getting dogs out of the Lincoln Heights Shelter and cooking them up for Rastafarian feasts. The bulls had shaved off his dreadlocks before they threw him in the tank, and he was afraid that demons could enter his brain through his bald head. Rice told him that dreadlocks were “out,” and brought him a copy of *Ebony* that featured ads for various Afro wigs. He pointed out that the Reverend Jesse Jackson was sporting a modified Afro and getting a lot of pussy. The man nodded along, grabbed the magazine and from then on would yell “Afro wig!” when Rice strolled by his cell.

C-11 was an old man who wanted to get off the streets and back to Camarillo. Rice falsely reported him as a shit-smearer for three nights running, and gave him three fake beatings, thumping the ding-donger into the mattress and screaming himself. On the third night, Meyers got tired of the noise and turned the old man over to the head jailer of the hospital ward, who said the geezer was Camarillo quail for sure.

The tattooed man in C-3 was the hardest to deal with, because the white trash he grew up with in Hawaiian Gardens all had tattoos, and Rice early on figured tattooing as the mark of the world’s ultimate losers. C-3, a youth awaiting a conservatorship hearing, had his entire torso adorned with snarling jungle cats, and was trying to tattoo his arms with a piece of mattress spring and the ink off newspapers soaked in toilet water. He had managed to gouge the first two letters of “Mom” when Rice caught him and took his spring away. He started bawling then, and Rice screamed at him to quit marking himself like a lowlife sleazebag. Finally the young man quieted down. Every time he walked by the cell, Rice would roust him for tattooing

tools. After a few times, the youth snapped into a frisking position when he heard him coming.

Around midnight, when the dings began falling asleep, Rice joined Gordon Meyers in his office and listened to *his* dinged-out ramblings. Biting his cheeks to keep from laughing, Rice nodded along as Meyers told him of the crime scams he'd dreamed up in his sixteen years working the tank.

A couple were almost smart, like a plan to capitalize on his locksmith expertise—getting a job as a bank guard and pilfering safe-deposit box valuables to local beat cops who frequented the bank, staying above suspicion by not leaving the bank and letting the beat cops do the fencing; but most were Twilight Zone material: prostitution rings of women prisoners bused around to construction sights, where they would dispense blowjobs to horny workers in exchange for sentence reductions; marijuana farms staffed by inmate “harvesters,” who would cultivate tons of weed and load it into the sheriff’s helicopters that would drop it off into the backyards of high-ranking police “pushers”; porno films featuring male and female inmates, directed by Meyers himself, to be screened on the exclusive “all-cop” cable network he planned to set up.

Meyers rambled on for three nights. Rice moved his plan up a day and started telling him about Vandy, about how she hadn’t written to him or visited him in weeks. Meyers sympathized, and mentioned that he was the one who made sure his photo of her wasn’t destroyed when the bulls choked him out. After thanking him for that, Rice made his pitch: Could he use the phone to make calls to get a line on her? Meyers said no and told him to write her name, date of birth, physical description and last known address on a piece of paper. Rice did it, then sat there gouging his fingernails into his palms to keep from hitting the dinged-out deputy.

“I’ll handle it,” Gordon Meyers said. “I’ve got clout.”