

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS



Crime Wave

James Ellroy

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About the Book

James Ellroy is a unique and powerful writer with a tough and explosive voice. His obsession with the dark side of L.A. is personal and vital, triggered by the murder of his mother when he was ten. This defining event spawned an early addiction to paperback crime novels, and Ellroy's own writing is saturated in an often violent underworld of bent cops, politicians, stars, sleaze and rumour. Ellroy exploits memory, history, fact and fiction with relentless energy and panache. What emerges is an intense, mythical vision of Tinseltown in the second half of the twentieth century.

Crime Wave is a vivid portrait of James Ellroy's L.A. landscape. This collection showcases his investigative non-fiction articles, previously published in the American edition of *GQ*, and also includes two novellas, *Hollywood Shakedown* and *Tijuana Mon Amour*.

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

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Clandestine
Blood on the Moon
Because the Night
Suicide Hill
Killer on the Road

*To
Curtis Hanson*

Crime Wave

REPORTAGE AND FICTION FROM THE UNDERSIDE OF
L.A.

James Ellroy



arrow books

INTRODUCTION

by Art Cooper, Editor-in-Chief, *GQ*

It was love at first sight. I first met James Ellroy in the fall of 1993 at The Four Seasons restaurant, a midtown Manhattan mecca for publishing poobahs where lunch for two can easily exceed the advance for a first novel. The first word James uttered was “Woof!”—and thus did the Demon Dog of American Literature enter my life and *GQ*’s. In the five years since, James has contributed some of the finest journalism and fiction we have published, and all of it is included in this volume. Contrary to the convention that writers make their names in magazines before turning to books, James was at the top of his game as a novelist when he decided to try magazine writing.

James is a big man with a big voice and a big personality. Those who don’t know him well find him intimidating. So do those who know him well. And he is fearless as a Doberman, which I discovered early on when we were trying to decide on a perfect story. Having admired his *The Black Dahlia*, I acknowledged my own fascination with Hollywood murders of the ’40s and ’50s. The conversation went something like this:

ME: You know, some Miss Idaho goes to Hollywood to be a star, doesn’t make it, works as a cocktail lounge waitress or a hooker, and winds up horribly and mysteriously murdered. JAMES: Well, I’m obsessed by an unsolved murder. My mother was murdered when I was 10. She had been drinking in some bar and left with a guy. They found her body on an access road by a high school. She had been strangled. They never found

who did it. ME (*excitedly*): That's it! Write your obsession. Reinvestigate it. Write it. Right away. JAMES: Yes, Godfather. (He calls me Godfather all the time. I like it. It makes me feel well-tailored.)

I didn't find out until a couple of years later that James went immediately from my office to visit with his agent, Nat Sobel, a wise, compassionate man on every occasion but this one. Art wants me to write about my mother's murder, said James. Don't do it, advised Nat. It will dredge up a lot that I don't think you want to confront. I'm gonna do it, said the Doberman. The article, "My Mother's Killer," appeared in our August 1994 issue and was one of the most widely praised magazine pieces of that year. James later expanded the piece into his bestselling memoir *My Dark Places*.

I am not alone in thinking that everything that James has written, indeed his very essence, has been shaped by the murder of Geneva Hilliker Ellroy. He acknowledges as much when writing of her in "My Mother's Killer": "The woman refused to grant me a reprieve. Her grounds were simple: My death gave you a voice, and I need you to recognize me past your exploitation of it." James inscribed my copy of *My Dark Places* "She lives!"

Accompanying the article there was a photograph of James just after he has been told of his mother's death. Look at his eyes. They are shocked, uncomprehending. Raised by his father, a rakish "Hollywood bottom feeder" (James's words), who did or did not "pour the pork" to Rita Hayworth, James grew to be a teen punk, a peeping tom and a petty thief who broke into houses to sniff women's panties. He filed away, in his mind, everything he saw when he was strung out on drugs or drunk on cheap booze or spending nine months in local lockups—nightmarish, photographic visions that would fuel his noirish fiction.

These complex tales of Los Angeles's seamy underside provide the truest social history of the city in the 1940s and '50s, an era of "bad white men doing bad things in the name of authority." Ellroy's stories are as dense as an

overcrowded prison, but his syncopated style is deceptive: short, staccato, often alliterative bursts. But they are not riffs. Each muscular sentence follows the next and orderly advances the plot. His protagonists are deeply wounded men on both sides of the law, scarred and corrupted by what they have seen.

James had achieved a reputation as the best American hard-boiled crime writer when his novel *L.A. Confidential* was turned into a critical and commercial hit movie, which happily introduced him to a much larger audience. He writes about that experience here in "Bad Boys in Tinseltown." In this volume, too, are three short fictions that continue where *L.A. Confidential* ended: "Hollywood Shakedown," "Hush-Hush," and "Tijuana, Mon Amour." James reprises Danny Getchell, the cannily corrupt star writer of *Hush-Hush* magazine, who has the grisly goods on almost everyone in Tinseltown and will blackmail anyone to obtain exclusive dirt. Elroy gleefully dips in the muck his band of merry miscreants, including Jack Webb, Mickey Cohen, Frank Sinatra, Lana Turner, Johnny Stompanato, Dick Contino, Sammy Davis Jr., Oscar Levant, and Rock Hudson. There is a raunchy ring of verisimilitude, a truly bizarre believability, to the way Elroy makes them behave.

Two years ago I hosted a dinner party at The Four Seasons for another '50s icon, 71-year-old Tony Curtis, who arrived wearing a ruffled white shirt, a tuxedo jacket without lapels, a medal from the French government on his chest, and his stunning 26-year-old, 6'1" girlfriend, Jill Van Den Berg, on his arm. James was there as were Tom Junod, who had written a brilliant profile of Curtis for *GQ*, and an editor whose name will come to me in a moment. When I suggested that Tony be seated away from the other diners, James thought it would be better if he sat near them. James, of course, was right. All evening, middle-aged suburban matrons fawned over Tony, pleaded for his autograph, touched him, told him he was the handsomest movie star ever.

We drank some surpassingly good wine, laughed a lot, and listened raptly to Tony and James, back and forth like a shuttlecock, tell ribald tales of Hollywood in the '50s. It became clear to me that no one alive knows more than James about that particular time in that particular place. He seems to know everything about the famous, the near-famous, and the infamous. Especially their penis size. His novels, like his conversation, abound with references to it. Some of his characters are "hung like a donkey," others "like a cashew." Why he is so obsessed is best left to Freudians, but for Ellroy, more than any other writer, anatomy is truly destiny.

Ellroy's destiny was to be a moralist. But he doesn't ride his moralism like some hobbyhorse. When he is outraged by some wrongdoing, he gets really juiced. Shortly after O. J. Simpson committed the double-slash of ex-wife Nicole and her friend, Ron Goldman, I asked James if he'd write an essay on the Crime of the Century. Yes, indeed, he replied. The result made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. "Sex, Glitz, and Greed: The Seduction of O. J. Simpson" is a passionate, powerful piece that skewers Simpson and the horrific Hollywood celebrity culture that spawned him. Several months ago, James was in moral high dudgeon again, this time outraged at Bill Clinton's sexual dalliance with Monica Lewinsky and his rather bizarre pronouncement that a blow job really isn't sex. James was itching to rip Bubba, and I, perhaps unwisely, declined.

This white-hot morality and a singular narrative gift aside, I think James has become one of the finest writers of our time because he is the most disciplined scrivener I have ever known. He rises early and spends 10 hours every day writing. He has never been blocked. He seems always to be juggling a novel, short fiction, and his magazine work. Astonishingly, he has never missed a deadline. He possesses the concentration—and the confidence—of a cat burglar; the outline of his novel-in-progress runs 343 pages.

Genius has its rewards. Elroy now commands advances robust enough to dine regularly at The Four Seasons. Last October he flew from his home in Kansas City to New York where, resplendent in black tie (James is some bespoke dandy), he accepted *GQ's* Man of the Year Award for Literature, for which he was selected by our ferociously intelligent readers. The two previous winners are Norman Mailer and John Updike. Mr. Mailer and Mr. Updike should feel flattered.

PART ONE

UNSOLVED

BODY DUMPS

I

DETECTIVE DIVISION/HOMICIDE BUREAU/LOS ANGELES COUNTY
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT (EL MONTE PD ASSISTING). VICTIM: SCALES,
BETTY JEAN. DOD: 1/29/73. DISPOSITION: MURDER/187 PC.
FILE#073-01946-2010-400 (UNSOLVED)

1

THE VICTIM WAS a 24-year-old white female. She lived at 2633 Cogswell, El Monte. The city was downscale. The racial mix was white trash and low-rent Latin.

The victim was married to William David Scales—a 26-year-old white male. They had a 4-year-old daughter and a 3-month-old son. The victim was unemployed. Her husband installed insulation.

8:00 P.M. Monday, 1/29/73:

The victim leaves her apartment. She's alone. Her stated intention: to deposit some checks at a bank night drop and shop at Durfee Drugs and Crawford's Market. She takes off in her husband's Ford pickup. Scales stays home. He watches the kids and checks out the *Laugh-In* TV show.

The bank is a block from the market. Durfee Drugs is one mile west. Their apartment sits equidistant.

It's a tight local spread. Scales figures his wife will be gone one hour.

9:00, 9:30, 10:00. No Betty Jean. The baby wants food. Scales feeds him and slaps on fresh diapers. He's ticked off and worried. He's working on pissed off and scared. He starts running abandonment tapes.

Betty left me and the kids. Betty *stuck* me with the kids. Betty's got a boyfriend. They're at his place or a bar or a motel. They're bopping at the Nashville West.

He calmed down. He switched tapes. Betty needs some time by herself.

To unwind. To cut loose. To visit her girlfriends.

He called Connie, Terry, and Glenda. They said they hadn't seen Betty. He ran tapes from 10:30 to midnight. He called the El Monte PD and the California Highway Patrol. He described his truck and his wife. He asked about car wrecks.

No go:

Your truck was not involved in any reported collisions.

He ran crash tapes to 2:00 A.M. He called the El Monte PD back. He got another No. The desk man said sit tight and wait by the phone.

He tried to sit tight. The tapes kept spinning. He left his kids alone and walked by Crawford's Market and the Nashville West. They were closed. He didn't see his wife or his truck. He walked home. He called the girlfriends again. He got three more No's. He fell asleep on the couch and woke up at 5:30. He called Betty Jean's dad in Corona. Bud Bedford said he hadn't seen or heard from Betty Jean. He said he'd shoot up to El Monte.

Bill Scales and Bud Bedford connected. They drove by Durfee Drugs, the bank, and the market. They did not see Betty Jean or the truck. They drove to the El Monte PD. They filed a missing-persons sheet. Scales said his wife was devoted. She wasn't a runaround chick. She didn't smoke dope or chase men. She wouldn't just split unannounced.

The cops told Scales and Bedford to sit tight. Don't think car wrecks or abductions. We're legally constrained until

your wife is gone forty-eight hours. Think car wrecks or abductions then.

Bill Scales thought it now. Bud Bedford thought it. They did not sit tight.

They drove the #10 Freeway east/west. They drove the 605 north/south. They stopped at gas stations. They talked to attendants. They described Betty Jean and the truck. Scales got a bug up his ass. He knew his wife was kidnapped. He *knew* the guy stopped to gas up.

More *No's*. *No's* straight across. No Betty Jean/no truck.

Bedford went home. He'd divorced Betty's mother years back. He had to break the news and say it don't look good.

Scales stuck the kids with a baby-sitter. He borrowed a car and went at the freeways systematically. He hit gas stations. He flashed a snapshot of Betty. He got a straight run of *No's*.

Wednesday, 1/31/73:

The missing-persons investigation kicked in pro forma. An APB went out. A Teletype detailed the truck and Betty Jean Scales:

WF/DOB 3/6/49, 5'4", 115, brown hair, brown eyes. Last seen wearing a red-pink top, brown Levi's, and white tennis shoes.

1:30 A.M. Thursday, 2/1/73:

An El Monte PD unit spots the truck. It's parked in the lot at Vons Market. The location: Peck Road and Lower Azusa. The location: two miles north of 2633 Cogswell. The location: 2.5 miles north of Durfee Drugs, the bank, and Crawford's Market.

A patrolman impounds the truck. He tows it to a yard in South El Monte. He talks to a clerk at Vons Market. The clerk says the truck was in the lot at least forty-eight hours. He noticed it around 4:00 A.M.—Tuesday, 1/30.

Eight hours after Betty Jean left her apartment.

The El Monte PD contacts Sheriff's Homicide. The Scales thing vibes murder. Deputy Hal Meyers and Sergeant Lee

Koury drive to the tow yard.

They examine the truck.

In the bed: metal scaffolds, a milk crate, an empty cardboard box, a leather tool holder, a matching belt, and a length of rope. In the cab: three bottles of baby formula in a small box. A purse, a white bra, white panties, one left-foot white tennis shoe, and a pair of brown Levi's.

The box is on the floor. The clothes are stacked beside it.

Koury and Meyers look under the seat. They find the matching shoe. A key ring is tucked inside. They note a blood spot on the canvas.

On the seat: a red-pink sweater. Distinct bloodstains. A toolbox on the step by the passenger door. Blood spotted.

More bloodwork:

Smears on the seat back. Spatters on the inside of the passenger door. Drops on the step near the toolbox.

Koury called the crime lab and told them to send out a crew. Meyers opened the purse. He found cosmetic items, three checks made out to William D. Scales, Betty Jean Scales's ID, and a checkbook. The last check logged in: \$9.71, to Durfee Drugs, 1/29/73. Meyers checked the box on the floor. He found a cash-register receipt for \$9.71. Koury called the El Monte PD and told them to contact the husband.

The lab crew arrived. A print man dusted the truck inside and out. He found no latent prints. He found wipe marks on the steering wheel and dashboard. A man scraped blood samples and cut a swatch out of the seat back. He found a long brown hair congealed in a blood smear.

1:30 P.M., 2/1/73:

Koury and Meyers meet Bill Scales at the El Monte PD. Scales recounts his wife's Monday-night plans. He runs down his own actions and describes his marriage as stable.

3:30 P.M., 2/1/73:

Koury and Meyers drive to Durfee Drugs. They interview a clerk named Gloria Terrazas. Mrs. Terrazas ID's a photo of the probable victim and says she came in about 8:30 Monday night. She purchased some baby formula and paid by check. She came in and left alone. She behaved in a normal fashion.

4:00 P.M., 2/1/73:

Koury and Meyers drive to Crawford's Market. They grill the people working Monday night. They flash a photo of the probable victim. They say, "When was the last time you saw her?" They get a straight consensus: She did not come in Monday night.

It looks tight and local. The probable victim leaves her pad and drives to Durfee Drugs. She never gets to Crawford's or the bank. Her deposit-ready checks are still in her purse. It looks like a snatch. The guy grabs her outside Durfee Drugs or en route to the bank and Crawford's. He hijacks the truck. He dumps her and dumps the truck at Vons Market. The truck was in the lot from 4:00 A.M. Tuesday on.

Or it's the husband.

6:00 P.M., 2/1/73:

Koury and Meyers meet Bill Scales at the tow yard. Scales ID's his truck and the items in the bed. He points to the empty box. He says his staple-bat is missing. It's very heavy. Maybe the guy beat his wife to death with it.

Koury and Meyers look at Scales real close.

Scales looks in the cab. He spots some gravel on the floor. He extrapolates.

Some clown kidnapped his wife. He beat her to death with his staple-bat and dumped her in the Irwindale pits.

It's a good theory.

Koury and Meyers make Bill Scales as one cold motherfucker.

The Irwindale gravel pits ran northeast of El Monte. They bordered the 605 Freeway. They covered twenty-four square miles. They fused with flood-control basins and brushland.

The pits ran fifteen to 150 feet deep. Paved roads connected them. Street access was cake. You could pull off east-west thoroughfares and drive right in.

The pits looked psychedelic. Scoop cranes hung over them all day and all night. Rainfall turned the pits into tide pools. Water collected and receded at a very slow rate.

Heavy rain hit L.A. that winter. The pit floors were submerged. The pit line began 1.5 miles east of Vons Market.

The Scales thing vibed body dump. The cops figured she was down in the pits.

Friday, 2/2/73:

A search team goes in. Deployed: one Sheriff's helicopter, ten deputies, three El Monte PD men, and three Sheriff's Homicide men. The chopper flies low. The cops kick through wet gravel all day.

Saturday, 2/3/73:

The search resumes. Deployed: one chopper, seven deputies, two El Monte PD men, four Sheriff's Homicide men and 103 horsemen from the Sheriff's Mounted Posse. The search area is greatly expanded. It covers El Monte, Baldwin Park, Irwindale, Azusa, Arcadia, and unincorporated parts of L.A. County.

The chopper flies low. The walking cops wear hip boots. The horses buck knee-high water. A storm hits at 3:00 P.M. The search is called off.

The storms continued. Big rain on Sunday and Monday. The search was postponed indefinitely. They had to let the water recede.

Koury and Meyers called it a snatch, rape, and kill. They leaned on registered sex offenders. They logged in zero suspects.

They door-to-doored by Durfee Drugs and Vons Market. They tapped out. Nobody saw anything. They interviewed the probable victim's father, mother, stepfather, stepmother, and brother. The father and mother ragged the husband:

He's a lowlife. He's a tyrant. He's a cold son of a bitch. Bud Bedford says it flat out: He killed Betty Jean.

Wednesday, 2/7/73:

Bill Scales is summoned to the Sheriff's Crime Lab. Sergeant Ben Lubon administers a polygraph test. Koury, Meyers, and an El Monte PD man observe.

Lubon calls the result conclusive. The subject has no guilty knowledge of his wife's disappearance and possible death.

The Scales job stalled out. No body and no workable crime scene. Koury and Meyers caught fresh murders. The new jobs demanded full-time work. The rain came and went. The pits were full of stagnant water.

3:30 P.M. Sunday, 2/25/73:

A perimeter road near a big pit mined by Conrock-Durbin. A five-gallon can on the side of the road.

A security guard stops his car and picks up the can. His dog jumps out of the car and runs into the pit. The guard whistles. The dog barks and ignores the command. The guard walks to the edge of the pit and looks down.

She was nude. She was faceup at the bottom of the pit. The staple-bat was fifty-seven inches from her left hand.

She was badly decomposed. Immersion had intensified the decomp. Maggots had eaten her eyes and most of her membranous tissue.

Her skull was caved in. Her hair fell out as she decomped. Maggots swarmed inside the cranial vault.

Matted hair on the business end of the staple-bat.

A dozen cops hit the crime scene. They grid-searched the pit. A chopper flew over. A photo deputy shot some wide-angles.

The grid search tapped out. Zero: dirt, rocks, mud, and gravel. A deputy coroner requisitioned the body.

He performed a postmortem. His stated cause of death: blunt-force trauma and resultant skull fractures. His semen smear turned up inconclusive. The vaginal membranes were water-logged and badly decomposed.

Everyone knew who she was. They tagged her Jane Doe #10 anyway. They needed a formal ID.

They ID'd her off dental charts:

Betty Jean Bedford Scales. Born 3/6/49. Probable date of death: 1/29/73.

Koury and Meyers worked the case part-time. They checked recent sex assaults with suspects at large. Their geographic focus: El Monte/Baldwin Park/Irwindale.

12/16/72:

2:00 A.M. The Baldwin Park Post Office. 220 PC—Assault with Intent to Commit Rape.

A white youth accosts a 44-year-old white female. He shoves her into her car at knifepoint. He rips off her bra, pulls down her pants, and fondles her buttocks. The victim screams. The suspect flees on foot.

12/17/72:

3:45 A.M. The all-night laundromat at 4428 Peck, El Monte. 220 PC—Assault with Intent to Commit Rape.

A male Latin accosts a 56-year-old white female. She works at the laundry and another laundry four blocks away.

The suspect tries to push her into a storeroom. He states, "I want pussy! I want pussy! I don't want to rob you!" The victim pulls a safety pin off her coat. She stabs the suspect. The suspect screams and runs out the door. The victim calls the El Monte PD. A patrol team responds. She tells them: "I saw the same man at two o'clock this morning. He cruised by my other laundry and looked in the window."

1/4/73:

1:00 A.M. The all-night laundromat at 4851 Peck, El Monte. 207 PC—Kidnapping, 261 PC—Rape, 245 PC—Assault with a Deadly Weapon, 10851 CVC—Grand Theft/Auto.

A male Latin accosts a 26-year-old white female. He saps the victim. He forces her into her car and takes the wheel. He drives out the 605 Freeway, the 210 Freeway, and Highway 71. He stops on a side street and orders the victim out. He marches her into a brush field. He rapes her and forces her to orally copulate him. He marches her to her car and drives her back to El Monte. He forces her out of the car at Cherrylee and Buffington. He tells her he'll leave the car at Cherrylee and Peck.

The suspect leaves the car at that location. He wipes down the steering wheel and dashboard.

2/2/73:

1:45 A.M. Lower Azusa and Peck, El Monte. 314.1 PC—Indecent Exposure.

A male Latin accosts a 36-year-old white female. The victim is standing by a bus bench. The suspect displays his penis. He states, "I can't sleep tonight because I can't get anyone to fuck."

The victim yells. The suspect walks away. A passing patrol car stops him. The suspect is carrying three pornographic books. The titles are *Husband and Friend*, *A Widow's Hunger*, and *Cocker Conqueror*.

The suspect was arrested. He was grilled on the laundromat jobs. He was exonerated.

The laundromat freak was still out there. His assaults preceded the Scales snatch by forty-two and twenty-five days. Vons Market was one hundred yards from 4428 Peck.

Durfee Drugs was two miles south. The killer grabbed the Scales woman at 8:30 P.M. The laundromat freak worked the late shift. He didn't quite vibe for the Scales job.

The post-office assault preceded the Scales snatch by forty-three days.

Koury and Meyers worked fresh murders. They stopped checking sex-assault sheets.

3/8/73:

7:15 P.M. Baldwin Park Post Office. 207/286/288A PC—Kidnapping, Sodomy, Oral Copulation.

A white youth accosts a 17-year-old white female. He flashes a knife and forces her to drive to a nearby park.

The area is secluded. The victim parks in the lot. The suspect forces her into the backseat and orders her to disrobe. She complies. The suspect gets in the backseat. He pulls down his pants and fondles the victim's genitalia.

He gets an erection. He partially penetrates the victim's anus. He forces her to orally copulate him. He masturbates and ejaculates on the victim's chest. He tells her to get dressed. She complies. He marches her into the park and orders her to take off her clothes. She complies. The suspect grabs her clothes and flees on foot.

3/13/73:

9:35 P.M. Food King Market. 14103 Ramona, Baldwin Park. 242 PC—Battery.

A white youth accosts a 25-year-old white female. He opens the passenger door of her car. He grabs the victim and tears her jacket. The victim pulls free. She runs from the car. The suspect flees on foot.

3/14/73:

7:15 P.M. Lucky Market. 13940 Ramona, Baldwin Park. 207/220 PC—Kidnapping/Attempt Rape.

A white youth accosts a 29-year-old white female. He opens the driver's-side door of her car. He flashes a knife and says, "Slide over." The victim complies. The suspect takes the wheel and drives out of the parking lot. The victim asks him to state his intentions. The suspect says, "I'm going to make love to you."

The suspect drives southeast. He stops at a red light. The victim tries to jump out. The suspect accelerates. The victim

grabs the car keys. The suspect says, "Put them back or I'll kill you." The victim does not comply.

The car decelerates. The victim jumps out. The suspect jumps out. A struggle ensues. The victim grabs the suspect's knife and stabs him in the arm. The suspect flees on foot. The victim retrieves her car and drives to the Baldwin Park PD.

She reports the incident. Officer Henry Dock takes notes. She describes her assailant and the knife wound she inflicted. She's cut and scratched. Officer Dock drives her to Hartland Hospital. A doctor treats her cuts and scratches.

Sergeant J. Morehead calls Officer Dock at Hartland. He says a knife-wound patient is there now. He matches the victim's description of her assailant.

The victim observes the knife-wound patient surreptitiously. She ID's him 100%.

He's 17. He's blond and skinny and acne afflicted. He goes to high school and lives with his parents.

Officer Dock arrests the kid. A doctor treats his wound. Officer Dock transports the kid to the Baldwin Park Station. A detective interviews him. The kid is released to his parents. A 207/220 charge pends.

The Baldwin Park PD contacts Sheriff's Homicide. They lay out the kid and his MO. They make him as a suspect in one rape and three attempt-rape priors. Koury and Meyers are working fresh cases. They don't key on the kid for the Scales job.

4/23/73:

1:30 P.M. Durfee Drugs, El Monte. 220 PC—Assault with Intent to Commit Rape.

A white youth accosts an 18-year-old white female. The victim is sitting in her car. The driver's-side door is open.

The suspect appears at the door. He grabs the wheel and tells the victim to move over. The victim says no. The suspect restates his demand. The victim screams. The

suspect puts one hand on her mouth and sticks one hand down the front of her bra. The victim digs in and pushes her weight against him. The suspect flees on foot.

4/25/73:

The kid is arrested and charged with the 4/23 assault. He turned 18 on 4/12. He's a culpable adult now.

Four prior victims ID him. He's held at the Temple City Sheriff's Station. A station detective contacts Koury and Meyers. They interview the kid about the Scales job.

The kid says he doesn't recall the rape and attempt rapes. He says he suffers blackouts. He snapped out of blackouts twice and found himself messing with women. He has problems with women. He's been seeing a shrink since his first bust on 3/14. He could have done things in blackouts.

The kid consents to a polygraph test. Sergeant Ben Lubon administers it.

The kid denies killing Betty Jean Scales. He denies the rape and attempt rapes that the victims made him for. He says he was never at Durfee Drugs. Sergeant Lubon calls the test "inconclusive."

6/12/73:

Koury and Meyers reinterview the kid. He denies killing Betty Jean Scales. He says he was never at Durfee Drugs. Koury and Meyers press on the Scales job. The kid invokes his right to silence.

The kid remained in custody. He was convicted for his 3/14 attempt rape. His sentence: an open-ended stretch of Youth Authority time.

The Scales file was marked UNSOLVED. It was the second unsolved homicide in El Monte history. It followed another body dump by fifteen-plus years.

The victim was named Geneva Hilliker Ellroy. She was my mother.

It was 6/22/58. The killer dumped my mother on a road next to Arroyo High School. He may have killed her there. He may have killed her at another location. It went down early Sunday morning. The road was a local tryst spot. It met established standards for short-term concealment. Street access was good. Shrubs cut down the street view.

The killer raped her or had consensual sex with her. He strangled her with a cotton cord and her right nylon stocking. He dumped her in an ivy patch. She was fully clothed and disheveled.

SHERIFF'S HOMICIDE FILE #Z-483-362 (EL MONTE PD ASSISTING)

The cops traced her Saturday night.

She left the house at 8:00 P.M. She was alone. She drove to the Five Points strip in El Monte. She checked out Mama Mia's Pizza—"like she was looking for someone." She was seen at the Manger Bar. She was alone.

10:30 P.M. Saturday, 6/21/58:

My mother and a swarthy white man dine at Stan's Drive-In. They sit in his car—a '55 or '56 Olds.

11:15 P.M., 6/21/58:

My mother and the Swarthy Man hit the Desert Inn—a nightclub that caters to Okies and middle-aged drunks. A blonde woman walks in with them. The three drink, dance, and talk. They leave at midnight.

2:30 A.M. Sunday, 6/22/58:

My mother and the Swarthy Man hit Stan's Drive-In again. They're alone. They sit in his car. The Swarthy Man has coffee. My mother has a late snack.

10:10 A.M., 6/22/58:

Pedestrians spot my mother's body.

It's tight and local.

The house is 1.5 miles from Five Points. The pizza joint and bar are just south. Stan's Drive-In sits at the hub. The

Desert Inn is seven blocks west. The dump site is 2.8 miles northwest.

My parents were divorced. I spent that weekend with my father. I didn't see my mother walk out. I didn't panic at her absence or fear that she'd never return. I was 10 years old. I didn't know the term "body dump." I did not endure a rain-prolonged deathwatch or view my mother's decomposed remains.

I was a cold little kid. I hated and lusted for my mother and went at her through postmortem surrogates. I buried her in haste and burned flames for other murdered women. My mother's death corrupted and emboldened my imagination. It liberated and constrained me concurrently. It mandated my mental curriculum. I majored in crime and minored in vivisected women. I grew up and wrote novels about the male world that sanctioned their deaths.

I ran from my mother. I put years and miles between us. I ran back to her in 1994. I was 46 years old. Fate intervened. It sparked a confrontation.

A friend called me. He said he was writing a piece on unsolved murders in the San Gabriel Valley. It would spotlight the Sheriff's Unsolved Unit. My friend would see my mother's file and know things that I didn't know.

The call announced an opportunity. I could see my mother's file.

My friend set me up on a hot blind date. I didn't know that I would take an epic fall for my mother.

I saw the file. I read the reports and saw my mother dead at Arroyo High School. It was shocking and revelatory. I knew that her death shaped my curiosity and gift for storytelling. It was long-standing knowledge. It was coldly reasoned and mock-objectified. I sensed the full weight of it now. I sensed that it carried a debt of recognition and homage. I sensed that I came out of her in a way that superseded all ties of shared blood. I sensed that I *was* her.

A Homicide detective showed me the file. His name was Bill Stoner. He was 53 years old and set to retire. He had thirty-two years on the Sheriff's. He broke the Cotton Club Case and the Mini-Manson Case and worked on the Night Stalker Task Force. He worked Homicide for fifteen years.

Stoner impressed me. I appraised him as he appraised me. I glimpsed a powerful and orderly intellect. I sensed that he balanced a vital compassion against strict levies of judgment. I sensed that he could teach me things.

Stoner retired from active duty. He remained on the Sheriff's reserve force and retained his full cop status.

I decided to reinvestigate my mother's homicide. I asked Stoner to help me. He agreed.

The investigation spanned fifteen months. I stayed in L.A. and worked with Stoner full-time.

We studied every paper scrap in the file. We contacted the surviving witnesses. We hypothetically reconstructed my mother's final movements 10,000 times. We installed a toll-free tip line and logged hundreds of worthless tips. We stalked the Swarthy Man extrapolatively.

Was he a salesman passing through El Monte? Did he book racetrack bets at the Desert Inn? Did the Blonde work with my mother or frequent the same cocktail bars?

We extrapolated. We targeted local lifers and retoured the late '50s. We combed the San Gabriel Valley. We hit El Monte, Baldwin Park, Irwindale, Duarte, Azusa, Temple City, Covina, West Covina, and Rosemead. We stalked my mother back to Chicago and rural Wisconsin. We found people who knew her sixty years ago.

We did not find the Blonde or the Swarthy Man. We heard the oral history of bumfuck L.A. County. People told us intimate things. I mimicked Stoner's inquisitor's stance and learned when to talk and when to listen. I was a voyeur/observer with a vindictive streak in deep camouflage. Cops liked me because I knew I wasn't one of

them and didn't want to be. They liked me because I loved and hated along their lines of rectitude.

Bill Stoner became my closest friend. Our commitment ran bilateral and exceeded the investigation. Our worldviews meshed and expanded to encompass two distinct visions. We discussed crime for hours running. Bill told cop stories. I described my petty-crime exploits and county-jail stints twenty years back. We laughed. We satirized macho absurdity and admitted our complicity in perpetuating it. Bill gave me things. He empiricized L.A. crime. He embellished it with great verve and let me place my mother in context.

We talked about her. We did not defer to her status as a murder victim or my mother. We bluntly discussed her alcoholism and bent for cheap men. We followed the evidentiary track of her life and charted the detours. We shared a genderwide and wholly idealized crush on women. We were indictable coconspirators in the court of murder-victim preference. Bill reveled in the luxury of a sustained investigation with a probable dead suspect and negative outcome. It let him live with the victim and explore her life and honor her at leisure.

The investigation faded out. The Swarthy Man became less relevant. We targeted a killer and amassed facts on his victim. I wanted to write a book and give my mother to the world. I wanted to take what I learned about her and portray my arc of recognition and love.

I wrote *My Dark Places* in seven months. I went at it with deliberate intention. I spilled the most sordid facts of my mother's life and did not cite mitigation. I did not want people to think that I loved her in spite of her unconsciousness and erratic and negligent acts. I wanted people to know that I loved her because of them—and that my debt of gratitude derived from the fact that she was precisely who she was—and that the specific components of

her ambiguously defined psyche and her sexual hold on me all contributed to shape and save my life.

My Dark Places was a best-seller and a critical success. I book-toured in America and Europe. Bill Stoner joined me in France and L.A. We took camera crews to El Monte. We showed them Arroyo High and the spots where the Desert Inn and Stan's Drive-In stood. I summarized my mother's story 6,000 times. I reduced it to comprehensible sound bites. I gave her to the world in a spirit of passion and joy.

The book sparked a string of worthless tips. Bill checked them out. I went home to Kansas City and researched my next novel.

My mother stayed with me. She stormed my heart at unpredictable times. I welcomed her insistent presence.

I couldn't give *My Dark Places* up. I didn't want to give it up. I toured for the paperback edition. I gave more readings and more interviews and took my mother public again. I told her story with undiminished passion. The repetition did not wear me down. I went home wanting more. I went home wanting something new and altogether familiar.

I missed Bill.

I missed the law-enforcement world and my observer role.

I missed El Monte.

I lived there for four months in 1958. I left the day my mother died. I stayed away for thirty-six years.

It was hot, smoggy, and dusty. Rednecks and wetbacks reigned. My father called it "Shitsville, U.S.A."

My mother died and scared me west to my father and Central L.A. Her ghost kept me out and pulled me back.

Arroyo High was still Arroyo High. My old house was still standing. Stan's Drive-In was gone. The Desert Inn was Valenzuela's Restaurant.

I reembraced my mother in the town that killed her. El Monte was our prime communion zone. My first visits scared me. Sustained contact wiped the fear out. Bill and I made friends with the cops and the man who owned my old