

Praise for *Monster*:

“The story of one man’s painful spiritual journey from violence toward transcendence . . . A book that sheds harsh new light on the violence that erupted . . . after the Rodney G. King verdict . . . The volume attests not only to Shakur’s journalistic eye for observation, but also to his novelistic skills as a storyteller, an ear for street language that is as perfectly pitched as Richard Price’s, a feeling for character and status potentially as rich as Tom Wolfe’s. This is a startling and galvanic book.”

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“A first-person chronicle that exquisitely documents urban warfare in the streets of Los Angeles since 1975, providing ample glimpses of its reach into the claustrophobic prison system . . . Scott-Shakur pens this vicious treatise with relentless sincerity riddled occasionally by humorous anecdotes. . . . Scott-Shakur proves an impressively capable storyteller.”

—Wanda Coleman, *Los Angeles Times Book Review*

“Is Shakur compelling? Yes . . . he voices the rage and desperation among bangers.”

—Roger Chesley, *Detroit News and Free Press*

“*Monster* is an incredible, often brutal look at one man’s rise from child to “ghetto star” killer to revolutionary black activist. . . . Shakur has an excellent dry wit and a fast-paced style. . . . The importance of *Monster* is that it explains the gang lifestyle; it shows us how much more there is to learn before we can begin to solve the problem.”

—Jeff Charles, *Houston Chronicle*

“This remarkably straight-ahead account of life as a member of an L.A. street gang lets those of us on the other side feel and know a bit of what street life is like.”

—Scott Walker, *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis)

“The real force of the book comes from the angry electrifyingly violent, streetwise credibility that Scott gives his story. While it is no doubt depressing, it demonstrates the stern measures that must be taken to control our cities, and the monsters who terrorize them. . . . Anyone who wants to know why our urban areas are dangerous combat zones should read these stunning, sinister memoirs of Kody “Monster” Scott.”

—Louis B. Cei, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*

“[An] electrifying life story: an angry, stunningly violent odyssey through gang warfare and prison to redemption.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“[*Monster*] is a compelling and frightening, bizarre, yet insightful insider’s look at the society that spawned gangs and the gang’s violent retaliation within it. If that was [Sanyika Shakur’s] goal with *Monster*, to reveal the vagaries of gang-banging and its deadly consequences, he clearly succeeds.”

—Tony Cox, *Quarterly Black Review of Books*

“With an eye for detail and a straightforward writing style, Shakur depicts a myriad of brutal scenes with cool clarity.”

—Steve O’Neil, *Albuquerque Journal*

“[Shakur] makes us see what we do not want to see through writing that is fresh, forceful and poetic.”

—June Arney, *Virginian Pilot and Ledger Star*

“The book succeeds as the story of a man struggling to make sense of a hostile environment, and Shakur must be credited for progressing from gang-banger to messenger.”

—Paul Tullis, *Might Magazine*

MONSTER

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN L.A. GANG MEMBER

SANYIKA SHAKUR, AKA MONSTER KODY SCOTT



GROVE PRESS
New York

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To my dearest mother, Birdie M. Scott, who had the courage to push me out in a world of which we control so little.

To my children, Keonda, Justin, and Sanyika, who have been an endless light at the end of my tunnels, and my indomitable wife, Tamu Naima Shakur, for patiently waiting for my change.

WE CARRY ON

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PREFACE

Helicopters hover heavily above, often no higher than the tree-tops that dot the battlefield. Staccato vibrations of automatic gunfire crack throughout the night, drowned out only by explosions and sirens. People hustle quickly past, in a dangerous attempt to get anywhere the fighting happens to be heaviest. There is troop movement throughout the city, and in some areas the fighting is intense. The soldiers are engaged in a “civil war.” A war without terms. A war fought by any means necessary, with anything at their disposal. This conflict has lasted nine years longer than Vietnam. Though the setting is not jungle per se, its atmosphere is as dangerous and mysterious as any jungle in the world.

Neither side receives funding from any government, nor does either side claim any allegiance to any particular religion or socioeconomic system of government. There are no representatives from either faction in the United Nations, nor does either side recognize the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Recruitment, or conscription, begins at eleven years of age.

Squads of five usually make raids into neighboring territories for preemptive strikes or retaliatory hits on enemies and targets useful to the opposition. Although both armies are predominantly made up of males, there are many females involved in the fighting. These infrastructures were built initially for robberies and extortions. Today, however, they are maintained by proceeds from major narcotics dealing and distribution throughout America. Each army has a distinct territory—the boundaries of some very large areas are broken by enemy cluster camps. Each army has a flag, to which total allegiance is pledged. Each army has its own language, customs, and philosophy, and each has its own GNP.

The war has been raging on for twenty-two years. The death toll is in the thousands—wounded, uncountable, missing-in-action unthinkable. No one is keeping a tally. No one has noticed, except for those recently involved in the fighting and those indirectly drawn in by geographical location, economic status, or family association.

Other than this, the war has been kept from the world, hidden like an ugly scar across the belly of an otherwise beautiful woman. Under the guise of being a showpiece for the world where prosperity is as easily found as water in a stream, America, for all her ostensible beauty, has an ugly scar across her belly that she has tried repeatedly to suppress and keep hidden from curious onlookers. More than a few times she has almost been exposed, and this ugliness brought to light, but always another garment would quickly be thrown over the rough spot and all the turmoil and ugliness again blanketed. But not this time.

On April 29, 1992, the world witnessed the eruption of South Central Los Angeles, the concrete jungle—battlefield of the Crips and Bloods. The scar of over twenty years that had been tucked out of sight and passed off as “just another ghetto problem” burst its suture and spewed blood all across the stomach of America. People watched in amazement as “gang members,” soldiers of the Crip army, pelted cars with rocks, sticks, and bottles, eventually pulling civilians from their vehicles and beating them. This was hours after they had routed a contingent of LAPD officers. Troop movement escalated and Los Angeles was set ablaze. All this began on Florence and Normandie in South Central, the late Third World battlefield.

I have lived in South Central Los Angeles all my life. I grew up on Florence and Normandie. That is part of my territory. I was recruited into the Crips at the ripe old age of eleven. Today I am twenty-nine years old. I am a gang expert—period. There are no other gang experts except participants. Our lives, mores, customs, and philosophies remain as mysterious and untouched as those of any “uncivilized” tribe in Afrika. I have come full circle in my twenty-nine years on this planet, sixteen o

those with the Crips. I have pushed people violently out of this existence and have fathered three children. I have felt completely free and have sat in total solitary confinement in San Quentin state prison. I have shot numerous people and have been shot seven times myself. I have been in gunfights in South Central and knife fights in Folsom state prison. Today, I languish at the bottom of one of the strictest maximum-security state prisons in this country.

I propose to take my reader through the life and times of my own chilling involvement as a gang member with the Crips. I propose to open my mind as wide as possible to allow my readers the first ever glimpse at South Central from my side of the gun, street, fence, and wall. From my initial attraction and recruitment to my first shooting and my rise to Ghetto Star (ghetto celebrity) status, right up to the South Central rebellion and the truce between the warring factions—the Crips and Bloods. Although no longer aligned with gang or criminal activity, I still draw a great deal of support from this quarter.

Come with me then, if you will, down a side street lined with stolen cars and youngsters armed with shotguns and .38 revolvers, lying in wait for the enemy, all members of a small gang. Then return with me five years later as the street is lined with luxury cars, dope dealers, and troops with AK-47 assault weapons, the gang now an army.

Let me tell you of funerals that have been overrun by enemy forces and the body stolen and “killed again” for reasons of psychological warfare. Think not that this war is some passing phase to be ironed out with a truce in five days—impossible! Sophistication has not, by any means, passed the gangs of Los Angeles. Surveillance, communication, and technology have now found their way into the military buildup of these two army factions.

It is not for glory that I write this. It is out of desperation for the survival of the youths and civilians who are directly and indirectly involved in the fighting. I will attempt to draw serious analytical conclusions designed to bring about a better, more in-depth understanding of this malady, so as to help reach workable solutions for all concerned. As with my life, I propose to bring the reader full circle to show the reality of a city gone mad in an attempt to rank as the nation’s murder capital longer than the District of Columbia and more consistently than Detroit.

Look then, if you dare, at South Central through the eyes of one of its most notorious Ghetto Stars and the architect of its most ghastly gang army—the Crips.

INITIATION

June 15, 1975. I proudly strolled across the waxed hardwood stage of the auditorium at the Fifty-fourth Street elementary school under the beaming stares of my mother, aunt, and Uncle Clarence. Taking my assigned place next to Joe Johnson, as we had rehearsed for a week, I felt very different, older, more “attached” than any of my fellow classmates. This feeling made me stand more erect, made me seem more important than any of my peers on stage—even Joe Johnson, who was the “king of the school.”

Looking back now it’s quite amusing to remember how proud I was and how superior I felt next to Joe Johnson. I first sensed my radical departure from childhood when I was suspended a month before graduation, driven home by Mr. Smotherman, the principal, and not allowed to go on the grad-class outing for flashing a gang sign on the school panorama picture.

Mr. Smotherman was appalled and accused me of destroying a perfectly good picture, not to mention that I was “starting to show signs of moral decay.” Actually, half of the things Mr. Smotherman told me I didn’t catch, because I wasn’t listening, and besides, my mind had been made up weeks prior to my having gotten caught flashing the sign on the panorama picture. How I expected to get away with flashing on a photograph is beyond me! But, too, it points up my serious intent even then. For I was completely sold on becoming a gang member.

As our graduation activities bore on, my disinterest and annoyance at its silliness escalated. I was eager to get home to the “hood” and to meet my “moral obligation” to my new set of friends, who made Joe Johnson look weak. After the seemingly year-long graduation my mom, aunt, and Uncle Clarence congratulated me with lunch at Bob’s Big Boy. I was the second youngest in a family of six. Everyone’s name began with a K: my brothers were Kevin, Kerwin, and Kershaun—the youngest; Ki and Kendis were my sisters. My father and I never got along and I couldn’t overstand why he mistreated me. While returning home I sat transfixed to the side window, looking out into the streets but not seeing anything in particular, just wishing my Uncle Clarence would drive faster. Tonight was to be my initiation night, and I didn’t want to be late or miss out on any activities that might occur during my first night “on duty.” Bending the corner onto our block in my uncle’s Monte Carlo, I sunned down in the back seat to avoid being seen in my white knit suit and tie. Peeking to make sure the coast was clear, I bolted past Moms into the house, down the hall, and into my room for a quick change.

“What’s your damn problem, boy?” bellowed Moms from the hallway. “I know you don’t think you’re going out anywhere until you have cleaned up that funky room, taken out this trash and . . .”

I never heard the rest. I was out the window and in the wind—steaming toward my destiny and the only thing in this life that has ever held my attention for any serious length of time—the streets.

Stopping once I’d gotten around the block, to collect my coolness, I met up with Tray Ball, who had accepted my membership and agreed to sponsor me in.

“What’s up, cuz?” Tray Ball extends his very dark, muscular, veined hand.

“Ain’t nothin’,” I respond, trying to hide my utter admiration for this cat who is quickly becoming a Ghetto Star. A Ghetto Star is a neighborhood celebrity known for gangbanging, drug dealing, and so on.

“So, what’s up for tonight, am I still on or what?”

“Yeah, you on.”

As we walked to “the shack” in silence, I took full advantage of the stares we were getting from onlookers who couldn’t seem to make the connection between me and Tray Ball, the neighborhood hoodlum. I took their looks as stares of recognition and respect.

At the shack, which was actually a backhouse behind Tray Ball’s house, I met Huckabuck, who was dark, athletic, very physical, and an awesome fighter. He came to California from New York—accent included. For the most part he was quiet. Leprechaun, who we called “Lep,” was there. I had known him prior to this, as he went to school with my older brother. Lep had a missing front tooth and a slight build. Fiercely loyal to Tray Ball, Lep stood to be second in command. Then there was Fly, who dressed cool and with an air of style. Light-complexioned and handsome, he was a ladies’ man, not necessarily vicious, but was gaining a reputation by the company he kept. Next was G.C., who stood for Gangster Cool. G.C. was possibly the most well-off member present, meaning he “had things.” Things our parents could not afford to give us. He gangbanged in Stacy Adams shoes.

“What’s your name, homeboy?” Huckabuck asked from across the room, through a cloud of marijuana smoke.

“Kody, my name is Kody.”

“Kody? There’s already somebody name Kody from the Nineties.”

I already knew this from hearing his name. “Yeah, but my *real* name is Kody, my mother named me that.”

Everyone looked at me hard and I squirmed under their stares—but I held my ground. To flinch now would possibly mean expulsion.

“What?” Huck said with disbelief. “Your mother named you Kody?”

“Yeah, no shit,” I replied.

“Righteous, fuck it, then we’ll back you with it. But you gotta put work in”—“put in work” means military mission—“to hold it ’cause that’s a helluva name.”

Fly piped up from his relaxed posture in an armchair. “I’m gonna put some work in tonight for the set.”

“We know,” Lep replied, “we know.”

G.C., who was dressed like a gas-station attendant in blue khakis with a matching shirt, and I started out to steal a car. All eyes were on me tonight, but I felt no nervousness, and there was no hesitation in any of my actions. This was my “rite of passage” to manhood, and I took each order as seriously as any Afrikan would in any initiation ritual from childhood to manhood.

G.C. was the “expert” car thief among the set. “Gone in Sixty Seconds” could have very well been patterned after him. He had learned his technique from Marilyn, our older homegirl who always kept at least two stolen cars on hand. Tonight we were out to get an ordinary car, possibly a ’65 Mustang or a ’68 Cougar—these, I learned, could be hot-wired from the engine with as little as a clothes hanger touched on the alternator and then the battery. The only drawbacks here were that the gas gauge, radio, and horn would not work and the car would only run until the alternator burned out.

Nevertheless, we found a Mustang—blue and very sturdy. G.C. worked to get the hood up and I kept point with a .38 revolver. I was instructed to fire on any light in the house and anyone attempting to stop us from getting this car. I paced in a tight to-and-fro motion, watching closely for any sign of movement from either the house, the yard, or the shrubbery flanking the house. I was the perfect sentry, for had any movement occurred or any light flashed on, I would have emptied six rounds into the area, if not the person. Actually, I had only fired a real gun once, and that was into the air.

Under the cloak of darkness I heard G.C grunt once and then lift the hood. It took him longer to unlatch the hood than to start the car. The engine turned once, then twice, and finally it caught and roared to life.

“It’s on,” G.C. said, with as much pride as any brand-new father looking for the first time at his newborn child. We slapped hands in a gesture of success and jumped in. Pulling out of the driveway I noticed a light turn on in what I believed to be the kitchen. I reached for the door handle with every intent of shooting into the house, but G.C. grabbed my arm and said, “Don’t sweat it, we got the car now.”

On the way back to the shack, I practiced my “mad dog” stares on the occupants of the cars beside us at stoplights. I guess I wasn’t too convincing, because on more than a few occasions I was laughed at, and I also got a couple of smiles in return. This was definitely an area to be worked on.

At the shack we smoked pot and drank beer and geared up for the mission—which still had not been disclosed to me. But I was confident in my ability to pull it off. I have never, ever felt as secure as I did then in the presence of these cats who were growing fonder of me, it seemed, with each successive level of drunkenness they reached.

“Cuz, you gonna be down, watch,” Lep pronounced, as if telling a son in law school he would be a great lawyer. He stood over me and continued. “I remember your li’l ass used to ride dirt bikes and skateboards, actin’ crazy an’ shit. Now you want to be a gangster, huh? You wanna hang with real muthafuckas and tear shit up, huh?”

His tone was probing, but approving. He was talking with heated passion and the power of a general-father.

“Stand up, get your li’l ass up. How old is you now anyway?”

“Eleven, but I’ll be twelve in November.” Damn, I’d never thought about being too young.

At this time I stood up in front of Lep and never saw the blow to my head come from Huck. Bam! And I was on all fours, struggling for equilibrium. Kicked in the stomach, I was on my back counting stars in the blackness. Grabbed by the collar, I was made to stand again. A solid blow to my chest exploded pain in bold red letters on the blank screen that had now become my mind. Bam! Another, then another. Blows rained on me from every direction. I felt like a pinball. I knew now that if I went down again, I’d be kicked. And from the way that last kick felt I was almost certain that G.C had kicked me with his pointed Stacy Adams.

Up until this point not a word had been spoken. I had heard about being “courted in” (“courted in” means to be accepted through a barrage of tests, usually physical, though this can include shooting people) or “jumped in,” but somehow in my still-childish mind I had envisioned it to be a noble gathering, paperwork and arguments about my worth and my ability in regard to valor. In the heat of desperation I struck out, hitting Fly full in the chest, knocking him back. Then I just started swinging with no style or finesse, just anger and the instinct to survive.

Of course, this did little to help my physical situation, but it showed the others that I had a will to live. And this in turn reflected my ability to represent the set in hand-to-hand combat. The blows stopped abruptly and the sound of breathing filled the air. My ear was bleeding, and my neck and face were deep red, but I was still standing. When I think about it now, I realize that it wasn’t necessarily my strength that kept me on my feet, but the ways in which I was hit. Before I could sag or slump I was hit and lifted back up to standing.

Tray Ball came in and immediately recognized what had taken place. Looking hard at me, then at the others, he said, “It’s time to handle this shit, they out there.”

In a flash Lep was under the couch retrieving weapons—guns I never knew were there. Two 12-gauge shotguns, both sawed off—one a pump-action, the other a single-shot; a .410 shotgun, also a single-shot; and a .44 magnum that had no trigger guard and broke open to load. G.C was now in possession of the .38 I had held earlier.

“Give Kody the pump.” Tray Ball’s voice echoed over the clanging of steel chambers opening and closing, cylinders turning, and the low hum of music in the background. “Check this out.” Tray Ball spoke with the calm of a football coach. “Kody, you got eight shots, you don’t come back to the car unless they all are gone.”

“Righteous,” I said, eager to show my worth.

“These fools have been hangin’ out for four days now. Hittin’ people up”—“hittin’ people up” means asking where they are from, i.e., which gang are they down with—“flaggin’ and disrespectin’ every Crip in the world.”

I sat straight-backed and hung on every word Tray Ball said.

“Tonight we gonna rock they world.”

Hand slaps were passed around the room and then Lep spoke up.

“If anybody get caught for this, ride the beef, ’cause ain’t no snitchin’ here.”

Head nods and looks of firmness were exchanged, and then the moment of truth.

We piled into the Mustang, Tray Ball driving—and without a gun. Lep sat next to Tray Ball with the old, ugly .44. Huck, directly behind Lep, held the .410 between his legs. Fly, next to him, had the sawed-off single-shot 12 gauge. I sat next to him with the pump, and G.C was on my left with his .38. In silence we drove block after block, north into enemy territory.

“There they go!” Lep said, spotting the gathering of about fifteen people. “Damn, they deep too, look at them fools!”

I looked at my enemy and thought, “Tonight is the night and I’ll never stop until I’ve killed them all.”

After driving down another block, we stopped and got out. Each checking his weapon (mine being the most complicated), we started out on foot. To rid the world of Bloods, Brims in particular, stealthily we crept up to where the gathering had assembled to promote their set’s ideology. Tray Ball sat idle in the car and was to meet us halfway after we had worked over the enemy. Hanging close to buildings, houses, and bushes, we made our way, one after the other, to within spitting distance of the Bloods. Our strategy was to just jump out and shoot, but on the way Lep made the point that the single-shots should go first. Then I would follow suit with eight shots, Lep with five shots in the .44, and G.C. with six in the .38.

Huck and Fly stepped from the shadows simultaneously and were never noticed until it was too late. Boom! Boom! Heavy bodies hitting the ground, confusion, yells of dismay, running, and then the second wave of gunfire. By my sixth shot I had advanced past the first fallen bodies and into the street in pursuit of those who had sought refuge behind cars and trees. Forgetting everything, I completely threw myself into battle.

A Blood who had seemingly gotten away tried to make one last dash from the safe area of a car to think, a porch. I remember raising my weapon and him looking back—for a split second it was as if we communicated on another level and I overstood who he was—then I pulled the trigger and laid him down. With one shot left I jogged back to the initial site of contact. Knowing fully that I had explicit orders not to return with any rounds in my weapon, I turned and fired on the house before which they

had originally stood. Not twenty paces later, Tray Ball sped to a stop and we all piled in, frightfully amped from the climax of battle.

Back in the shack we smoked more pot and drank more beer. I was the center of attention for my acts of aggression.

“Man, did you see this little muthafucka out there?” Fly said to Huck with an air of disbelief.

“Yeah, I saw him, I knew he was gonna be down, I knew it and—”

“Shut up, man, just shut the fuck up, ’cause he can still tell on all of us.” Silence rang heavy in my ears, and I knew I had to respond to Lep’s reaction.

“If I get caught, I’ll ride the beef, I ain’t no snitch.”

Although my little statement lessened the tension, Lep’s words had a most sobering effect. Tray Ball announced my full membership and congratulations were given from all. It was the proudest moment in my life. Tray Ball told me to stay after the others had left. I milled around, still high from battle, and thought of nothing else but putting in work for the set.

“Check this out,” Tray Ball said. “You got potential, ’cause you eager to learn. Bangin’ ain’t no part-time thang, it’s full-time, it’s a career. It’s bein’ down when ain’t nobody else down with you. It’s gettin’ caught and not tellin’. Killin’ and not caring, and dyin’ without fear. It’s love for your set and hate for the enemy. You hear what I’m sayin’?”

“Yeah, yeah, I hear you,” I said. And I had heard him and never forgot nothing he said from that point on.

Also from that point on Tray Ball became my mentor, friend, confidant, and closest comrade. He allowed me acts of aggression that made my name soar with alarming effects.

* * *

The seriousness of what I had done that evening did not dawn on me until I was alone at home that night. My heart had slowed to its normal pace and the alcohol and pot had worn off. I was left then with just myself and the awesome flashes of light that lit up my mind to reveal bodies in abnormal positions and grotesque shapes, twisting and bending in arcs that defied bone structure. The actual impact was on my return back past the bodies of the first fallen, my first real look at bodies torn to shreds. It did little to me then, because it was all about survival. But as I lay wide awake in my bed, safe, alive, I felt guilty and ashamed of myself. Upon further contemplation, I felt that they were too easy to kill. Why had they been out there? I tried every conceivable alibi within the realm of reason to justify my actions. There was none. I slept very little that night.

I’ve never told anyone of these feelings before.

In the neighborhood, respect was forthcoming. In 1977, when I was thirteen, while robbing a man turned my head and was hit in the face. The man tried to run, but was tripped by Tray Ball, who then held him for me. I stomped him for twenty minutes before leaving him unconscious in an alley. Later that night, I learned that the man had lapsed into a coma and was disfigured from my stomping. The police told bystanders that the person responsible for this was a “monster.” The name stuck, and I took that as a moniker over my birth name.

As Monster, however, I had to consistently be more vicious and live up to the name. Tray Ball was there for me at every level, but Tray Ball was at least four years older than I. Still, we could relate. In

1978, Tray Ball was captured for knocking a guy out in front of the police, who were questioning him about being robbed. I was left with Fly, Lep, Huck, and G.C, who seemed to have lost their will to “get busy” when Tray Ball was locked up. So I went in search of a “road dog,” or best friend.

I had been seeing the name Crazy De written on walls for some time and had a pretty good idea who he was. While walking up the alley one day toward G.C.’s house, I ran into Crazy De. We formally introduced ourselves and I asked him if he wanted to kick it with us. Although he was already from the set, he kicked it with other people. A jovial cat of my age with happy eyes and a Hollywood smile, De became my road dog. He clicked right away with the others, too. I took him over to the “white apartments,” where we had everybody and their parents claiming or sympathizing with our set. He loved it!

From this point on, De and I were inseparable. The set was still relatively small, and everyone knew each other. (When speaking of small here, I mean approximately seventy-five to eighty people. That’s a small set. Today it’s not unusual for sets to be a thousand deep.) Though there were various sides and sections, we all met up at meetings in our park, though this usually occurred only when someone had been killed or some serious infraction had been committed. I continued to see and associate with G.C, Lep, and the others—but it wasn’t the same with Tray Ball missing. He was the glue that bonded us.

Besides this, I had escalated from little homie to homie, and was putting in much work and dropping many bodies. In fact, some shied away from me because I took things, they said, “too serious.” But Crazy De overstood me and my thirst for a reputation—the purpose of all gang members. For I had learned early that there were three stages of reputation to go through before the title of O.G—Original Gangster—would apply righteously:

1. You must build the reputation of your name, i.e., you as an individual;
2. You must build your name in association with your particular set, so that when your name is spoken your set is also spoken of in the same breath, for it is synonymous; and
3. You must establish yourself as a promoter of Crip or Blood, depending, of course, on which side of the color bar you live.

In 1978 I was fourteen, and still working on the first stage. But I had as much ambition, vitality, and ruthlessness to succeed as any corporate executive planning a hostile takeover—a merger was out of the question. Gangbanging in the seventies was totally different than what’s going on today. The gang community on both sides was relatively small, contained in certain areas, and sustained by the few who kept the faith in their belief. Although all gang members are in the military, all gang members are not combat soldiers. Those who stand out, and *all* fear and respect them. This is true up to this day.

By now, of course, I had acquired my own weapon—a blue steel .44 Bulldog. It was small and fit into my pocket. I kept it on me at all times.

One afternoon my little brother and a friend (both later would become fierce combat soldiers in their own right) were eating chili dogs at Art’s. Frank—my brother’s companion—left his chili dog wrapper on the outdoor table, and it blew to the ground. Eric, who had been hired by Art as not just a cook but a watchdog, was a hothead already and needed little provoking to act like a complete fool. I told my brother to pick up the paper. When my brother explained that it was not his paper, Eric became angry and collared my brother and ripped his shirt. Angry and confused, my little brother we

home and got my mother, older brother, and sister.

I was out on a ten-speed, patrolling the 'hood with, of course, my .44. Ironically, I was sitting on the corner of Florence and Normandie Avenue, across from Art's, when I saw my mother's car with everyone in it pull to a stop at the light. Here I was, waiting for some action, and it pulled right up—fate, I guess. My older brother signaled for me, so I followed them across the street to Art's. No one knew I was strapped. As I rode up my older brother was standing there arguing with Eric. Then my brother hit Eric in the face, and they began to fight. I immediately dismounted and rushed up on Eric's flank to get a hit in, but he was swift and struck me in the ear, knocking me back. All the while my mother was frantically shouting for us to stop, stop the fighting. Mad now, and insulted, I drew my weapon, aimed, and pulled the trigger. CLICK.

Damn, I remember thinking, *I only got three bullets*, and I didn't know where in the cylinder they were! The click stopped everything—and then everybody seemed to move at once. Eric ran toward the chili stand, my brother rushed to me. Before I could aim and fire, my brother and I were wrestling over the gun.

"Give me the gun, I'll shoot him!" my brother exclaimed.

"No, let me shoot him!" I shouted back.

In our battle for control, the gun was now pointing at my mother's chest.

CLICK.

My mother jumped, and momentarily I was paralyzed with fright. In this instant I let go of the gun and my brother turned and fired into the chili stand.

BOOM! The .44 sounded like a cannon.

CLICK: another empty chamber.

Eric had by now retrieved his shotgun and was on his way out after us. Seeing him coming, both my brother and I turned and ran. We had barely rounded the corner when the report from the shotgun echoed behind us. He chased us through several yards, firing and tearing up people's property. He fired a total of eight times, but we escaped unscathed—except for our pride. My mother, sister, and little brother also escaped unharmed, though in great fear for us, for they knew not our fate.

After meeting back at home, my mother wanted to send us all out to my uncle's house in West Covina. We protested and stayed. The next morning, however, while I'm standing at the bus stop waiting to go to school, Eric pulls up and mad dogs me. "What you lookin' at, punk?" he shouts from the car.

"You muthafucka!" I respond, though scared because he may have a gun and I couldn't get mine out the house, since after yesterday's episode Mom's was searching me. There were three young ladies standing there, as well, so my pride and integrity were also involved, not to mention my reputation. I had to stand my ground.

Eric leapt from the car, circled from the front, walked up, and hit me in the mouth—bam! I faltered and became indecisive. But in an instant I knew I needed an equalizer, because he lifted his shirt to reveal the butt of a pistol in his waistband. I turned and bolted. Running at top speed with tears streaming down my face, I made my way back home, went right in, got my gun, and trotted back to the bus stop. I was hoping the bus hadn't come, so that the three girls who saw me get hit could watch me kill him.

Art's chili dog stand has been on Florence and Normandie since the forties, and it was still in its original decor—open and primarily wood, with big windows facing onto Florence Avenue. The bus

stop was across Florence on Normandie. Turning the corner on Seventy-first at a steady trot, I was relieved to find the three girls still there, almost as if waiting for me. Passing them, I heard one say to another, "That boy is crazy!"

I was taking no chances this time; with six rounds ready I stood in the street in front of Art's on Florence Avenue. Commuter traffic was moderate, so I waited for the light to turn red. Once I saw that I could safely break back across Florence and then to a backyard, I opened fire on Art's. BOOM! BOOM! Loud baritone echoes cracked the morning stillness, as chunks of wood and shards of glass flew off of Art's with magical quickness. Cordite filled my nostrils and revenge filled my heart. BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM! Six shots I emptied into the tiny dwelling, hoping to have killed Eric, who had just opened up for business.

No such luck. I was captured the next day and given sixty days in juvenile hall, but actually only served nineteen due to overcrowding. Once out, my reputation was stronger than ever. Even Eric gave me my props, though grudgingly.

The very next week after my release for the shooting, De, myself, and two members of the Rollin' Sixties Crips (later the Sixties and my set—the Eight Trays—would become mortal enemies) were on our way to Rosecrans Skating Rink, which was where everybody who was somebody in the gang world went to further promote their name and set. Walking up Manchester Avenue westbound, we passed Pearl's Gym and Best Yet hair salon. Still within the established boundaries of my set, we came to a halt at the corner of Manchester and Gramercy Place, waiting for the light to change so we could trek on to Van Ness, where our bus was to depart. We heard two reports from what sounded like a .38. The sound came from the direction of Duke's hamburger stand, which stood on the southeast corner of Gramercy Place off of Manchester Avenue. Duke's had recently become contested territory, as the Inglewood Family Bloods had begun to frequent it regularly in hopes of establishing it as theirs. (Gangs tend to function as "states" in regard to taking or colonizing territory.)

We looked toward the sound and we saw Fly and Tracc breaking out of Duke's, running right at us across the street. Tracc had what appeared to be a big, long-barrel .38 revolver in his left hand. Without stopping, Trace exclaimed, "Y'all bail, we just busted on some Families!" They kept running right on past us.

We hadn't done nothing, so we kept on our way. Not a minute later, a white Camaro screeched out of Duke's parking lot. "There they go!" we heard an almost hysterical voice yell from the car. A second car, a huge orange Chrysler, came out of the parking lot, bearing down on the bumper of the Camaro—which was now heading directly for us. We scattered.

De and I darted into an adjacent alley behind Best Yet, and I don't know where Stone and Snoopy went. The chase was on. Hopping a fence in the alley, De and I hid ourselves in the dense shrubbery behind Pearl's Gym. The Camaro and the Chrysler roared up and down the alley several times as we lay in wait. The thoughts that ran through my head were hopes that the Blood who had been shot would die.

It's significant that there were no Crip-on-Crip wars raging in these times. The worst enemies were Crip and Blood sets. Today, of course, Crips are the number-one killer of Crips. In fact, Crips have killed more Crips in the last twelve years than the Bloods have killed in the entire twenty-two-year conflict. And, too, sets in the Crip and Blood communities have increased twenty-fold—so that there is literally a gang on every street. Also, there are the huge conglomerate sets spanning hundreds of city blocks at a time, extending themselves into other cities and counties. It's not at all unusual for one of these huge conglomerate sets to be policed by five separate divisions of both the LAPD and the

sheriff's department. (The East Coast Crips are one such set, spanning from First Street in downtown Los Angeles to 225th Street in Harbor City.)

After an hour or so we emerged from hiding and walked east in search of Snoopy and Stone.

“Man, them fools was mad!”

“Huh?” De spoke up. “If they would have caught us, Kody, we’d have been through.” De was very serious when I finally looked at him. “Why you didn’t bring the gat”—gat is a generic term for gun—“anyway?”

“’Cause of the metal detector at Rosecrans. Ever since the Families blew the door off they been really tight on security. Besides, all homies be there anyway.”

We found Snoopy and Stone standing on Western Avenue and Manchester. Well aware that the Families were now out in mass looking for revenge, we devised a new strategy for getting to the skating rink. Just then the orange Chrysler hit the corner of Eighty-fifth Street, packed with occupants from the Red side. We had two choices: run into the street and try to make it across Western and further into the interior of our ’hood and possible safety, or run into the surplus store behind us and hope they wouldn’t follow in view of such a big civilian crowd. We quickly chose the second option.

De broke first, with myself, Snoopy and Stone heavy on his heels. Looking back, I immediately realized that we had made a terrible decision, for the Bloods were bailing out of the huge Chrysler like beans from a bag and chasing us straight up into the store! I remember taking one last look back after I had jumped the turnstile, and I knew then that we were trapped.

The surplus kept a huge green trash can by the door that was full of axe handles of heavy oak; each Blood grabbed one as he entered. Alarmed and not knowing if this was a gang raid on his store, the manager locked the door once the last Blood had come in. I knew we’d be beaten to death.

Snoopy and Stone went one way and De and I went another. I followed De up some stairs that led to an attic supply room and further entrapment. Four Bloods followed us up, swearing to kill us for shooting their homeboy. One guy was shouting about the victim being his brother. Damn, how in the hell had we gotten into this?

Running up into the small attic area, I thought seriously about death for the first time in my life, and for the slightest second I wanted to turn and tell the Bloods, “Hey, all right, I quit. I’m only thirteen, can’t we talk?” Diplomacy was as foreign as Chinese to us all, but it’s a trip that when under pressure, clear thoughts seem to abound.

Stopping and crouching, temporarily having lost my tail among the rows and aisles of stocked clothing, I heard De trying to explain that it wasn’t us, that they had made a mistake. “Hold it, man, it wasn’t us,” I heard De say in a cracking tone of sincerity and terror.

“You a muthafuckin’ lie, we saw you Blood!”

Crack! “Ahh!” Crack! “All right, man, all—” Crack! “Ahh!”

Terrified, I crouched lower and closed my eyes, hoping they wouldn’t kill De, who was now on the ground and silent. But the beating continued. I felt completely helpless.

“Here go another one!” Crack! “Ahh!” Across the top of my head the heavy axe handle came down. Swoosh! A miss, and in an instant I was on my feet. Crack! “Ahh!” One to the back, as I tried to get past another in the semidarkness.

“Wait, wait!”

“Fuck that wait shit, fool, you didn’t wait when you shot Mike!” Crack! “Ohh.” Crack! “Ahh . . .” Blackness.

When I came to I was on my stomach, handcuffed. Next to me was De. Both of us were bloody and swollen. Craning my neck to the left, I saw Snoopy and Stone. They, too, looked whipped and soiled.

“Which one of you did the shootin’?” a police officer asked from somewhere behind me.

“Him, the one in the blue overalls and sweat jacket.”

That was me! “What?” I managed to say through fog and loose teeth. “Who, me?”

“Yeah, you, you little crab-ass punk!” (Crab is a disrespectful term used by Bloods against Crips—defacing the enemy.)

For the first time, I noticed her—a girl. Looking up, I brought her into focus. Never seen her in my life.

“You a lie, bitch—” I blurted out and was abruptly cut short by a police boot on the back of my neck.

“Shut up, asshole. Are you sure this is the shooter, ma’am?”

“Yes, yes I’m sure, officer. He was trying to talk to me and then found out who I was with and just pulled a gun and started shooting. I just—”

“Bitch, you lying, I don’t know you, I was—Uuugh!” I was kicked in the side by the police officer who had already smashed my face to the ground.

“One more word, dipshit, and you’ll get another ass whipping.”

I felt it best to remain silent. I was transported to the Seventy-seventh Street Division and booked for attempted murder.

Now I was hoping he wouldn’t die. I was the only one arrested. At the station, I was asked a series of questions, of which I answered none. I was taken to Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall to await court. I was no doubt facing a camp term now, worse than juvenile hall, for the attempted murder, which I hadn’t even had anything to do with. The strict code of the street held me, though, and I said not a word to anyone about who had really shot the Blood.

The Hall (juvenile hall) was another territory to conquer, just like South Central, but all the sets were now face-to-face, bunched together in units of fifty. I met Crips who I had heard about and others whose names I had seen spray-painted on walls. I fought against Bloods whose sets I had never heard of and, of course, against those who were our worst enemies.

I went to trial three months later. The gang turnout was surprising. Along with my family, at least fifteen of my home-boys came. All were in full gear (gear is gang clothes, colors and hats—actually uniforms). On the other side, the Bloods also came in force, in full gear. Tension ran thick through the courtroom as stares of hate were passed back and forth.

I was told after the first day that a shoving and shouting match had taken place in the hallway outside the courtroom. My homeboys had to serve as bodyguards for my family. On my next court date, I was released into the custody of my mother, pending trial proceedings. During my next scheduled court date, three gangs filled the court—the Crips, the Bloods, and the LAPD CRASH unit (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums).

The atmosphere was tight with rage that ran just below the surface, and this is where I began to grasp the meaning of “low-intensity warfare.” I couldn’t believe how personally the Bloods were taking this. After all, their homie was shot “legally,” that is, within the unspoken but generally known guidelines of gang warfare. He was fired on in a free-fire zone. In fact, this area, as I explained above, was contested. We had gotten numerous reports of Blood sightings. He just happened to be the first caught.

And now here they were, taking the war off the streets and into the courtroom, where neither of us had the experience to win. Blood after Blood testified to my shooting of their home-boy—all lying, of course. The final witness was the victim himself. He was thin and wearing cornrowed braids; his testimony would be the testimony to seal my fate. After the prosecution asked him to convey the events of that day and time, he was asked if he saw the person who had shot him in the courtroom. Silence. And the . . .

“No, he ain’t the one who shot me.”

“What?” The D.A. couldn’t believe his ears.

Murmurs filled the courtroom as his homies whispered their disbelief at his honesty. Snickers and taunts came from our side. I sat still and just looked at Mike, who stared back without a semblance of hate, but with a sort of remorse for having put me through this.

The judge’s gavel struck wood. “Case dismissed.”

I stood, still looking at Mike, who was dismounting the witness stand.

“Tell Trace,” Mike whispered as he passed me, “that I’ll see him at another time.”

I said nothing, turned, and fell into step with my crew.

That night I led an initiation party into Family ’hood and dropped two bodies. No one was captured.

My relationship with my mother soured continuously as I was drawn deeper and deeper into the streets and further away from home and school. My sixth-grade graduation was my first and last. Actually, it was the last time I ever seriously attended school—for academic purposes. My homeboys became my family—the older ones were father figures. Each time I shot someone, each time I put another gun on the set, each time I successfully recruited a combat soldier, I was congratulated by my older homeboys. (Every gang member is responsible for bringing guns into the gang. We used to break into neighbors’ homes and steal their weapons. Now, with the influx of narcotics and overseas connections, guns are bought by the crate.) When I went home I was cursed for not emptying the trash. Trash? Didn’t Mom know who I was? Apparently not.

De and I continued to campaign hard, but we couldn’t transcend that first stage of reputation. Today, it’s twice as hard to break through because there are so many competing factors: the Crip and Blood communities have grown to astronomical proportions since the seventies, the police have a vast array of laws and techniques to curtail the bangers’ growth, and, of course, there are narcotics—everyone wants to be rich and no one wants to go to war.

On February 14, 1979, when I was fifteen, I was captured for assault and auto theft. I took a car from a man by striking him over the head. Too drunk to drive, I hit every car on the block in my attempt to flee the area. The last and final car I struck was a Cadillac. Once I slammed into the rear of the Cadillac, the bumpers must have gotten caught, because the car I was in would not go into reverse. As I exited the vehicle I was surprised to find practically the whole block chasing me. Actually, it turned out to be just the owners of the cars I had hit. I’m certain the chase closely resembled a lynch mob in pursuit, because the chasers had sticks and baseball bats and were initially all running together in a tightly held group. But as I began to accelerate out of fear and youthful energy, their group dwindled to two.

Both men were quite intent on catching me. I continued to run, however, at top speed. Falling farther and farther behind, they cursed me and swore my death upon capture. I struggled on. Luckily, I had taken the vehicle not far from my home (I lived on Sixty-ninth Street and I had taken the car on

Sixty-sixth). Therefore, my run was not that far.

Rounding the corner onto my block I was elated to see that my pursuers were at least four houses behind me. I darted down the drive of our next-door neighbor and hopped the fence into our backyard. I then staggered heavily into the house and literally collapsed on my mother's bed. Pulling myself up I began to discard my clothing, putting on fresh pants, socks, and sneakers. I deliberately omitted a shirt, so as to look as at-home as possible, just in case.

Not ten minutes later, I heard the police helicopter hovering over my house. I felt good at least to know that my mother was, as usual, at work. Five minutes after I heard the first hum of the helicopter I heard voices coming from the front room. I quickly hid myself in my mother's closet, to no avail. I was violently pulled from the closet and promptly arrested. I later found out that it was a mentally ill cat name Theapolis who had snitched me off to my pursuers, who in turn summoned the police.

During the trial on assault and grand theft auto charges, my sister, Kendis, perjured herself to save me from a jail term, but was not convincing enough against thirteen witnesses who had originally given chase. I was subsequently convicted and sentenced to nine months in camp. (Camp is the third testing ground in a series of "tests" to register one's ability to "stand firm," the streets, of course, being the first and juvenile hall the second. With each successive level—the Hall, camp, Youth Authority, prison—comes longer, harder time. This, coupled with a greater danger of becoming a victim, pits one hard against the total warrior mentality of "Do or Die." Here, the slogan ends and reality sets in.)

Nine months later I was released from Camp Munz and dropped off in the initial stages of a war that would forever change the politics of Gripping and the internal gang relations in South Central. Although my camp term lent prestige to my name, it did little to help me break through to the desperately sought-after second level of recognition. Crazy De, I learned, was due out in December, so I just did "odd jobs"—wrote on walls, i.e., advertised; collected guns; and maintained visibility.

It was during my stay in camp that my younger brother chose to follow me into banging and ally himself with the Eight Trays. Seventy-nine was the year of the Li'l's, that is, the year of the third generation of Eight Tray gangsters. All those who were of the second resurrection—beginning in 1976 and ending in 1977—acquired little homies bearing their names. For example, there was Li'l Monster, Li'l Crazy De, Li'l Spike, etc. In a nine-month period, the set doubled.

Meanwhile, the war between us and the Rollin' Sixties was beginning to heat up. The first casualty was on their side. Tyrone, the brother of an O.G. Sixty, was gunned down during a routine fistfight by a new recruit calling himself Dog. The O.G. whose brother had been killed wanted us to produce the shooter before a full-scale war broke out. The shooter, who few of us knew, as he was new, immediately went into hiding. We thus could not produce him and our relationship with the Sixties soured dramatically.

Up until that point only one of our homies had been killed, and his death was attributed to the Inglewood Families. Threats of revenge grew loud, as did rumors of an imminent war. In the midst of these warnings, our homeboy Lucky was ambushed on his porch and shot six times in the face. Witnesses reported seeing "a man in a brown jogging suit flee the area immediately after shots rang out." The night Lucky was murdered, Mumpy, a member of the Sixties, was seen at Rosecrans Skating Rink in a brown jogging suit. It had been further noted that Mumpy had been heard telling Lucky that "since one of my homeboys died, one of yours gotta die." A fight had ensued and had subsequently been broken up by members of both sides.

After Lucky's death tension ran high in our 'hood. We wanted the shooters to fall under the weight of our wrath. A meeting of both sets was called by the O.G.s, in an all-out last effort to curtail a war,

which would no doubt have grave consequences. The most damaging thing that we all held in mind was that we all knew where one another stayed—not more than six months before we had been the best of friends. The meeting was a dismal failure. It erupted into an all-out gang fight reminiscent of the old gang “rumbles.” Diplomatic ties were thus broken, and war was ceremoniously declared. Another casualty quickly accrued to their side, as their homeboy Pimp was ambushed and killed. Several others were wounded.

At about that time, De was released. I relayed to him the drastic chain of events of recent times, and we both chose to give one hundred percent to the war effort. And perhaps, we concurred, this was the issue to carry us both over into the second realm of recognition on our climb to O.G. status.

In retaliation for Pimp’s death—which the Sixties without a doubt attributed to us—our homie Tit Tit was shot, and while he lay in the street, mortally wounded, the gunmen came back around the corner in a white van. Before we could retrieve Tit Tit, they ran his head over and continued on. The occupants in the van had also shot two other people before shooting and killing Tit Tit, though both were civilians. This was the second homie to die in a matter of months. Shit was getting major.

Although we had been engaged in a war with the Families, it had always, somehow, been contained to fistfights and flesh wounds, with the exception of Shannon—who, we contend to this day, died at the hands of the Families. This escalation was new and actually quite alarming, for Crips tend to display a vicious knack for violence against other Crips—as will be duly noted in following chapters. Seemingly every Crip set erupted in savage wars, one against the other, culminating into the Beiruttype atmosphere in South Central today.

The news-catching items of violence to date are a result of clashes between Crips and Crips and not, as the media suggests, “Red and Blue,” “Crip and Blood.” Once bodies began to drop, people who were less than serious about banging began to fall by the wayside. Excuses of having to “be home by dark” and to “go out of town” abounded. The set thus dwindled to, I would learn, fighting shape.

De and I held fast and “seized the time.” China, a very pretty but slightly plump homegirl, became my steady girl. She and I would often dress alike to further prompt our union.

China lent me her eight-track tape player. One afternoon, as De and I were walking with China’s radio, we drew fire from a passing car—no doubt Sixties. Unscathed but very angry, De and I climbed from the bushes.

“Check this out.” De spoke with barely controlled anger. “Kody, we gotta put a stop to these muthafuckas shootin’ at us and shit.”

Looking at me hard in search of some signs of overstanding and compliance, I said, “You right, homie, I’m wit’ it.”

“You serious?” De gave me a sinister smile. “All right then,” he continued, “let’s make a pact right now to never stop until we have killed all of our enemies. This means wherever we catch ’em, it’s on.”

“All right, I’m serious, De,” I said as I pledged my life to the Sixties’ total destruction, or mine—whichever came first.

With that, I spun and threw China’s radio high into the air as an all-out gesture of total abandonment. The radio seemed to tumble in slow motion, twisting and twirling as my gang life up until that time flashed in vivid episodes across my mental screen. From graduation to this—blam! The radio hit the ground, shattered into a hundred pieces, and the screen in my mind went blank.

There was De with his hand extended. I reached, grabbed, and shook it with vigor. From that point on the medium of exchange in my life has been gunfire.

BOYS TO MEN

Trying hard not to come across too thuggish in front of China's grandparents, I sat stiff-backed, pretending to be interested in what Ben, China's ostensibly aristocratic grandfather, who drove an RTD bus, was saying.

"You youngsters don't have any incentive, no drive. You are always looking for someone to put something in your hands."

China, sighing loudly, nudged my leg and shot me a stare of "I've heard this a million times." She was eager to get back outside. We had only come indoors to retrieve China's coat but had gotten caught in one of Dot—China's liberal grandmother—and Ben's discussions on youth. Now night had fallen.

China's well-kept house sat smack in the middle of the block on Eightieth Street, our newest possession in our latest recruitment drive. I would imagine that our aggressive conquering of territory in those days, and still today, resembled Hitler's sweep through Europe.

The apartment complex on the left end of the block off of Normandie Avenue became our base for this block. We have since referred to it as the "blue apartments." We had "lost" the "white apartments" on Sixty-fifth Street to Bloods while I was a prisoner in youth camp. The battle, I'm told, was fierce, but not worth the price. Although we suffered no fatalities, our wounded and MIA list grew steadily. Besides this, the Brims, whom the battle was with, had called in reinforcements from the Rollin' Twenties Bloods. The white apartments thus passed to the Reds and new ground was sought.

Eightieth Street was just one street out of many that fell under our jurisdiction. The mechanics involved in taking a street, or territory, is not unlike any attempt, I would assume, on behalf of early Euro-American settlers. Send in a scout, have him meet the "natives," test their hostility level, military capabilities, needs, likes, and dislikes. Once a military presence is established, in come the "citizens"—in this case, gang members. Those who are not persuaded by our lofty presence *will* be persuaded by our military might. All who are of fighting age become conscripts. The set expands, and so does our territory. Sometimes there is resistance, but most of the time our efforts are successful. China's younger brother was one of our first recruits from Eightieth. Recommended by China and sponsored by me, he became Li'l G.C.

"Listen now, Kody," Ben continued in a deep baritone, pronouncing every syllable of every word. "You have got to stop pussyfooting around with your life. We are quickly becoming a technological country, and computers are going to overtake manual labor. What that means is—"

A shot rang out, cutting Ben's monologue short. For an instant I thought he himself had been hit; I was belly down on the floor. Another shot resounded, this time a shotgun blast.

Jumping to my feet I headed to the front door, opened it, and ran out onto the porch. My heart was pumping, but my adrenaline was urging me on. Looking first to the right, toward the blue apartments and then to the left, in the direction of Halldale, I spotted a burgundy Cutlass creeping down the street with a shotgun barrel in the passenger's hand barely visible through the open window.

Jumping the Creeping Charlie plants on the porch, which grew in huge flower pots, I darted into the street. Pulling out my chrome .25 automatic, recently put on the set by a new recruit, I began firing at the car. The car sped away. I kept firing at its rear as it turned left on Normandie Avenue.

I turned and bolted toward Halldale to assess the damage of their ride-by. Once I reached that

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