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The Night Stalker

Chapter One

5 The downtown area around the Los Angeles Greyhound Bus Terminal is a very dangerous place
after dark. Colorful legions of thieves, muggers, fences, crackheads, junkies, alcoholics, and ten-
dollar whores prowl like hungry sharks around a bleeding man. Known as skid row, people here
often sleep in the filthy, vermin-infested streets where they dropped the night before. If the great,
10 grand City of Angels had an asshole, the downtown area around the terminal would undoubtedly
be it.

It was from this place that he came, nameless and nocturnal, as silent and deadly as cyanide gas.
He always wore black, with the brim of a black baseball cap pulled down low; even his socks and
shoes were black. Thus attired, he moved about in shadows, blending and becoming one with
15 them, rarely seen until it was too late.

At 8:30 on the evening of June 27, 1984, he copped two grams of cocaine from Roberto, a skinny
Colombian who sold pure rock from the little park with the benches and the palm trees just in
front of the terminal. It was a simple matter of saying, "Two grams" and shaking Roberto's hand,
20 and all of a sudden the coke was in his hand. Roberto shook hands with dozens of people a day
and was adept at passing the drug without being seen. It was like a magic trick.
Tonight, the man in black was driving a stolen dark-blue Toyota. However, no one paid particular
attention to what he was driving: that was his business and, for the most part, people who moved
through the underground empire of degradation and crime in downtown Los Angeles minded their
25 own business. It was a very easy place to get lost in. There were transient hotels all over that
rented rooms for eight to twelve dollars a night, no questions asked, no ID necessary. The
Huntington, Cecil, Rosslyn, Ford, and Frontier were some of the places he'd go and binge on
cocaine for several days straight, not eating or sleeping, answerable only to his addiction and the
hot winds of his psychosis.

30 But tonight all his money had gone for the cocaine and he'd have to make do out in the open. He
got into the car, drove a few blocks, and parked. He knew the mean, stinking, urine- stained
streets and alleys as intimately as the palms of his large-knuckled hands. He had prearranged
places where he'd go to get off without being disturbed. He got out of the car and walked to the
35 back of an abandoned building just off Pico, anxious and in a hurry to get the drug into his system.
He removed two of the four glistening rocks from a neatly folded piece of aluminum foil and put
them into a cut-down Pepsi can he carried in a little paper bag. He then spilled a tablespoon of
bottled water into the can and quickly the coke melted and became one with the liquid. Moving
his long, powerful fingers deftly, he took a syringe out of the bag and drew the cocaine-laden
40 water into it. He then tied a piece of cord around the sinewy bicep of his left arm and waited for
the basilic vein to swell.

It was a clear, hot summer night. He used light from a street lamp to see. Rats scurried about, not
happy about his presence. When the vein stood out like a thick purple worm, he untied the cord

45 and slowly slid in the needle, injecting the drug. The cocaine raced to his brain and limbs like a speeding train on its way to no good. He put the works and rocks back in the bag, stashed it, and hurried to the car- the drug heightening his senses, dilating his pupils. Sweating, he began to cruise downtown, driving up and down its foul, sweltering streets- thinking about a hooker, a specific kind of sex. But he had to have money for that. By trade he was a burglar, and he was good at his
50 chosen profession. He knew how to get into any kind of home, even one with an alarm system, though he avoided alarms and dogs when possible. He drove in widening circles around the terminal. While he cruised, he listened to heavy metal music- Judas Priest, AC/DC, Black Sabbath, Billy Idol. He found the frantic beats and often violent lyrics stimulating. To him there were hidden, important messages in the music he related to and made his own. He thought that Idol's "Eyes
55 without a Face"- about a murderer on a bus-very much reflected what he was about, for he often fantasized about killing people he saw on the bus as he was returning downtown after dropping off a hot car. He returned to the alley a third time, shot up the rest of the cocaine, and resumed his cruising. He saw a few street hustlers who made him slow down and wave, but none who made him want to stop.

60 Money! To get what he wanted he had to have money. As he drove and watched people walking on the sidewalks of Main, Broadway, and Spring, sitting in their cars waiting for red lights, he thought about violent sex and domination. The right time and place were essential for successful murder. He'd later reveal: To be a good killer you have to plan things out carefully You've got to be
65 prepared in every way when the moment comes to strike; you cannot hesitate. Under the influence of cocaine, time goes by quickly; he was beginning to come down. The euphoric rushes he'd been traveling with were leaving him, replaced by an edgy, nervous anxiety, which could only be relieved with more cocaine.

70 He got on the 10 Freeway and drove for a few exits, got off at Alhambra, and looked for a situation he could exploit. He couldn't find one, returned to the freeway, and drove over to Glassel Park- a small community inhabited by low-income working people. Its population was 42,000. He drove without directions or map, his dark eyes searching the night, looking for a place where he could get in, get what he wanted, and get out.

75 He parked on Chapman Street, which ran parallel to the gentle, peaceful rolling hills of Forest Lawn Memorial Park. He sat in the car a few minutes and collected himself, put on dark- colored gardening gloves, and made sure no one was watching him. When he was satisfied he was unobserved- he had a sixth sense about such things- he got out of the car and walked along the
80 dark green cemetery wall, staying in shadows, taking long, silent steps. Above, an ink-black sky was punctuated with glistening stars.

Light from the stars and street lamps put a kind of luminous frosting on the tombstones, all neatly lined up and well cared for. Gauze-thin, silky clouds scudded across the night, momentarily
85 blocking out the stars. In his mind he heard the howl of a wolf, imagined he was walking through thick fog. He stopped in front of a two-story pink apartment building, not too well cared for, fifty feet wide, a hundred fifty feet deep. It was a barracks-like structure with an alley on the right that ran to the back of the building. The apartments were off this alley, five on the upper level, five on the lower, connected by rusting outdoor metal stairs.

90 He walked to the yard, studying the doors and windows with the experienced eye of a seasoned
jeweler looking through a loupe. He quickly decided not to break into one of the rear apartments.
If things went wrong back there, he could be trapped. He started back toward Chapman and
stopped at apartment 2, the home of seventy-nine-year-old Jennie Vincow. Jennie had thinning
95 hair as white as salt, was 5'9", and weighed 190 pounds. She had two sons: Jack, who lived in
apartment 9, upstairs, and Manny, who resided in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn.

Jennie had been living in Brooklyn with Manny until November 11, 1981. Manny had some
"mental problems," Jack would later say, and he often fought with his mother. He had even struck
her on several occasions. Jack thought it best if he brought his mother out to sunny California,
100 where he could watch over her and get her what she needed. She had a very low electrolyte count
and was always tired; just the act of walking was strenuous for her.

On this night her window was open, but there was a screen covering it. He made sure he wasn't
being observed. A tall, bushy palm tree at the front of the building blocked any light from the
105 street. He had no idea who lived in apartment 2, but it didn't matter. He'd make it his, neutralize
whoever was inside and take what he wanted. He'd dominate; he'd control. He was certain that
Satan, archenemy of Christ, of all things good, was traveling with him, and that Satan would
protect him so long as he stayed evil in his heart and showed no mercy.

110 The gloves made getting the screen off difficult, and he had to remove one. He rarely took off his
gloves, but tonight he was wired and jammed with the coming down of the cocaine, and his motor
movements were off. Carefully he pried the screen loose, silently put it down inside the
apartment, and opened the window ever so slowly. He put his glove back on, grabbed the sill, and
hoisted himself up and into the apartment in two easy movements, catlike, as silent as the turning
115 of a page. Inside, he got down low and let his eyes adjust to the dark. It was, he could quickly
discern, a one-bedroom, and as soon as his eyes registered the poverty in which Jennie Vincow
lived, he knew he'd come to the wrong place. It made him angry. Furious. Anger was a very
difficult emotion for him to control. Staying low, on the balls of his feet, he walked toward the
bedroom and made out the form of Jennie Vincow, sleeping deeply under a brown-and-white
120 plaid blanket, her breathing slow and labored. When he was sure she was alone, he took out a
penlight and looked around the apartment. There was just about nothing worth stealing there,
except, of course, Jennie Vincow's soul ...

He spotted a suitcase at the foot of the bed and silently went for it, hoping there might be
125 something in it he could sell- turn into currency, cocaine and sex. He opened it and found only
wrinkled clothing. There was a dresser against the wall. Soundlessly he went through its drawers,
but again he found nothing of value- no jewelry, no hidden cash. He stared at the sleeping form of
Jennie Vincow, hate and anger welling up inside him, contorting his face into an animal-like snarl.
He took out a razor-sharp six-inch hunting knife, approached the bed, and stood there, his heart
130 now beating rapidly. He could feel hot blood pulsating at his temples and at the backs of his eyes.

Sexually excited by the prospect of what he was going to do, he raised the knife and plunged the
full length of the blade into Jennie Vincow's chest. She woke up screaming; he kept stabbing. She
tried to fight him off, but that was impossible: he slammed his hand over her mouth, raised her

135 chin, and stabbed, then slashed her throat from ear to ear, cutting so deeply he nearly severed her
head. Her body shook violently. She choked and gagged on her blood. The last image her dying
eyes registered was of him- standing over her, killing her. He pulled down the blanket and stabbed
her deeply in the chest three more times, sexually charged by the plunging of the blade, propelled
140 he'd just done - the blood, her gaping wounds, his omnipotent power - he excited himself for
nearly an hour, drinking glass after glass of water, the small, hot, humid room filling with the fetid
smell of blood, sweat and death.

145 Finished, he washed his hands in the bathroom sink and left the apartment as soundlessly as he'd
come, taking a small, portable radio. Quickly, though not so fast that he'd draw attention to
himself, he made his way back to the stolen car, got into it, and drove toward the corner.
It was now 5 A.M. and dawn was slowly filling a sad, tranquil sky. The horizon in the east was a
deep indigo above big, puffy clouds that were stitched with the fiery threads of the rising sun. It
150 was the time filmmakers call the "magic hour," when there is no glare in the air and color and
dimension are sharper and more defined. People were on their way to early-morning jobs.
Sparrows and finches chirped in trees that dotted the cemetery and lined the block.
He came to a stop sign on the corner of Weldon Avenue. He was going to run it, but something
made him slow down; something held him back. As he started out again, an LAPD black-and-white
155 came to a slow stop on the corner to his immediate right. His heart rolled over at the sight of the
cruiser. The officer watched him pull away just half a block from where Vincow had been
murdered. He had her blood all over his clothes and was in a stolen car with stolen property.
But Lucifer was with him, and he drove one way as the police cruiser took a left and moved in the
opposite direction.

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