

Nightsounds - by Raven

Pt I

The band's music was almost too loud - or at least the bass was. Rob and Joe had come to Lenny's place just to hear this new group but found that this "new" band was really just a rename of an old band. New name - but same old sound. How often can one listen to a bad version of "Rapper's Delight" anyhow - especially every gig? Plus, the seemingly mandatory five minute guitar solo in every song (behind the back or not) was beginning to wear thin. So the group - in hopes of generating some new fans - had renamed themselves "Thornbird". Still, it was the same thing just repackaged.

"Did ya hear about Harry and Dan?" asked Rob, watching Joe wince with each high note the singer/bass player tried to hit by growling it. Rob and Dan went to school together and Rob's wife Lori was good friends with Sally from way back.

"You mean the affair thing?" bounced back Joe, taking a sip of his Killian's and almost shuddering when the bass player hit the wrong vocal note again on a very white bread version of "Sex Machine". "Wasn't that a crock? I mean - man, your BEST friend and you're out with his wife doing the nasty! How can anyone do that???"

"I don't know" said Rob. "I guess that Sally is just crushed. I saw her down at the dealership a couple of days ago and she just looked like a ghost. I asked her about the car and all, but she just said everything's on hold right now. Something about attorneys, divorce, and all that other stuff. Ugh... I wouldn't want to be in either one of their shoes right now."

Joe just nodded again, his index finger swirling the glass top, his mind drifting off to other thoughts.

The band played on... with the bass player trying his best to do a version of "Put Your Lights On" that mercifully ended with another break. "Damn! Does he need some practice or WHAT?" asked Rob to no one in particular. Not seeing that Joe wasn't even listening. "Joe? Hey, Joe..."

"Uh - yeah, whatever" said Joe. "Hey, let's head back to the garage. I just thought of something I want to do." "Might as well" agreed Rob, "this is getting old." With that, they got up and left and headed back out of town to Joe's house.

Joe's garage was a mechanics dream. He had bought his house just a few months ago and before the boxes were unpacked, he began the work on getting the garage built. It was everything he had always wanted in size (40 x 30), and it had a roomy work area, a lift, parts washers, bulk oil storage, floor drains, hot and cold water, a half bath. Yep, Joe did it right.

Rob loved to visit Joe's garage and hang out there. About anytime, night or day, someone was over at Joe's, either watching Joe work on his street machine or asking for Joe's advice. Joe was like that - he wanted to help anyone that asked. He remembered when he was starting out as a teenager and was glad his Dad was there to show him the ropes. Joe's Dad had died years ago but Joe knew that if he HAD been still alive that he would be right there with Joe, showing the up and comers the right way to set up a

motor or even how to change the oil. He always tried to tell his younger protégés how important time with their dad was. And, respectfully they listened.

They slowed and then pulled into the drive in the black Dodge Ram 4x4, just as Joe blipped the garage door opener. Pausing while the far right of the three 9' x 7' overhead doors slowly rose, the light began cascading out onto the dark concrete. Joe thought how lucky he was to have a place like this and enjoyed just sitting there, watching the door open to his haven, the turbocharged diesel emitting a clattering staccato to the world.

Being a warm August night, the bugs were out in force. Rob watched a swarm of moths and smaller insects flitting about the Mercury light at the north end of the garage as they drove on up the drive. He saw a small bat deftly swooping in and out, enjoying the buffet provided this warm, late summer night and marveled at how agile in flight the creature was. Oddly, it reminded him of the order of the food chain - the smaller and slower get eaten by the bigger - or, the quicker.

Joe nudged the accelerator and the huge black Quad Cab long-bed truck pulled on into the brightly lit bay, idled the Cummins H.O. for a minute and then shut it down. Amazing how quiet it is when you shut off a diesel inside a building at nighttime.

Rob walked around the front of the truck and watched Joe flick on the light switches. The light was so bright it almost hurt his eyes. Joe, a master of "Too much is just right", had put in 4 foot shop lights every 8 feet and on every third rafter. There were no shadows in Joe's garage.

In the first bay, still on the lift, sat Joe's car. Long, low, and very imposing, the SS gave away no outward appearance of the power beneath the hood. And the black paint looked wet, especially in the glaring light, and coupled with the dark window tint, gave off a "Don't Mess" attitude. Rob was with Joe the day he bought this car new, back in January of '98. It was one of just a few new '97's left on dealer's lots. Joe didn't care though that it was a carryover. It had everything he wanted and that was all that mattered.

This particular SS left SLP's factory in late April of '97. The dealer had specified only options that he thought would make the car perform, hoping to generate some interest from the local street racer crowd. SS performance package, Ram Air hood, SLP exhaust, Hurst Shifter, Power Steering cooler, Sport Suspension, and more. And because he thought it would hurt performance, he left off the T-Tops. But with no T's and the high sticker price those same bug-eyed wannabe's just stayed away - \$29,440 was too much. So, the car sat on the little Kentucky Chevy dealer's lot for several months - until Joe found out about it. He bought it over the phone, sight unseen, and for a whole lot less than the sticker.

Joe pointed at the amber rear turn signal lenses as he walked by the rear of the car - "I love the contrast that red/yellow/black make together" he said with a smile. The same smile that was all over his face the day he saw that car out in front of the dealership awaiting him to come take it home. The SLP performance exhaust and those taillights were the first thing that Joe saw as he drove up and were usually the only thing the local street racing crowd saw too.

"Did you get the new blower from John yet?" asked Rob.

"Yeah... it's on there. But I also bought this alcohol injection setup too and I want to get that install finished tonight. Since that band was so far out of whack, the best music I could think of was the sound of this force-fed LT1 being wound out. It shouldn't take us long. We can probably still make the show down there at the K-mart lot. There's always action there you know."

Every weekend, from about dark on, the local street racers gathered at that parking lot. There were several fast-food places nearby, so it was a great place to hang out, bench race, talk trash and just maybe line up a race or two. But Joe and Rob were different. They always showed up in either Joe's SS or in Rob's '96 Viper GTS. The snake was a Hennesey convert - a Venom 650, that easily had that much. But Joe's SS was no slouch either, having been to Lingenfelter's shop in Decatur, Indiana for some of John's special touch in the form of a blower package, head and intake work, headers, gears and suspension upgrades. But the coolest thing about the car was it's sound. Unless it was wound out, it sounded pretty much stock because the SLP exhaust was still there - in appearance. There was some magic there too, but Joe never did disclose what was done. He would just smile.

After about 45 minutes of wrenching, Joe lowered the gleaming black hood. He reached over and wiped down his hands with the red shop towels and then said, "Let's go". Rob reached up and hit the door opener button as Joe fired the healthy mouse and after waiting for the door to open, backed off the ramps out onto the apron. There the SS sat, idling menacingly, and waited for Rob to get in.

As Rob pulled the long door shut he could see Joe's grin in the dim light. "You ready?" he asked Joe. "Oh yeah... we're ready now. I just hope that guy is there tonight that has the white 10-second Buick. And, that HE'S ready!" he grinned as he let the motor warm some more. The Regal he was talking about belonged to a guy from out of town but was never there the nights that Joe or Rob were there. Supposedly, this Buick was a 10 second street legal car that had torn everyone he raced a new rear. Joe was about to change that tonight - IF the guy was there.

He pulled the Hurst shifter over and into reverse, backed into the turnaround and headed the nose of the SS down the drive.

"I wonder if Sally will be there tonight. She - or Harry - haven't been there since this whole thing blew up. But it would be nice to see them again, even if they aren't together..." mused Rob.

"I don't know Rob... I think it'll be awhile before we see much of either of those guys. What a shame..."

The SS reached the end of the drive, turned left right back towards town and sped off into the night, it's exhaust still echoing over the night air. All was silent now at Joe's garage.

But no one was there to see the car with the rectangular headlights, wide taillights, and rumbly exhaust approaching from the west. It then slowed as if to pull into the drive but stopped - it's driver seeing that no one was home. The car just idled at the driveway entrance for a moment as the driver snicked it into neutral and just slowly revved it occasionally... not even thinking, just quietly enjoying the sound of several hundred horsepower being nudged. Then, ever so slowly it just pulled away and drove on down

the road... on past Joe's house... and on in towards town, it's taillights disappearing in the distance...

The night was silent once more...

Pt 2

It was a little before 1AM when Rob and Joe reached the busy intersection of Secor and Door where the new K-Mart sat. Even as they approached, they noticed more and more modified cars coming and going, some from the parking lot, others from the neighboring fast food restaurants' exits. The smells of Mexican food, flame broiled burgers and hot fries wafted through the open windows of the SS, trying to lure them to stop for the nightly specials, such as a Mexican Pizza with two Taco Supremes and a large Pepsi. Though neither one spoke, both sat quietly while their mouths watered.

Those wonderful smells were overlain with the crackling of a speaker box at the Burger King asking the patron if he wanted onions on that Whopper, while they sat waiting for the light to change. And occasionally, above the all the traffic's din, they could hear the sound of a rumble from a high compression V8 or the buzzing of a Honda with a performance exhaust. But they both smiled when a blown late '80's Mustang entered the intersection, it's blown motor emitting a discernable whine above the sound of the Flowmasters. "That's Sam Gordon's car" noted Rob. "It sounds pretty good..." Joe nodded a definite agreement. Sam was one of the most knowledgeable Blue Oval boys in the area and was nicknamed "Iceman" because of his cool demeanor. Joe raced Sam once at the T&T night at the track - it wasn't even close. Sam's 'Stang ran a high 10 against Joe's stock 13.9. Of course - that was *before* Joe took his SS to Decatur. The next time it would be different.

They watched Sam go on through beneath the changing light and turn into the first entrance for K-Mart's mammoth lot. Soon, his car was lost in the sea of sheet metal parked there, most with parking lights ablaze and stereos blaring, with bench racing going on in full force. The serious action - those wanting to actually line up against each other - could be found at the southwest corner of the lot, next to the Penske Automotive Center. This area had two kinds of attendees - hardcore street racers or those who *thought* they were hardcore street racers. It didn't take long to figure out who was who...

Joe idled the SS through the cars heading back to that area, hearing strains of Kid Rock's "Bullgod" pounding out from a Canary Yellow Supra MkIV's open doors. Slowly... barely idling... the SS wove in and out between Civics, Camaros, Firebirds, a Red M5, some Integras, a couple of late '60's Darts with healthy Mopar motivation... on to the area where Joe hoped to find the White Regal.

As they approached the makeshift paddock, no sight was found of the Buick Joe hoped to find. But - there sat a black one, no badging, all squatty and sinister looking, black center wheels with drag radials. "Is that a GN?" asked Rob. "I don't know.... could be. Could be one of those GN looking regals too. I think they're called a WE4 or something like that. You know - Megan's got one - Dan's wife. Remember?"

"Oh yeah! Is it hers?" asked Rob. "Mmmm... I don't *know*. I haven't seen it for a while. It just might

be...", mumbled Joe, his thoughts returning to the controversy that had circled the town like a stalking lion when news of Harry and Megan had first come out. Megan had been lying low and had not been seen at the track, Dan had seem to become invisible too and - well, Harry and Sally were pretty much assumed to be history. Yet, no one could say that they had seen any of the participants (willing ones or the victims) together since that weekend earlier in the summer.

"Hey! Is that **SALLY???**" Joe nearly shouted. "It IS! What is she doing next to that Buick?????" asked Rob as they pulled up a couple of rows behind the Black Car. Sally was talking to someone inside the car, leaning on the passenger side door, holding a helmet in her right hand, but not wearing her usual fire suit she wore when she raced. But who could she be talking to? Who was in the car? Those questions raced through their heads as Joe shut off the force-fed LT1 after idling it for a few minutes....

Joe and Rob opened up the F-body's long doors and stepped out into the cool air. In the distance a train's whistle blew as the safety gate's clanging bells drifted lazily through the night. The doors closed with a solid "thunk-thunk" and they headed towards the Buick.

"Sally? Is that you?" asked Joe as he approached the rear of the idling Regal, noticing the tail lamps come on, followed by the brake lights. Sally looked up with an odd expression and as she did, the Buick driver (whoever he was) snicked the tranny into drive and pulled away, before Joe or Rob could see who it was.

Sally smiled when she recognized Joe and Rob, but both guys noticed that she looked a little tired, a little older, a little less happy than the Sally they knew. Her lips still had that wonderful inviting smile, but her eyes were sad... even a little red it seemed - or was that just the light? "What are YOU guys up to?" she jabbed teasingly. "Even **I** know trouble when I see it and when you two guys are together, there's got be some trouble close by!"

The guys just grinned at her but Joe was so curious as to who was in the Buick, he couldn't help himself. "Now Sally... we're just looking for that guy in the white Regal. I think I've got his number tonight - I'm ready. Say - who was that in the Black Buick? Was that Megan's car?" Even as Joe asked the questions, he saw Sally's face change. She didn't answer right away and only looked down, her smile gone.

"Just some one I used to know. It's not important..." she drifted off. "The car's leaving anyways." She changed the subject quickly. "So you're gunning for Dave Smirsal? The guy who lives over near Chesterton?"

"Is that who drives that white hot Buick?" asked Joe, thinking how odd that Sally sounded. "Whoever it is, I hear he's the one to beat. Has he ran Sam yet?"

"Sam?" asked Sally. "Sam Gordon?"

"Yeah" said Rob.

"Actually, I heard they ran last weekend. I guess Sam got him off the line, but Dave reeled him before the eighth and beat him by about two cars. Dave is definitely the one to beat - but he's not here." Sally

noticed Joe looking intently into her eyes, searching for clues, so she looked away nervously.

"Well, I thought maybe that was Megan in the black car that just left" continued Joe, dying to know who it was. "I've been wanting to run her car sometime - is she coming back?". Joe kept prying.

"That wasn't Megan Joe..." was all Sally would say. "Uh... I've got to go. If you see Harry here tonight, give him this helmet. He asked me to drop it off but I'm not going to hang around any longer." She handed the Bell to Joe, turned quickly, and began to leave.

"Sally, I'm sorry. I just was wondering how things are. I shouldn't have asked..." murmured a very embarrassed Joe.

"You're right Joe. You shouldn't have... but I understand. I'll talk to you some other time." Sally's sobs could be heard as she walked away and Joe stood there watching, feeling very sad.... Rob could only feel an uneasy stirring within him as the very awkward moment just hung in the night like an oppressive pall...

As Sally disappeared into the night-covered ocean of cars, Joe noticed shadows being cast upon the Penske Center walls from a car coming up from behind him. He turned and saw a white car with rectangular headlights approaching the area - it was Smirsal's Regal. Joe and Rob both were stunned by the news that Sam had lost to this car - Sam had been undefeated as far as Joe knew. Apparently, this WAS one serious car and even more respectable because it was pretty much a daily driver. "Maybe tonight WILL be the night" thought Joe, a mixture of confidence and doubt creeping about his mind... the tiny voice in his head whispering "Yeah... but what KIND of night will it be?"

The white Regal that everyone knew was actually more than just a Regal - it began life back in October of 1987 as a Black Buick. A Grand National to be more precise. Dave had bought the car from the original owner back in early '88 with only 8,300 miles on it's clock. Over the years, Dave had pretty much kept the car garaged other than for an occasional blast down the ¼ mile and the local cruise scene. But in early '98 the "Go-Fast" bug bit Dave. Bit him HARD. And the transformation began. Oh, it started innocently enough. First were the usual bolt-ons. A new fuel pump here, an adjustable fuel pressure regulator there. Then, new valve springs, an aluminum MAF pipe, adjustable wastegate, K&N, the list became endless. And what fueled the list was the absolutely incredible responsiveness of the car to the simple upgrades - it quickly became a solid mid-11 second car with stock internals, turbo, and convertor.

Dave had base lined the car and knew it was a very high 13 second street car - if launched properly. He had laid waste to many IROC's and 5.0's during the bolt-on phase of the buildup. But he lost some too. Too many to be exact and to suit Dave. So, after some calling around and then finding out about an incredible website called TurboBuick.com, he learned about building a combination. Someone wisely advised him to "Plan your work - then work your plan" and so he did. He knew he wanted to have the fastest Buick he could build. He had heard about that WE4 over in Adams County so he thought he would go even one step further. Well, maybe two steps. And he knew he wanted "more"... a lot more.

And he knew how to get it...

Pt 3

When Dave decided that he needed more, his thoughts kept coming back to the same thing - a Stage Two Duttweiler-built engine. Secondly - he wanted to paint the car white. He wanted something different, something noticeable, something unique. So, while waiting for the motor to arrive he had the car painted Arctic White. He did have the blackout trim put on to offset all the white. It was a gorgeous car. And now, Joe was staring at something he had only heard about. Something that was hard to believe. He was looking at the fastest street-legal car in the state. And it only had a V6. And - it was almost 14 years old.

The car that pulled away from Sally now was sitting over at the parking lot at McDonalds. It's driver could see the complete area near the Penske center and saw Sally discussing something with the two guys who had walked up. Munching on some hot fries, he watched Sally turn and walk away and then saw the white Buick pull in behind the two men who had gotten out of the SS. He had heard about the white Buick - a lot. And, he had heard about this supposed superbuilt SS that Lingenfelter had worked on. But no one knew about this car... yet.

Dave pulled in the same spot that the black car had just vacated moments earlier, idled a while and then shut it down. Stepping from the car, Joe could finally see who this Smirsal guy was. Tall and lanky with hair too busy to comb, Dave didn't look at all like most thought he would. He looked more like a guy you would see at a Staind concert than beneath the hood of a high horsepower machine. But anyone who knew about Turbo Buicks had either heard of Dave or at least his car.

He started the car back up, enjoying the sound of the exhaust. An exhaust that until now no one in this town had ever heard. A true dual exhaust... exiting from two turbos - one that now sat next to each head, each dumping into a 3" downpipe, the pipes snaking back beneath the car and out behind the rear wheels. The heads were hogged out Champions, a mammoth twin throttle body doghouse sat atop the highly polished manifold. A billet roller cam setup opened and closed huge valves in concert with the firing of the 75lb injectors. A Tripodi dual alcohol system was plumbed in to each inlet pipe fed from twin 2 quart reservoirs, each mounted on a fenderwell. Other than the exhaust note, no external indication was visible that gave away the dark side of this car.

The driver looked into the mirror and then pushed a set of sunglasses to his face.

Sally sat quietly in her new car - a silver Honda Accord EXV6 (she sold the BB Camaro after Harry left)- and watched through tearful eyes as Joe and Rob stared at the white Buick. After all she had been through, after all the curious stares, the whispers, the glances, the looks of pity from people she didn't even know, for some reason Joe's questions had hit her deeper than anything of the last several weeks. Maybe it was the way he asked them. Maybe - it was that she knew that, even though she had signed the papers filing for divorce that very morning, she still loved Harry. Everyone told her that Harry wasn't worth it, that he was a cheater, a rogue, a liar. Yet - she still loved him. For her, that was all that mattered. Harry had begged her to forgive him, to try and start anew. But she wasn't ready for that. She wasn't sure if she ever would be... sometimes, love is not enough. She turned the key in the ignition, started the V-

Tech motor and then headed on out the exit. Stopping to pull out, she saw it - the black car that just moments earlier she was leaning against. It was sitting in McDonald's lot. And inside that very black and very powerful car sat the one person she always had trusted. The one person who had never let her down. And someone who truly understood what she was feeling...

Inside the black car - sat Dan. The car he sat in used to be Megan's...

Dan saw Sally's car leaving the lot. He flashed his lights at her as she headed on down Secor Drive, watched her wave out the window, and then he felt sad once more. Neither of them could remember the last time they had felt truly happy. Well, except for the time she called him one day, full of questions about the details. They had met for coffee later that afternoon and while they didn't really get any answers, they did get something more important - they got their friendship started again.

*He finished off his fries, tossed the trash into the container and headed back out the drive onto the street. It was time for a little fun. It was time for a little payback for all the hours he had spent throwing himself into this car after Megan left. She took nothing with her and went to live with her mother in South Bend while they figured out what they were going to do next. The future... it just wasn't something that Dan wanted to think about when he thought of Megan. Now... today... This moment... these terms of time were all that he seemed able to think about. And this **very** moment was one that he hoped would bring about some fun. For it was time for a changing of the guard when it came to the state's fastest street legal car.*

Joe walked up to Dave's car. Dave had stuck his head under the hood to check the tightness on the Inlet Pipe hose clamp that he had just replaced that afternoon and didn't see Joe walk up.

"Hey there!" said Joe, extending his hand. "Nice car. A VERY nice car..." Dave looked up, shook Joe's hand and said "Thanks. Although, it's really a work in progress. But thanks for the props. You got your ride here tonight?" asked Dave.

Joe just grinned and nodded yes, his eyes narrowing ever so slightly. Somewhere behind him he heard someone start up one of the Darts, it's ungodly rumble and heavy idle sounding all the world like a Hemi. "Yeah... I sure do. I was hoping maybe we could hook up. Interested in running tonight?" Joe smiled with his lips only - his eyes were now very serious, glancing over the impressive mill beneath the hood of the Buick.

Dave now tucked the ratchet and 9/16th's socket in his hip pocket. "Well, it depends." "On what?" asked Joe. "On if I think you've got anything worth running, to be blunt."

"Really? How about a blown SS Camaro?" breathed Joe.

"Nah... I've ran several of them. A blower isn't anything new. Gotta bring more than that buddy." Dave stuck his head back under the hood of his car and checked the plug wire connections at the coil pack.

"Well," continued Joe "this isn't just an ordinary SS. It's a 383 stroker from Lingenfelter with some other stuff. Still doubtful?"

Dave didn't look up. "Maybe. But you got enough money? I won't run you for less than \$2000, pure and simple. And really, I hate to take your money because I'm telling you now - you aint' got enough."

"Maybe" shrugged Joe. "But - maybe I do. And I definitely got the money. Let's run 'em."

"I want to look under your hood first. You got to see what I've got - now, I want to see yours. THEN, I'll let you know" said Dave. "No problem... that's my car over there."

Joe let Dave do the once over. Neither of them noticed Dan pull into the lot, but Rob saw what he thought was a GN pulling in. Since Joe was busy, he didn't say anything and even forgot about it eventually. But Dan parked a few rows back and watched Dave and Joe negotiating.

It was all finally agreed to. Rob would start them, and Sam would hold the money. Sam slid up next to Joe before they left the lot to head out to Deep Cut road, another favorite street race site.

"He's fast Joe. Damn fast. Maybe you ought to rethink this. Two large is a lot of money. Trust me - I know. He got two of mine last week and I don't think his car was even breathing hard."

"Nah... I've got enough. And anyways - it's only money, right?" laughed Joe. "Don't say I didn't warn you" smiled back Sam as he headed for his car.

Word spread quickly through the crowd. Dave was going to run the SS. Most people just shook their heads. "No way is that Chebby gonna have enough for that car. No way..." seemed to be the most prevalent opinion. Dave and Joe led the way out to Deep Cut. After the money was handed over and it was agreed that it was a one shot deal, both drivers adjusted the air pressure in their tires. Dave was running slicks; Joe - drag radials.

Both cars lined up and began the routine that each driver knew so well. For Joe, it was set the line-lock, put the shifter into second and bring up the rpm's enough to get the hives to spin. While this was going on, Dave was doing the same, but he was simply building boost. Water from the ditch tossed onto the road served as the burnout area and soon heavy white smoke filled the air.

It was time.

Pt 4

Dave released the line-lock and allowed the GN to power on across the start line finishing the burnout. The crowd immediately roared its approval. Joe did the same a split second later, matching Dave's burnout in smoke production and almost lifting the front wheels when the rears bit hard. This made the crowd roar even more and side bets began to be placed. Most money was on Dave, but several were now putting their money on Joe's SS.

Both drivers backed their cars up to behind the "start line" and waited for Rob to motion them forward. He then gave them the sign to pull ahead, still choking and coughing from the heavy scent of burnt rubber hanging in the air. Both cars idled roughly, the huge valves within the heads sucking volumes of air to be compressed even further than the power adders were already doing.

Joe was first to the line. He knew that while Rob was his buddy, Rob was fair. He would not give Joe any kind of advantage and would restart the race if either racer jumped the gun. He inched forward to a spot that Rob was satisfied with and waited...

Dave watched the SS pull ahead, it's exhaust thumping loudly enough to feel the concussive pulses in his chest. Of all the cars he had ever ran he never got any kind of anxiety - until now. This Camaro was different. He noted the bright red taillights eyeing him menacingly, making him realize that this was the first time he ever let the other guy stage first. Slowly, he released pressure on the brake pedal and allowed the Buick to lope ahead... slowly inching up to a spot that Rob determined was nose-up with the SS. Even with the windows up, the heavy exhaust of the SS thumped loudly.

Both drivers cinched up their helmets and pulled their belts tight. Dave locked the transbrake... the SS began increasing it's revs till Joe was seeing a solid 3500 RPM on the tach.

Boost was building in the manifold now on Dave's car. 1psi... 2psi... 3-4 psi... he stayed in the accelerator as the Autometer gauge on the A-pillar showed the rise. 8psi... 10 psi... 12 psi... the car was straining against the transbrake hard, yet the hardened gears of the reworked Level 10 tranny held the torque in check.

As Joe was watching his tach, he slowly became aware of a high pitched whistle. At first, it had the sound of a mosquito at night trying to land for a meal on your arm that's out from beneath the covers. But rapidly the whine became a shriek, a scream, a piercing whistle of ominous power being multiplied and then multiplied again. The Stage 2 motor was moving massive amounts of air through it and wasn't even breathing hard yet. Joe immediately wiped the sounds from his mind and regained his focus, waiting... waiting... waiting...

A lot of people had followed the guys out to the site. All had parked behind the "start" start line and watched now as both cars were lined up to Rob's satisfaction. It was going to be a Pro-Tree style launch. One blink, then launch on the second. Many covered their ears to unsuccessfully try and block the sounds of nearly 2,000 combined horsepower being loosened. The noise rapidly rose to a deafening level with the scream from the Buick barely above the blown 383's din. They all watched... and waited...

Dan walked up and stood at the rear of the crowd. He had lost several pounds since the mess with Megan had began and with the sunglasses, no one even recognized him. He just hadn't been around - until tonight.

He watched the cars line up, the burnouts, and the "staging" now going on. "Should be interesting" he

thought...

BLINK At this point - only a few seconds after lining up, Dave already had 14 pounds of boost built, the only thing tethering his car in place was the trans brake. Joe had already activated the alcohol injection and was holding the rpms, the huge Centerforce clutch barely off the surface of the flywheel, waiting to be dumped upon it by the flick of Joe's ankle, ready to take up nearly 1000 pound-feet of torque and apply it to the driveshaft and on out the rear axle to the 10 inch wide tires. The exhaust notes now were oddly harmonious in the night... the crowd was hushed, soaking in the sound of well over a thousand horsepower being ready to be freed. The GN was shrieking louder yet, almost screaming through the open exhaust, yet Dave himself sat smiling, his hand firmly on the T-handle, ready to push it forward, disengaging the transbrake and loosing the rein on the most powerful street car in the state. The boost now sat at 15 psi...

The SS just continued to rumble loudly, the blower not yet completely into it's power band but far enough into it that near maximum torque was available upon the moment the clutch face impacted with the flywheel. Joe felt a bead of sweat trickle down from his brow along his right eye and smiled. The heat of battle... nothing better.

Tick... tick... almost time...

Rob's finger began to apply pressure to the lantern switch... when his eyes spotted something shiny on the ground beneath the SS...

Dave saw Rob staring at the SS for some reason and couldn't figure what the problem. The second light should have hit by now... 15 psi... the car was almost shuddering from the torque...

Joe was waiting... waiting... waiting for the second light and saw the Starter suddenly waving the light side to side and criss-crossing his arms. The sound of the Buick backing down off the boost was overwhelming - a chortling noise was coming out from beneath the hood like machinegun fire. What??? Now, Rob was telling Joe to cut his motor by slashing his hand across his throat, his eyes wide in near panic, frantically pointing beneath Joe's car. The crowd howled in protest - no race?

Almost instantaneously, Joe smelled raw fuel! He hated to shut down like that but he now knew what the problem was - he was losing fuel! He shut off the key and jumped out of the car, immediately hearing the hiss of high-pressure lines bleeding down. While crouching beneath his car saw it - raw fuel was spewing out from somewhere in a massive amount. Damn!!! Popping the hood it was obvious. Somewhere near the front passenger side injectors a massive leak had developed. He would need the hauler to take it back tonight. Luckily, no fire.

Dave let the Buick idle, unbuckled the harness and sat his helmet on the passenger floor. Then, he climbed out over the cage and walked over to see what Joe was looking at under the hood of the SS. "What happened?" Rob spoke. "I saw something shimmering in the light and I got a whiff of gas JUST a nano-second before I was ready to hit the lantern again. You were lucky Joe... damn lucky. That could have been a bad one."

"I know. I know..." Sam walked up and handed over the cash back to each racer. "Looks like it's gonna be another time Joe. Sorry to see it happen but at least you've still got your car. A fire and who knows..." his voice trailed off, not wanting to consider the obvious.

Then, from out of the crowd someone spoke. "I'll run the white car. How about it?" Everybody turned to look, wondering who thought they even had a chance against Dave's albino GN. They saw a man standing with his arms crossed, sunglasses on his sternly set face, a frightening smile upon his lips.

"No need to waste this great opportunity... The crowd's here. You're here. I'm here. And best of all, I've got my car here... Whadayasay?"

It was Dan, leaning against the twin turbo WE4...

Pt 5

"Well?" Dan asked again. "Let's not disappoint everyone. That Camaro is toast - so to speak. I'll run you. Buick against Buick. Sounds like a match made in heaven. You've got a bigger motor - I've got an extra turbo. Should be fun, right?"

Dave smiled. "You got two grand? Gotta pay to play bud."

Dan's smile faded. "Hmmm... I'll go you one better. How about running for the slips? Winner take all. I've got mine here - see?" Dan pulled the yellowed title to the WE4 from his pocket and held it up. "I'm ready to play."

The crowd now eyed Dave. No one had ever challenged him like this. Most wannabes couldn't even come up with the two large and certainly weren't willing to risk their cars against the fastest car in the state. That white GN had beaten so many up and comers that it was hard for Dave to even get a race from someone that knew about his car. Until now... and he knew that Dan was serious.

"Tell you what - let me look under the hood. If that's ok, I'll be glad to take that black car off your hands."

Dan reached inside the open driver's window and popped the hood. "Look all you want. Then - let's race. But I'll let you in something - you won't win this car."

Dave felt a chill sweep his back. Later he would look back at this moment and remember that cold hand upon his back.

Joe and Rob looked at each other. "Damn, Rob! Did you hear **that**???" Rob just nodded, his eyes drawn to the hushed crowd and the approaching car in the distance. His first thought was a cop but he could quickly see it wasn't a cop.

After Dave looked beneath the hood he simply said "Let's go. It's getting late. Are you SURE you want to do this? It's not too late to back out my friend."

"I *never* back out..." Dan nearly whispered. "I'm ready."

Both drivers gave their titles to Sam. Rob strode back up to the start line after explaining the procedure to Dan, who only half listened. He had his game-face on now and needed nothing other than to see the light that would let him launch.

A slender figure walked up in the crowd, her hands in her jeans pockets. People back at the Penske Center told her where to go. Now, she was here...

After repeating the burnout procedure, both drivers were now staged with Rob sandwiched between the fenders. Dave was in the left lane - Dan in the right. Both drivers had different thoughts racing through their heads now. Dan didn't care if he lost, he felt he had already lost his world anyhow. Dave on the other hand, couldn't afford to lose. But, like most men, couldn't afford to back down. It was all or nothing now. He had been on top so long, he didn't really know how far "down" was... All he DID know was that he didn't want to go there... no man ever did.

And just as quickly - the fear left him.

Rob slipped his ear plugs back in and gave both drivers the thumbs up. Immediately, trans-brakes were locked and RPMs were raised. It was agreed to a three blink start, leave on the third.

Where before the crowd heard the shrieking of only one turbo, they now were inundated with the screaming of compressed air from three of them. Boost levels were quickly rising and the drivers waited for the lights...

BLINK 1 Both cars were already at 10 psi and climbing...

BLINK 2 Dogs barked in the distance... porch lights came on from neighbors' houses a mile away... frogs stopped bellowing and crickets stopped chirping...

BLINK 3 GO!! Immediately, both drivers released their trans-brakes while simultaneously flooring the accelerators. The massively multiplied torque values began to rotate the drive shafts, twisting the pinions and hurling the ring gears of both cars. Frames were subjected to incredible twisting forces with both cars passenger sides trying to roll over, only to be held in check by reinforced frame structures and suspension components.

Front wheels briefly flirted with heading skyward but were also held planted by the weight transfers. The cars left the line as one, Dave getting a few hundredths of a second head start. Within the first 60 feet less than 1.4 seconds had elapsed...

The crowd roared it's approval as Ebony and Ivory (tagged such by a Coors light fan in the crowd)

launched hard and straight. Each set of eyes watched the front bumpers of both cars start to raise then stay grounded; their senses assaulted by the smells of high octane fuel, spent alcohol, overwhelming sounds, and the sights of rapidly fading taillights...

Dave nor Dan looked over. Each only watched their tach, the boost gauge and the overhead light that now was less than an eighth mile away that would determine who won...

Dan's car shifted into third hard, just slightly ahead of Dave's shift, yet both cars were essentially nose to nose. 100 mph had passed only a couple of seconds ago, yet it seemed like yesterday. Neither car showed signs of falling down, Dan's twin turbo's swallowing as much air as the huge PTE beneath Dave's hood.... The shrieks from the cars raced across the countryside; an owl on the power line decided that perhaps a quieter place could be found and thus swooped down and away from the cars that flew by below it's huge wings...

Back in the wild western days, there used to be a gunfighter who was supposed to have roamed this part of the country. Many, many men fell to his quick draw and deadly aim. Yet - he always knew that there was someone faster. The only questions that he could never answer were: Who would it be and when would it happen?

For a brief and shining moment, Dave felt the nose of his white GN inching ahead. Emotions still were held in check as his gloved hands gripped the wheel tightly. He knew better than anyone - it's never over till it's OVER.

Dan watched the finish approaching rapidly, yet as if in slow motion. The lights were illuminated showing the Alcohol was being injected and the car was running as straight as on rails. Never in his life had he felt such acceleration. Never had he felt so alive. And for that same brief and shining moment - all was right with the world. No worries, no stress, no problems - just racing... for at least those 9+ seconds, all was right with his world...

Both cars roared past the finish line, just beneath the overhead mercury light. The few spectators that had decided to be at the big end watched the white fender of the Dave's car pass by mismatched with nose of the black one. One person moaned... another one sighed... and another smiled.

Both cars slowed at the abandoned farmstead and after turning around, headed back to the crowd. Dave reached up and unfastened his helmet, lifting it off his head with one hand and smiled. Dan only rode in silence, staring at the approaching crowd, wondering what everyone would say, how everyone would react... and suddenly, he felt old again. Suddenly, the world he left less than 10 seconds ago was back upon him and he felt empty... and sad.

As the two combatants pulled up and parked along the roadside, Dave got out first and walked over to Dan's still idling car. Dan got out and could only stand silently at first as the crowd pulled around, waiting to hear who spoke first. Oddly... no one - nobody - said anything for a moment.

Then, Dave simply said, "He won". Most of the crowd could only gasp. The king was dead. The KING - was

dead...

Just then, a slender, tired woman walked up behind Dan without him even seeing her. He turned suddenly - almost startled - because he caught the scent of an exotic perfume that only one woman he ever knew wore.

Standing before him was Megan.

Slowly, the owl from the finish line now circled above the crowd, finally landing atop a nearby utility pole. It cried out in the night, "Whooooo-oo-oo-ooo"...

As a wave of emotion raced over him, Dan reached inside the car and shut it down, then turned to face Megan once more, the eyes of the crowd upon them. A torrential flood of feelings and memories swept his mind and soul - he hadn't seen her in weeks. She took a hesitant half step towards him as he slowly raised his arms to pull her near. She then simply fell into his embrace. Her face was on his shoulder and her arms around his waist, the tears now flowing freely as she broke the silence of the night...

"I'm sorry, Danny... I'm really, really sorry..."

Part 6: "The New Beginnings"

The strains of "Take a Load Off Annie" hung lazily in the cool evening air, circling about his brain like so many thoughts of times long ago... So many miles, so many years ago. It seemed like just yesterday... "I'm really sorry, Danny...I'm really, really sorry..." The words still haunted him just like the familiar smell of her perfume that caught his attention the night he beat Dave.

He couldn't help but feel some regret for turning down her offer to reconcile, but at the same time he couldn't forget the betrayal. Even during the few get-togethers that he and Megan had awkwardly endured, it was obvious to both of them - it was over. That pain was something he wanted to forget but just couldn't. Maybe tomorrow, maybe the next day, maybe one day he would wake up and it would be gone... but for now, it was as close as his shadow.

Dan sat silently for a moment, his iced glass of Coke still covered in shimmery drops of condensation, the melting nuggets clinking softly as they shifted from shrinking. The evening DJ had already begun another song as "Take a Load Off" ended - a song that made a smile began to creep across his weary face. A song that brought back good and happy memories... "Pink Houses" by Mellencamp.

Maybe someday, those new yet-to-be happy memories would begin. Hopefully, it would be soon...

Suddenly, Dan was startled by the sound of his phone ringing and vibrating the glass tabletop it sat upon. He reached over, pressed "TALK" and answered.

"Is this Dan?" a strangely familiar voice asked.

"Yes, this is Dan. Who's this?"

"C'mon, Dan... you can't have forgotten already, can you?" She was playing with him now and he felt not only guilty for not being able to pull the name up in his mental computer, but also felt a niggling of interest in her soft voice. It had been a long time since a phone call caused those kinds of feelings to stir...

"Well, you've got me on this one. Your voice rings a bell, but I'm sorry - I don't remember." He was being totally honest.

A silent pause...

"Dan. It's Sally..." She heard him draw in a breath, only so slightly.

"Sally... it's been a long time. I thought you had moved away?" he half stated, half asked.

"I did. Well, in a way I guess. I'm living near Holbrook now. I took a chance that you still had the same number and I guess tonight's my lucky night. How ya been?" Hmm... small talk. Small talk is good he thought, his suspicions now even more heightened.

"I've been good, Sally. You know I'm divorced now, don't you?" "Yeah... I ran into Megan at the Ayersville mall a couple of weeks ago. Seems she and Harry are still seeing each other, but I guess Harry's having some problems..." she just let it drift off, Dan's mind wondering what was wrong with his former best friend. "Anyhow, that's not why I called Dan. I called to ask a favor of you. Could you take a look at a car for me?"

"Well, that depends, Sally. Where and when? And what type of car?" Dan was really curious now. The last he knew, Sally was driving an Accord. But he knew she had race fuel in her blood. He couldn't help but wonder...

"It's a WE4 I found by accident. You know, I've always loved those black Buicks. This one is 100% stock and only has sixteen thousand miles on it. It's being sold to settle an estate near Ayersville and I can buy it right - I think. I would like for you to look it over to verify if it's what they say it is. It looks solid to me, but I'm not sure. Would you take a peek at it for me, Danny?" her soft voice sounding so much more inviting than just for a car look-over. Or was it just his imagination?

"Sure. You know me - I can't turn down a chance to look at a Turbo Buick. Or, for a chance to see someone like you!" Dan hated himself the moment he said - his intentions that even he wasn't sure of sounded so awkwardly obvious. It's been too long; he thought... how he dreaded getting back into the Dating Game...

They set up the particulars and after some more cursory conversation, hung up. Dan sat there, the darkness now pretty much set in. All around him, the sounds of the coming evening grew. A train in the

distance... a dog barking at his neighbor's house... a helicopter heading into towards town, probably a Life Flight... and the silence. Even the silence was loud tonight..

The sun was bright and warm... Dan had picked up Sally at her work place so they could go see the car for the afternoon. She had taken the rest of the day off, promising Dan lunch right after they looked at the car. The sun felt good on his arm hanging lazily on the doorsill of the Impala SS. Dan had bought the beast just a few weeks before and still was in awe of it's power and poise. Being a '96 it had the floor shifter and even though it had almost 50k on it, it ran strong as new. The original owner sold it to buy an M5 and Dan was the first one to see the ad. He snatched it up, not even trying to barter the guy down because he knew \$12k for the car was a good buy.

Sally settled into the gray leather seat, her eyes closed, thinking about "stuff". Do you ever really get over something, or do you just slowly forget?, she mused. The air was fresh and clean, her short blond hair tossing about in the breeze as they headed north towards Ayersville.

She had thought about this day ever since she and Dan had talked. How would she feel seeing him, knowing that he knew what he knew - about how she begged Harry to come back. How she had gotten into a heated argument with Megan at Sears one day, the argument ending with Sally slapping Megan's face hard and calling her something she shouldn't have. Megan just standing there, her left cheek reddening, her eyes sad and empty and surprised, the tears falling... watching Sally look at her with her hand over her own mouth. After all those weeks, all those nights, all those thoughts and feelings - they all came out in that one instant - right there in front of a stunned clerk. And as Sally stood there, she realized that from that day on, it was going to get better. The sun was going to shine once more...

Dan pulled the SS into the drive and saw the WE4 sitting in the sunlight, apparently backed out of its stall in the enormous 5 bay garage. The seller obviously wasn't hurting for money - only garage space. Sally had told him he needed the space to put his soon to arrive Viper GTS-ACR in.

"I thought you said this was to settle an estate?" asked Dan, stepping from the Impy and hearing Sally's door shut just before his.

"It is - sort of. It's his late brother's car but he inherited it. He wants to sell it to get the room, and he's going to give the money to his sister-in-law and her children. As you can see, he's not hurting financially!" Dan nodded in agreement. The two story brick home was gorgeous and the lawn was clearly professionally maintained. Reading Dan's mind, Sally spoke. "He's a very successful trial attorney."

Dan just smiled. Seems like all he's talked to or about lately was attorneys. Why should today be any different?

Just then, the seller came out of the house and greeted them.

"There she is, folks. You must be Dan?" he asked, extending his well-tanned hand to shake Dan's.

"Yep. I'm Dan. So this is an original, huh?" Dan was surprised at the flawless condition of the car's

exterior. Peering in through the driver's side window opening, he saw an interior that looked like it just came from the showroom floor.

"My brother was very, very particular about this car. It's never seen rain, much less snow. And it's been professionally maintained since he took delivery in the summer of '87 by the same Buick dealership here in town. Take a look under the hood."

Dan reached in, pulled the hood release latch and noted its tightness (like new), and heard the hood spring upward. Walking around the front of the car, he released the safety catch and lifted the heavy black covering. It was incredible to behold. All the stickers were there. No dust. No grime. The factory coil pack was STILL in place. No rust anywhere. And from all appearances - 100%, factory delivered, bone stock. He hadn't seen a car in this condition for years.

"Here - start 'er up." The seller tossed the keys to Dan, the sunlight catching on them as they flew through the afternoon sunlight.

Slipping the square "GM" logo bearing key into the ignition slot - and noting still the new feeling - Dan heard the open door chime begin as he rotated it forward. Hearing the fuel pump kick on and build pressure then kick off, he advanced the key. The motor fired immediately, settling into the staccato burble that sounded so innocent to the unknowing. That sounded so weak to the uneducated.

Crawling beneath the car, Dan again was not disappointed. Clean as the day it was delivered. Doing all the pre-buyer checks he knew, everything checked out. The car was precisely as advertised. He and Sally even took it for a test drive, noting how solid the shifter moved, how tight the steering was, how quickly the car wanted to run. But he babied it out of respect. Out of respect for a feeling that few people have known since this car was built. The feeling of driving a brand new Turbo Buick. It's a special feeling and one that those who are lucky enough to have experienced will never forget.

As they pulled back into the drive and pulled alongside Dan's SS, Sally simply asked, "Well?" as Dan snicked the shifter into "P" and let the car idle for a while.

Dan smiled. "Sally, I'll say this. If YOU don't buy this car today, I'm going to. It's THAT good of a car. How much does he want for it?"

Now it was Sally's turn to smile. "Well... do you think I should try and get him to take less than he's asking?"

"Depends..." Dan smiled back, his eyes noticing a twinkle in hers. "What's his asking price?"

"Five grand. Is it worth it?" she again smiled, knowing that this car was a steal for that price.

"Yeah... it's worth it," laughed Dan. "It's definitely worth it."

"Good! Let's buy it and go get some lunch. I'm starved!" she laughed.

With that, Sally exited the car, leaving Dan to ponder the Concert Sound stereo. Switching through the preset channels, he came upon a song that jolted him with its irony. "Bad to the Bone" was filling the air - and even on this sunny afternoon, THAT song sounded new... perhaps in a way, it was.

Sally had already withdrawn the funds and had the cashier's check in her purse. Since the seller was an attorney, he took care of the notarization and within minutes, Dan was following behind a motorized time capsule. A beautiful, shiny black and breathtakingly evil appearing example of GM's finest iteration of an efficient, ruthless, and brutal automotive predator.

An intercooled Turbo Buick.

Nightsounds - Part 7 "The Challenge"

The hot, steamy water hissed and cascaded from the shower nozzle above her head, pelting her skull and then running on down her neck and shoulders, dripping from her nose and chin, snaking down her tired body... falling into foamy rivulets that lazily spiraled down the drain. The colors of the white foam swirling and moving against the burgundy fiberglass floor reminded her of the always melting raspberry Cream-Sickles she ate as a child, her father always bringing her one home on Friday after work during the summer... Thoughts about her Dad, her mom, her life swirled through her mind just like the sudsy water did beneath her feet. And for some reason, she felt more alone at that moment than at any other time in her life...

She stood there leaning, with her hands against the shower wall and her face downward for long time thinking. Where did it all go wrong? How could she have missed all the signs? How could Harry do this to her? Her tears fell like so many other droplets that afternoon in the shower stall... And now - of all things, this...

The car sat silently in the dark bay, its paint gleaming and looking very wet. The gray cloth seats were freshly vacuumed as was the black carpet, the trunk had received the same attention and even the spare tire had been blackened anew. A-Pillar gauges sat silent, ready to announce the boost pressure as well as Knock Retard. Atop the Stereo pod sat a darkened Scanmaster 2, its deep red face looking near black in the subdued light. But better yet, beneath the hood sat a motor that has no equal in efficiency on the street as a factory car. Although its heart was foolishly considered by many (mostly the uneducated) to be small in size and thus an easy target, it was actually extremely brutal and unforgiving to its opponents. And now, less than three months after coming to this new garage, this new owner, the heart was stronger yet.

Power producing intake air now was drawn through a 9" K&N filter, on through the MAF sensor and through a new chrome MAF tube that replaced the ductwork style factory unit before entering the factory Turbo to be compressed. The compression/heating of the air was then channeled through a modified turbo

outlet pipe to a new CAS factory stock replacement/upgrade intercooler. There, the air charge was cooled and became denser and capable of more power, before exiting the intercooler outlet and into the newly red-painted up-pipe. Then, it would be drawn into the gaping mouth of the polished blade of the throttle body before entering each of the six cylinders to be compressed once more. Compressed - AND mixed with high-octane fuel introduced through a new set of 009 injectors fed by a 340M Walbro pump and controlled by a new adjustable fuel pressure regulator that had been hotwired. The boost was now controllable via the upgrade to an adjustable boost control rod, the computer work now handled by a newly programmed Lubrant chip. The exhaust gases left through the 100% stock exhaust, exiting through the angle-tipped exhaust pipes. This marvelous and yet sinister power plant was now capable of producing well in excess of one horsepower per cubic inch - at the rear wheels; wheels now shorn with the new style BFG drag radials. All of this - at the highly economical additional cost of little more than twelve hundred dollars.

It is said - and widely believed among most automobile enthusiasts - that cars have souls. And some of those souls/personalities of various cars are easily identifiable. There is the fun-loving spirit of the new VW Beetle. The elitist and artsy personality of the C5 'Vette. The take-no-prisoners feeling that demands your attention the moment you buckle in the driver's seat of a Viper. And even some Turbo Buicks have varying auras. Some are happy go lucky, some are temperamental racers, and some are just great family-mobiles. But once in a while, and very rarely at that, comes along the alter ego of all that is nice and comfortable and fun and normal about a car. Sometimes, the relative no one talks about is in there, lurking, waiting to be loosed with the turn of a key and the movement of a transmission shift lever. Sometimes, the kind of car that everyone wants to own but seldom get to - comes along. This car silently waiting for the right time - is one such car.

Sitting now, the shadows growing long through the garage windows, the dust particles dancing and twinkling in the sunlight above its hood, the car was impatient. It was time. It was time to do what it had been waiting 14 years to do. Destroy someone else's fantasy... Because THIS car, this automotive evil-incarnate was from the **darkest** of the Dark Side. And if it had a name, it could only be called one...

...Evil.

She sat down on the bed, the brightly colored comforter bunching beneath her damp towel. Drying her hair with another towel, she stared blankly at the dresser mirror, not even feeling like she knew who the woman was she saw. The white bath towel fell away from her shoulders leaving her exposed. She thought of all the times this happened when she was with him and how it led to an afternoon or evening of romance and passion. But not anymore... Ironically the realization of how long it HAD been since she had felt romance and passion in her life slapped her hard. And she slowly began to realize, at that very moment, that if she was going to have those things again, then she and she alone had to create the opportunities for them. Oddly, that growing realization gave her a nearly forgotten tinge of personal happiness. Now, for the first time in many, many months she had a plan - she was going to have fun again. And she was going to be romanced and romance someone, even if it meant she had to make the first move.

So, she picked up the phone and dialed...

Harry sat at the bar, smoking yet another cigarette, an unsavory habit he had picked up since he told Sally the news. His eyes tightened as the blue smoke curled and wafted about his fingers that were nervously flicking the red glistening ash into a heavy glass ashtray. Oh well, he thought - what's the worse smoking can do? Kill me? He chuckled at the thought. How can you kill someone who is already dead inside? How can you? He laughed at the ludicrousness of the thought and smiled at himself in the smudged mirror behind the bar that reflected the truth back at him. He was ugly - inside and out. And there was one thing he had to do before it was too late. Maybe tonight would be the night.

He looked out the tiny window in the door to the bar and saw the evening was coming on. Gathering up his car keys and cigarettes, tossing a twenty down on the bar to cover his tab, he turned and walked out, pieces of peanut shells sticking to the bottom of his shoes. Yeah, he thought... I gotta do it tonight. I gotta do it while I still can...

Dan didn't answer the phone. Hmmm, she wondered as she hooked her very sheer front hook bra before sliding her low cut V-neck top over her head. ("Accentuate your positives" said Redbook - and she had always been told that she had some nice "positives"!) He had told her that he was usually always home in the evening so she was sure he would be there. But he wasn't answering the phone - busy in the garage maybe? Pulling up her black patterned slacks up and over her tanned and smoothly shaven legs, she remembered the lunch date they had shared after she bought the car, how the food was superb and the conversation fun and light. How Dan's eyes twinkled when he told her how he always liked her and that he was going to ask for her number those many years ago but that Harry had beaten him to it. She laughed at that one, wishing quietly to herself that he had been a little quicker too, wriggling her curvy rear into the tight pants and buttoning them up. Maybe both their lives would have been different.

But he never called her after that and she was hesitant to call him, fearing she would look desperate and clingy. Ok, so now she didn't care about that - but darn it! She finally gets up the nerve to call him - and he's not home. Just her luck, she thought, brushing her hair once more before putting on a dash of lipstick, smacking her lips and smiling. His loss, she grinned to herself...

Well, maybe I'll drive by his house anyhow, she thought. After all, she hadn't taken out the Buick for several days while she did the mods to the car. She had thrown herself into the task, letting it be cathartic for her and it worked. She always loved working on cars. Her old 502-powered Camaro was her pride and joy and she hated having to let it go after the divorce. But she also had always coveted Megan's Turbo Buick and now, she finally had one of her own. A good one it seemed. It actually seemed to be a part of her now, part of who she was. The new Sally.

Digging the keys out of her purse, she walked through the utility room, her low heels clicking on the white/black linoleum, and out the garage door. There it sat. Its long, low hood with the power bulge beckoning her. The sharply angled B pillar catching her eye as it always did, the wide backend and big rectangular tail lights making her smile. Maybe tonight, just maybe, she could show those babies to someone...

She pulled the door handle up and swung the long door open, slid in behind the wheel and shut the door. It closed loudly, being manufactured in an era when they used metal - not plastic. Nothing like a Fisher

body to make one feel safe. Sliding the key into the ignition and turning it, she heard the big Walbro say a friendly hello by making the hood-mounted fuel pressure gauge dance to life. Then, rotating the key further forward, the starter engaged and the Turbo Buick came awake with a vengeance. Spitting for only a moment, it sat and idled while Sally flipped the parking light rocker switch with a ruby red tipped finger. Pushing in the tiny "Power" button on the stereo after hitting the garage door opener, she listened to the whir of the power antenna extending from the right fender and the quickly increasing clarity of the local radio station.

Reaching behind the gray steering wheel, she pulled the tilt lever towards her, lowering it to the just right position. Not needing to adjust the power seat much, she was ready. She checked her rear view mirrors, and after buckling her seat belt with a solid "click", she slid the T-bar shifter into "R" and backed out of the garage into the cool evening air. Good, she thought, these cars love cool night air. Backing on out onto the garage apron, she braked long enough to push the garage opener button again and watched the white door close, matching the other one that secured her other car. Continuing to back out the drive onto the street, she braked, pulled the shifter on back through "N" and into "D" and smiled. Yeah... tonight's gonna be fun. Let's go see what ol' Danny is up to...

Right foot to the accelerator, the throttle body opened and cool night air rushed inward. And now, after many years silently waiting... **Evil** was loosed upon the streets...

Nightsounds - Part 8 "My Place or Yours?"

Dan stepped out of the garage walkthrough door and pulled it closed, twisting the knob a couple of times to verify that, yes, he did lock it. Satisfied that all was secure, he turned and headed across the stone drive towards the attached garage's walkthrough. The sun was just about as low as it could get, all orange and fiery, causing the scattered wisps of long vaporous clouds to appear nearly luminescent in their red and mauve splendor. He stopped to marvel at the sunset, never tiring of seeing it disappear behind the horizon; Dan welcomed the night as one would a friend.

He stood silently for a moment, breathing in the cool air, watching the cars pass by on his road - Carson Road - and wondered why it was even called a "road" at all. Really, it was a glorified 4-lane highway that once was a part of the Interstate Access system. Once the new I-38 bypass was built, this stretch was pretty much abandoned. Still, the locals knew it was quicker most of the time to take Carson around the city because of all the usual traffic jams on the new bypass.

But the best part about Carson road was that once the retail shops and malls closed up for the night, it was a very dead road. With long stretches of pavement that afforded a perfect spot for street racing.

As he stood quietly, he rolled and toyed with the keys to the white Buick in his left hand, having just finished changing the oil and filter on it. Very few cars in town even had a chance to be close enough to see it's tail lights if they raced. And it had only been beaten once. By Dan. And now, it sat in his garage, in the bay farthest to the right, in a place of honor next to his twin turbo GN and two spots over from his

recently acquired Impala SS.

A noiseless breeze ruffled his hair ever so gently; almost as a lover would touch it, moving a lock here, an errant strand there. The way Megan used to do, back before... *I'm tired of feeling like this*, he thought. *I'm tired of being alone, I'm tired of eating by myself, I'm tired of talking to the cars, the cat and the dog...* He tried to remember the last time he had fun. Real fun. The kind that you never forget. It struck him that the last time was a while back - when he and Sally had lunch the day she bought the Buick up near Ayersville. Then, a rush of guilt and regret surged through him - he had never called her after that! *How could I have forgotten? Damn! I bet she's wondering too.* As he turned on his heel to go into the garage, he remembered that day, that 'look' in her eyes, and how it made him feel so alive. Odd how that feeling left as quickly as it came upon him that day.

He thought, *"I've GOT to move on. I've been saying it - I've got to start living it."* As he stepped up into the kitchen and closed the heavy oak 6-panel door behind him, he saw the cordless phone left laying on the counter, having been used last to order his dinner that evening - pizza. Again.

Should I call her? What will I say? How will I explain the fact that I HAVEN'T called her till now? The phone was now in his hand, his index finger over the dial as he looked at the marker board where he had scribbled her number weeks before. *Oh well, I'll just wing it...*

He listened to the rings... Once... twice... three times... four times... then: *Hi! This is Sally. Sorry I missed your call! Please, leave a mess* - He clicked "Off", hanging up. *No need to leave a message. She's out on a date anyhow. Maybe there's a Horsepower TV rerun on ESPN tonight...* he thought as he sat down on the kitchen chair and began untying his work boots, resigning himself to another night of waiting for another day, the phone still rocking on the counter top where he had just tossed it...

As she came up to the Carson Road/Mulvaney Drive light/intersection, Sally began to second guess herself. *I don't know... I mean, look at me. Is this desperate or what? Going over to see if a guy's even home, that hasn't called you once and even remotely acted interested.* She sat at the light waiting for the opposing turning lane to precede her and being lost in thought, didn't see the cat eye headlights come up behind her, then switch lanes to slide up along her driver's side. Fiddling with the Stereo controls and still waiting for the light, she paid no mind to the solitary figure in the neighboring car who was staring intently at her, gently revving the motor to keep it from loping too much... The driver had heard about this car from a buddy who worked at the local Buick dealership and had sold Sally some filters. How this badass Buick that was pretty much stock was so freakin' quick - and it was only a V6... And how this black "antique from the '80's could most likely kick the rear of the car beside it now - "easy"....

Maybe, thought the driver of the orange car. Maybe not...

The little green arrow on the dash of the WE4 still pulsed green with a loud announcement for each illumination. The chrome plastic coated turn signal with the multi-function twist control for wipers and cruise felt cool and smooth to Sally's hand which toyed with the grooves upon it while she stared intently at the light, waiting to turn... only about 5 minutes away from Dan's house...

Dan sat up and thought for a moment. Getting a wild idea in his mind and being a person prone to impulsive action, he quickly laced up his shoes again, threatened his hair with a brush then decided to wait because he didn't want to waste the time, grabbed the keys for the Impala SS off the key rack and headed back outside. *I'll just drive by. If her lights are on, I'll stop. I can say I just was wondering how she was doing with the new car.*

Unlocking the door that he only moments before triple verified was locked, he walked back into the garage. Hitting the "Unlock" button on the remote keyless fob, he heard the driver's door unlock on the SS, and saw the dome light come on. *I love modern conveniences*, he grinned. *She DID say she liked this car. Maybe she might be willing to go get a bite to eat?*

Firing up the LT1 was always a treat to Dan. This time was no different. The twist of the key brought to life the high horsepower/high torque V8. As the garage door rose behind him, he watched the tach settle down to a smooth 700 rpms then slowly backed the car out. Flipping on the headlights with one hand as he slid the console shifter into "D", he headed down the drive and out onto Carson Road. Towards Sally's house...

The driver revved his motor higher, waiting to see if the blonde in the Buick would look over, hoping she might take decide to go straight instead of turn. He knew she would be impressed with his car because he was sure all women were - in his mind anyhow. But he would rather put any doubts to rest that his buddy had about that old shoebox being able to run with him than just impress someone with the muscular fenders and curvaceous lines that surrounded him - and the 5.4 liter motor...

The light finally changed, Sally turned right, as did the car on her left, but she didn't notice at first. For some reason, she suddenly felt like she was being shadowed in the failing evening light - and she was. To her left, a squatly looking sports car with odd headlights was slowing, then gunning up beside her, then revving ahead only to slow again. Finally, as the car with the strange exhaust note got far enough ahead, she could make out an odd-shaped wing on it's rear, yet it's taillights looked like a Mustang. Some sort of Cobra, maybe? She only laughed - at first to herself, then at the driver in the snake, not knowing if he saw her. The sudden raising of the rpm's of the Cobra only to be harnessed by the dumping of the clutch and setting it sideways from the enormous and instantaneous torque application to the Pirelli's on the rear told her that, yes indeed, he saw her laughing at him...

The driver in the Ford was insulted. *How could this woman laugh at ME?*, he fumed. Disgusted, he couldn't decide whether to continue trying to goad Blondie into a street race or head on out to the club. His libido won out. Slowing to turn around and go back to Mulvaney Drive, he waited for the approaching car to pass him, noticing it was a big sedan with some nice wheels as it passed by. He watched the Buick's receding taillights head on down Carson Road as he paused and then did a U-turn back to the west. Quickly, he caught up with the Sedan and noted it was big Chevrolet with big tires...

Her loss, another woman's gain he thought as he turned right onto Mulvaney, opposite the direction the hulking Black Cherry Chevrolet turned. The Cobra with the funny wing then quickly sped off on in towards the brightly lit town, it's driver not paying any attention to the red tail-lights in his rear view mirror slowly going out of sight...

Another time, sweetie... there'll be another time...

Actually, it would much sooner than either of them would have thought...

Nightsounds - Part 9 "Red - and redder"

Hmmm...., she thought to herself walking back to her car. *Maybe I'll wait a little bit and see if he comes back...* Sally opened the car door and slid in, her eyes smarting a little from the bright dome light. Closing the door, it became dark once more inside and she sat in the quiet waiting - hoping maybe? - that Dan would be right back. *Where could he have gone?* She listened to the night settle in for good now. A freight train rumbled somewhere in the distance, it's sound smooth and reassuring. Dan's neighbor's dog barked (an annoying, whiny bark) - determined to put the fear of God into a rabbit just outside the chain link kennel, to which the brown long-ear paid no attention. The dog was barely as big as the rabbit. *I'll give him 15 minutes...* she thought, turning on the stereo once more, just as Blessid Union of Soul's "Light in Your Eyes" hit the chorus. She closed her own eyes, leaning her head against the square cloth headrest... *15 minutes...*

See - I knew she would be gone. Damn! When am I going to learn? thought Dan as he started the car and backed out of Sally's drive. *She's out on a date, I'm sure. A girl that sharp and with it must have a string of guys, just waiting to go out...* If there was one thing Dan had become good at it since his Loveboat hit the iceberg was being negative. And he didn't even know it.

Putting the car back into drive he felt the torque cause the Impala to feel impatient. *Yeah... that's why I love these LT1's - even with an automatic, you FEEL the torque.* Sidestepping the brake and mashing the go-pedal he was thrust back into the cushy leather seat, his face instantly breaking into a wide grin. *Nothing like a fast car to help a man forget about woman troubles...* he thought. *No sir, nothin' like a fast car...*

The Orange Cobra pulled out of The Booby Trap Lounge and headed east. The driver, in spite of his company was troubled. For some reason, the lady he saw earlier in the evening reminded him of someone. She just looked familiar for some reason... then, the thought was gone.

The lady now accompanying the driver leaned against his right arm and shoulder, her low cut top barely covering what he could hardly keep his eyes off of. With each shift of the Tremec, her body moved and swayed - jiggled actually - which only caused him to fight looking all the more, a fight he was losing at each stoplight.

The light changed but he didn't even see it at first, his eyes busy looking at nicer things - like her red hair. And, well... other things too. "It's green, baby" she laughed, seeing his eyes were below the horizon again, to which he stumbled and mumbled, dumped the clutch too quick, and stalled the Stallion right there. Now, he was REALLY embarrassed. Starting the car up once more, he made sure he gave it enough pedal

and dumped the clutch, leaving a pair of wide black marks behind them, his face almost as red as her lipstick.

As he slowed the SS, Joe pointed out to Rob the fact that the light was green but the doofus in the Mustang was just sitting there. Joe downshifted the 6 speed to second, as he now was within a hundred yards of overtaking the Mustang, and swung over to the right lane. But he had no more than nudged the Camaro's wheel to the right when they saw the orange car's exhaust puff a slight white - as if it was being started - and then hastily speed away from the intersection. "Ain't that the dumbest thing you ever saw?" asked Rob. "Aw, he probably stalled it and had trouble getting it started. Those mod motors don't have the torque at the low end and he probably let the clutch out too fast" answered Joe.

They glided the '97 blown SS up closer to the rear of Mustang, both of them noticing the rear wing at the same time. "What do you make of that?"

"I don't know," said Joe. "But if I didn't know better, I would swear that's a wing off the Cobra R's. That can't be an R, can it? Who around here has one? Nah... that can't be an R... Can it?"

They shadowed the Cobra a little more, laying back and noticing that it had a much different exhaust. Finally, another light turned red ahead of them and they slowed then stopped, next to the Snake. The woman turned around and looked at Joe, then drank in the lines of his Camaro with her eyes before turning her attentions back to the guy who was apparently trying to test the tensile strength of her top's hem.

"Well, I think we know why he stalled the car" laughed Rob, watching the mini-floor show in the car next to them. "She's a looker, that's for sure! And it looks like he lost his watch and is trying to find it." They both laughed at the pun. Just as Joe was laughing, the driver noticed for the first time the long, black F-Body next to him, idling menacingly. And the fact that he was busted 'looking for change' only made it worse. For the second time in less than 10 minutes, his face reddened...

"Rob - is your seatbelt on?" asked Joe.

"Yep. Gonna play Joe?"

"Maybe - he might be too busy." More chuckles...

Joe revved the force-fed LT1, just enough that the exhaust rumbled. The driver in the Cobra looked straight at Joe and nodded, then revved his motor as well. Still not sure what kind of Cobra he was lined up against, Joe glanced at the lights above, noting that the turning lanes still needed to cycle through. He looked over at the Cobra. Orange-ish color. Special wheels. Power bulge hood with snorkel intake inlets. Odd wing. It had to be a Cobra R... He watched the turn lanes lights turn yellow and now, his focus was on the launch.

The Cobra jockey watched the same lights, now forgetting the woman beside him, not hearing her breathing pause because she knew what was coming. Being out with Joshua in his toy ALWAYS meant street racing at some point or another. Tonight was going to be no exception. She watched the lights

slowly change, as if in time suspension. She heard the revs coming up on the Cobra, wishing that Joshua would at least put a stereo in the car. "It doesn't need a radio," he was always telling her. "The motor noise is music enough." It didn't make sense to her, but she knew that this car with no rear seat, no air conditioning, no radio and a rough ride was NOT going to be changed for her musical listening pleasure. She just couldn't fathom why anyone would pay what Joshua said he paid (Was it almost eighty thousand?) and NOT get a radio. And they talk about some dumb things WOMEN do, she thought, seeing the lights in the last nano-second of yellow, hearing the exhaust note of the black car to her right audibly increase...

Yellow...

Thoughts came in flashes as he waited... Joe hadn't street raced for a while. His last time out was when he was going to run the white Buick and cracked a fuel rail, forcing him to shut down and get the car hauled home. He just hadn't had the time to get it out for a while and tonight was only the second time out. And now, he finds himself lined up against what most consider the finest Mustang Ford had built in a long time... his grip tightened on the white ball atop the Hurst shifter. *Maybe a few more rpms wouldn't hurt* he thought, the LT1 willingly obliging his right foot's ministrations...

Joshua had only had the car a little more than a month, buying it from a man who took a blood bath in the stock market downturn and needed the cash to cover some margin calls. Having just finally getting the room in his garage to park it, he had it shipped from the East Coast. And now he sat at a light on a quiet street lined up against a very noisy Camaro; a Camaro that sounded pretty healthy. His palms felt damp, his breathing increased, and he leaned a little more forward in the seat, watching the yellow....

Jen looked over once more at the guy in the Camaro... *I know him from somewhere... Where do I know that guy from?*

A white Silverado slowed at the same intersection, noting the turning lanes on the cross street were changing from yellow to red and that two sports cars were in the east-bound lane. He had no more than began to stop when several things happened at once. The cross lanes' light turned green. Multiple sounds erupted and overwhelmed the ear - sounds he had not heard in a long, long time. At least out on the farm. Bawling, wide tires protesting the ungodly amounts of torque being applied to them; high performance motors being floored and fighting the initial static mass of thousands of pounds, trying to immediately accelerate that weight in a linear fashion and defy Newton's laws of motion. But for him, probably the most unforgettable part of the tiny microcosmic glance of street racing he just had was seeing just how FAST both cars left the intersection - gone, side by side at first but not for long.

Within a few seconds, the Black SS had half a car length on the Cobra. By the time Joe hit third, the Cobra's nose was at the rear of the SS and fading. It wasn't even close. Joe let off, watched the Cobra blow by and saw the woman giving him the thumbs up, the driver not even looking over...

"Hey Joshua?" she purred, watching his stony face becoming red for the third time that evening. "How much did you say you paid for this car? Wasn't it like, uh, eighty thousand dollars?"

"Shut up, Jen."

"How much do you think that black car cost?" she chuckled, knowing it would piss him off more.

"I said - Shut up, JEN."

"From the way it spanked you, I bet he paid twice what you did, huh?"

"Jen - SHUT THE HELL UP!" Joshua couldn't believe it and he fumed silently... He had to find another race, even if it took all night. He wasn't going home empty handed - so to speak.

Jen leaned over onto his arm again, pulling it against her chest. "Aw, c'mon Josh... I was only teasing you. Let's go home - I'll make you forget all about it, ok?"

"Later" he steamed. "Later..."

Dan was about to his driveway until he noticed the car in his drive. *Who could that be?*, he wondered. *Looks like a G-Body. A Monte or Buick? DAMN!* He was pretty sure it was Sally's WE4. Then, when he saw the plate, he knew for sure... DAMIEN it glared. Sally had told him at lunch she had the vanity plate picked out so he knew it was her car. He sped into the drive and then realized how eager he looked, so he slowed and motored up to the garage, not even opening the door. He shut off the Impala, and stepped out, wondering where she was. *Maybe she's out on the deck, looking at the stars?*

As he walked closer to the Buick, he heard the stereo and then noticed the driver was slumped back in the seat. He walked on around to the driver's side and there she sat, the moonlight radiant in her blonde hair, her face peaceful and beautiful, and unbelievably cute. *Don't get your hopes up here, Dano...* he admonished himself.

He walked up to the window and stood there. Then, he knelt down, his face level with hers and watched her breathing in softly, then exhaling... she was sound asleep. He spoke softly...

"Sally?"

"Sally? Are you awake?"

No movement still. *She must be TIRED...*

Dan touched her shoulder gently - her eyes didn't move.

He shook her lightly and said "Sal-"

Sally suddenly screamed as if her life was in mortal danger, frightening poor Dan so bad that he screamed too. The dog stopped barking.

She blinked rapidly, rubbed her eyes and apologized. "I'm so sorry Dan. I fell asleep."

"So... what's up, Sally?" She didn't answer as she opened the car door, the interior light flooding the drive with its pale light. Stepping from the car and shutting the door, she leaned back against it, still not answering him. She looked at him, he at her, neither one speaking yet. Something was going on at that very moment, almost as if two kindred spirits had met; something on another plane, another level of consciousness.

"Dan?"

"Yes Sally?"

"You might think I'm crazy..."

"You're not crazy, Sally. You're beautiful..." Dan wished he hadn't blurted out the last words. But - they were words that gently spoke to Sally's heart. It had been a long, long time since she had heard someone say those very words to her that had that kind of emotion beneath them...

"Dan? Could I have a hug? I just drove over here to see you and ask you if you could give me a hug. I'm lonely tonight Dan. And I hoped you would be here." The words spilled from her lips now, her eyes moist, her gaze locked upon his shadowy face...

Dan reached for her, pulled her into him and held her tight. Her hair brushed his cheek, her perfume intoxicating him, her touch and warmth enveloping him...

"Sure, Sally. I need a hug too. I've got lots of hugs."

She looked up into his eyes, her face mere inches from his, her arms around his waist and her hands clasped. His arms were around her shoulders and he could see the stars and planets in her eyes.

"Sally?" She smiled and raised her eyebrows as if to say "Yes?"

"I just came from YOUR place... As someone once sang, isn't it ironic?"

She smiled even more and so did he...as he leaned his face just a little closer... she raised hers towards his. Her eyes closed as her lips moved closer... She felt his embrace tighten even more, heard him inhale... she could feel his breath upon her face; hers was upon his... only a whisper was between them...

Neither spoke a word, but the kiss said it all...

Nightsounds - Part 10 "The Stars and the Moon..."

Dan awoke very slowly, the events of the night before still not quite registering within his foggy mind.

Sitting up on the edge of the bed, he rubbed his eyes and slowly stood, stretching and listening to the creaks and groans reminding him that he wasn't as young as he used to be. Grabbing his dark blue robe from the floor he walked out into the kitchen, hit the start button on the instant coffee maker, and then walked out the back door and onto the deck. The cool, crisp air splashed about his face - it's freshness clearing his mind a little more each passing moment. *Was it a dream?*

Seeing that the sun was soon to make it's way above the eastern horizon he thought it strange that he was so wide awake this early in the morning. *I haven't slept that good in months...* he thought to himself, watching the sky turn it's myriad shades of aqua and red, yellows, oranges, and blues... *It's gonna be a great day...* he mused.

Hearing a noise behind him, he turned - and saw Sally standing in the open doorway, smiling quietly, wrapped in one of Dan's maroon button-down shirts - with most of the buttons not in use. "Can't sleep?" she purred... "Actually, I slept quite well. How about you?" he asked, reaching out and pulling her close. Wrapping her sleeve-covered arms around his waist and placing the side of her face against his chest, she whispered, "Yeah... I slept pretty good too..."

They stood that way, just being close to one another, each of them silent and content. "Want some coffee?" he asked, his beard-stubbed chin nuzzling the top of her head.

"Sure... But I've got to get home and get ready for work. Just a cup and that's it, ok?" she smiled and looked up into his eyes.

Looking down at her, his hands upon her sides, he could only nod yes, his heart taking complete control of his mind.

Noticing that Dan's eyes were slowly straying downward from her face, she looked down to see what had his attention. Seeing that his shirt gapped at all the right places, she asked in her most seductive voice, "See something you like?"

Dan's face reddened immediately but seeing that she wasn't quick to hide what his eyes, lips, and hands had explored just hours earlier, he nodded a meek "yes" before mumbling "But - I think the coffee's done..."

She slipped from his grasp, laughed and headed in the doorway in front of him, then surprised him by allowing the shirt to slip from her bare shoulders and fall to the deck as she walked away from him. Her beauty took his breath away as he watched her step back into the kitchen.

"Maybe the coffee can wait?" he half said, half asked to which she replied "It will still be hot after bit, won't it? And - I haven't been late for work for a while...so?..." She now leaned against the dark oak table, facing him, her hands at her sides upon the cool, smooth wood. Her eyes were dancing, the twinkles easily seen in the soft morning light, her lips smiling the lover's smile of desire...

"Yeah... it'll wait, Sally. It will just have to wait," he whispered as he neared her, nudging/following her

back into the bedroom.

The kitchen was silent once more as night continued to ebb into day; the songbirds announcing the coming sun and the traffic beginning to pick up as always on Carson road. The coffee bubbled and hissed softly, its smell filling the house while gentle, muffled sounds of delight could barely be heard from behind the closed door to the bedroom... a blue robe in a pile on the kitchen floor.

In another part of town it was a different kind of morning for someone else. He got up as usual and after grabbing a quick shower and dressing, headed on into town, anxious to drop off his car at FFI (Faster Fords, Inc.), a reputable Ford tuner shop. After explaining to Vince (the owner who had helped him locate the "R") what exactly it was he wanted and why Vince should take his car in on an "emergency" basis (only getting the rush appointment after explaining the embarrassment of the night before), Josh got his wish. Vince reassured him that, yes, his wish was attainable - but not recommended due to the risk. Josh didn't care - he wanted to have the quickest car around.

"Ok, it's your money and it's YOUR car - but don't say I didn't warn you" smiled Vince, shrugging his broad shoulders.

Joshua went back outside and hopped in the passenger side of Jen's Lexus SUV, a little more spring to his step. "Is he going to make your car fast, Josh?" she teased. "Really fast? Because you KNOW - fast cars really, really turn me on."

"Jen - it will be fast enough. Just wait and see, ok? And step on it - I'm already going to be late for my 9AM appointment."

Vince watched the silver vehicle pull away and thought to himself, "If it's fast he wants, fast he will get... I love those guys with DEEP pockets. Usually, they've always got way more money than sense." Chuckling, he pushed the "Open" button on the door to the first bay and walked out to the Cobra. "Yeah, she'll be fast alright... Damn fast."

Weeks later...

Thursday night... As always, the local strip held its weekly Test and Tune/Grudge Race Night, which was packed once more. Since the season was waning and fall fast approaching, the locals were anxious to get in as many runs as they could before the annual "Summer-Slam" event was held on Labor Day weekend - only a week away. The usual contingent of racers was out - from the mild to the wild. And, the lanes were full and overflowing. Josh and Jen arrived late, the "R" secured on the trailer behind the Lightning. Most locals had heard about this car, many of them seeing it in Vince's shop, usually under a tarp. It was rumored that Vince only worked on this car himself, and only when no one was around. NO one knew what was so special about this "R" and NO one had even heard it run since it was pulled into the shop that day many weeks ago.

Josh and Jen registered for the T&T and then found a suitable place to park. After removing the tie-downs from the car, Josh climbed into the cage-surrounded cockpit, not noticing the crowd of nearly 30 onlookers watching... waiting... listening. Most just listening, hoping that their ears would give them the answers to what was beneath the hood.

After making sure the shifter was in Neutral, he turned the key. Immediately, the motor came to life; but it's sound disappointed everyone. NO huge lopey cam noises... just a subdued rumble. Not even a telltale whine of a huge supercharger. The car just sat and basically... whistled. Sure, the low restriction exhaust sounded good. But still - nothing like what everyone was certain was going to be heard. Many had even heard - or started? - the rumor that the mod motor was pulled and traded for super-secret Roush Stage IV mill. Yet, most agreed that the sound that came from beneath the locked hood couldn't be a Roush. The onlookers watched and whispered as Josh backed the car off the trailer, never revving it once, only letting it back straight down and stop, then idle for a moment, the windows still up.

Jen grabbed the camcorder from the console of the Lightning, hit the "Lock" on the Keyless, and headed for the stands as Josh headed for the packed staging lanes. He had the car in strip-tune before it left for the track and he was anxious to see what his money had bought. *"I hope Mr. SS is here tonight"* he smirked... *Won't HE be surprised..."*

Jen found a seat up near the top of the stands and began watching the racers doing battle. Pair after pair did their burnouts, staged and blazed away from the tree, many mismatched opponents, as often is the case at T&T. The grudge races didn't start till 9 so right now it was just a matter of dialing the cars in. In her estimation, there were only a few truly streetable cars there (she smiled at the irony since Josh had tailored in his "Street car") that would even only remotely have a chance against Josh's Mustang. One, a nasty black Viper with no badging that had only a "Venom" sticker on its rear fascia. The Viper was evil and it was obvious the driver was lifting before the end, sandbagging it maybe in hopes of getting some wagers before he revealed all he had.

Another was a funny, white, boxy looking car that had to be from the '80's that sounded a little like Josh's car. It was a solid 10-second performer. Another - a white Trans-Am with some funny graphics on its side, something about a "Pace Car". That car ran wickedly fast she thought, wondering how it would feel to be inside when it launched, it's left front wheel leaving the pavement each and every time before it lit a low 10 light. And the strangest one of all - was a truck. A black, boxy looking compact truck (*Was that a GMC logo?*) that didn't do a burnout before staging. She guessed that it HAD to be four-wheel drive. It did have an aftermarket hood on it and it whistled too - but this whistle was deeper and more threatening. And in the rear window of the truck was a "Going Fast With Class" decal that she had never seen before. The truck just plain, flat out hooked up and disappeared in the angry hiss and whistle that it built to near ear-splitting volumes at each tree. "Yeah... that truck is trouble" she mused, and then giggled. *"I hope Josh runs him!"*, knowing that if he got smoked by a little truck it would really get his panties in a bunch...

But Josh was oblivious to everything except the car in front of him. He didn't care what he ran against - he only wanted to collect a low 10 tonight, exactly what Vince had told him was the best he should expect. Vince had worked his magic (with Josh's many dollars) and had taken a car that was actually more

designed for road racing and wrenched it into the quarter-mile warrior he now was strapped within. A car that Josh had always wanted since he first saw the Cobra "R" at an auto show in Detroit; a car with a heritage of racing and winning.

It was just then that Rob pulled into the track and after paying the admission, headed for the Registration tent. Finishing the paper work, he fired up the SS and headed for the staging lanes, noticing that darkness wasn't far off - maybe another hour of daylight and then they would be racing beneath the lights. Hoping to find Joe but realizing that it may take some doing, he just fell in line behind the others and was quickly swallowed up by the crowded lanes. Cars were everywhere - cars of all makes and models; of all levels of expertise; of all levels of performance. Tonight, Rob and Joe were going to run each other for the first time on the strip. The two times they tried to run earlier in the summer only had to be cancelled because of one reason or another. But, hopefully tonight it was going to happen. Well, if Joe was there anyway...

Dan and Sally pulled into the track shortly after Rob did and followed the same routine. They were in Dan's SS Impala which he had just finished working on. Only Sally knew what was beneath the hood - but it was far from stock. She had been with Dan the weekend before while he was doing some street T&T and was there to see a highly modded VR4 Mitsu and a gnarly dark blue big block Nova get left far behind, much to Dan's delight. Tonight, they only wanted to baseline the mods before they began tweaking in earnest. Not even realizing it, they pulled into the same lane that Josh was in. However, he was about to go out onto the track - they had about a 20-30 minute wait and they didn't know that Rob was about half way up in yet another lane nor that Joe had just finished up another solid mid/high ten-second run in his black Viper. Shutting down the LT1, Dan's right hand came to rest upon Sally's lap, her hand quickly grasped his and squeezed it. "It's gonna be fun, Dan. It's gonna be fun..." He only nodded and squeezed her hand back.

The stars and the moon were slowly coming into alignment this night - the night of change. The sun settled beneath the horizon and darkness broken by high intensity lights came once more into their corner of the world. The night was greeted by the sounds of enormous amounts of horsepower and torque, of an announcer who loved his work and knew his cars, of track personnel yelling instructions to the racers, and of the roar of the crowd when delighted by a good run or a smoky burnout. And occasionally, by a few boos when a racer broke and oiled down the track, causing a long delay in racing.

This night was, as all usually are, far from silent. And, it was just barely dark... but before the sun would rise again, before the morning songbirds would announce the next coming of warm morning rays, before another fresh pot of coffee would begin, this night would change the worlds of many.

And - not *all* change is good...

Nightsounds - Part 11 "Every Rose Has Its Thorn"

The sun was now a memory. Twilight had swept its cool hand over the land and the brilliant floodlights that ran the length of the track and turning night into day in the staging area were humming their night song. Thousands of insects of every species darted in and out of the lights' warm glow, many plunging to smoldering deaths if they got too close to the several hundred watt bulbs. An occasional bat flitted into the eerie glow to gather its evening meal of mosquitoes and moths, only to disappear as quickly as it came - oblivious to the roar of horsepower and the screams of the crowd below... The four lane that paralleled the strip only a mile and a half away showed its nightly stream of traffic, the rumble of heavily laden 18-wheelers and intermittent Autobahn racer wannabes' exhausts completely lost in the din from the strip. Only ever so often could an ultra high horsepower car's startup be heard from the pit area west of the staging lanes - its rumble always eliciting grins from the knowing and the faithful.

Dan was now at the burnout box, having backed into it simultaneously with his opponent, an early '90's Fox Body with a huge Vortech sticker in the rear window. The Mustang had a very deep whine which could even be heard over Dan's SS's rumble. *I guess this will be a good one to start with...* Dan thought. Hitting the line lock and bringing the LT1 up in rpms the drag radials only mildly protested against the weight of the car before the nearly 700 lb/ft of torque overwhelmed them and began the rotation. Slowly then abruptly, the rubber scrubbed itself in the water atop the asphalt, it's surface temperature rising quickly - developing steam and beginning to melt the surface of the tires. Huge plumes of smoke now rose from beneath both vehicles; the Mustang driver sidestepped his brake with the heel of his right foot a second before Dan released the Line Lock, both vehicles spinning wildly at first then hooking and rocketing toward the Prestage lights.

Both drivers slowed and then began the creep into the invisible electronic beams that ran across their lanes. Breaking the beam of the first set of bulbs caused the "Prestaged" yellow light to illuminate in each lane. Then, ever so slowly both racers rumbled/whined on into the path of the second row of lights - the "Staged" beam. Once this beam was broken, each racer promptly braked, ceasing their car's forward movement. Dan staged first and immediately began to press the accelerator, running the LT1's torque up against the 3200 rpm convertor. The Mustang also was now slowly, slowly, slowly creeping into the path of his "Staged" beam and as soon as it lit the bulb, the tree started. His rpms were up now, well over 4,000, his clutch foot just below the threshold point of engagement, his eyes glued to the tree...

First yellow...

The Impala was now beginning to lift the rear ever so slightly, the torque trying to twist the rear axles from the housing, only the brakes holding the black leviathan in restraint. In the stands, Sally watched, her hands clenched, knowing how much this race meant to Dan as far as bragging rights. She saw the second yellow lamps blink on...

Second yellow...

Dan's grip on the leather covered steering wheel tightened, his knuckles white beneath the gloves. His helmet strap tight beneath his chin, a bead of sweat snaked from beneath his Bell down his neck... His

eyes were solidly locked on the ambers, his ears telling him the LT1 was at maximum sustainable speed without breaking the tires loose... In his right ear he could clearly hear the whine of the stroked 5 liter (+)'s motor.

The Mustang driver liked running late in the evening. With the air being denser, the blower helped make more power. He hadn't been up against the Impala to his left before but from the sound of its exhaust he knew it was far from stock.

As the Second Amber bulb lit, both racers set in motion huge events with only very small movements of their body. In the left lane, immediately as he saw the second bulb light, Dan's reaction was to lift his left foot from the brake pedal. The idea was to break free of the "Staged" beam close enough to the perfect reaction time without red-lighting, although with tonight being a test/tune evening it didn't really matter. Except to the racers. No one wanted to "win" on a red-light so as always, it was a gentleman's code to run from a clean tree.

As he lifted his foot, the hydraulic fluid pressure dropped immediately, allowing the brake springs on the Chevy to pull the calipers away from the rotors. This sudden freedom of rotation allowed the torque to violently begin twisting the entire drive train of the SS, transferring it to ultimately be applied against the small but sticky contact patch of the DR's upon the asphalt. No sooner had the torque been loosed did the third light illuminate...

Third Yellow...

Just as Dan was releasing his car, the Mustang driver sidestepped the clutch and floored the accelerator - just as the second yellow glowed. High-pressure clutch springs threw the clutch face against flywheel of the Blue Oval motor just its rpm's were racing skyward. A perfect launch, with the tremendous shock load being handled with ease, rewarded the driver. As in the Impala, now the torque of the motor had to overcome the weight of the car and driver, the static position of all the rotating drivetrain components, and most of all, Newton's Law that says "A body at rest will stay at rest until acted upon by an outside force". In this case, the body at rest was a 3540 lb Ford Mustang GT (with driver) - the outside force was the several hundred horsepower supercharged V8's torque. And the torque won. Actually, the torque was overwhelming.

Just as the maximum torque was reached and the rear tires almost at the point of losing adhesion, a weak universal said "I'm outa here...". With a loud crack, it sheared itself free from the tailshaft yoke causing the V8 to be complete free of any load at all... a very, very bad thing when the accelerator is floored and the blower is cramming even more air/power into it.

Green light...

Almost in slow motion, the SS lifted its left front fender as the car broke free of the beams. A .51 Reaction time flashed on the board in Dan's lane 1320 feet away, his SS now accelerating at a rapid pace. He heard an odd noise and a super-high pitched whine as he launched, then another very loud boom, saw a .77 RT in the right lane but then focused only on the end of the track. No time to worry now about what

happened - get the best ET was all that mattered. He roared across the finish not knowing that his was a solo run until he picked up the slip at the shack...

But back at the starting line...

As the SS roared away, the crowd watched as the maroon Fox-body first jerked, then bucked as a loud "Crack!" was heard, then heard the engine over-rev only for a moment before another very loud "BOOM!" was heard with sparks coming from beneath the engine. Nasty mechanical sounds stopped abruptly, the exhaust note of the SS fading with each passing second. Dark fluid could be seen dripping/pouring from beneath the mortally wounded Mustang - oil. And antifreeze. Number three rod had freed itself of the piston as well as the crank and chose to leave the confines of the block out the side - but only after it had hurled the piston violently upward into the head and cracking it while flattening the valves trying to do their duty.

The driver sat in disbelief, still not sure that what he had just felt/heard was real. But he knew it was. The crowd first cheered then began to boo, knowing that another delay was inevitable now. He unbuckled his five-point, pulled his helmet off and sat it on the floorboard of the passenger side (the seat gone to save weight) and wanted to cry. Another season wasted as well as a lot of money. Maybe next year, he thought as he watched the Chevy's board illuminate with a 11.77/114.8 light. *Damn... I would have got him, too...* he murmured to no one but himself. *I would have got him...* Next year... it will be different next year...

Meanwhile... back in the staging lanes...

Joe and Rob finally hooked up and were talking trash and laughing just as a guy in a new firesuit walked up. Standing there quietly, he just stared the Camaro SS and then asked, "Do you remember running a Cobra R out near Carson and Mulvaney a few weeks ago?"

"Carson and Mulvaney?" asked Rob. "Hey! Yeah, I do. Some clown in a Cobra R was playing touchy feely with this chick then he gets cutesy with me at the next intersection. But it wasn't any contest - I dusted him ..." Rob's voice trailed off as he made the connection. "It was you?" he laughed. "YOU were the guy in the R? Man, I'm sorry, but you asked for it." It wasn't the fact that Rob was laughing about it that really pissed Joshua off - it was that he knew Rob was right.

"Tell you what Camaro boy. How's about you and me running heads up tonight? I've got a little something for you", said Josh, his voice cold and vengeful. "And this time, there aren't any distractions. I'm three cars behind you and two lanes over. How about you back out and we'll line up together. Unless you're afraid to race where it really matters - at the track."

Now, Rob was the one who was pissed. But only for a moment - then he regained his composure, recognizing a good fisherman when he saw him.

"Ok... it's all in fun anyhow. Sure. I'll run you."

"I got another idea..." stroked Josh. "How about we make this interesting... say, run for money?"

Rob was immediately suspicious. "How much you wanna lose tonight, catfish?" he asked, the insult (catfish = all mouth and a tiny brain) lost on the attorney.

"Oh... how about \$500?" asked Josh coolly, pulling his wallet out and holding five \$100's in his hand. Rob laughed, which surprised the R owner.

"Man, I ain't got that kind of cash on me tonight. I *work* for MY money!" Another insult above Josh's head.

Pulling \$200 out of his wallet, all twenties, he countered - "How about this? I'll run you for two bills, ok?"

"Alright. Let's do it. And your buddy can hold the money, ok?" Josh was so eager for revenge he didn't even think about whether he should trust Joe with the money. Dancing back to his Cobra, he had to push his way through several onlookers to get in, all the while ignoring their questions. Now he would simply wait... wait like the scavenger he was, both in his professional life as well as his personal life.

Jen waited quietly in the stands, watching the track crew clean up the mess from the blown Mustang in record time. Racing quickly resumed with several more pairs squaring off. Then, *finally*, she saw the orange nose of Josh's Cobra slither through the gates alongside a low black car. She wasn't much on cars but she knew she had seen this one before... *Where was it?* She couldn't remember - but she knew this car *from somewhere*...

Both the SS Camaro and the wildly modded R were now at the lights, the "Staged" bulbs lit and the tree in motion...

Blink The first amber... Roars of exhaust from both cars, the crowd was silent...

Blink Amber #2... Tension thick in the air, a whine easily heard from the Camaro, a loud whistle - was that a *pair* of whistles? - from the Cobra...

Blink Amber #3... both cars now were being unshackled from their restraints by the dumping of clutches, the increasing of throttle body openings and the ramping up of the power adders - a single blower on the Camaro; twin turbos on the Cobra.

Blink **GREEN!** Both cars broke the beams and began their runs as if welded together. Both had identical RT's - .51's. The crowd was at it's feet in a roar as they left the tree, neither one at an advantage.

Rob and Josh were slamming the gears, not letting off. No matter what else you could say about Josh's personality - he could drive. He might have been distracted that night on the street, but here he was in the zone. He hit every shift flawlessly - even now and ever so slightly, he began to pull away from the Camaro... the DOHC running strong with it's new induction system cramming huge volumes of air into the hand made plenum.

Josh crossed the finish line almost 4 tenths of a second quicker than Rob, but not as fast as he wanted -

11.13 versus Rob's 11.52. Still, he took consolation in the fact that he had won easily AND that he hadn't even used his ace in the hole. There was more from where this came from - much more...

Getting back to the lanes, Josh jumped out expecting excuses from Rob and protests about the money. But he was wrong. Rob was out of his car first, extending his hand to shake Josh's just as Joe was walking up.

"Hand him his money, Joe! He's got quite a car there!" Rob laughed. "Man, you sure surprised me. I guess I should have looked under your hood first, huh?"

Josh laughed nervously. "Well, the motor's not exactly what you raced uptown that night. It's had some 'work', shall we say?"

Both laughed. Then, Joe stepped up. "Tell you what, my man. How about running me and my Mopar? It won't be as easy I think."

Josh thought for a moment..."For another \$200? Sure, even if I lose, I'll only be losing your buddy's money... why not? Whacha got?"

Joe looked at Rob and then with a poker face said, "A Viper. A Hennessey 600 actually. I just got it back a couple of weeks ago. Whadayasay? Game? Here's my \$200. Hey, I've got an idea - let's make this even more interesting. You wanted to run for \$500 earlier - how about now?" Joe's eyes sparkled in the cool night air... he knew how to fish too.

"Boy, I'll be glad to take your money as well as your friend's. A 600 horsepower Viper don't worry me at all..." Josh chuckled, knowing that he had to be making well over that now. *Don't you worry none there, rube. I'll take your money just as quick. Just give me another ten seconds or so...*

Nightsounds - Part 12 "In only a moment..."

Jen saw Josh beat the Camaro and she had gotten it on tape, knowing that Josh would replay this race forever. It was all he had talked about for weeks - beating the guy in the SS and that was why she knew what that car finally was. It was the one that beat Josh uptown that evening and was the reason Josh was so determined to win again, no matter the price. Not really sure what all "twin turbo's" and "Foggers" all meant, she just knew that the Vince-guy had given Josh a bill for nearly six grand - and to her surprise, Josh just smiled. Men... who could figure them?

Now, it was almost Joe and Josh's turn to pull onto the track. Josh was behind a nasty little GMC truck that whistled and rumbled. He had yet to see this truck run, but knew it sounded good. "*Syclone*"? *What kind of name is that?* he mused... Josh was a die-hard Ford fan. He didn't keep up with the competition - because in his mind, there **WAS** no competition. It was only a matter of spending enough to win. He couldn't grasp the concept of just 'getting buy' since he was born into money and kept on making it. To him, it was win, no matter the cost - because 'cost' didn't matter. His pockets were deep.

Over in front of Joe sat a white Trans Am. However, Joe knew this car and it's owner, as well as the guy driving the Syclone. Both of them worked in the same office building as he did and they often talked cars at the water cooler or in the parking lot. The Syclone was far from stock, it's Stage 2 motor having been built and massaged by Duttweiler Performance. The TTA was only mildly built, all bolt-on stuff with a new turbo/intercooler/converter - but still capable of hitting very low elevens and supposedly nudging 10.90's if the conditions were right. Still he didn't think it would hold up against the Syclone.

And he was right.

Less than 11 seconds later, the little black truck crossed the finish line - nearly a second ahead of the TTA. *Oh well... you win some, you lose some...* Joe thought for the TTA driver (Dennis he thought was the guy's name.)

Joe nudged his Viper into the box and did a long slow burnout to heat up his tires. Josh did exactly as he did against the SS - a quick warm up followed by a charge to the line. In just a few seconds, both were set and the tree began to descend.

At the green, both cars launched. But this time, the incredible torque of the Hennessey (the sticker said it was a Venom 600 - but the mods were those of an 800) absolutely annihilated the Cobra - MUCH to Josh's surprise. And the worst thing about this 'surprise' was that now Josh was playing catch-up. But still, he didn't falter and by mid track, he was beginning to reel in the Viper ever so slowly. Yet, the finish line was coming too, too soon. So, he decided it was time. Time to press the red button which he did just after shifting into fourth.

With the pressing of the red button on the dashboard, he energized a solenoid placed in a line - a NOS line that was routed up to a fogger plate in the intake plenum. This solenoid allowed the already pressurized line to flood the intake tract of the already force-fed Cobra with cold Nitrous Oxide in a gaseous form, immediately increasing the horsepower development of the DOHC mill. The results were incredible.

Immediately, the Cobra jumped forward and would soon be nose-to-nose with the Viper. But then - fate intervened and with less than 150 feet to go before they would cross the line, both of them in the ending phases of high 10 second runs...

Just as he pulled even with the Viper and about to pull ahead, an O-ring that was pinched during installation in the aftermarket fuel pressure regulator failed, spraying a fine mist of high pressure 116 octane fuel into the engine compartment. And like all disasters, not just one thing causes them - this incident was no exception. Just as the vaporized fuel was leaking, a loose connection on an electrical sending unit arced, causing the tiniest spark.

But this tiny, nearly invisible spark was all the fuel needed to ignite. For just a brief moment, Josh didn't realize the trouble he was in - an engine fire at nearly 130 mph - and then his luck went from bad to worse with less than 100 feet to go to cross the line.

It was at *that* very inopportune moment that a fitting would crack on the NOS line in the Cobra's bay, spraying a very fine stream of Nitrous Oxide *directly* into the fire. The results were cataclysmic. A small explosion was heard and the hood was flung up and back onto the windshield, the NOS accelerating and intensifying the engine fire. Now, Josh knew he was in very serious trouble... He had to stop the car NOW, he couldn't see in front of him, and flames were lapping up out of the engine bay, whipped by 130 mph winds.

His first reaction was to hit the brakes - HARD. He crossed the line only a half car length behind the Viper, but in a very grave situation.

The heat from the fire was now incredibly intense - so intense that it began to boil the brake fluid. In only a moment, Josh lost his brakes, and he was now careening out of control toward the sand traps in the wildly burning car. Emergency response personnel were already rolling before he hit the sand, but they were a quarter mile away. Luckily, the hood flung on off of the car now, blackened and bent beyond recognition. But Josh still had to get out...

*Joe looked back and saw the fiery ride hurtling past him. Fear and terror gripped his heart, knowing that this was one thing all racers feared - fire in a moving car with fuel on board. He slammed the massive brakes of the Viper and slid to a halt, jumping from his car with an extinguisher mounted between the seats and began running toward the Cobra, now only 40-50 yards from the sand. To his horror, he saw that now flames appeared to be coming from **INSIDE** the passenger compartment.*

The Cobra hit the sand at about 40 mph, tossing sand and dirt in the air several feet, spinning to one side. Thankfully, the dirt and debris was forced up into the engine compartment in enough force it somehow put out the fire. But that didn't help Josh - the interior of the car was now on fire and he could feel the heat through his fire suit. He had enough presence of mind to hit the quick release of the 5-point and - couldn't open the door! The twisting of the car hitting the sand had jammed the door latching mechanism. His only hope was to get out of the window somehow... a window that was still up! The power window controls were burnt away.

Trying to free himself from beneath the steering wheel, he began to feel weak, the acrid smoke filling the compartment. His extinguisher was in the rear seat but he couldn't see it and he was now choking and beginning to falter. He could hear sirens but strangely, they seemed to be getting softer. It was then he realized he only had a few more seconds to get out before he passed out from the heat and smoke. He now knew he was about to die a horrible and gruesome death.

He heard someone screaming - and realized it was his own voice. The fire had broken through his shoes and gloves and his skin was beginning burn. Terror and panic now gripped him as he realized he was going to die alone in his car. He struggled frantically, his left leg stuck between the steering wheel and the door, the heat and pain and smoke were making him sleepy...

So very tired and sleepy...

Just then came a sound of broken glass followed by a huge white cloud with a loud roar that came in

rushing in through the broken driver's window. Joe had busted the glass with the extinguisher and was flooding the compartment with the dry chemical, putting the fire out. But Josh was slumped against the seat, his suit blackened. Joe tried to pull the door open but the handle wouldn't budge so he reached in and grabbed Josh's limp body trying to pull him free.

Just as the rescue teams pulled up, with one final tug, he pulled Josh through the open window and laid him on the sand. EMT's ran over with med bags, Oxygen kits and a stretcher as Joe began removing Josh's helmet. Still, no movement...

Back in the stands, Jen stood crying, not sure what happened other than she knew it was something horrible and it involved Josh. She saw his car's hood fly up, then the fire, then nothing but smoke ending in a strange sounding crash with dirt and sand going everywhere. Smoke still poured from that end of the track and she saw the Ambulance/rescue vehicle's race down the track. Oh dear God - please let Josh be ok? Please, God? Oh please..., she cried near hysterically now. Then, she felt someone pull her close. It was Sally.

"Hang in there, honey. He'll be ok." Sally said hopefully. Just having someone near her and hearing another person say "He'll be ok" gave Jen a little bit of hope... but not much...

At the far end, the medical people had taken over and were now working on Josh. Still, no sign of consciousness. Joe wasn't even sure if he was breathing. Josh's face could barely be seen beneath the O2 mask. His fire suit was now completely cut away and Joe could see some severe burns on his lower legs and forearms. But his skin color was bad... very bad.

The crowd still stood silently, only a few murmurs could be heard. "What happened?" "I'm not sure - some kind of fire." "God, I hope he's ok..." "Yeah... me too..." "You just never know, do you?" Nervous whispered conversations rose quietly from the stands to be swallowed by the night...

Just as Joe was about to look away, certain that this brash man who drove a great race was dead he heard a soft cough - then another, and then a stronger one yet. YES!!! He was alive! Josh could barely open his eyes, but he got them open. The rescue personnel told him to lie still, that he was burned pretty badly in some places and that they were about to transport him, but he wouldn't say "Ok" until he held up his burned hand toward Joe. Joe took it and smiled at him, just as Josh weakly mouthed "thank you". Tears welled up in Joe's eyes at that moment. Tears of gratitude that Josh's life was spared.

Sally and Jen were making their way down through the stands when they heard the announcement. "Ladies and Gentlemen... as you saw, there was a violent and tragic accident just moments ago. The driver of the car we have just learned is - "

*Jen's heart leapt into her throat, afraid to hear the next words - was he **dead**?*

"- is going to be ok. He's suffered some burns and some smoke inhalation, but the initial medical team report is that his injuries are not life threatening. Thank God."

A loud cheer went up in the stands and Jen faltered, having to sit down. Sally sat with her while she regained herself then helped her to make her way on down and out toward the staging lanes.

Already, the other racers - sure of their own invincibility and full of the it-won't-happen-to-me attitude were anxiously waiting their turns. Just then, Sally saw Joe pull up to the rear and led Jen towards him.

Joe told Jen what had happened and she hugged him hard, crying against his chest. Joe held her; tears full in his eyes too as he realized he had just glimpsed his own mortality. Sally likewise was crying, her hand on Jen's shoulder, hearing Jen sobbing "Thank you... thank you for saving his life..." She thought about how life can change so quickly, how one moment you're having the time of your life - the next, your life could be gone. She felt someone's hand upon her back now. It was Dan.

Sally turned and leaned against Dan's chest, her tears moistening his shirt. "Hold me, Dan. Don't ever let me go..."

Dan and Joe stood there quietly, each lost in his own thoughts...

Joe asked Jen softly "Need a ride to the hospital?"

Jen nodded her head and wiped at her eyes, her mascara running down her tear stained cheeks... "We can take Josh's truck."

Joe watched the wrecker coming up the return road now with Josh's burned out car, the ambulance already out on the highway and running hot for the hospital.

"Ok. Let's go then. Oh, by the way - my name's Joe."

"I'm Jen" she sobbed through her tears... "Thank you, Joe for saving Josh's life. He really IS a good guy at heart." And with that, she started crying hard once more...

As Joe hit the "Lock" button on his keyless remote he heard the audible chirp. He can come back and get the Viper later and besides, it was off to the side so it wasn't in anyone's way. Right now, he had more important things to do than race.

And that was helping someone else...

Nightsounds - Part 13 "Winds of Change"

Joe stepped out of the truck, once again reassuring Jen that Josh was going to be ok. Having just left the hospital after a long 5+ hours, Joe was ready to head home, grab a hot shower and fall into bed. It had been an incredible evening and even now it was still sinking into him that he had in fact saved someone's life that very night. Funny, he thought... I don't FEEL like a hero like everyone's telling me...

Pressing the small button on the remote to the Viper he heard the audible "click" of the door locks being released. Jen, seeing the interior lights come on, slowly pulled away, the exhaust of the Lightning rumbling in the cool early morning air, the sound of the gravel crunching beneath the meaty tires easily heard as she neared the exit, paused then headed on out the exit road. It was nearly 3am and even though the track had been closed for nearly 4 hours, there were still several trucks, trailers and cars around. It had been a weird night for everyone with the nearly fatal fire that the Cobra had fallen victim to a definite memory maker for everyone.

Thankfully, Josh was going to recover. He suffered second and third degree burns on his feet, his hands and the back of his neck and had inhaled a lot of smoke. The doctors were certain he was going to need some grafting done but it was too early to tell. Maybe next week, thought Joe as he slid beneath the wheel of the Viper, buckled up the 5 point, pulled the driver's door shut and slid the key into the ignition. Rotating the key around brought the gauges to life and after pausing a second, he rotated the key to "Start". The noise overwhelmed the night...

As he sat there and revved the V-10, he could feel the enormous torque trying to tear the motor free from the mounts, which only caused the car to rotate slightly. The metal shifter knob felt cool and powerful in his grip, the pedals at his feet begging for his ministrations, and the car sat menacingly, waiting impatiently to kill something. Anything, it just needed to annihilate another mechanized foe - this was the purpose for which the car was built.

With each rev, the grin on Joe's face got bigger and the worry about Josh faded... After warming the car, he pulled on down the same access lane Jen had just used, stopped at the exit, and then headed on out into the cool night air towards home... the tail-lights disappearing over the rise.

It was nearly 10 days before Josh was released. Joe, Jen, Dan, Sally, and many others were at the hospital to see him wheeled out to his first glimpse of the sun in those many days. Jen stood close by and hugged him as he stood up and then slid into the passenger side of her new car, a Nissan Maxima SE that she had just picked up that morning. Everyone applauded the release and Josh just smiled a thank you, surprised at so many having come to see him go home. He had decided earlier in the week that perhaps racing really wasn't something he was in a hurry to resume. And, since the insurance company wouldn't cover his car since it was being used "in a manner for which coverage did not allow"; the wreck was a complete loss. The smoky hulk sat in his garage, waiting for his return. Ironically, he knew he would never sell it - fix it someday, maybe - but he would never part with it.

It's odd how events can change one's life in an instant. How a near death experience can make you realize that life IS indeed very short and precious. Or, how much you can learn from just being there...

The sun seemed to jump up from the horizon that morning. Sally was dreaming that she was standing in the shower, the hot water cascading upon her face, feeling hot and flush. Then, her mind cleared and she realized that the sunbeam had in fact penetrated a crack in the blind and was directly upon her cheek, warming it for the coming day.

A smile crept across her lips as she reached back behind to feel Dan's back against hers, his skin cool and dry, his breathing deep and steady. They had been seeing each other for months now, both in love but both afraid to really say it often... as if saying it would jinx the feelings each held for the other. Oddly, their relationship had deepened since that night of the Cobra's crash, perhaps both mindful that no one is guaranteed the next moment.

Her hand slid on down Dan's muscular back and then on around his waist, rubbing his skin. Searching, reaching, she moved closer to him, her touch now making him stir and come awake. Perhaps not ALL of Dan was asleep, she thought. He now rolled toward her; his sleep-filled eyes catching some of the same ray of sun and making him squint hard. He pulled Sally's naked body close and held her, her head upon his shoulder, her hand still exploring, still moving. Kissing her forehead, he shocked her with his first words that morning.

"Sally, will you marry me?"

Her hand stopped moving and she looked into his eyes, hers becoming moist with tears. She was barely able to speak.

"Dan? Are you sure you're awake?"

"Yes. I'm awake. Will you marry me Sally? Today?"

Sally paused as she tried to think of a reason to say no. But the screaming of her heart drowned out any protestations of the mind.

"Oh, yes Danny... I'll marry you."

Dan smiled and sank back into his pillow, feeling Sally's hand once again begin to stir southward once more. It was definitely going to be a great day.

Later that evening, Dan and Sally drove down to the Flats, an area known for its fine eateries and pubs. Celebrating their hurried up ceremony with only a witness for each standing by, they had an evening of partying to do.

Dan glided Sally's WE4 into the parking lot of Nicky's Little Italy, stopped, parked and gave the keys to the valet, then they headed on inside. Four hours later, after a meal of the finest Italian food in that part of the state and being entertained with the singing and piano playing of Guido, the Piano Man, they headed back out the door and after waiting for the valet to bring the Buick around, got in and headed on out down the street. They both were still flush with excitement of the day and happier than either could remember.

"Oh, Dan... I want to feel like this forever," said Sally.

"I promise you Sally that I'll do my best" beamed Dan, his hand clasping hers atop the shifter.

They headed back out of the Flats and turned onto a road that would take them past a favorite hangout of the local street race fans - Woody's Restaurant. Woody's was well known for its '60's motif and had carhops on roller skates taking orders and bringing the food out, specializing in huge burgers and malts. If one closed their eyes and listened, it was as if you were sitting in a scene from "American Graffiti" - only the age of the cars were different.

"Wanna Cherry coke?" half joked Dan, nodding up the street at the brightly parking lot of Woody's, several primo street machines already queued up waiting to pull in as traffic cleared..

"Sure! It'll be fun! Let's see who's at Woody's tonight". Sally never looked more beautiful to Dan he thought. Maybe this marrying stuff isn't so bad after all...

They waited their turn to pull in, and after easing over the curb entrance to avoid scraping the pavement, pulled on into the first open slot, between a '71 Ford Torino Cobra that looked to be completely stock and as if just driven from the dealer's lot and a deep blue LS1 Camaro that had two gauges mounted on the hood in front of the driver. As usual, people stopped and stared as Dan backed the WE4 into the slot, idled for a moment and then shut it down. Almost immediately the carhop was at his door taking their order.

As the order taker skated away, Dan and Sally watched a couple of young men engaged in a debate on the opposite side of the parking lot. What caught their eyes was the fact that once in a while, either one of them seemed to be pointing towards the Buick, or perhaps one of the cars near them. Sally felt uncomfortable about the looks and attitudes of the two - oddly, a chill seemed to run down her back each time one of them pointed their way...

Moments later, they were enjoying their drinks; Dan slurped on his Chocolate Malt, and Sally on her Cherry Coke. Listening to the Black Crowe's "Hard To Handle" blaring over the PA, they both noticed the two guys that appeared to be arguing earlier head over toward their side of the lot. And oddly enough, most everyone else was watching them walk that way too.

"Hmmm"-mused Dan, "wonder what these clowns want."

"I don't know, Danny", worried Sally, "but lets just head home, ok? No racing tonight, ok Dan?"

"Sure, honey," mumbled Dan, watching the two approaching their car. Still, he wasn't sure they were coming their way because just as they got near the front of the Buick, they split up. But, one came to the driver's side; the other to the passenger side and then they both leaned over to look into the car.

"What's up, boys?" asked Dan, just before he emptied the malt glass, a loud slurping sound exaggerated purposely by him. Slowly, he turned to face the one at his door.

He saw the face of a twenty-something young man, a couple of gold chains around his neck, pierced

eyebrows, nose and ears, and an odd inverted cross tattoo upon the neck.

"Hey, my man" said the one leering at Sally. "The homey's got a bitch wid him. He ain't gonna play!" which oddly make both of them laugh.

Dan felt his face go red. Still, he kept his cool.

"You lookin' for some action, bro?" asked the one at Dan's door.

"Not tonight" Dan hissed. "It's been a long day and we're heading home. Maybe another time."

"See, Roberto, I tol' you - he ain't no playa" laughed the one with the backwards cap at Sally's door. "He's done heard about yo ride 'berto and he knows ain't nuttin gonna keep wid the Vtec."

Suddenly, Dan had to laugh. "You mean to tell me that you boys have got a Honda and you want to run ME? In THIS car?" He laughed again, but oddly, he laughed alone. Roberto's eyes narrowed and then he leaned in closer.

"Listen up, G. I've got \$500 dollars that says my ride will kick yo gramma-car's ass. Oh, I've heard about these nasty Buicks alright - by me and my peep there put together a killa fly-ride. Wanna play? Or do ya wanna go home with momma there?"

Sally's grip tightened on Dan's arm. Dan reached over and patted it.

"Tell you what" smiled Dan coldly. "I've got a thousand that says you OR your ricer ain't **** - no matter how much 'nawwwwwwwwwwwssssssssssss' you may be sprayin'." Dan knew just which button to push all right.

Sally gasped. "Dan", she whispered, "NOT tonight. Let's **GO!**" He pulled his arm free from her grasp, turned and smiled at her. "It's ok, honey. It'll only take about 11-12 seconds to do this."

Sally could only roll her eyes.

"Show me your ride," hissed Dan. "You've already seen mine."

"This way homey... this way" pointed Roberto toward a dark red import sitting beneath the fluorescent lit canopy.

"You wanna run my wife's Buick with your CIVIC?" laughed Dan. "And for MONEY? Man, you ARE crazy."

'Berto looked at his buddy and smiled. "Hey Pez - do you think we got a chance?" They both laughed again. "Oh yeah, 'berto - you got a chance alright... you *definitely* got a chance."

He popped the hood to show Dan what he was going to be running. The first thing Dan noticed was that

this was no transverse mounted inline four - it was an axially mounted V-6 that had somehow been wedged between the strut towers. Someone had spent a LOT of time and money on THIS car.

Roberto couldn't resist. "Man, it'll be a V-6 against a V-6. That's fair, right? It's pretty much stock out of a '99 Accord. I did the work, used a rear from a wrecked Supra, and used the Accord Auto tranny. Yeah... it was a LOT of work...wasn't it Pez?" More laughter.

Dan could see the braided lines coming from behind and beneath the firewall. NOS lines. He stood thinking for a moment... this definitely was a very nice job, rice or not.

Sally's WE4 wasn't stock but it wasn't heavily modded either. Maybe a very, very low 12 or a high 11 at this point. But, it should be enough.

"Yeah. Let's go. I'll take your money, 'homeboy'", sneered Dan. Again, the ricers just laughed.

As Dan walked back to the car, he knew Sally would be pissed. But - he also knew that in a matter of minutes, he would be a thousand dollars richer.

Sally didn't speak as he got in the car until he started it up - and even then, she only glared at him, murmuring under her breath about "racing on our honeymoon night". And of course, Dan didn't hear.

Nearly everyone watched as the Civic pulled around and motioned to Dan to follow him. Almost simultaneously, several other cars fired up and pulled out too, following the two soon to be racers out to the abandoned access road. The Cobra Torino, the LS1 Camaro, a few 5.0's, and several others now formed a convoy heading to "The Quick or The Dead"; the name given to the semi-official "track". A string of taillights of all shapes snaked its way north then west, everyone eager to see the race.

No one had noticed the driver in the Marina Blue '68 Chevelle bringing up the rear. The thin, gaunt face. The deep-set eyes. The heavily veined hands covered by a leathery skin that had seen too much sun. Hands that had become very good at handling the Glock 21 .45 cal semi-auto tucked in the glove compartment of the Chevelle... hands that lately had way too much time upon them - ever since he had lost his wife, his job, his soul...

...it was Harry.

NO one had any idea how ill fated the name was going to become for that road - that night...

Nightsounds Part 14

"The Long Kiss Goodbye"

Dan's fingers lightly drummed the console cover nervously and without him even thinking. It wasn't that he worried about racing the Civic - rather he was more concerned with Sally's quietness. He had only been married for less than 12 hours

and now, she sat stone faced while he drove out of town, the headlights of the cars following sometimes reflecting in his mirror and illuminated the interior of the WE4. Which only showed Sally's set jaw all the clearer...

She finally spoke.

"Dan, it's not that I don't want you to race or anything like that. But really – there IS something else I would rather be doing right now than heading out to race some rice mobile that you KNOW doesn't have a chance."

More silence. Dan knew precisely what she meant.

"I know honey. But this won't take long and when it's over, we'll have a few extra bucks to blow so it will be worth it." Dan half smiled, reaching over to touch Sally's hand but not getting any response in return.

"Hmmm..." he thought, " better let this go for a while."

Finally, the dark red Civic slowed and turned down a dark road, weaving past a "Road Closed" sign on a path obviously well used. The path then opened up to a pretty much pristine 2-mile patch of abandoned 4-lane blacktop. The construction was stopped when state funds ran out and the federal boys refused to give the state anymore. The road was then set aside to be completed sometime in the future – over three years had passed and still no "future" date had been set. Which of course, was all the better for some of the local street racers.

Dan followed the Civic to a white line painted across the middle two lanes and pulled up on the right side of the import. The excited witnesses scurried down either side of the two, picking parking spots and turning their cars in, as was the norm to use their headlights as illumination on the 'track'. The last car in was a '68 Chevelle that no one paid any attention to. Its driver had chosen to stay back about 20 yards from the 'start' line, had pulled to the same side Dan was on and shut off his headlights, leaving the parking lamps on. The rumble from beneath its hood was ominous and throbbing, yet subdued. More than one person stopped to look in the direction of the Chevy, then just as quickly turned away. Everyone was out of their cars now, heading up to the front of the two racers where money was being counted and then held, signals being agreed upon, and more than a little trash talking being done by Roberto and his partner Pez.

Dan said nothing but his mind was now in race-mode, all thoughts about this night of Sally's discontent being lost and washed over by the adrenaline coursing through his veins. If there was one thing Dan did well, it was focus. He not only wanted to beat these punks, he wanted to embarrass them.

Embarrass them a lot...

After agreeing to race in 15 minutes, which would allow the motors to cool somewhat, Dan reached inside the open driver's window down along the kick panel and pulled hood release, which allowed more engine noise to escape. Walking back to the front of the car, he slid his hand beneath hood, released the safety catch and then pushed the hood on up to the fully open position. Using his flashlight, he then pulled the vacuum hose off the fuel pressure regulator and using the small crescent wrench and Allen wrench, he upped the static fuel pressure. After seeing the desired

increase on the fuel pressure gauge, he then came back to the driver's door, reached in and shut off the motor. Reaching in on back seat to retrieve a pair of gloves, he went back to the front of the car where Sally was now standing, arms crossed, and pulled the clip off of the adjustable waste gate control rod. Making the desired number of turns, he replaced the clip after wrestling the rod back onto the linkage, sure of the accuracy having done this enough before to know how much additional boost he could run with 103 octane fuel in the tank.

Sally spoke again as Dan stood upright in front of the engine compartment, various sounds of cooling metal being heard in the still night air. Behind them could be heard the voices of Pez and Roberto, sometimes in Spanish, as they went about the necessary pre-race adjustments to the V-Tec and its induction and fogger system. The bottle warmer was already on, pressure looked good... things were about to happen. Pez was adjusting the air pressure in the rears and having already checked the fronts for the proper pressure, the Civic was pretty much set.

An unusual characteristic of the Honda that Dan noticed at that moment, not seeing while at Woody's was the huge exhaust pipe exiting in front of the passenger side rear tire. And no wing. If one were to just glance at the car, they would pretty much see that it had a very stock appearance – well, other than the huge exhaust pipe and the darkened window tint. The stance was definitely more aggressive and a tasteful ground effects package had been installed, including a much more radical front fascia with new driving/fog lights. Yet, it looked pretty stock. Dan hadn't noticed much of an exhaust note so he wasn't sure just how to gauge the competition. He just knew that he knew...

A leggy brunette who knew Sally from work that was riding with the guy in the Torino was holding the money, her boyfriend a good candidate for an NFL linebacker position due to his imposing build. Nobody was going to argue with him. He was also going to be the one to start the race, using Dan's flashlight for a pseudo-Christmas tree, both participants agreeing to leave on the third blink of the Craftsman light.

Dan was leaning against the driver's fender and Sally came around to his side, slowly nuzzling up next to him. She was still fuming over even being here in the first place, having more amorous ideas in mind, but she was being won over by the excitement. It wasn't about the money to her at this point – she just wanted to see that cocky Latino have to eat his words. And something about the shifty eyes of his buddy – was that 'Pez'? – that she definitely didn't like. Maybe it was the way he was always pulling his hugely oversized and baggy pants back up, never missing a chance to grab himself while leering at her if he caught her eye. Nope – these two were definitely trouble.

Listening to the Pioneer in-dash CD playing "Life in the Fast Lane", an old Eagles tune, the driver in the Chevelle lit another cigarette, having just snuffed out one minutes before. He watched intently as Dan and Sally were talking, feeling the pulses of each piston firing in the big block beneath the SS's hood. He knew about Roberto and Pez – how they had only recently been paroled from a prison sentence brought about from a life of crime. Oh yeah... he knew Roberto all too well, having testified against him after seeing him and two others (one being Pez) nearly beat someone to death on a street corner. Had it not been for him pulling up and jumping out with his tire iron, the poor guy would have been dead in minutes. He was lucky enough to get the license plate and having seen the inverted cross tattoo on the one guy's neck gave the cops enough to go on and get an arrest –

eventually.

But his interest really was more in Sally. He licked his dry, cracked lips while seeing her flip her hair in the cool night air. He had been watching her a long time now, waiting for just the right time. He just couldn't believe his good fortune in seeing her pull into Woody's tonight. Oh yeah... tonight. Tonight will definitely be THE night...

*He reached over and dropped the mammoth glove compartment door open, it's tiny bulb glowing brightly in dark car. Wrapped in a shop towel, he could see the outline of the pistol and he knew it was loaded. It **always** was loaded... just waiting for the right moment...*

And it wouldn't be much longer. She was shut the hood as Dan slid into the seat of the Buick and then walked around to stand at the window.

"Good luck, honey" she winked at him. "Make me proud."

Dan just smiled and nodded as he cinched up his helmet he kept on the rear floor of the car for moments just like this. He reached up and patted her hand on the door his eyes noticing her ample cleavage exposed from her leaning over and the shirt falling open, nothing on beneath it. Definitely some fine, fine eye candy he thought for just a moment.

"I'll see ya in about 11 seconds – with some money for a trip to Victoria's Secret", he grinned. "And, you may want to button up – looks like you're cold."

She looked down. "Oh! I guess it IS a little chilly out here..." and she grinned devilishly back at him, turning and walking to the lane near where a Camaro had parked flooding the starting area with its headlights.

Jason walked to the front of the cars as Roberto was cinching up the five-point. Both drivers sat quietly, the motors still off.

"Start 'em up, boys – I'll give you about a minute to settle out and then watch the light, ok?" Jason explained as both drivers nodded. Immediately, clicks could be heard as keys turned in ignitions, rotating around to energize the starter solenoids in both cars, the LC2 firing just a second before the V-Tec. Still, to the rear of both cars, the rumble of the big-block Chevella could be heard/felt, its driver not even noticing the starting procedure. His eyes were on Sally. Soon, it would be time...

"Bwa-BAAAA!... Bwa-BAAAA!" the V-Tec sounded angry, its exhaust note now very noticeable due to Pez opening the dump tube just as Dan had done. The race was less than 30 seconds away...

Dan reached over and checked the Scanmaster II, ensuring it was displaying the O2's and KR. He knew the Lubrant Street/Strip chip he had in was good for what was about to happen, but he also knew that he gave the Boost Control Rod an extra half turn more than he usually did, not sure if he needed it or not. He was definitely going to be on the edge.

The steering wheel of the Buick felt warm in his hands, his eyes alternately scanning the boost gauge on the A-Pillar, the hood mounted fuel/oil pressure gauges, and temp gauge. The V-6 seemed impatient. He rolled up the power window with his

thumb, his eyes not leaving the instruments. The A/C was off, the TC Switch thrown, his left foot solidly on the brake pedal, waiting for the moment to begin bringing up the boost.

From outside the car, Sally watched and listened, oblivious to everything else... even the Chevelle idling a mere 25 feet away. She saw the body of the Civic yaw slightly with each time Roberto revved its motor. No, that obviously wasn't not just an out-of-chassis V-6 in there. She saw him purge the NOS system with vertical plumes of vapor exiting from just in front of the wipers, somewhere out of the cowl. And, she heard the metallic click of a transbrake she thought. Since when did they start making a transbrake for a Honda Tranny, she wondered?

Jason brought the flashlight up to eye level for the drivers and turned it on. Immediately, things began to happen quickly. Dan pulled the T-bar shifter to D and pressing hard against the brake pedal, he began to bring up the rpms in the Buick. The torque made the car raise itself against the brakes holding it back and a whistle (shriek?) that at first was barely audible then grew to an eerie howl, was heard.

In the left lane, Roberto was bringing up the rpms of the Honda up against the transbrake – the tranny actually a completely reworked and highly modified unit custom built for this application. And although the V-6 beneath its hood had a V-Tech shield above its intake area, it wasn't even close to stock. Stroked, bored, balanced, blueprinted, with forged internals, huge mains, a dry sump system, and delivering nearly 480 horsepower to the rear wheels via a Currie Enterprises Ford 9" third-member, the motor was doing its best to brake the transbrake loose of its hold it had on the rapidly rising torque. But it held...

Jason blinked the light the first time.

Dan's eyes watched the boost gauge intently now. 2psi... 3psi...4psi... the shriek of the turbo now heard above everything else, the motor twisting against the motor mounts, the rear of the car trying to torque itself up over the tires planted firmly against the cool tarmac. Neither driver did a burnout, both agreeing to run as they sat other than air pressure adjustments.

Roberto flipped open the laptop on the passenger seat, its display showing the fuel map and diagnostic system for the engine, the light an eerie greenish/blue glow that matched the neon light system he had flipped on just a second before. He energized the multi-stage NOS system switches; arming the backup/kill switches which would protect the motor from being sprayed if an over-rev occurred or if anything less than full throttle and preset fuel pressure values were not met. It was actually a modded TNT Nitrous system, one of the best of the best.

<Blink 2>

4psi... 5psi... Dan's eyes watched the increase coming up just as he wanted, the flashlight squarely in his peripheral vision.

Roberto grinned. Regardless his lifestyle, he knew how to street race. And he knew this car well....

One blink to go...

To be continued...

Nightsounds Part 15

"The Long Kiss Goodbye" – Part II

Everyone's eyes were focused on the flashlight, waiting... waiting... waiting...

Dan stared intently at the boost gauge, now reading a little over 8psi, the car straining hard against the brakes, trying to rotate the rear axles while the locked pads kept the car in place. Metallic groans could be heard as the WE4's rear was now significantly raised from the torque being held in check. A slow, tiny bead of sweat trickled down Dan's left temple, beneath the helmet, coursing down his sideburn... on down his left cheek... but he didn't feel it. His eyes were waiting to see *the blink*.

Roberto's hand was on the shifter handle and his forefinger against the transbrake button. The motor was also fighting to tear itself loose of anything mechanical that was keeping the huge amount of horsepower in check. Metal distended and distorted microscopically as the twisting force on the crank input shaft was held at bay by a simple set of gears... Both stages of the modified TNT nitrous system were armed and waiting for the electronic signal that would arrive to the brain/solenoids in a nanosecond once the required limit switches were met. Vaporized Nitrous Oxide was held back from the intake by only a few millivolts of signal – a vapor that would change the already terrifying personality of the motor into a mechanical maniacal leviathan.

The crowd's eyes were equally focused but their ears were being treated to a symphony of horsepower and forced induction. People either held their hands to their ears to shield their hearing or they simply smiled that weird smile you see when at the pits at an NHRA race and a Top Fueler lights off. To those kinds of gearheads, a motor that is about to be unleashed has a more musical sound than any Wagner concerto.

Waiting...

For...

The...

<*BLINK*> !!!

At that very instant two things happened at exactly the same time – Dan sidestepped the brake pedal and Roberto released the transbrake. A clock would have shown R/T's of barely over .4 seconds from the time the flashlight blinked to the launch of both cars. And, since both cars were running auto's, from here on out, it was a matter of who had done what days, weeks, or months ago to the vehicles. The drivers now were only along for the ride... but what a ride it would be.

At what would be considered a 60' mark, they were nose to nose, with both cars

lifting their left front tires just barely above the surface of the tarmac as they left the line. In little over 4 seconds, the cars were already passing 60mph.

In the Civic, as the switches were made at the launch, NOS vapor was released into the intake tract, supplying an additional 125+ HP to the high-winding V6. The result was instantaneous – the rear tires nearly broke free but they held – barely. Traction was at the very limit with a loss due to tire hazing probably only 20 more hp away. Roberto had the Civic dialed in and it showed.

At the 330' area, the Civic had a barely perceptible lead, visible ONLY to those who were at that mark and who could see the cars side by side. But the WE4 was now well into 2nd gear and pulling hard. The turbo was sucking in huge volumes of cool night air, compressing it yet heating it due to the compression, sending it hurtling out the down tube into the Intercooler where it flowed through the finned chambers that had cool air drawn from beneath the bumper into the I/C shroud and across the fins, and thus cooled the incoming intake charge several degrees – increasing the horsepower in a non-linear fashion.

The boost gauge showed almost 20psi on the A-pillar. The Scanmaster had shown no indication of knock on the 1-2 shift and O2's were solid at ~780. So far – so good. The Buick was screaming now, and beginning to make up the few inch lead that the Civic had gained earlier. By the 1/8th mile, they were dead even again. Red taillights were disappearing fast to those who still stood at the line, waiting... wondering... who would win and how soon would they know?...

He pulled the pistol out and held it now, the crowd distracted by the launch of the racers. Slipping the driver's door open and leaving the Chevelle running, he crept out of the car and begin to work over towards where Sally was standing, her back to him. She was on her toes, trying to see farther, trying to see if her husband was going to win or lose. She did not know that more could be lost tonight than just a race... a LOT more...

The pavement felt warm, even through his shoes, yet the night breeze felt like a lover's breath upon his grizzled cheek – cool, soothing, comforting. Somehow, evoking memories of happier times. Times before he screwed up so badly. Times when her kisses were his; when her embraces were his; when her body – was his. If he couldn't have her anymore, then neither would anyone else. To hell with the restraining order that very few even knew about. To hell with rules and "getting over it". Tonight – was time for a little evening of the score. He wanted her to see, to hurt, to feel like he had felt for a long time now – maybe for a lifetime. She would soon feel the pain, up close and personal...

Nearing the finish, it was anyone's race. Both cars mechanicals were working perfectly. Roberto's laptop showed a perfect profile; Dan's Scanmaster showed every value right where it should have been.

Slowly... one bumper began to creep ever-so-slowly ahead. People at both ends of the 'track' couldn't tell who was ahead. But HE knew it. He knew it all along; that sooner or later in the midst of this sub-12 second race, the other guy would know he had lost – before they crossed the line. And as he thought, so it was.

Roberto watched the line approaching, now hurtling towards it at over 114 mph. His

grin was growing because he knew – he just KNEW he was winning the race. Until – He looked over and saw the door handle of the WE4 even with his passenger side mirror.

They crossed the finish line that way – the WE4 less than a fender ahead of the Civic.

The racers slowed down, taking nearly another 1/8th mile to do so and then turned back towards the start line. People were already piling into the cars that were at the finish, some of them unable to agree as to who actually won.

But Roberto knew. And now, he was mad.

Very, very mad. He knew that all those words he had said would have to be eaten. He knew that Pez would diss him like none other for losing to a piece of white-bread trash in an old granny car. And worst of all, he KNEW that the respect he had been gaining on the street from all the races before - was now gone. He may as well have had a huge, red "L" tattooed on his forehead. For 'Loser'.

Well, it wasn't over yet. As both cars slowed at the finish, people who had beat them back there were saying, finally in agreement, that Dan had won. Barely – but yes, he did win. As both cars stopped and sat idling, things began to fall apart horribly for everyone...

Dan snicked the tranny into park, loosened his chinstrap and saw Sally looking at him beaming. Her huge smile was all he needed for winnings. He pulled the door handle open and stood out, only to turn and see Roberto was already out of the Civic and heading his way, his hand beneath the flowery shirt that covered the waistband of his baggy shorts. There was an angry, odd look in his eye. Sally was at Dan's back and she sensed something was wrong... the night breeze stopped. Even the crickets had stopped serenading the trees... the crowd was hushed... waiting... watching...

Jason and his girl were striding towards Dan, ready to hand them his winnings. Jason didn't see that Roberto was pulling something from beneath his shirt... something shiny and small and metallic... nearly hidden in the palm of his sweaty loser hand.

And NO one saw the man with the Glock step from around the white minivan, raise it, take aim and start to slowly squeeze the trigger, muttering.... "This is for you. This is from me. Sooner or later, we all got to see..."

"Dan!!!" screamed Sally, now seeing that Roberto had a gun. Dan, not seeing the same light reflection that Sally did, whirled to see what she had screamed about. As his eyes focused on Sally, he saw the dark man only 10 feet behind her raising his hand as if he was pointing at someone. Then he heard Roberto yell...

"Hey asswipe, you ain't getting' away with this..."

Dan turned once more only to see that Roberto had a pistol aimed in his direction.

The crowd screamed, now seeing only Roberto's gun. Pez shouted at him – "STOP 'BERTO! DON'T DO IT!!!"

But it was too late – Roberto squeezed the trigger and fired.

For Dan, for Sally, for everyone there... time slowed to a crawl. There was a flash from Roberto's gun and then a recoil as the .40mm pistol jumped in his hand and the bullet left the barrel. A bullet that had a black, serrated nose that had just left the casing of an illegal shell. A Black Talon.

The bullet was now speeding in Dan's direction and would impact human flesh in less than a fraction of a second.

He saw the Latino racing toward Dan. Good – another distraction. Now's the time. Slowly, he squeezed the trigger of the Glock 21 – a .45 caliber semi-auto chambered with conventional hollow-points, each capable of knocking a man down and leaving a hole in his chest the size of your fist. Imagine what it could do to a woman...

Soon, all would know...

To his surprise, Roberto fired!

Dan saw the flash from Roberto's gun - and tried to duck... too late.

Sally saw the flash from Roberto's gun and couldn't move – horrified, she knew Dan was about to die. And she couldn't do a thing about it...

HE saw the flash from Roberto's gun – and then...

he felt the bullet enter HIS chest. Barely before he could pull the trigger. The impact of the bullet knocked him back abruptly and the Glock fired harmlessly into the air.

The bullet pierced the shirt, the skin and hit a rib, just below the tip of Harry's heart. The physical properties of the Black Talon caused it to mushroom into a splintered shape; the shape of a spiraling eagle's talon with a much more deadly and sinister mission – to tear and rip flesh, bone, organ and tissue. And it did so remarkably efficiently.

The spiraling mass of hot lead and copper tore Harry's lungs and heart to shreds. He was dying before he even hit the ground. His pistol rattling off the pavement noisily, people screaming and running; Sally standing looking at Dan and not even knowing what had just happened behind her.

Frozen in place, she watched Roberto walk up to Dan and then reach down to help him to his feet. Dan was white, certain that he had to have been hit and then realizing that he didn't know where Sally was.

As he jumped up with Roberto's help, he turned and saw what had really happened. Sally was crying, still standing there with her hands over her mouth. People were

trying to see what had happened to Harry (although no one recognized him), and seeing the huge amount of lost blood, could only stare with eyes that wanted to look away but couldn't.

"What happened?" Jason asked, as much in shock as anyone.

Roberto stood motionless, only his lips moving, tendrils of smoke still wisping from the end of his pistol. "Man, I was just about to bust this homey's chops for kickin' my ass on the track and demand another race when I saw your man over there getting' ready to bust a cap in that bitch's ass. Now, ain't no way I'm gonna let a fine thing like that get chilled the big chill – I shot his ass dead. He got what he deserved. Man, ain't nothin' worth nothin' anymore it seems..." His voice trailed off slowly... realizing that now, there would be more cops... more questions... more problems...

Sally spoke.

"I... I just don't know... I mean, I don't know how to thank you."

"Man, who IS that guy, anyhow?" asked Roberto, pointing to the lifeless corpse on the ground. Off in the distance, sirens could be heard, seeming to grow louder...

"Someone I used to know...", she said...."Someone I used to love... and someone I guess who just couldn't let go..." Tears streamed down her face as Dan pulled her close and she sobbed upon his shoulder.

A man had walked over to the Chevelle that was still idling, opened the door and shut it off. On the dash he saw an envelope and he picked it up.

"Is your name 'Sally' by any chance?", he asked.

"Yes, her name is Sally" said Dan. "Why?"

"This here envelope has her name on it then. Maybe you better look at it." He walked over to Dan and handed it to him. Dan ripped it open and looked inside as Sally turned to see what it held.

Inside the envelope were three things. One was a faded picture of happier times. A picture taken when Harry had met Sally at Indy several years ago, taken by Dan that late summer day.

Another item was a end of a Video box. The title of the movie was "When Harry Met Sally".

And the last item was an old, handwritten note on a piece of yellowed paper that said, "Harry, Be back soon... Love, Sally"

The sirens grew closer, the crickets chirped again, people began to murmur; the breeze blew once again and the leaves on the trees stirred with the wind.... Traffic sounds over on the bypass once again seem to intensify as Roberto sighed...

And Dan held his lips against Sally's cheek for a long time that night...