

CRASH 2 – THE SEQUEL

The 502 (drunk driver)

Oscar was stinkin'. Blotto. Wasted. About 100 sheets to the wind. He was having a little trouble figuring out the high tech process of zipping his pants. He wasn't absolutely sure he'd be able to get the key in the door at home.

But, all the same, he "knew" he could drive the Buick, and that's what he was trying to do, all over East LA – both lanes of every street he was on, up on a curb here, across a parkway there. He couldn't figure out why he kept making wrong turns and driving around block after block to get to a place he'd lived at for 20 years. *Now where did I leave that house last time I saw it? Jeez, is this 3^d Street? I wanted Brooklyn. I must be really "tired"!*

He gave no thought to the fact that his BAL was .21. He "knew" he could pack his mud, drinking or driving. On he drove, careening around ELA, toward his house if he could find it, or to whatever fate might have in store.



The Mother

"Ma, I'm goin' out!" Manny declared from the doorway of Mrs. Guzman's bedroom. Stella Guzman had just gone to bed at 10:00 p.m. in her East LA home, but she slept pretty lightly these days, since her other son had been killed in a gang shooting six months ago. She sat up in bed and started to protest Manny's leaving, but she was relieved and reassured to see that Manny was fussing with putting a gun in his pants pocket.

"Ok, go ahead, as long as you go prepared, but be careful."

"Don't worry, Ma, I'm "strapped". Just want to see what's up outside."

Mrs. Guzman relaxed back into her bed as Manny went out the front door. She figured that as long as Manny had a gun, he could take care of himself. Her son Soto hadn't been armed six months ago, when they got him right in front of the house. Since then, she and Manny's "wife" Gloria looked to Manny for protection against rival gangs.

I know Manny does a little banging, but he is a good boy, she thought as she looked in on Gloria, still sound asleep. But I almost hope Manny does run into some punk he can shoot, so he can even the score.

The Man with a Gun

Manny walked out of his yard and past the neighbor's block wall he had tagged with his gang graffiti. At 26, he was still marking turf for his homeboys as he had done for ten years. He wasn't the sharpest tool in his gang's shed, but he knew how to use two things--his "piece" and a spray can. He wasn't an o.g.--but he liked the feel of belonging, so he still hung out with some of the real hard cores enough to know, caper and score with them. He sure wasn't going to let the punks from five streets over get him like they got his gang-banging brother.

So, he was "ready" as he turned and walked southbound on Eastern Avenue.



The Cabbie

Pete cursed again when he saw the dead end. He had no idea how to get out of the cursed East LA "Alps". Sure, he'd been pushing a hack for several years, but *these streets are too darned screwed up!*

Of all the places to spill a load of hot coffee three weeks ago, he picked page 635 his Thomas Guide. It had since disintegrated. Without page 635, he was like a rat in a maze.

The street was too narrow for a u-turn, so he had to back out. *I'm gonna get mugged, knifed, or shot before I find a way outta here, I just know it.*

The other cabbies didn't call him "Paranoid Pete" for nothing. *What was that?!?! Pete saw movement in a dark yard as he backed around the corner. Bet it's some thieving gangbanger lying in wait.* He looked closer and saw a girl trying to get her dog to come to her. *Well, it could have been a gangster.* Pete hadn't figured out that even in a crime-challenged neighborhood like City Terrace, the good people far outnumber the bad.

After a couple more winding streets led to the “not-a-through-street-blues”, Pete finally got out of the Alps. *Eastern Avenue and 60 Freeway here I come. I am bringing no more fares to this part of town – even from LAX!*

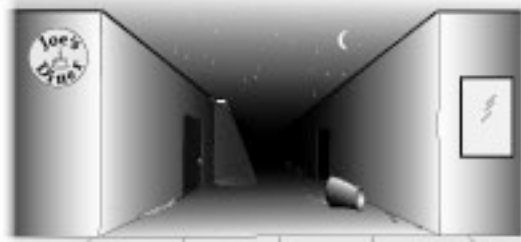
“Whoaaaaa!!!!... Jeez guy, watch where you’re goin’,” Pete screamed at the swerving Buick that had just cut him off. “Stupid drunk.”

Pete turned onto Eastern just in time to see the Buick start a wide left turn up ahead. *He’s not gonna make it...* **Ka-Pow!!** Through the block wall and into a pepper tree.



Dumb schmuck, thought Pete as he hurried by. *Somewhere else I might stop to help, but here I’ll get knifed or shot.* Pete drove on and hurried toward the freeway.

An Ambush?



It’s a well-known photo. A dark, junky alley. A tired street light throwing confusing shadows. A caption... “You wouldn’t go down there for a million bucks. A cop does it for a lot less.” (And a Reserve does it for nothing!)

Every patrol deputy has his or her own slant on what things are most dangerous about this job. Many would include some variation of the 9-1-1 hang up, where an informant calls or lures you, but *doesn’t say why*.

Saturday night, 2245 hours, Deputies Edmundo Torres and Rodel Reyes, 21A PM’s, are stopped southbound on Eastern Avenue. A yellow cab driving hurriedly northbound pulls up along side their car. The driver shouts, “Go down there, go down there!” pointing down toward a side street behind him. And then... he speeds off without another word!

Now what the heck is that about?!? Let's see, it could be a murder in progress. Or it could be a vandalism, or even a big nothing. It could be a diversion, or a total set-up. Maybe some self-styled thug needs to shoot a cop to get jumped in. Or maybe it's one of life's sad losers raising Cain just so the cops will kill him.

Well now, just how much time are you going to take to decide? Mundo and Rodel didn't waste any time mulling over what to do. They had developed the ability to process the information and possibilities *while they were rolling*.

So, southbound they went, two blocks to where they saw a pedestrian worth lighting up. Presto—the ped transformed into a suspect by turning startled toward the radio car spotlight, backing away to a chain link fence, and then pulling and tossing a handgun into the yard on the other side. Then, off he ran.

Mundo and Rodel went through a split-second mental checklist as they began the chase – car in park...key out... know where partner is... both running... which one will broadcast... who else is on the street right now... who's watching us... is this guy really alone... where's he leading us... is this what the cabbie put us onto... is partner still with me... we're gaining on him.....

By that time, the suspect had tripped and recovered, slowing enough for Mundo to grab a piece of his jacket, pull him away from a fence he was clutching and get him on the ground. Together the deputies leveraged the suspect's arms into cuffing position, and he was promptly in custody and en route to the radio car. *Wow, looks like we made light work of this one.*

A few house lights came on at the place the suspect had tossed the gun, so Mundo ran to be the first to get it, while Rodel took the suspect to the radio car that was stopped in mid-Eastern Avenue.

You guessed it – it was Manny, and he was running his mouth at 150 decibels. WHAT GUN? THAT'S NOT MY GUN! YOU'LL NEVER FIND MY PRINTS ON THAT GUN! (Did we mention he wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed?)

Then it started happening. Both deputies noticed it. At first, it was just a couple of shaved heads peering out of windows, then the sound of a door opening, then a guy on a porch. "Hey, watch your back partner," Mundo cautioned as Rodel was searching Manny.

The neighborhood was starting to feel like the chess board in Harry Potter – full of pieces that can move on their own, simultaneously, threateningly closing in...

Suddenly a new sound pierced the night – startling, intense, and ominous. It worked like a homing signal, drawing out more neighbors, who came on like the ghouls in Michael Jackson's Thriller. From houses to yards, yards to sidewalks, sidewalks to curbs.

The deputies could hear the sound coming closer, getting loud. *What's causing that?* If not spine-tingling, it was at least puckering. Suddenly, the hideous thing descended. It was..... it was....

The suspect's mother! Stella! And she was coming on like a dreadnought.

"THEY'VE GOT MY SON! WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO MY SON?"

"Please step back to the sidewalk, ma'am," Rodel requested. (Another Region I award for courtesy under pressure!)

"LOOK WHAT THEY'RE DOING TO MY SON!"

Stella paused for a second. Now *she* was hearing a sound. To her it sounded like a lot of wailing and yelping. But actually, although she didn't recognize it, it was a symphony, orchestrated by Mundo and Rodel, called "Music of the Night Street." Instrumentation – radio car sirens. Acoustics – from every direction. Dynamic--Crescendo.

The "musicians" were all arriving at Stella's neighborhood, leaving their "instruments" at odd angles in the street, reporting to the "conductor" – Mundo Torres. Pretty soon, the musicians seemed to outnumber the audience!

As Mundo tried to calm Stella, much of the "audience" sullenly dissipated. (Turns out some of the folks in that neighborhood weren't music fans!) Mundo calmly explained the arrest to Stella by showing her the gun Manny had tossed. (Yeah, right, like she hadn't seen that before.) Still she chipped, "THEY'VE GOT MY SON..." yelling out so that half of East Los Angeles could hear her.

Reluctantly, Mundo asked Deputies Sean Banks and Cheryl Clark to detain her, and Mundo arrested her for 148 P.C. With Stella in the back seat, and Eastern Avenue looking like an IACP convention, the neighborhood started to calm down. Rodel checked the gun. *Stolen!* (Ha! So Manny had been telling the truth. It *wasn't* his gun!)

While sitting in the radio car, with Manny in the back seat, Mundo and Rodel looked down Eastern Avenue. CHP was down there, amber's flashing. They were investigating a 902T, auto vs. tree. Mundo and Rodel looked at each other and laughed with the same awareness – *so that's what the cabbie was putting us onto!*

"So what were you doing out tonight?" Mundo asked Manny.

"I was gonna stay in, but I heard that big car crash, and I wanted to check it out!" Mundo and Rodel laughed again.



Fate works in mysterious ways. Thanks to Oscar and John Barleycorn, and no thanks to Paranoid Pete, Manny and Stella were in the clink. Thanks to Mundo and Rodel, one more gun was S/R/EV, Manny didn't get "off'ed" that night, and Stella learned a lesson about how not to organize a "neighborhood watch." Just another night in ELA.