

Sierra
Court
Blues

A Novel

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Lawrence Parlier

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Dedicated to the memory of
Thomas George Hopkins
1972-2006

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To all of my band members past and present.....you guys rock..... And to my lovely wife, Trina, for keeping the whole damn machine upright and moving forward. Baby, you're the best.....

Chapter 1

Anger pulsed through my veins like the impetuous flow of molten steel as I raced across the hot June streets toward dusk. The sun, as if rebelling against the coming night, stirred a vast magenta tide against the darkness. As it sank, framed before me inside my windshield, I stood on the accelerator, out, to escape the chaos left behind me at home.

I didn't feel like being out. I was tired from a long workday in the heat and would have much preferred to be lounging on the couch in front of the TV, but after another raging fight with my wife, Jade, I took to the road in a rage.

I decided to escape to my best friend and loyal band mate Jon's new place.

I had been putting it off.

Jon's life was even more chaotic and drama laced than mine so I tried to stay away as much as possible. We were as close as brothers and like brothers he could really get on my nerves.

I eased up on the gas after the first dozen miles and let my thoughts drift as I closed in on Jon's new home. I took a few deep breaths trying to dispel the anger I was carrying. It had dawned on me that my relationship with Jade was rapidly deteriorating. A few hours at Jon's would be a welcome distraction.

The trailer park where Jon, and his girlfriend Angel, had moved was really nice, as far as trailer parks go. It had wide paved streets and a clubhouse with a pool. The local kids were out roaming the streets on bicycles and skateboards while their parents enjoyed the balmy evening from the comfort of their patio furniture. The smell of charcoal and burgers wafted into the car from an unseen grill along my route. It seemed to be a very nice neighborhood.

Jon's street, Sierra Court, was the first to my right and I followed its tree lined curves until I saw Jon's white Chevy truck parked on the left side of the cul-de-sac. Jon's trailer was big and blue it looked brand new with a small out building on the driveway side. The yard was freshly mowed with a Shepard's hook

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beside the driveway that held an ornate wooden sign with Jon's last name, Tompkins, burnt into it with the street address carved underneath. Everything here was completely in order. It was a snapshot of domestic bliss that I would never associate with Jon and Angel.

I was impressed.

I circled around the cul-de-sac and parked, blocking Angel's grey Camaro in the driveway. I got out of the car and before moving ten feet I could hear *Slayer's* "Seasons in the Abyss" wailing from the stereo inside.

That's how I knew I had found the right place.

Like all of Jon's other houses I knocked out a five beat rhythm, loudly, then cruised right on in. Immediately I was assaulted by the music and a wall of pot smoke about three feet thick. There were a few people lounging around the living room, none of whom I recognized. They all turned to look as I moved through the doorway, startled by the boldness of having welcomed myself in. I ignored them and scanned the room for Jon.

"Bo! Hot damn, brother, I'm glad you finally made it. Do you want a beer?" Jon swooped in from the kitchen to my left and wrapped me up in a big hug.

"No, I'm cool," I said, reaching over to turn the stereo down so I could hear. "I like this place. It's a lot bigger than I imagined."

The interior of the trailer was bright and cheery, carrying the blue motif into the décor. That, coupled with Angel's flair for decorating really made the place stand out.

"Well, it cost enough," Jon said. "It's cool, because Mom and Phil are helping us out."

"So is everything good with you and Angel?" I asked.

Jon rolled his eyes, "Same as always, what about you and Jade?"

I just shook my head and let out a long slow sigh.

"Another fight?" Jon asked.

"You know it," I said, stress raising the pitch of my voice.

"I really don't feel like talking about it though, O.K."

Jon reached over and gave my arm a squeeze. "C'mon, let's

get you that beer.” he said.

“Yeah, what the hell,” I said.

I felt a little bit better just knowing Jon was there for me.

He always had my back.

As we headed to the kitchen he leaned in close and whispered, “You know that Laney chick I was telling you about? She’s here.”

“The one you met at The Viper Room? The model?” I stopped and looked at Jon, amazed at his boldness. “Here? In the house with Angel?”

Jon smirked. “They’re back in the bedroom sharing a bottle of tequila.”

“Oh, that’s brilliant,” I said. “You just beg for trouble, don’t you? What in the hell did you tell Angel? ‘I’m going to invite some random hot chick over to the house to party, baby.’ I’d like to have been a fly on the wall for that conversation.”

“No, fucker, I was telling Laney about how Angel designed all of our stage clothes and did the photography for us and Laney wanted to meet her. I told Angel that Laney was a model and wanted to see if Angel could throw together an over-the-top metal look for her and maybe take a few pictures for Laney’s portfolio. It’s a win-win. Hell, they seem to be getting along, pretty well.” Jon shrugged before reaching in the fridge and grabbing my beer.

I looked in his eyes and saw the glimmer. He was absolutely kinetic with the potential for disaster. That was one of the major differences between Jon and me. He thrived on drama and sometimes went out of his way to create it. I detested big drunken scenes and maudlin displays. Jon lived for them.

“Whatever,” I said. “I just don’t want to be here when the fight breakouts I’ve had enough of that for one day.”

“It’s cool, Bo. Don’t worry about it. Laney’s got this modeling thing going on. She doesn’t want any strings, she just wants to party.”

I shook my head, then, took a huge drink of beer. I really wasn’t in the mood for a bunch of silliness.

Maybe coming over here wasn’t such a good idea after all.

“If you say so, big daddy.”

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“Look, it’s no big deal,” Jon said, “Angel doesn’t have room to say much. She’s been playing around again, too. I don’t know with who, but, at this point, I don’t care.”

As his words faded his eyes betrayed the lie.

Across the kitchen, the door to the back opened and Angel and who I guessed to be Laney came stumbling out. They both looked to be about pretty well buzzed. Angel had the bottle of tequila in her hand. It looked to be about half full.

Angel smiled when she saw me. She came right over and all but fell into my arms trying to give me a hug. “Where you been, Bo? We missed you, man.”

Her deep brown eyes swooned in their sockets. Her pretty elfin face was pale like it wasn’t the first day of her present buzz. She was a beautiful girl but right now she didn’t look so good. I think the stress of her relationship with Jon was really starting to affect her. She was drinking way too much.

Angel lingered in my arms looking up into my eyes. We stood there staring at each other through the smoke of our own secret history.

I was worried about her.

Jon ignored the little display, “He just didn’t want to have to help us move.”

Angel stayed by my side as Jon introduced me to Laney. It was certainly easy to see why Jon was messing around with her. This girl was fine.

“So, this is Bo.” Laney’s words slurred together like one long drunken note. “It’s nice to meet you. Angel was showing me pictures of the band earlier.”

I took a minute to get a good look at Laney. She was gorgeous, a tall brunette with coal black eyes and legs about a half a mile long. I found it amusing, though, that she was standing here in a trailer park kitchen wearing a \$200 dollar black mini-dress and stiletto heels. I had to hand it to Jon. She looked like she was worth all the trouble.

“Hey, where’s that other little chick that was back there with you?” Jon asked.

"She's in the bathroom crying," Angel said. "Two shots of tequila and she's back there bawling over some guy."

Angel rolled her eyes like she'd be damned to waste tears on some mere guy.

"Cali's a friend of mine," Laney said to me. "She just broke up with her boyfriend."

"Yeah, she's still in high school. So don't go hitting on her, Bo." Angel said with a giggle.

"Christ, I've got enough going on right now," I said. "I sure as hell don't need to go looking for trouble."

"Bo's married," Angel said to Laney. "He's got the cutest little boy you'd ever seen. He looks just like Bo."

"What's his name?" Laney asked.

"Kirby," Angel said, not giving me the chance to answer. "He just turned a year old last week."

"Wow," Laney said. "I know it can't be easy raising a kid. "How old are you, Bo?"

"Nineteen," I said, "Yeah, it's a trip, but I wouldn't trade the little guy for anything in the world. Now his mom, on the other hand, I'd trade for a bag of magic beans."

"Are you and Jade fighting again?" Angel asked.

"Yeah, sweetie, that's why I'm here. I had to get the hell away from her for a while." I said.

"You need to get away from that bitch permanently." Angel said. "I don't know how you've managed to put up with her this long. You need to take that baby and run before she's got him ruined. You know, you all could come and stay with us. I'd love to babysit Kirby. He's such a little doll."

The look on Jon's face was priceless.

"Let me introduce you to the rest of the gang, Bo" Jon said by way of changing the subject.

Angel leaned in close and whispered, "I'm not kidding. You can stay with us." She broke away from me and sat down with Laney at the kitchen table.

I had to smile as I followed Jon to the edge of the kitchen. The thought of him having a baby underfoot was hilarious.

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“Let’s see if we can work this out,” Jon said, resting his hand on my shoulder. “OK, you see that old dude on this side of the couch? That’s Bill. I don’t know his last name.”

Jon pointed to some hippie looking guy with long, stringy, black hair and goatee who was wrapped up in rolling a joint on the coffee table.

“He came over the other day when we were unloading the band equipment. He’s been over every day since to smoke weed and hang out.”

Jon looked at me and shrugged his shoulders, “He probably wants something.”

“Yeah,” Angel said from behind us, “He wants to join the band.”

Jon shook his head, “Yeah, well, that ain’t happening. Now, those other two hombres fighting over the Nintendo are friends of ours. Bruce, the one with the glasses and the beard, is my cousin. His partner’s name is Mick. If you ever need anything to change your head those are the cats to see. They can get their hands on just about anything. The two blondes sitting there looking bored are their girlfriends Nikki and Shana.”

To someone on the outside it would appear that Jon made friends quickly. But, friend was a tricky word in Jon’s vocabulary. Very few of the people that passed through the endless party of Jon’s life could be counted as a friend. He had a bad habit of playing people to his advantage. Most of the people I’d met over the years were there solely for his convenience. They all had something he wanted even if it wasn’t always tangible, to him or to me.

Jon’s cousin, Bruce, conceded the Nintendo game and walked over to where we were standing.

“So, you’re Bo, It’s nice to meet you, man.” Bruce shook my hand. “I played football in high school with your cousin Jim.”

“Oh yeah? Nice to meet you, man,” I said.

“I haven’t seen him since he joined the Army.” Bruce said.

My cousin Jim was the one who had introduced me to Jon back before we were even teenagers. He had told me there was a

guy in his new neighborhood that was just as good a guitar player as I was. Jon and I hit it off as soon as we met and the three of us were as thick as thieves the rest of the way through school. I spent more time in Batavia hanging out with them than in Bethel where I lived.

“Yeah, I miss that crazy bastard,” Jon said. “The next time he’s home we’re going to get him over here and get him completely fucking wasted.”

One of the blondes, a reed thin waif with big blue eyes, came over and grabbed one of Bruce’s hands in both of hers.

Bruce looked at her and smiled, “Bo, this is my girlfriend, Nikki.”

“Nice to meet you,” I said.

“You, too,” Nikki said. “You’re one of the guys in Jon’s band?”

“He’s our singer,” Jon said.

“Oh, yeah? Cool, I can’t wait to hear you guys,” She said.

I looked at Bruce and Nikki as they stood there hand in hand. They were a good-looking couple. Bruce had long blond hair and a bushy blond beard. He had sharp blue eyes behind silver aviator glasses. It made him look like an oddly intellectual mountain man. Nikki was a looker, too. She was tiny, small breasted, but very attractive. Her blue eyes sparkled with life. I bet she gave Bruce a run for his money.

Jon interrupted my train of thought as he drained his beer and tossed his empty can into the garbage. He looked at Bruce as he slid his keys out of his pockets. “You think Lenny’s come back with that smoke, yet?”

“I sure as hell hope so,” Bruce said. “He left at, like, 6:00. You want to run over there?”

“Hell yeah, I’m ready to smoke a good joint instead of that ragweed shit Bill’s been burning. We’d better stop and pick up some more beer, too.” Jon looked at me and smiled. “This place is great. Bruce has a solid connection on the other side of the park and the beer store is right across the street. All of the amenities all in one place.”

“That’s what I look for in real estate,” I said. “So I take it you

won't be gone long?"

"No, we'll be back in a flash. Hey, if you want, the band stuff is in the bedroom at the end of the hall. I think you'll dig what I've done with it. Maybe we can crank out a tune when I get back."

"Cool, I could stand to blow off some steam." I said.

"I figured as much," Jon said, as he and Bruce made for the door. "I'll be right back."

I started to head for the bedroom when Angel spoke up behind me.

"So what's up, Bo? Come here and hang out with me for a minute."

I really didn't feel like dealing with a couple of drunk girls, but I didn't want to leave Angel hanging either.

I smiled and sat down next to Angel so I could get another good look at Laney. Angel leaned her head on my shoulder then gave me a quick kiss on the cheek.

"So how's Kirby?" Angel asked.

"He's fine. He's gone from walking to running like a sprinter. We've had to hang just about everything from the ceiling to keep him out of it. His new game is playing hide and seek in the kitchen cabinets, which would be fine if Jade ever cleaned the damn house. Lately she doesn't want to lift a finger to do shit," I said.

Angel reached over and gave my hand a squeeze. "You deserve better, Bo. As hard as you've been working to support the three of you, the least she could do is keep the damn house clean. What the hell does she do all day?"

"Who knows?" I said, with a sigh. "She spends most of her time on the damn phone when I'm home. She hands Kirby off to me and then just sits around smoking weed and gossiping with her friends. It's getting old. We can't have a conversation about anything without it turning into a fight. So, we pretty much just avoid each other."

"That's fucked up," Angel said, leaning over and kissed me on the cheek again. "Bo, baby, you really need to think about moving on. Especially, if all you do is fight. It can't be good for Kirby."

"I know," I said. "But, I can't just leave him. He's the only reason

I've stuck around this long."

"Well, all of the stress can't be doing you any good," Angel said. "I know it sucks but it would be better for him in the long run if you two were divorced and happy than together and miserable. Trust me. I know what I'm talking about. My parents were the same way."

A sad look poured across Angel's face. That feeling of loss was exactly what I wanted to avoid for Kirby's sake. No matter what happened he was still going to have a couple of dumb asses for parents, whether we were together or not.

"I don't think Jade would be happy sitting on a stack of money with the Hope diamond jammed in her ass," I said. "She's the most disagreeable person I've ever met."

"I know I can't stand to be around her anymore," Angel said. "She's an ungrateful little bitch. That day she sat there and trashed your Mom after she let Jade move in just pissed me off, and, she's like that with everybody. I've never heard her say one nice word about anyone."

Behind us the door opened. I turned around to see the hottest little brunette on Earth walk out. I was stunned. I found myself staring into the deepest set of green eyes I'd ever seen.

I was mesmerized.

"Cali," Laney said, pushing out a chair out from under the table. "Are you feeling better, sweetie?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. I'm staying away from that shit, though." She pointed at the bottle of tequila in the middle of the table.

"Cali, this is Bo, the singer in Jon's band. I'm sorry, Bo. I don't know your last name," Laney said.

I snapped out of my daze and replied, "Kineally."

"Bo, this is California Jones," Laney said, smiling, as she noticed my confusion. "We just call her Cali."

Cali was absolutely arresting. She was about 5'8", tall, but not skinny. She was built solidly, like a farm girl. She wore a pair of Daisy Dukes, short enough make me almost swallow my tongue. Her legs were long and tan and she had a cool, loose fitting, gypsy top on that de-emphasized her ample assets. As I looked at the

black paisley bandanna tied up through the back of her long, sandy, brown hair, I belatedly realized I had forgotten to speak.

“Nice to meet you,” I said, grinning, embarrassed. “That’s a really cool name.”

Angel turned to look at me, then, kicked me in the leg under the table. I remembered; high school. I suddenly wondered how old she was. She looked like she was as older me. She just had this vibe, like she’d already been there. It was in those emerald green eyes.

Hell, Jon and I had just graduated the year before. It wasn’t like I was a 40 year old perv attracted to a high school chick. I just thought she was hot. It wasn’t like I was going to hit on her. For better or worse, I was still married.

I was really just happy to look.

“Thank you,” Cali said. “My parents were hippies. That’s where they met, then, discovered they were both from Ohio. They moved back here when my Mom got pregnant but they said they’d always have that California Jones.”

She smiled at me again as she sat down. It was probably obvious that I was staring like a goon.

“Wow, that’s a really cool story,” I said, all but gushing.

Angel rolled her eyes and poured herself another shot of tequila. She slugged it back, then, sharply tapped the shot glass upside down on the table, looking at me. “You want one?”

Even buzzed on tequila, she was still pretty sharp.

“No thanks, darling, I have to drive home,” I said, winking.

“Jon and Bo are going to jam for us as soon as Jon gets back,” Laney said.

Cali looked me dead in the eye and smiled as she replied; “Can’t wait to see it.”

Nikki walked to the threshold of the kitchen still smiling her infectious smile. “Hey, Bill is about to fire up another hooter. Y’all want in?”

“Sure,” Laney said, grabbing Cali by the arm. “C’mon.”

Laney must have picked up on Angel’s subtle hostility. Plus, I think she wanted to warn Cali about my marital status. It was just

as well. One of us needed to keep me from making an ass out of myself.

“So, what’s your problem, Miss Lane?” I asked, after the girls left the room.

Angel smirked and shook her head. “I knew you’d go for that Cali chick. I told Jon when she got here that she was just your type. That’s why I warned you earlier. I knew it.”

“Well, that’s no reason to be mean. It’s not her fault,” I said.

“I know,” Angel said, with a big long sigh. “She sure pepped up when she saw you, too. All she did was mope around whining about her ex before you got here.” She shot me a strange look before going on.

“So how long has Jon been fucking around with that Laney chick?”

I stopped cold. I didn’t figure it would take long for her to put it together. I was just surprised she was taking it so calmly. At least, maybe, the tequila was serving a purpose.

“I don’t know,” I said.

“Bullshit. He tells you everything. I really want to know.”

I looked at Angel and considered my predicament. I loved them both. I wanted the best for both of them and I hated being put in the middle of their relationship. They had both cheated on each other and fought and lied and broken up and gotten back together more times than I could count. I think I survived as their friend mostly because I refused to choose sides. That was the path I needed to stay on.

“Don’t put me on the spot, Angel. You know I love you both, but I really get tired of this one up bullshit.”

A look of surprise slowly registered on her face. “Is that how it looks to you?”

“It has to be,” I said. “Anything else would make my brain melt.”

“That’s not how it is, Bo. I really loved Jon, but there’s just nothing there anymore. Fucking Jon is like a routine for technical merit, now. There isn’t any passion between us anymore, not like there used to be. Jon can be fun. The band is fun. I’m pretty much

just another hang out like the rest of them, now. So, I'm going to do whatever I want and try and ride the wave."

"OK, now my brain is melting," I said. "As crazy as it sounds, Jon really does love you, in his own warped way."

Angel kept her gaze on the tequila bottle. "Jon doesn't know how he feels about me. I can tell. Whatever it is, it's not strong enough to keep him from boinking whoever he can charm out of her pants."

I really didn't want to have this conversation with Angel but I didn't want her to be depressed either. I had a bad feeling things were about to go haywire again and I didn't want any part of it.

"So what about you, kiddo, what do you want?"

Angel inhaled deeply, shaking her head as she began picking at the label on the tequila bottle. "I want passion, man. I want somebody that's stupid in love with me and not afraid to show it."

She stopped and took a slug of tequila straight out of the bottle, "Something way different from how it is now."

"Those are some great lyrics. You mind if I borrow them?"

Angel turned and smiled at me but I could see tears forming in her eyes.

"They're yours, baby doll," she said. "No charge."

"Are you sure you're OK?"

Angel looked at me as if measuring her response. "He hit me again the other day."

My temper flared at the thought. I knew it wasn't the first time. The worst fight Jon and I ever had was over the last time he'd done it. That's when I decided I wasn't going to take sides with the two of them anymore. What happened was between them. I needed to stay out of it.

It wasn't easy.

Jon and Bruce came in carrying a case of beer a piece. They strolled into the kitchen and Jon shot me a funny look finding Angel and I alone.

"Hitting on my old lady, again? You really got to quit that shit, Bo."

His tone was joking but I knew for a fact he was jealous of my

friendship with Angel.

“At least, Bo knows how to treat a lady,” Angel said, patting my hand as she got up from the table. She grabbed the bottle from the table and disappeared into the bedroom.

“What’s her deal?” Jon asked as he and Bruce started stuffing the beer into the fridge.

I thought about jumping his ass over hitting Angel again, but I didn’t. It wouldn’t do any good, anyway. I also thought about telling him that she knew about Laney, too, but, again, I knew it wouldn’t do any good. Jon was going to do whatever the hell he pleased and no one was going to talk him out of it, including me.

“I think she’s on to you, again, hot stuff,” I said. “You might want to check your game.”

Jon looked at me and rolled his eyes. “She thinks she knows everything. I’m not worried about it.”

“It’s your funeral,” I said.

“Look, I’m sick of her shit. She’s been doing the same fucking thing. I don’t why she’s pissed.”

“Calm down it’ll be alright.” I said.

“Yeah, when she sobers up,” He looked over his shoulder at the door, sighing and running his fingers through his ratty blond hair. “I guess the tequila was a bad idea.”

I looked at Bruce and shook my head before following Jon out. “Gee, you think?”

“Wait ‘till you see the front bedroom,” Jon said, as I followed him down the hall, “I turned it into a proper jam room. I think the whole band could fit in there.”

He opened the door to a nice size room. He was right. We probably could fit the whole band in there. Lord knows we had played in worse places. I didn’t think his new neighbors would be too crazy about it, though.

“Not bad,” I said.

Jon had the mixing board set up on a small desk against the wall. He had our boom box already jacked in to it and the P.A. speakers set up in opposite corners. My mike stand was plugged in and standing in the center of the room. It looked like he had

it all planned out.

“Where are our amps?” I asked.

Jon grinned. “Check this out.” He slid open the closet door and nestled inside were both of our half stacks standing side by side. There was enough room for both of Jon’s guitars and one of mine to slide in on either side of the amps. I had to grin. It was way more organized than any of our other rehearsal spots.

“OK, this is pretty cool,” I said. “But there’s no way we can practice here Jon. Your neighbors would go ape shit.”

Jon looked at me and frowned for the briefest of moments. He hated it when someone questioned his judgment, including me.

“You let me worry about the neighbors. You just concentrate on looking pretty. OK?”

“It is what I do best,” I laughed. “Well, hell, if you can sell Devon and Stevie on it, I guess I’m good.

“They’re already on-board,” Jon said, smiling. “They were here last weekend helping us move. They’re not prima donnas like certain singers I know. They keep in touch.”

“Yeah, and neither of them is married to Jadezilla, either,” I said. “If you needed help that bad you should have called her. I’m sure she’d have been more than happy to rush us right over to help.”

Jon looked at me and smirked. “Yeah, fuck that. I hate to talk to her on the phone long enough to ask for you. She always sounds disgusted when she figures out it’s me.”

“Yeah, she has a gift for making people feel welcome.” I said. “So are we going to jam or what? I can’t stay here all night, man.”

As soon as we got our guitars out and started making a little noise, the crowd from the living room started filing in to check it out.

I loved playing in front of an audience. It filled a void in me somehow. Nothing juiced me up more than strapping on my guitar and showing off for a crowd. Even if it was only one drunk slumped over in a corner, I still gave it my all.

Jon and I tore into one of the originals we had been writing over the past year, “Subtropolis.” Our song writing was starting to get

more sophisticated and we reached a point where we bagged all of our old material from high school and started from a new zero point. This song was the first from that time, and it was heavy! We had played it so many times we didn't need our drummer to keep time. We could play it in our sleep.

Welcome to our wonderful world where you are doomed to stay/ Under a weary concrete sky/ A dull florescent day/ Inside here is Paradise/ Inside here there is pain/ Remnant of the world that was and the choice few that remain/ Sane

As I sang I noticed Cali had set down in the floor right in my line of site. When I looked at her she grinned from ear to ear. I smiled, then, quickly looked away so I could concentrate.

Welcome to our wonderful world where you are doomed to dwell/ Inside the belly of the beast and one stop short of hell/ Screams ring out all through the night/ Like music to the ears/ As souls escape into the light/ Drown and blood and tears....March through the gates....

The slow crush of the song was a blast to play. Singing it like I was the harbinger of doom was even more fun.

As I went into the guitar solo, I noticed Angel hadn't come in with everyone else. Jon noticed it as well. He kept looking toward the door as we played. He didn't look happy, either.

As I rolled through the solo I stole a quick glance at Cali. She had her eyes closed and looked like she was just totally into it.

She looked amazing.

Welcome to our wonderful world/ Our city built on hate/ Dancing to the rhythms of Gods as we await a bitter fait/ Vengeance is its own reward/ Feeding off the strong/ We have no fear of men or Death/ We've lived it all along....March through the gates....March through the gates

We finished the song and garnered a rowdy round of applause. As soon as the last note faded Jon set his guitar on its stand and made for the door.

“I’ll be back in a second,” he said.

I knew it wouldn’t do any good to try and dissuade him, so I just watched him go. He didn’t have sense enough to just leave well enough alone.

As I stood there trying to figure out whether I should go over and talk to Cali, Bill, the hippie guy, came over feeling the need to talk. He sounded completely burned out. He reminded me of a slightly younger version of Tommy Chong.

“I usually don’t listen to that really hard core stuff but that shit is killer. Where’d you learn to sing like that, man?”

“A short life of complete frustration,” I said, taking my guitar off and putting it on the stand. Bill looked surprised by my answer, but, then he started nodding.

“Wow. I can dig it. It’s cool, though. Singing is the best way to let it all out, you know.”

I nodded. It was cool comment. He might have been burnt but he didn’t appear to be stupid.

“It does help,” I said, “A lot.”

“You keep it up. You guys have real talent. I can’t wait to hear the whole band,” Bill said.

“Thanks, man.” I said.

“Well, I better get out of here, before my wife decides to track me down. I’ll never be able to talk my way out of being around a room full of hot chicks,” He said.

I had to laugh. I knew exactly how he felt. “I know what you mean. Well, thanks for stopping by, man.”

“No problem, I had a blast,” Bill said.

“Later.” As I watched Bill head toward the door, Laney and Cali came up giggling.

“That dude is fucking toasty,” Laney said. “What’d he say to you?”

“He was just telling me how he liked the song.” I said. “He seems OK.”

“Too weird,” Laney said. She bumped Cali with her hip. “I think Cali here got into it, too.”

Cali’s face turned beet red. She smacked Laney on the top of the arm. “Shut up.”

“Go on; tell him what you told me, California. If you don’t I will.” Laney shot Cali a mischievous little smile.

Cali was completely embarrassed “Shut up, Laney, please?”

I understood where the conversation was going. It was just too bad it would never lead anywhere. Laney cocked her hip and put her hand on it.

“You’ve got to get over the shy shit, California. If you want something you’ve got to pull up your big girl panties and go for it.”

I stood there staring at Cali, still mesmerized by her. I thought it was charming that she was embarrassed to tell me that I was a good singer or cute or whatever it was she was going to say. At the same time it demonstrated that she was, perhaps, a little too young. Cali looked up at me, staring intently into my eyes and smiled.

“I told Laney when you were singing, the way you sounded all scary and intense, that I had a really powerful orgasm.”

Wait. What the hell did she just say? I wasn’t ready for that comment. It was my turn to be embarrassed. I wished I’d been paying more attention.

“I have no idea what to say right now.” I just stood there staring at her like a complete idiot.

“Well, if I were you, Bo, I’d tell her you were ready to help her out with a few more.” Laney said.

I looked at Laney totally blown away by her boldness. Hell, I was blown away by both of them.

“If only,” I said. “Didn’t Laney didn’t tell you that I’m married.”

“Yes, but, at the moment, I really don’t care.” Cali said.

I stared at her, amazed, and completely unsure of how to respond. Before I could really collect my thoughts on the matter, all hell broke loose in the living room. Jon and Angel were screaming

at each other. I heard Angel scream at the top of her lungs.

“Fuck you, Jon. You brought the bitch to my house.”

“Come here, bitch,” Jon yelled. “Where the hell do you think you’re going.”

I looked at Bruce. He was jumping up off of the floor where he’d been sitting. We both bolted out of the bedroom as the front door slammed.

As I turned the corner, the front door was swung wide open and I could hear Jon yelling. Bruce and I made it out of the trailer in time to see Angel jumping into the passenger side of a beat up Toyota pick-up truck. She was fighting with Jon to get the door shut.

“Get the hell off of me, you son of a bitch, I’m sick of you.” Angel screamed.

“You’re not leaving here with this piece of shit, bitch. I’ll kill both you motherfuckers.”

Jon managed to get his hand on top of the door frame and jerked the door out of Angel’s hand. As he reached in to try and pull her out, Angel fell back in the seat and kicked Jon in the face with both of her feet. As soon as Jon stepped back, the truck pulled away from the curb. Jon took off running beside the truck trying to smash Angel’s window. As the driver began to maneuver the curve, Jon cut the corner and tried to jump into the bed of the truck. It didn’t work.

Jon hit the top of the tailgate, but slipped and rolled down the back, crashing down sideways onto the bumper then smashing hard, onto the pavement. He slid a good 15 feet from the momentum and came to rest on a heap in the middle of the road.

Bruce and I ran full bore to get to him. Adrenaline mixed with the surprise of seeing Jon try to superman into the back of a moving vehicle made the whole scene seem surreal. By the time we got to him, Jon had gotten up to his knees and was ramming his fists into the pavement in rapid succession.

“Goddamn it.” He screamed, as the streetlights shined down, spotlighting him in a halo of florescent light.

Bruce and I crouched down and tried to help him to his feet

but he jerked away like an insolent child and put his head in his hands, sobbing.

I looked around and saw that a bunch of people from around the neighborhood had come out to see what was going on. Out in front of Jon's the whole gang had gathered out on the sidewalk.

It was a lot to process.

"C'mon, man, we need to get him out of the street," Bruce said.

We got on either side of him and pulled him to his feet and leading him out of the road. Between the streetlights and the porch lights we managed to get a good look at him and try to gauge his injuries.

He was a mess.

The skin on his left elbow was practically gone from where he'd fallen. His face was scraped on that side and two lines of blood were drying under his nose, presumably from where Angel had kicked him. His nose didn't look broken but it did look like he was going to have a couple of black eyes from it. His blue jeans and shirt were ripped down the left side and I guessed he had road rash there, too.

I looked at Bruce. "I think he could stand a trip to the emergency room. His elbow's completely shredded."

Jon looked at me and shook his head as tears rolled down his cheeks. I saw blood flowing from his knuckles where they'd ripped against the pavement. It smeared across his face as he wiped at his eyes. His pupils were mere pinpoints as he looked at me and I was afraid he was going into shock.

"It was Donnie Keiler," Jon said.

It took me a second to figure out what he said. His voice was little more than a whisper.

"What'd he say?" Bruce asked.

"He said it was Donnie Keiler, a neighbor at their last apartment they used to hang out with."

"I can't believe he would do this to me," Jon said. His voice was a little stronger but still subdued. "I'm going to beat that bitch to death."

Suddenly, the muted light in his eyes came to life. He walked

away from us and started back toward the trailer fishing his keys out of his pockets. I looked at Bruce and shook my head. "I guess he's not done doing stupid shit, yet."

"Christ," Bruce said, as he took off at a trot to get in front of Jon. "You don't need to do this, Jon. We need to get you checked out. Your elbow is wasted."

Jon didn't reply. He was intent on getting in his truck and chasing the two of them down. I ran up beside him and tried to talk some sense into him.

"C'mon, man, if you don't want to go to the hospital, at least come inside and let me patch you up." I said. Jon turned and looked at me. I could see the rage boiling inside of him. It was probably the only thing that was keeping him on his feet.

I looked at Bruce, "We have to keep him from leaving or something really bad is going to go down."

As we reached Jon's truck, Bruce stepped in front of Jon and blocked the way, "You don't want to do this, Jon. Forget that bitch. Let's go get a beer."

Jon stopped and pushed Bruce, hard, in the chest. "Get out of my way Bruce."

I saw Bruce's face turn from intellectual to feral in a hot second. He was pissed.

"Fuck you, Jon. You're not going anywhere. You either give me those keys or I'm going to beat your ass to a fucking pulp."

"You can try." Jon said.

Bruce took a step back and I thought for sure that he was going to knock Jon slick out. But, before I could get between them, Mick slid up and snatched the keys right out of Jon's hands while he was focused on Bruce.

"C'mon, Jon, I'll drive. You jump in shotgun. That way when we find them you can spring right out on that piece of shit." Mick said.

What the hell?

You could have lit a cigarette off of the light that dawned in Jon's eyes. Without a word, he ran around to the passenger side of the truck and climbed in. Under the glare of the dome light, he

looked like the last victim in a horror movie.

He was a bloody mess.

Mick looked at Bruce and me, flipping the keys in his hand.

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep him out of trouble. I’ll just feed him a few more beers and bring him back after he calms down.”

With a grin, Mick jumped in and started the truck, peeling out past us with Ozzy screaming from the radio. The smile that spread across Jon’s blood streaked face as they went by was unnerving.

Bruce shook his head as we watched the truck go around the curve. “Sometimes I can’t believe I’m related to that stupid son of a bitch.”

“He and Angel just need to stay the hell away from one another,” I said. “Everything’s cool when they’re not together. I like how your buddy handled Jon. That was pretty slick.”

“Yeah, Mick’s a good guy. I just hope Jon doesn’t give him any shit,” Bruce said.

“I think once the adrenaline wears off, Jon’s not going to feel like giving anybody shit,” I said.

Bruce’s eyes widened, “I know, man, he hit the ground like a ton of bricks. I thought it killed him.”

“It sure as hell didn’t knock any sense in to him.” I said.

Bruce laughed and clapped me on the back. “Thanks for helping me out with him. You know you remind me a lot of Jim. He’s a good man, too.”

“Thanks, man, it was nice to meet you. Hopefully, the next time we hang out, it’ll be more peaceful.”

Bruce cocked an eyebrow and smiled. “It sure as hell better be.”

“Well, dude, I’m going to get out of here before the cops show up,” I said. “I’ll catch you around.”

“Good idea,” Bruce said. “As soon as I turn Jon’s lights out, I’m out of here, too.”

I shook Bruce’s hand, then, made tracks for my car. As I turned to open the door, I discovered Cali had followed me.

“You mind if I hitch a ride?”

I knew I shouldn’t. I should have just said no and drove away.

Apparently, Jon didn't have the market cornered on stupidity.

"I guess," I said. "Where do you live?"

Cali smiled and it was all that I could do to keep my head together.

"I just live on the other side of the park. I really just wanted to talk to you without everyone else around."

That set off an alarm in my head. Talk. Make damn sure that's all you do, Kineally, talk. "Sure," I said, "Why not?"

I watched Cali as she walked around the car. Her cut-off jeans were just blowing my mind. They made her hips look like the hood of a cobra. As she turned to get in the car, the wind caught her long sandy hair and fanned it out behind her. Under the glow of the streetlight she looked like a living dream. I could have helped her out with a few more orgasms, alright, shouldn't take more than a week.....or three.

Talk, Kineally, that's all you're going to do.

I climbed in the car and did a quick turn around the cul-de-sac. Cali smiled at me as I eased the car straight up the road toward perdition.

"I'm sorry about all of this shit with Laney," Cali said. "Is Jon going to be OK?"

"He's pretty messed up, but he'll live," I said. "And you don't have to apologize for Laney. Jon was the architect of this whole mess."

"I wouldn't put all of the blame on him. Laney has a bad habit of playing people to get what she wants."

I looked at Cali and knew exactly how she felt. She was as burdened by her friendship with Laney as I was with Jon.

"Jon can be the same way," I said. "I guess they make a hell of a pair."

"I doubt it will last long," Cali said, rolling up her window a little against the night air. "Eventually, she'll get bored and move on."

"A lot of turnover?" I asked.

Cali gave me a strange look then eased into a grin. "Well, that's not exactly how I'd put it but, yeah. She does get around. I just feel

sorry for Angel. I really liked her when we met earlier. She just seemed so sad. Now I know why.”

“Angel and Jon have the most screwed up relationship I’ve ever seen. I think it eats at both of them. They’ve screwed each other over more times than I can count. Angel can be vicious, too, though. When she goes off she goes for the throat. This isn’t the first time she’s run off with one of Jon’s friends.”

Cali turned in her seat and looked at me, surprised. “You mean that guy she left with was a friend of Jon’s?”

“Yeah, Donnie, he was a neighbor at the apartment they just moved from. They used to hang out all the time. Hell, I even liked him. Now, I can’t say for sure there’s anything going on between him and Angel, but, judging from past behavior, I’d say there probably is.”

“Why would they keep putting themselves through that?” Cali asked. “You’d figure one of them would just give it up.”

“Beats the hell out of me,” I said. “I try not to take sides. I just observe the madness and referee occasionally.”

“So has Angel ever set her sights on you?” Cali asked. “When she was talking about you earlier, I got the feeling that you two had been close.” I paused for a second and hoped it didn’t give away the tale.

“We flirt like mad but nothing’s ever really happened.” It was a lie I could live with.

Cali held her gaze on me as I cruised around the trailer park. I was afraid to guess what she was thinking and I knew I had to get her out of my car before I did something stupid.

“You know, Bo, it’s really too bad that you’re married,” Cali said, putting her hand on my thigh, “Because I could go for you, like, right now.”

“Trust me, Cali, the feeling’s very mutual, but I can’t do this. I have to give my marriage a serious shot, even if we are at each other’s throat.”

Cali took her hand off of my leg and nodded, “For better or worse, huh?”

I could hear the disappointment in Cali’s voice. It was too en-

dearing. I pulled up to a stop sign and looked at her.

“Trust me, if things were different, you wouldn’t be able to get rid of me. You are absolutely gorgeous, and you seem to have a good head on your shoulders and that’s sexy, too. I really enjoyed meeting you, trust me. You’ll have to come over to band practice and hang out sometime. There’s absolutely no reason we can’t be friends.”

“I’d like that,” Cali said, looking around at where we were. “I guess you can let me out here, so you can get home. I just wanted to make sure you knew how I felt. I’m here for you, Bo, if you ever need anything....and, honey, I do mean anything.”

I was amazed at her boldness. She was so damn hot I thought I was going to melt.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” I said, with a big, stupid grin.

Cali opened the car door and started to climb out, “Well, hopefully, I’ll see you soon,” She said, then, a big, wicked, grin appeared on her face. “I dare you not to think about me.”

She shut the car door and walked off without looking back.

I sat at the stop sign, amazed, as I watched her walk away.

As I pulled out onto the highway leaving Cali and the trailer park behind me, I was elated, frustrated and aggravated all at the same time. I couldn’t wait until I saw Cali again, and that was not a good thing. I doubted I could hold out the next time.

I shook my head as I cranked up *Megadeth* on the stereo and tried to leave this whole crazy evening behind me.

I still had issues I needed to deal with.

I still had to go home.