

ORLANDO DAVIDSON

Sometimes Murder Hides in Plain Sight.



BASELINE ROAD

Advance Praise for *Baseline Road*

“There is an unmistakable vibrancy in how Orlando Davidson writes in capturing those tumultuous times”

Garrett Hongo, author of *The Perfect Sound*

“Cops and crooks, babes, bombers, and bikers—all the idiosyncratic denizens of California in the Seventies come to life in this delight of a novel. The music of the time provides a rich, nostalgic accompaniment to a plot that winds and twists its way through highways and byways to a satisfying conclusion.”

Vicki Lane, author of *And The Crows Took Their Eyes* and of the Elizabeth Goodweather Mysteries

“With tight, well-paced plotting, Davidson transports the reader to *Baseline Road* and Southern California of the 1970s. It’s a worthwhile trip! Historical facts and figures are expertly woven into a twisty-turny ode to a culture and landscape filled with well-drawn characters who are flawed enough to be believable and interesting enough to keep the reader engaged well past bedtime.”

Tena Frank, author of *Final Rights*

“Orlando Davidson is a gifted writer, and his first novel *Baseline Road* is riveting, complex and intriguing. It’s a book full of compelling action and irresistible tension, and at the same time is grounded in empathy and compassion for its characters, including its hired killer. In that way *Baseline Road* is a rare thing – a moving crime novel with emotional depth and real heart.”

Tommy Hays, author of *The Pleasure Was Mine*

“Bombs, babes, and burning rubber. Buckle up! It’s 1972, and that’s cordite you smell with the patchouli oil and pot smoke. With this delightful detective boogie, Davidson hits all the right notes—sex, thugs, and rock and roll!”

Ed Davis, author of *The Last Professional*

BASELINE ROAD

by

Orlando Davidson



**Artemesia
Publishing**

ISBN: 978-1-951122-44-7 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-951122-54-6 (ebook)

LCCN: 2022941202

Copyright © 2023 by Orlando Davidson

Cover Illustration and Design © 2023 by Ian Bristow

Names, characters, and incidents depicted in this book are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and beyond the intent of the author or the publisher.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without written permission of the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

Artemesia Publishing
9 Mockingbird Hill Rd
Tijeras, New Mexico 87059
www.apbooks.net
info@artemesiapublishing.com

Content Notice: This book contains descriptions of drug use, mental illness, police actions, and physical assault and trauma that may be disturbing to some people. The book also uses racial slurs and derogatory terms that were in use at the time that this book is set. We have kept this language to reflect its usage at the time, but the author and the publisher condemn the usage of such language whether it was used in the past or today.

CHAPTER ONE

Monday, May 25, 1970

I'LL CALL YOUR OFFICE at 4:45 Monday afternoon. No cops.

Rebecca Meadows stared down at the note on her office desk, her fingers drumming a nervous beat, still only half believing it. Holding her manuscript for ransom? That just didn't happen... but it was gone, leaving her with no choice but to wait for Mark Collins, the thieving bastard, to call.

What had she been thinking? Collins had shown up five days ago, during the evening panel presentation on the financial impacts of continuing the Vietnam War. The topic was too broad for the Economics faculty to tackle on short notice, but she and her Claremont Graduate School colleagues had soldiered through it. The panel had told the audience—still angry and bruised from Nixon's Cambodia debacle and the resulting Kent State/Jackson State murders—what they wanted to hear, namely, that the costs of the war were insupportably high.

Collins had approached her afterward as she organized her papers. He'd asked good questions, showing he'd understood the nuances of her talk. She'd been intrigued, not least by his looks. He was handsome, ridiculously, movie-star handsome. He'd told her he was an army veteran, now disillusioned with the war, and that

Baseline Road

religious faith was guiding his actions.

On Saturday night, after two lovely dates, Rebecca decided to sleep with Mark. It was a whirlwind affair by her standards. She knew it was a fling—that this mystery man would probably vanish in the air—but it sure was fun. It had been work, work, and more work since January, made more depressing by the endless Vietnam War and now all the student unrest and heartbreak. Rebecca figured she deserved to have the sexy stranger in her bed.

After their lovemaking, she reached over to him. At first, he resisted, seeming nervous, then relented. Rebecca felt a long, jagged scar along his lower back, and something else near the base of his neck. He answered before she could ask. “Too many wars, too many battles,” he murmured. “I’m so tired.”

She then felt him fully relax as he allowed her to hold him. It was more intimate than the sex. Intertwined, they both drifted to sleep. Rebecca woke up in the morning in a dreamy haze, wanting him again. But Mark wasn’t in bed. Maybe he was making breakfast. Did the guy cook too? She got up, hoping to find him in the kitchen. No luck. The apartment was empty. Throwing on a robe, concerned now, she made a check of the parking area from her front balcony. His convertible was nowhere to be seen. What the hell?

Still hopeful that he would return with bagels or pastries, Rebecca made coffee and took a cup into her study. Her eyes went at once to her desk to enjoy the sight of the finished manuscript, her journal article titled “A Macroeconomic Analysis of the the 1919 Paris Peace Treaty” by Rebecca Anne Meadows, Ph.D., neatly typed and awaiting a mailing envelope.

“Holy Mother of God,” she gasped, her hands shaking, spilling the coffee. The manuscript, the work that had

consumed her life for the past two years, was gone. She'd planned to make a copy before mailing it off—pricey but necessary. And now the only copy was gone. Had Mark stolen it? Had he played her? She steadied herself against the desk, almost fainting. That's when she saw the note, written on a single sheet of paper and wedged under the lamp. *I'll call your office at 4:45 Monday afternoon. No cops.*

"This is crazy," she muttered. The journal article was due at the University of Chicago next Friday. No publication meant no tenure track job at Claremont Graduate School for the fall semester.

Okay, stop and think. Some perverted creep had humiliated her; she could handle that. Nobody knew of their affair, anyway. But she needed her work. The article was good, possibly even groundbreaking. Her thoughts churned furiously. Christ, her research notes and early drafts were scattered all over hell, some in her office, some at her library work station. Could she put the whole thing back together? Sure, but not by the freakin' deadline. Rebecca began to cry. The sexy stranger had been a total fraud, and a thief. But why?

Waiting for her office phone to ring on Monday afternoon, the thought of those tears put her in a rage. She would find out what this slimeball wanted and deal with it. She stared down at the phone with loathing. At 4:45 exactly, it rang.

"What in God's name are you doing?" she asked without waiting for him to say anything, surprised and annoyed that a wave of sadness had crept into her voice. She realized that she was wounded. That she'd cared for the man. That she was no good at flings.

"Listen, the boss wants you to understand something. You're not in charge. You can't dictate terms. That's all. I'm just the messenger. Sorry about all the subterfuge, babe,

Baseline Road

but we did enjoy ourselves, right?”

“The boss...” Rebecca struggled for the right words. “Now what?”

“Simple. The manuscript is in the departmental mail room. Consider it a lesson learned. Have a nice life.”

“Wait... just wait. Who is your boss? What did you get out of this horrible, cruel trick?”

“Well, aside from the obvious, I must admit to a souvenir, those black panties of yours. I’m putting them to good use right this minute, thinking of you naked in the shower, that thing you did. It was so—”

“Fuck you!” She slammed down the phone, shaking the desk. Flinging open her office door, she reeled toward the mail room, her heels clattering on the polished wood floor.

A chill. She knew suddenly who the “the boss” was. That crazy night. Its memories clung to her. The bad sex, fumbled apologies, and then the sudden violence. He’d slapped her, hard. After that, she’d refused to see him again, despite his pleadings. And to think it was all because of a bad toothache and too much nitrous oxide. Never again, she’d sworn to herself.

Was he stalking her? The man she’d jilted. She’d recently felt eyes on her at the apartment. But all that was tomorrow’s problem. First, she needed to reclaim her life, her future—all wrapped up in the journal article.

The second-floor mail room, cool and elegant like everything at Harper Hall, was deserted in the late afternoon, the department secretaries having left promptly at four. The high ceiling and thick stucco walls kept out the heat of the day. A fat manila envelope was stuffed into her named mail slot above the common worktable. Rebecca practically wept with relief as she stretched her five-foot frame to remove the package. There was a click, and a

blinding white light.

Collins watched from nearby. The pay phone was located on the north portico of the Claremont Colleges' main library. It offered a perfect view of Harper Hall. The sex talk had been a ruse, something to keep the target off balance, to keep her from asking any more questions. He saw the flash before he heard the explosion. Now smoke was billowing from two second-floor windows. For a moment, the smoggy Southern California air smelled like Nam. He breathed it in, and it made him tingle. People were running in all different directions. "Not again," a young woman wailed.

Collins fired up a Marlboro and checked himself out in the reflection of the library's big revolving glass doors, seeing himself and his Dodgers baseball hat again and again in the shadowy light as the doors spun round and round, faster and faster, students spilling out from the library to find out what had happened. He looked good.

He heard the first sirens. The colleges still were jumpy on account of that other bombing two weeks before. It was time to split. His blue Corvette convertible was parked close by on Dartmouth Avenue, facing south, away from Harper Hall. He headed toward it, not too fast, not too slow, and careful to keep a serious expression on his face. After all, he was as shocked and concerned about a campus bombing as anyone.

A gust of hot desert wind nearly blew his hat off. Dirty brown leaves swirled in the almost combustible blast of air. Collins pulled his hat tighter, noting that the Santa Ana winds had come early this year. He got in the car, thankful that the convertible top was on, and pulled away from the curb, failing to notice a piece of stiff paper—a parking

Baseline Road

ticket—that lay in the gutter buried among the leaves and gritty debris. He drove through Claremont village, then down toward the San Bernardino Freeway. A fire engine blazed past him, heading toward Harper Hall, followed by two cop cars. Those damn campus radicals! It made him laugh out loud.

Mission accomplished. More complicated than he would have chosen, but he got extra pay for his time and trouble. The client somehow had known about the journal article and had insisted upon its theft, after the seduction. Humiliation definitely was a part of this gig. Collins made a quick stop at the Chevron station near the freeway, found the pay phone, and made his brief after-action report, using all the correct code words. The client was pleased.

Turning his Corvette east toward the desert, Collins began to relax. He could be home in an easy four hours, going fast but not too fast. He wasn't carrying—no weapons, no coke—but still didn't want the Highway Patrol to pull him over. At this precise moment, Collins did not exist, except to a small chosen few, and even they had no clue as to who he really was. He was a specter, a shadow, possibly your worst nightmare, and that's the way he liked it.

He put *Sketches of Spain* in the tape deck, digging on Miles Davis's haunting trumpet. It was a tradition of his after completing an assignment. Maybe he'd hit some golf balls at the club tonight, pounding long arching shots into the neon-tinged sky. They kept the driving range lit up all night. Las Vegas was groovy that way. The city didn't sleep much, and neither did he.

Later, as Collins drove through the twilight, it hit him like a punch; the familiar stirring of feelings and thoughts, half-formed and confused, remorse for the dead woman, remembering the way she'd held him after the sex, her

kindness, so different from his usual, joyless couplings. Briefly, in the dark, as he'd stared at her ceiling while she slept, her body turned toward him, she'd made him regret all the things he wasn't, made him wonder if he could ever find a better, less feral, version of himself. But...

Forget it. He refused to let this jumble of emotions take hold of him. It was post-job blues, nothing more. No room for weakness in his line of work. Collins stopped at a diner in Baker, wolfed down two cheeseburgers, and flirted with the waitress. Sipping coffee, he breathed deeply, closed his eyes, and let all the negative thoughts drift away, replaced by plans and calculations, anything concrete, technical, and capable of implementation. Feelings were a trap.

Walking back to the car, his step lighter despite the heavy food, Collins was free again, as if absolved from sins to which he hadn't confessed. He removed the convertible top, choosing the starry night as his roof. The vast Mojave Desert, keeper of secrets, stood in mute witness, its harsh landscape offering a perfect refuge for fractured souls.

CHAPTER TWO

January 1972

I WAS AT THE urinal in the club's dark, putrid bathroom, thinking about Papa John Creach—that fiddler who played with the San Francisco hippie bands—and wondering if I should change my style, when a man sidled up behind me, too close. I felt his presence, even his breath on my neck. Christ! I tensed up and reached for my side-arm, which of course wasn't there since I was off duty.

"Nice playing, Jimmy," the man rasped.

"Thanks. Gimme a little room, will you?"

"You're the law, right?" he asked, backing off some.

"Not tonight, dude."

"We know who you are, man. Here's a news flash for you, Sergeant Sommes. The Claremont bombings, the FBI pigs got it all wrong."

I zipped up and faced the man. In the dim light provided by the single naked bulb dangling above the sink, I recognized him as "Acid Bill" Dixon, a Pomona College lifer who showed up at some of our gigs. He had a late-night weekend show on college radio, broadcast from a funky little shack on the Pomona campus. I listened sometimes, when I was too wired to sleep after playing two sets. He preached Peace, Love, and LSD, mixed in with conspiracy theories and really good album cuts. A stone freak to be sure, but he knew his music.

Baseline Road

“Not my case, Bill. In fact, not even my county—I work San Bernardino, not LA.” The notorious Claremont Colleges bombings had taken place in May of 1970, during the whole Cambodia/Kent State business. One person had been injured when a bomb went off at the Pomona College administration building. Two weeks later, a female economics professor was blown up at the Claremont Graduate School. My best friend, Carol Loomis, of the Claremont PD was first on the scene and the horror of it bothered her to this day. But like I told Bill, not my jurisdiction. Claremont was just over the county border, a rich college town. Perfect for LA County.

Acid Bill stayed in my face and said, “You’re the only lawman I know that can play ‘Mr. Bojangles’ on his mandolin so, by my reckoning, you can’t be a complete asshole. And if you care anything about justice, man, you should take another look. There might still be a bomber out there. Nice hat, by the way.” I wore a battered old black Stetson at our shows, anything to not look like a cop. Bill started to shuffle away in a fog of patchouli oil—that hippie smell—mixed with a richer, earthier scent: high-quality Mexican weed. A real goddamn spice rack.

I remembered something. “Anyway, they caught the guy and he confessed. Score one for the FBI,” I said to the retreating back and the salt-and-pepper ponytail.

Bill turned and sad-eyed me like I’d really disappointed him, like I’d failed a test. “He confessed to the first one, Jimmy, where the secretary got hurt.”

With that he was gone, leaving me oddly irritated that I’d disappointed a spaced-out old hippie. What did I care? But I had music to play.

Which brought me back to...Creach. His fiddle playing with Jefferson Airplane, long psychedelic runs and leads, was not my style at all. But the kids dug it. Our

band, Salton Sea, had finished the first set at Baldy Village, and my playing was off tonight. The rhythm and fills were okay, which was mostly what I did since we were more rock than country. But my leads didn't have any flow, any magic. I'd seen people drifting away toward the bar as I played. Hell, even the bass player gave me a look. It was a constant struggle. I wanted more Bakersfield honky-tonk country in our sets. The singer and drummer wanted to be The Rolling Stones.

What the hell. Maybe it was time to rock some more and give the crowd some cheap thrills—easy to do on Neil Young's "Down by the River," one of our staples, with me and Tom Sokoloski, our lead guitar player, trading licks. After all, our band was playing country rock to California college kids, not auditioning for the Grand Ole Opry.

I gathered myself, dismissing all thoughts of Acid Bill's dark ramblings, and headed for the door. Time to let my fiddle screech like Creach.

The telephone woke me up the next morning, after a short night's sleep. The second set had gone better—I'd even pulled out my mandolin and played "Mr. Bojangles." It was my mother on the phone reminding me of our monthly brunch date at Walter's down in Claremont. As always, she asked me if I was bringing "someone" with me. In other words, had I met the woman of my dreams that would result in marriage and children and a house in the suburbs? "Just me, Mom," I said. "See you in an hour."

Being a cop and a musician was a great way to meet the ladies—one-night-stand-type ladies, mostly at bars—and a lousy way to meet a future wife. That's the way it was. Also, I was thirty-five years old. The women I had gone to high school and college with were happily mar-

Baseline Road

ried, or bitterly divorced. And the younger ones I met, often at gigs, seemed so different in terms of life experience. Sometimes, I'd say "Buddy Holly" to my date, out of the blue. A blank look spelled trouble. It happened a lot.

The weird episode with Acid Bill Dixon was bugging me. Over coffee, I took a quick look at a *Time* magazine story I'd kept about the bombings. Richard Manning, an admitted student radical and member of the Claremont Chapter of the SDS, Students for a Democratic Society, had been arrested after the second Claremont Colleges bombing, the one in which the college professor had been killed. I thought he'd confessed, but he hadn't exactly. Instead, he'd issued a statement through his lawyer saying, "Death to all pigs that support Nixon's Killing Machine. Civilian casualties are to be expected during the revolution. Power to the people." Then he'd clammed up. It certainly wasn't an outraged claim of innocence. His statement sounded like bullshit to me. I had friends dying in Vietnam. I doubted that he or his SDS buddies could say the same.

Time for breakfast. I left my Palmer Canyon cabin, tucked in among the live oaks, my boots resonating on the wooden steps, and took a deep breath of sunny winter. Scrub jays were gathering above in the oaks and pines, having some sort of raucous meeting. The rain had finally stopped two days ago, but snow remained on the higher peaks of the San Gabriel Mountains. There was no smog, and it was just cool enough for my jean jacket. This was Southern California at its sneaky best, trying to convince the doubters, myself included, that its best days lay ahead—that its golden promise still could be kept.

Climbing into my '71 Dodge Charger, I resolved to take a quick look at the Manning thing tomorrow at the office, provided some poor soul didn't get stabbed in a back alley along old Route 66, in which case I'd be too busy.

CHAPTER THREE

AT 20,000 SQUARE MILES, San Bernardino County was larger than New Jersey, Connecticut, Delaware, and Rhode Island, combined. The bosses liked to trot out this fact, especially when they'd lost a prisoner or suffered some comparable calamity. The dividing line with Los Angeles County was more than just a boundary. "San Berdoo" had a long history of untamed lawlessness, was almost proud of it. It remained the wild, wild, west.

I worked as a homicide investigator for the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department, SBSB to us, and was based at the small, relatively sleepy Alta Loma substation. We shared the building with the county fire department. On paper I had a partner, but he was long gone, unofficially transferred to the higher crime Fontana area, near the speedway, where more bad guys hung out. This sleight-of-hand maneuvering was needed to keep the accountant types happy, since all investigators were required to partner up.

Working alone suited me. Fewer personality hassles. We were a relaxed crew at Alta Loma. I mostly wore jeans, except on court days, and nobody cared if my hair came down over my collar. If things got tricky on my Cucamonga, Etiwanda, and Alta Loma beat, I called the patrol guys to back me up. Laurie, our dispatcher/secretary—one of those California blondes the Beach Boys wrote songs about—ran the office and also made good coffee. Which

Baseline Road

I was drinking Monday morning while reading the sports page of the San Bernardino Sun. The Lakers had finally lost, ending a record winning streak, the Bucks' Abdul-Jabbar outplaying Wilt Chamberlain. Ah, basketball. I'd actually tried out for my college team at Cal Poly, but wasn't good enough or, at six feet even, tall enough. It still was my favorite sport.

"Call on line two," Laurie yelled out at me. Our intercom system was busted, had been for quite a while. Yelling worked. I picked up.

"Is this the intrepid homicide detective?" a familiar female voice asked.

"You bet. Got any dead bodies?"

"Only the mayor, but he doesn't know it yet, like that zombie movie."

It was my best buddy, Carol Loomis, who worked for the tiny Claremont Police Department as its only detective. I'd called her earlier. "Actually, I have a question for you. You know the famous Claremont bombings—"

She laughed. "Do I know the bombings, only the biggest deal that ever hit this sleepy little burg?"

"Yeah, I know, but I had a weird conversation, if you can call it that, with a stoner type over the weekend. About the bomber, saying he'd only confessed to the first one. Does that ring any bells?"

Carol hesitated a moment before answering. "Kind of. Buy me lunch at La Paloma and I'll tell you more."

I was ten minutes late to lunch. Carol was already seated and made a show of pointing at her watch as I approached, giving me the good-natured grief that was customary in our relationship. She often remarked that nobody remembered what she looked like on account

of her regular and unremarkable features. She wore her brown hair short, cut just above her neck. Her mouth and nose were small, surrounded by light freckles. She had a figure that was best described as trim as opposed to sexy and she dressed to avoid unwanted attention.

Carol thought of herself as a plain Jane, but her flashing brown eyes told me a different story. They sparkled when she was happy, broke your heart when she was sad, and were downright scary when she was mad. I knew all three emotional circumstances well. She also was the smartest person I knew.

We ordered and dug in. It was way too much food, as always, at La Paloma, but I didn't let that stop me. Tortilla chips, two chicken enchiladas, rice and beans, and iced tea for both of us. Our usual order, except Carol always asked for more hot sauce. Some people said we made a perfect couple, since our features and demeanors seemed to match. Not exactly.

One night about two years earlier, after too much tequila and fast, sweaty dancing at a rock club in La Verne, I'd put the moves on her in the parking lot. Following an unusually fierce rejection, then boozy tears, Carol let me in on her secret. She was attracted to women, always had been. Since she wasn't sure how her superiors would react to this fact, Carol kept it to herself and, as far as I knew, didn't have much of a love life. I often served as her date at official functions, and that worked out fine for both of us.

Small talk and gossip had filled our lunch. Time to get to work. "Okay, what do you remember about the bomber, Richard Manning?" I asked.

Carol drank some more iced tea. "You remember how crazy it was back then? All the college kids marching and protesting, even burning down that bank in Santa Barbara. So when that first bomb went off, the one at the college

Baseline Road

library, everybody just freaked out. The college presidents met at midnight, demanding action, their assistants screaming at the mayor, who of course then screamed at me. The normal chain of command.”

“Yeah, I remember. It was all hands on deck for us too.”

“It was a serious freakin’ pipe bomb,” Carol said, poking her finger at me. “That young woman, the secretary, just about lost her hand, plus her eardrums were ruptured. The entire storeroom at the library was torched.”

“Did you take the initial call?”

“For about half an hour, then your buddies from LASD, LA County Sheriff’s Department, came rolling in, the arson guys, bomb guys, you name it. My job quickly shifted to coordination and communication—which really meant bringing them coffee—which was fine with me. I didn’t know squat about bombs.”

“What about the FBI? Did they show up?”

Carol shook her head and pushed her plate away. “Not then. I heard they were getting briefed by LASD. In fact, once things settled down and it was clear that the victim was basically okay—no life-threatening injuries—and the college kids stopped occupying buildings, it was almost business as usual.

“Then it happened, late May, a couple of weeks later.” Carol shuddered. “I’ve got no illusions, Jimmy. I’m a small-town cop, nothing more, and that second bomb scared the living crap out of me.”

I signaled for the bill, needing to be in San Bernardino at 2:30 for a meeting with an assistant DA. Carol didn’t notice. Her eyes were fixed on something I couldn’t see; she was reliving the scene.

“It was almost 5 p.m., just a regular day,” she said. “I was thinking about taking my dog to the park after work when the call came in—a man, hysterical, screaming, ‘A

bomb, a bomb, Jesus! They blew her up.' I got to the graduate school in about five minutes... and, wow." Carol's eyes welled up.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to open up old stuff."

She ignored me. "The room was still smoking. I had to tell the fire department to wait, needed to preserve the crime scene. The woman, the professor... well, she was just blown to bits, body parts, blood on the walls. Who could do shit like that?"

The waitress came with the check. I took it. "My treat."

Carol nodded. "Okay, but I haven't earned my lunch yet. This time the FBI was all over the case, senior people from the LA office, real arrogant pricks. They pushed everybody else away, never even talked to me, probably thought I was clerical if they thought anything. All the Los Angeles TV stations showed up too, helicopters landing at the Pomona College quad. It was chaos."

"What about LASD?"

"They were there, but second string to the FBI. It turned out that Ed Charles of the LA Sheriff's Department had been investigating Richard Manning, this campus radical guy, for the first bombing. In fact, he'd gotten an anonymous tip that Manning was good for it."

I'd worked with Ed Charles. He was solid. "But he hadn't acted on it yet?"

"Nope. He told me later that he didn't have enough evidence to even brace the guy. He was still talking to other radical types, trying to figure Manning out, when the second bomb blew. Then he felt terrible, told the FBI about Manning. The Feds snapped their fingers, a judge gave them a search warrant, and they showed up in force at 3 a.m. the next morning at Manning's cottage in the Claremont barrio and arrested him. I heard he was just sitting there, reading something by Che Guevara, like he

Baseline Road

was waiting for them.”

“Jeez. Did you know about the raid?”

“Not until later, when I read about it in the *LA Times*, which was embarrassing. Maybe the mayor knew. The FBI found all sorts of threats, manifestos, you name it, about pigs, Vietnam atrocities, et cetera, et cetera. And then the big deal. There was bomb stuff in the garage, bags of fertilizer, blasting caps, diesel fuel, and timers. Plus bomb instructions. The Feds had Manning cold. In fact, there even was some kind of half-crazed letter, unsent of course, to the library victim, part apology, part political rant about the revolution.”

“Some of that showed up later in his statement,” I said, “civilian casualties and such.”

“Yeah, what a jerk. That’s pretty much it. You know the rest, except, apropos to your question, the evidence on the second bombing was thinner, more circumstantial. And the case never really got worked in any normal way. They’d arrested their man, decided he’d set both bombs, and J. Edgar Hoover was happy as hell. That was it.”

I frowned. “Same kind of bomb though?”

“Yeah, that’s what the U.S. Attorney’s Office said, really hammered on that point, said the bomb experts told them the bombs were identical.” Carol shrugged. “We’ll know more if there’s ever a trial. They’re fighting over him, you know, the State and the Feds, each claiming jurisdiction. Hoover and Governor Reagan both want the credit for nabbing the radical bomber. Isn’t there some kind of law against just sticking a guy in a cell without a trial?”

“I guess not for him.”

I paid and we moved from La Paloma’s fake Mexican gunfighter décor into the bright white glare of Foothill Boulevard. It always was kind of a shock, the brightness of Southern California, especially reflecting on all the con-

crete. I put on my shades, a necessity even in January, and we walked to Carol's shiny cherry-red Chevy Bel Air, her pride and joy.

"When are you going to pop for new wheels?" I asked, trying to tease her into a better mood, away from the bombing memories.

She mock-shoved my arm. "Hell, this baby is on its way to being a classic."

"Let's go to the Fontana drag strip someday. My Charger can take this antique."

"In your dreams, pal. That bananamobile of yours doesn't stand a chance," she said, pointing at my car.

"That's classic gold and black, lady; a lawman's vehicle."

"Whatever." Carol grinned at me, got in the Chevy, gunned the engine, and then peeled rubber out of the La Paloma parking lot, taking a wild left turn onto Foothill. Illegal as hell. Lucky she was the law.