

## Chapter 1

Eddie Van Halen's scorching guitar on "Runnin' with the Devil" pounded out of the 120-watt Pioneer stereo that Lance had installed in my white-pinstriped fire-red 1973 Dodge Charger SE. This was the stereo system that Lance had insisted I have.

There was no debate in Lance's world when it came to audio equipment. Listening to music – and by music I mean rock 'n' roll – through an inferior stereo system was sacrilege. When he removed the stereo the manufacturer had put in my car six years earlier, Lance held it at arm's distance and turned his head as he dropped it into the trash bin. "Good riddance," he said. "Now we rock."

Lance's words rang through my head as blood trickled out of my forehead and onto the street curb under the flickering light of the All-Niter Bar & Tap.

Knelt down beside me was an elderly black woman, praying. "Be our light in the darkness, O Lord, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of your only Son, our Savior Jesus Christ."

Over and over she repeated this same prayer, as if she herself was in shock, while in the distance a deep, gravelly voice echoed in the still of the night.

"You smashed up mah cah! You smashed up mah cah!"

The only voice I recognized came from Lance, and it was the lone voice of reason.

"Hey, my buddy's hurt," Lance fired back. "We need to get an ambulance."

"You smashed up mah cah, mothuh fuckah! How could you hit a pahked cah, you drunken mothuh fuckah? You're gonna pay for this, mothuh fuckah!"

"I don't give a fuck about your car. My friend here needs help. Can't you see he's hurt?"

At that moment the stranger at my side closed her eyes, and cut off her prayers.

"I think he does need help, Buck," she cried. "I don't know, but I think he might be hurt bad. *Really* bad."

Was I hurt? Looking back on it now, the answer, invariably, is yes. But not as you might think. Not in a physical sense. No, the injuries I sustained that day can't even really be traced to that accident. They began earlier that day, and, maybe, even before that.