

idea of a honeymoon spot, but Portland had the best club for rhythm and blues and after-hours dancing and drinking, and that was Shelagh's idea of matrimonial bliss she'd look back on with glowing nostalgia in our golden years. Me, I would've thrown my tent, sleeping bags, and fishing gear in the car and headed east of the mountains to Lake Chelan, rent a campsite, a boat with a little Seagull motor. I was a damn sight better in a campground than on some dance floor, especially when I was one of the few white guys there, and the only one who obviously shouldn't stray too far from his drink, chair, and table.

The trouble was, Shelagh had grown up in the Central Area, and got this taste for R&B and soul from her black friends. We'd met in high school, but I was from a different neighborhood, and while I liked soul music as much as the next guy it didn't turn my crank enough to plan a honeymoon around. But it had one big thing in its favour. Dancing, especially dancing to R&B and soul, made Shelagh horny. And who was I to argue.

The '55 Chev with its new engine was a dream on the highway. After dinner in Portland, we cruised up and down in front of the R&B club, looking for a parking spot, and to see the club's arriving patrons check us out. We spent two nights until four a.m. dancing, and two days in our hotel room. The bands were so cool, said Shelagh. Cool turned into hot on the king-size bed, and I made up for the moves I lacked on the dance floor. Said Shelagh.

The second night, a black couple leaving the club when we did were parked behind our car, and the man said to me, "That's one delux car, baby," and we cruised back to our hotel, almost forgiving Sam.

We were cursing Sam the next day about twenty miles south of Tacoma, while a driver hooked the gold Chev to his towtruck. The clutch was gone. We fixed that and my mechanic, who'd been my father's for the Buick, let us give him \$25 a week. We were still paying that off when the alternator died. Then a weird sound developed in the rear end. The mechanic advised us to sell. In fact, he told us to avoid driving the car before anything else went wrong. We knew he was right, especially since all our spare cash and more was sinking into the car as if it were a gold mine in reverse. So we let the car sit in our driveway, rode the bus, and let the insurance run out before we finally could bear to part with our honeymoon car.

The morning the ad appeared in the paper, two men showed up on our front porch.

"We here to look at your car."

James Boone was my height and stocky, with a sullen, glowering expression on his round face. His shoulders were hunched and torso leaned forward, like a football player about to make a tackle.

Lincoln was taller, over six feet, with very black skin, a huge friendly smile, and a long thick scar on one cheek. He did all the talking, while Boone inspected the body, looked under the hood, got inside and started the engine.

"The insurance has run out," I yelled.

"He'll be careful," Lincoln said, "just go round the block."

The gold Chev disappeared around the corner, and Lincoln started telling me about the older cars he'd owned and the new ones he'd stolen and delivered to a fence back in L.A. and the Jaguar he'd kept for himself, a little too long, which landed him in jail for 18 months.

James Boone came back with the car.

"We need to talk bread," were his first words.

We went into our apartment, to the kitchen, where Shelagh was doing the Friday night dishes in her Saturday morning cut-offs and tank top. James and Lincoln sat down at the table, and James took a pint of Johnny Walker Red out of his jacket pocket. Shelagh and I never drank in the morning, but this was ritual, and scotch was our favourite drink, one we couldn't afford the past few weeks. I got three glasses.

"What about me?" Shelagh said. "Or is this the men's room?"

James poured four glasses and handed one to Shelagh with a formal courtesy he hadn't yet shown.

"Ice?" Shelagh asked.

"No thank you, Ma'am," he said, "I like to feel it burn down the throat."

Shelagh leaned against the fridge, checking out James and Lincoln. "Where you guys from?"

"L.A.," Lincoln answered. "Watts. James here's from Kansas City."

"What are you doing here?" she asked, and I got a bit tense, trying to send her mental signals: Hey, maybe it's not a good idea prying into these guys' lives. We're trying to make a sale. Don't screw it up. Who knows what their background is? Can't you ask something harmless, like, what's your favourite basketball team?

Lincoln smiled wide again. "Get away from the gangs, man. I used to be in a gang. Wicked stuff, you wouldn't believe. That was my life. Then one day, shebbam, shebazz! I smartened up."