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Going home saved her and she wasn't sure why. She had no money for luxuries and the half bottle of dish soap she was using instead of regular bubble bath just managed to cleanse the summer from her body. The steam in the bathroom matched the fog outside. This was the only time of day that she could have the one bathroom to herself. Sixteen people and eight Harley Davidsons parked in the living room shared the small house. The Banditos paid more attention to their bikes than they did to their four women. Drugs, their main source of income, were a close second. Third, the gang's arsenal. The women could just envy the fondling the men gave their weapons. The ladies sometimes had to work the streets of Ventura to buy food for the gang. Beer and wine were at the top of their grocery list. The youngest had to pay the rent, usually flat on her back under the landlord. Once, a long time ago, Susan had refused and her recovery was long and painful. That gang was different from the one she was with now. Beaten and dumped outside the emergency room, she had to crawl to the door.

She watched the summer dirt drift down the drain. The window in the bathroom had been an add-on. She opened the added-on window even wider, not sure if the mist was fog coming in or steam going out. *What time is it, she wondered. Early morning sometime?* She'd lost her watch years ago and never replaced it. Not wanting to look at her body, she cleared only enough of the mirror to see her face. "Old

and worn out,” Randy told her. More and more the biker kept telling her he was going to trade her in and “get me a new old lady.” She grinned at her reflection. The 300-pound tub of lard she’d been with for the last few years couldn’t get it up even with a car jack, and for that she was very grateful.

The dish soap had done a lousy job on her hair and the gray streak that ran from her forehead to the back of her neck stood out clearly. Dressed, she was sitting on the edge of the tub tying her tennis shoes when the gunfire erupted. Susan fell back into the metal tub as chunks of plaster and glass flew everywhere. She watched Randy die on the bathroom floor as he struggled to reach the safety of her tub. Screams kicked her ass and she went through the open window at the first lull in the shooting. She’d been this close to gunfights before. The first time ended with her serving six months in the county jail. Twice it had been gang against gang and she had escaped unharmed. This time she wasn’t waiting around to find out who was who; it was time to go home. Scrambling through back yards, she could hear sirens getting closer. She ran into parked cars in the fog. She knew that if she continued to move around, she’d be picked up when the sun burned off the fog. She’d be pulled in, and this time she’d have to do a year. *Fuck that*, she thought *I don’t want to do any more time*. She crossed a ditch, then another back yard and stopped. Breathing hard, her heart pounding, she tried to calm herself. Instinctively, she jumped back. An alley cat had run over her feet, disappeared through a car window and she realized she was standing two feet from the abandoned car—the cat’s home. Susan crawled in through the partially open door, glad she was still thin. After her frantic run, she wouldn’t have had the strength to pull the door all the way open. The odor of cat piss almost overwhelmed her and she breathed through

her mouth. Trying not to sit on the sharp spring she felt digging into her, she decided to hide in the old car until full daylight. She heard no more gunfire, just sirens. For an instant she wondered what the shootout was all about back at the house, but then realized she really didn't care. Instead, she concentrated on how she was going to get home.

She hadn't talked to her mom in six years and at that time her dad wouldn't even come to the phone. She tried to remember the last time she'd spoken to her brother. She'd dried out once staying at his place and he'd given her fifty dollars and told her not to bother him again. His kids called her Aunt Skunk because of the gray streak in her hair.

She sat on the car seat that smelled of cat piss and wondered when she'd died. It seemed like her goal of going to Miami Beach was ten lifetimes ago.

She fell asleep and dreamed her favorite dream, of elephants running wild in the jungle. The few people she'd shared that with over the years thought she just made it up. There was a dog in the dream, too, and that always made her happy. When she awoke and recalled parts of the dream, she wondered if she could ever be good again.