

The Backseat

by Dean West

I always sat in the backseat of the Dodge when my Dad drove, never in the front seat beside him. It was safer there when he ran over the dogs that wandered onto the road. I'd hear the sudden bump and sometimes a broken yelp and sink lower into the cushioned seat. Almost never did I look behind through the rear window. I didn't want to know what happened; it was better that way.

That afternoon, I sat watching the roofs of the houses fly by in the Dodge's side window, interspersed with telephone poles and street lights all blended to gray. My dad was in a hurry and the judge firm. I had to be delivered to my mother before six or there would be hell to pay. My allowance was one dollar a week and I offered to pay for hell. But my dad refused and told me to keep my money but thanked me for sharing.

At six years old, I understood I was being shared. Five days a week, I stayed in my bedroom at my mother's house and each Saturday, my dad would honk and I'd ride in the back of the Dodge to his apartment and sleep on the sofa. The secret was running as fast as I could from my mother's house to the car's opened door. If I ran fast enough, my mother wouldn't know the Dodge was at the curb. If I ran very fast, she might not even know I was gone.

That day, I sat higher on the seat than usual, my neck stretched to its limit. It was my birthday and my mother promised to save a piece of cake for my dad. That was my mistake because I saw the dog running across a yard in the distance. I watched him run toward the curb and I knew what would happen. Because sometimes, when I was with my Dad, I could see the future. But seeing and changing are not the same and I knew the dog would run into the street and I'd hear the bump and Dad would cuss - *we don't have time to stop because there's hell to pay...*

And that's what happened.

