

Justice

by Steven Gowin

"Too dumb to live," my wife said when cretins on a motorbike blasted around us nearly taking a side mirror with them.

Traffic can jam any time, even at 10 PM; we were on the 101 Southbound, Van Ness Avenue... the main drag through town. No freeway crosses North to South.

Neither of the fools wore a helmet, and I saw a vodka bottle in the passenger's lap. Fifty-five, sixty in a thirty zone... Quite a racket too... a big rice burner... weaving between cars. They ran a red in front of us.

"I don't mind them killing themselves, but they up our damned insurance rates. And imagine if you're the one who smacks into them. Brains on the tarmac, bones sticking out. Man I don't care how stupid they are, you'd have killed somebody."

We travelled forward, 10 blocks, 15, and slowed to a stop. Red lights flashing, blue ones, red. An ambulance siren whooped. Cops already swarmed the scene. Four prowlers, eight uniformed seamus... seven already standing around, backs to the accident, smoking cigarettes... collecting overtime.

The rice burner, on its side, trailed a long petroleum slick. You could smell gasoline and oil. It had skidded 20, maybe 25 yards. Broken glass and plastic lie about.

One of the riders was sitting on the asphalt, a shoe and sock missing, both hands atop his head, elbows pointed forward. The other stretched out on the ground covered with a blanket, but not dead covered. He giggled as he talked to the cop taking the report.

A stopped SUV ahead of the bikers blinked its hazard lights. The accident had dented and gouged its back quarter panel. I suppose it had been changing from the middle to the left lane when the fools started past.

The driver probably hadn't seen them. Their speed would have startled him. He was standing outside the open left front door, now,

insurance card and registration in hand ... waiting for the one working cop to interview him. He wore a turtleneck sweater.

"I'm stopping," I said. "These snake brains can't get away with this." I pulled over carefully, where we wouldn't be smacked, and wrote my name and phone number on an old envelope and took it to the SUV driver.

"I saw those idiots further north on Van Ness," I told the turtleneck, "weaving, speeding, probably drunk." He took my envelope slowly and tried to hand me his papers in exchange, tried to apologize for the wreck.

The cops called about three weeks later. Both the motorcycle rider and driver had survived, had suffered little injury. Detectives thought the actual passenger was trying to take the rap for the driver who possessed no driver's license and no insurance.

The cops hoped I could describe which of the two had been driving and which had been the passenger. I did not remember, though, had never known in fact. I apologized I couldn't help.

Sure they said. They understood, sure. They were sorry too.

