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SHAFT FELT WARM, LOOSE, in step as he turned east at Thirty-ninth Street for the truncated block between Seventh Avenue and Broadway. It had been a long walk from her place in the far West Twenties. Long and good. The city was still fresh that early. Even the exhaust fans of the coffee shops along the way were blowing fresh smells, bacon, egg and toasted bagel smells, into the fact of the gray spring morning. He had been digging it all the way. Digging it, walking fast and thinking mostly about the girl. She was crazy. Freaky beautiful. Crazy. They went out to dinner and she was wearing a tangerine wig and a long purple coat that looked like a blanket on a Central Park plug pulling one of those creaky carriages. It was the mood she was in and he had become a part of it. He never got back to his apartment. She wanted a night like that. They had it and, then, about 7:30, she handed him a glass of cardboard-container orange juice and began pushing him out of the apartment. It was their night, but the maid's day.

"Please, John. Hurry."

Sitting on the edge of the bed, tying his shoes.

"Hey, you think that cleaning lady gives a ████ about your morals? All she has in her head is twelve a day and tokens."

"Just hurry. Go."

He hurried, he went. It gave him time to kill. There was no point in turning back toward the Village and his own

place. His clothes were fresh. He had hardly worn them except for dinner. The subway or a cab would have been too quick for the trip to Times Square. So he walked. A big, black man in a gray lightweight wool suit moving quickly through the morning. The light at Thirty-ninth and Broadway caught him. He paused for a moment at the corner. The garment-district trucks were beginning to roll into the area. Shaft watched them and glanced north toward Times Square.

Sitting in his office up there, staring out at it when he had first found the rooms and moved in a desk, a chair, a filing cabinet and a few hopes, he had looked for a point of view, an attitude in Times Square. He failed to find it. He decided it was a giant pinball machine. The biggest XXXXXXXXXX pinball machine in the world. In the early morning, like now, it lay there dull and dusty. All the parts were scattered around. But nothing was working. The dime went into the slot about six in the evening, turning on the juice. Then the whole thing caught fire. The bumpers, bangers and zingers lighted up, and channels and traps glittered, the shimmering steel balls flashed from point to point while the score was emblazoned across the top half of it with shrieking glare. If it had a mystique, he thought, that was it: a big irresistible pinball machine. Go steal some more money from your mama's purse; we'll hit four million this time and win a free game. That was its point of view, its attitude. He liked it. It suited his needs for a temporary place.

Shaft began to pick up its vibrations as he waited for the WALK sign to flash green permission for the crossing. All that up Broadway a few blocks had become a part of him and was waiting for him. He stepped off the curb and moved easily around the grill of a battered Dodge truck, rolling with the contained grace of a solid, muscular man who stays in balance, who can land running or at a halt, poised to run again.

"I love to watch you get out of bed and go to the

bathroom or the window or the kitchen," she said against his shoulder, a hand flat across the slab of pectoral on the right side of his chest, holding him, stroking him. "You uncoil like an animal coming out of a cave." He blew cigarette smoke at the ceiling. She could not see him smile. It was much too dark. Her hand moved from his chest across the flat ripple of muscles sheathing his stomach. It must have been 5 A.M., but it didn't matter. He could always sleep, he could always die. But he couldn't always do this. Not with someone like her.

The thought of her clung to him like her cologne. Shaft glanced up at the gleaming triangle of the Allied Chemical tower at Forty-second Street, then back at the driver of the cab inching toward him across the tattered white lines of the crosswalk. The driver's milky blue eyes were clouded. Maybe with fatigue from a night of cruising. Maybe with hate from a life of hacking. ██████████ Shaft stared him down. The cab stopped inching. One of these days, he would go over to Lexington to Uncle Sam's umbrella shop and order a bamboo-looking walking stick of Swedish steel to enforce a system of forfeits and penalties for cabs. Too close to the knees, one headlight. Too close to the back, a rear window. Slight physical contact, two headlights and the windshield, and if the driver got out of the cab . . . The worst they would bust him for was malicious mischief.

He skipped up onto the curb at Thirty-ninth Street, moving north. The coat, suit and fabric-laden trucks would turn these streets between Seventh and Sixth Avenues into a steel trap in the next fifteen to twenty minutes. He glanced at the steel-cased Rolex, face down on the underside of his left wrist. Eight-seven. Too early for anything. She had made him get up, nagged him through the quick shower. The parting kiss had been perfunctory and the push of her hand firm as he went through the door. He had a good memory but the hardest thing in the world to remember seemed to be that he

should stay away from there on Tuesday nights. For a girl with her body and her inclinations, her easiest thing seemed to be to make him forget that the maid came every Wednesday.

Vibrations. He felt again the slight signal of mood, the nuance of the atmosphere, that had brushed against him a block away. Shaft's bland face, an oval mask of black-brown skin about the color of a French-roast coffee bean, fell into the lines of a slight frown and he slackened the strong, march-time stride. What the hell was it? He walked his eyes up and down Broadway. Nothing. Nobody. There were three colored guys he knew standing in front of the Drago shoe repair shop just past Forty-first Street, wearing green cotton smocks and drinking coffee from containers from Whelans on the corner or maybe from Schrafft's up past Forty-third. They knew him but they had not spotted him coming. There was no one around him on the street, just a few Puerto Rican kids getting to the garment racks they would be pushing through the streets all day. Shaft did not bother to be subtle. He turned to look behind him, down Broadway as it angled toward the crossing with Sixth Avenue (who called it the Avenue of the Americas outside *The New York Times*?) at Thirty-fourth Street. Nothing. Nobody. The cars and trucks were nondescript, one Fleetwood limousine among them hurrying someplace to pick up its passenger. The chauffeur was a chauffeur. The rear seat was empty. But Shaft still had the feeling. There was something; he had felt it before. He turned quickly into Fortieth Street and one of the curbside telephone booths.

"Nine-six-seven-five," the operator answered.

"Good morning, Mildred. Shaft. Any calls?"

"Say, where've you been all night?"

"Mildred ..."

"Somebody's been trying to get you all night,"

she rattled on. "I told them you were apparently unavailable."

"Who?"

"They didn't say. They wouldn't say. You know I always try to get a name or a number,"

"I know you do. Man or woman?"

"Man. Men. Two of them, I think."

"Any message?"

"They said as soon as you called you should leave a number where you could be reached. It was important."

Shaft let the Cardex file of cases roll through his mind. Three divorces. A couple of pilferage things. One guy thought his partner was going to burn their warehouse. A couple of insurance claims in Harlem; the adjuster was afraid to go up there and handle them himself. Nothing important. Nothing anybody would want him for bad enough to stay up all night trying.

"They didn't leave a number?"

"Huh-uh. Sorry."

"That's all right. Look, Mildred, if they call again, you still haven't heard from me. All right?"

"I got it."

"Thanks. Talk to you later."

"Oh, Mr. Shaft...?"

"Yes."

"What does it cost to get the goods on somebody for a divorce?"

"I don't know. Depends on who it is. How much time it takes. What kind of a case the lawyer wants, just testimony or the whole works with photographs and all that. Why? Who's it for?"

"Me. I think Emil is fooling around and you're the only private detective I know."

Shaft looked east up Fortieth Street and saw the sun reaching down over the shoulders of the big buildings, paving the street with a moment of gold. He smiled.