

# Slammer

by Phillis Ideal

*“Please, please grant me probation and a deferred sentence with no time behind these walls. I have never had a driving ticket before. NOW one Margarita and a DUI. Never again!”*

Five in the afternoon was the magic hour that six male prisoners and I were to be checked out and released.

A guard, who was seven feet tall and three times as wide as any doorway, gave me a bag of my clothes and an opaque sealed package, which contained my ID, jewelry, wallet and cell phone. He told me to change out of my green jail scrubs into my street clothes and to sign off that I had all my belongings. It was impossible to see through the plastic so I asked if he would open it for me.

He inhaled deeply, showing off his huge chest, heaving with power, and stood within a few inches of me. His voice had the shattering force of a wrecking ball. *“You sign off that you have all of your items and then you go out that door. You will not be allowed back in.”*

Startled, I tilted my head to meet his hostile glare. He was the strongman of the snake world, a boa constrictor wrapping around its victim. Terror began squeezing the life out of me: I couldn't breathe and my heart pounded. I scrawled my signature and scrambled out the one-way exit door to the street. The lock on the door clicked behind me.

Out in the parking lot with a dead phone, no sign of transportation, and a ten-mile walk to the city, I wondered if I would make it home. I rummaged through my wallet, found my credit cards but saw that \$70 was stolen. I didn't have five cents on me. I was alone and stranded. A voice inside me silenced by fear was screaming, “Help!” I fought back tears as I frantically walked in circles, and then stopped to stare at the ground, as if I were about to float away. Just as I was walking in the direction of the highway, a

municipal bus slowly pulled into the parking lot. I sat in a seat across from the bus driver.

“I have no money but need to get to town. Where is your first stop?”

“This is a municipal bus and there is no charge. The next stop in town is at the mall and you can get off there.”

“May I use your phone to call my friend to pick me up?” She handed it to me with a smile. I had forgotten about gestures of kindness. The bus dropped me off at the shopping center where my friend met me with a large bouquet of sunflowers. I had only seen three or four drab colors and touched only concrete and steel for what seemed an eternity.

The bright yellow of the flowers dazzled and overwhelmed me. I slipped on my sunglasses.

