After the shave he tried to summon forth the killer again, determined to at least read for the part. His worthless swine of an agent hadn’t even called him about the role and yet there it was in yesterday’s trades. That’s what happens, he thought, when you have an out-of-town agent who couldn’t make it in L.A., when you’re an out-of-town actor who’d never even tried it in L.A. And once again he wondered if it could’ve all been different had he lived in L.A. instead of in this town.

Never believing stories about people being discovered, he believed that people discovered *it*: the opportunity to get out of your own miserable hateful body and be someone else for a while, without resorting to mind-altering, liver-killing drugs to accomplish the transformation.

For a moment he thought he’d found his man again while pulling on his socks, but
when he ran to the mirror it told him he was wrong. Morning eye pouches caused momentary despair so he pressed a hot washcloth to the sockets, stimulating circulation. The contract killer was supposed to be in his thirties, and he’d just turned forty-five years old. Forty-five!

A wry thought: Maybe they could use a *middle-aged* sociopath. Gazing into the mirror he used an actor’s trick and conjured images of middle-aged sociopaths: Fat Tony Salerno, Saddam Hussein, Ted Kennedy. Nothing worked, the killer had boogied.

The only way to catch his worthless swine of an agent was to get him when he came to the office at ten o’clock. That’s what he planned to do, and he’d covered himself at his job by claiming he had a morning dental appointment.
The job. Maybe the face in the mirror could tell him the truth about his job, a job he’d wasted himself on for twenty-three years when he should have been acting. Truth? Looking squarely in the mirror at the forty-five-year-old face, he decided there was not a single truth about which he was certain, so maybe he should run for office.

He spoke aloud to the mirror in a theatrical baritone: “Today, a typical day in Southern California, two thousand, three hundred and seventy-five unemployed actors will phone their agents. Three of them will receive callbacks, and I, I shall not be one of them.” Then he added, “But maybe I’ll catch him and tear the Velcro grin right off that smirky moosh!”

Then after jacking up his agent, he’d have to rush to work and begin the daily brain-slaughtering paper-shuffle that was his life.
With a sigh that could blow out a bonfire, he adjusted his tie, brushed off his green-checked sport coat, collected his gun, badge, and handcuffs, and headed for the door. He hoped some junkie would burglarize his goddamn rathole of an apartment so he could make an inflated insurance claim.

It was 10:05 A.M. when he parked his Corvette on the street in North Park at the office of Orson Ellis Talent Unlimited. Orson was a failed talent agent, formerly of Hollywood, U.S.A., now living in San Diego, California, who’d made a “scientific” study of his failure as a Hollywood agent, scientifically concluding that it was the result of his mother not dubbing him Marty, Michael, Mort, or some other name beginning in M.

After locking his Vette, he noticed a passing coach full of elderly tourists,
probably going somewhere like La Jolla, where they’d discover that they could spend two months at a time-share at the Lawrence Welk Resort with unlimited golfing for what a simple “frock” would cost in a pricey La Jolla boutique. He knew that most of the seniors would be wearing walking shorts, and would have varicose veins like leeches clinging to their poor old legs. He also realized that the seniors were not that much older than himself. It made him think of polyps. Before entering Orson Ellis Talent Unlimited, he decided that Mother Nature is a pitiless cunt.

The agency was not impressive, but Thirtieth Street and University Avenue was not a trendy address. Orson had decorated the place to make you think you could actually get a job there, until you realized that all the inscribed photos of famous movie stars