

Hurricane

The First Book in the Troy Adam / Mangrove Bayou mystery series
by Stephen Morrill

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Chapter 1

June

The cool days were past and another sauna summer approaching, with 90-degree temperatures and 90-percent humidity — what the locals called "the 90-90s". It was still morning in the town of Mangrove Bayou, on the Gulf coast of Florida somewhere south of Naples and somewhere west of the Moon. Out over the Gulf of Mexico the first thunderheads were building into the blue sky. They would sweep ashore by late morning and in the afternoon collide with the east coast storms crossing over the vast Everglades between here and Miami. That daily artillery duel would continue to mid-October.

Troy Adam was standing on the town's small public beach admiring the clouds through polarized sunglasses. He was sweating already in his one dark gray suit that he wore only to funerals and job interviews. He looked at his wrist watch, sighed and turned and walked the few blocks to the town hall. He'd already applied to half a dozen other police departments with no luck. But he had always liked Mangrove Bayou, and he had hopes.

The mayor of Mangrove Bayou and the other two town councilmen had picked Troy's résumé out of a stack of two and, on seeing Troy, they weren't sure they didn't like the loser better. In thirty-five years he had grown accustomed to people staring at him. He was light brown, with black eyes with just a hint of almond shape, and with short jet-black straight hair, and the Mangrove Bayou town council was staring now.

Two of the men looked as if they worked with their hands and stood around in the sun. One was heavysset, with thick wrists and callused hands with scarred, thick fingers. He wore khaki slacks and a darker brown Columbia fishing shirt, vented across the back and with pockets all over it. Troy had a closet full of identical shirts. The other was shorter, slender, with softer hands, who wore creased denim slacks and a Polo shirt. The third was a tall, pale, skinny man with a bald, narrow head, sorrowful look, black suit and matching narrow black tie.

The four of them sat in the large meeting room above the town hall, three councilmen on one side of a cheap wood-grain-vinyl-covered table with folding legs, one police chief candidate on the other side. The yellow plastic chairs would stack neatly and there were more tables and stacks of chairs against one wall, useful should a game of bingo suddenly break out.

"I'm Les Groud," the heavysset man said. "Besides being one of the councilmen, I'm the mayor when I'm not out guiding sport fishermen." He pointed at Polo Shirt, "Councilman Max Reed. Max is a real estate developer out to bulldoze Mangrove Bayou into the modern day." Reed gave Troy a small, pained smile. Groud continued, "And the other gent is councilman Howard Duell — that's like a sword duel but with two "L"s. He rides herd on our high school kids."

"*Doctor* Howard Parkland Duell," bald-head said emphatically. "I'm principal of the high school and the junior high as well. And I would like to know why you even want this job. It's not as if we've had a lot of applicants. Just two, in fact. It makes me wonder what past transgressions you are running from that you didn't mention in your résumé."

Troy stared at Duell a moment, then switched his attention to Mayor Groud.

"Well?" Duell said after a long moment of silence.

"Oh. Was that a question?" Troy said, looking back at Duell. "Or just your assumption as to my integrity?" *Tamp it down*, he thought. *Give this guy a chance*.

"We'll figure out, quick enough, if you're honest," the mayor said. "That's why you would be hired on probation. We have six months to decide to keep you or throw you back."

Troy smiled. "Like an undersized redbfish."

"Exactly."

"You see," Max Reed said, "We're a little cautious. You know, after Bob Redmond and all."

"Redmond was the chief before you fired him last month?" Troy asked. "What did he do that scared you so much? And where is he now?"

"He left," Groud said. "I don't know where he went and I don't care, just so as he's gone. He had a thirteen-year-old boy in jail for killing his father with a shotgun. My opinion, the old bastard deserved it. But I'm not the jury. Anyway, the kid was looking at being sent on up to Naples, sitting in county jail there, being tried as an adult, and sentenced to twenty-to-life in state prison. Redmond sat down with the kid in the jail cell here and explained to him how he could break up razor blades into tiny bits and swallow those."

"Did he also recommend a good wine to go with that?" Troy asked.

Groud ignored that. "We didn't think our public safety director should be advising kids on how to commit suicide. There were other incidents but that was the last straw. We fired his sorry ass and shopped around for a replacement."

"And you got, what, two outsiders interested?" Troy said. "Why didn't someone on the police force ask for a promotion?"

"Ask them," Groud said. "You look good on paper: Army MPs, Tampa police, college degree from some place up north ..."

"Cornell, actually," Troy said. "Majored in history. And the college came first. Then the Army. Through ROTC. Then the Tampa police department."

"History?" Duell said. "The classics."

"Ancient and medieval history concentration," Troy said.

Duell frowned. "But what good is that to a policeman?"

"Well, with that and a driver license," Troy said, "I can get a job as a taxi driver." Troy often spoke only to amuse himself.

"Perhaps we should let you do that," Duell said.

Groud was looking at Troy's application. "You never put down a next of kin. Something happens to you, who do we contact?"

"I have no next of kin," Troy said. "I grew up in The Orphans Home in Troy, New York. They named me for the town and also for the first man in the Bible."

"That sucks," Groud said. "Growing up like that."

"His race might be a problem too," Duell said. "With some prominent members of our community."

Groud stared at Duell a moment. "I suppose so. With some of the scum of our community too." He looked at Troy. "I'm not legally permitted to even ask you what race you are. But you are an odd duck, for sure."

Troy grinned. "Nice work-around. But I don't mind. My mother probably was, perhaps still is, a light-skinned black woman, most likely a prostitute, who spent one night with an Asian man, gave birth to a mixed-race baby, abandoned me on the steps of The Orphan's Home, and vanished."

Mayor Groud glanced to his left at Councilman Duell. "We don't hire, fire or promote people here based on the color of their skin. You know that."

Duell looked sorrowful. "Of course. And there are legal considerations too. Just thought I'd mention that there will be some pushback from certain quarters."

"They can screw themselves," Groud said. He grinned. "Besides, Adam, here, looks sort of beige, kind of like a Seminole. Around here that could be an advantage. He's gonna confuse the hell out of people."

"Beige?" Troy said.

"It's a good color," Groud said. "Goes with almost any furniture. Now, I talked to a few folks up in Tampa. Heard you were smart. They said you could sniff out a crime like a bloodhound. Said you had an I.Q. of 160 and could almost tell what a criminal was thinking, just by looking at a clue."

"What am I thinking now?"

"You're thinking that Duell, here, is a pompous ass and that we're going to hire you anyway."

Troy grinned. Duell opened his mouth to say something, thought about it, and closed his mouth. Max Reed gave out his pained smile.

"That alone can't be it," Troy said. "What's the other reason?"

"People I spoke to said you might have gotten a raw deal from Tampa, that them firing you was a mistake. Why did they fire you?"

"I shot a teenager with a water pistol," Troy said.

The three men stared at Troy. "Well, that hardly seems serious," Max Reed said.

"The teenager was the one with the water pistol," Troy said.

"Oh." Reed said.

"That teenager was not the apple of his mother's eye," Troy said. "He had just used the fake gun to commit a robbery but, no matter the perp's criminal record, the law takes a dim view of a police officer sparing the courts the trouble of a trial. The review board said I should have held my fire." Troy shrugged. "Maybe I should have. I don't make excuses for my past actions." Troy decided against telling them about the nightmares. Hard enough to get hired without people thinking you were mentally unstable.

"Wasn't just that, according to what I heard," Groud said. "Guy named Prado said your main problem was that you wanted to run the show."

"Ah. 'Bust Prado." Troy smiled. "Ramon Bustello Prado. He was my immediate boss. He loves me like a son."

"Didn't sound like it. He said you didn't work well as an Indian. You wanted to be the chief. Well, here's your chance to be the chief. I'm curious to see how it works out."

"I'm not," Duell said. "Put another way, he was both trigger-happy and insubordinate to the point that he was fired from his last job and now we're talking about giving him a new job and promotion. And," Duell said, speaking to Troy, "you were willing to come to this godforsaken place. Why is that?"

Troy smiled. "I like it here. Been here visiting many times. This is a pretty town and well-laid out. Come here canoeing. Some sailing. Done the Wilderness Waterway, from here to Everglades City and then into the park and on to Flamingo, several times."

Groud smiled. "Know every foot of that route. More'n a hundred miles. All-day trip by power boat. And I wouldn't do that in a canoe if you paid me."

"Plus, Dr. Duell is right," Troy said. "The Tampa P.D. booted me out. I need the job. And, not to be overlooked, I'll take the job for the pitiful salary you're offering. What was wrong with the other applicant? Was he a bigger jerk than I am?"

"He had one tooth, and a left eye that pointed someplace his right eye wasn't looking at," Max Reed said. "I wondered if he could even shoot a gun straight."

"I guess that might depend upon whether he shot right or left handed," Troy said. "So does the beige guy get the job?"

The mayor looked at his councilmen. Reed thought about it but then nodded. "May as well," he said. "These two are the only people who answered the ad. We can always look for a replacement later, re-advertise, see if we can get more responses than a half-blind guy and a trigger-happy, insubordinate, fired guy."

Principal Councilman Doctor Howard Parkland Duell just looked sorrowful and shook his head. "This man is far from suitable, he said. "And I certainly don't care for his attitude."

Groud looked at Reed and Duell. "I vote yes. That's two out of three." He looked across the table at Troy. "You get the job. On probation. For six months. Then we'll make it permanent or look around some more."

"Good," Troy said. Now that I'm your chief ..."

"Actually, director of public safety," Dr. Howard Parkland Duell said. "Includes fire and medical supervision."

Troy ignored him and focused on Les Groud. "Now that I'm the chief. I want some things."

"Demands already?" Groud frowned. "I'd hoped to get to the next monthly town council meeting before that started. Whattaya need?"

"Can't be anything that costs much money," Max Reed said. "We run a tight ship here."

Troy looked at him. "You're in a marsh between Everglades City and Naples and not even the sheriff's deputies like to come here. You have a nine-person police department, a volunteer fire department, and the town clinic doctor drives the town ambulance. Ships don't come tighter than that. Your officers not only look like bad Gestapo troops in sweat-stained black uniforms but they like to stay inside their air conditioned Suburbans all day. Nice patrol trucks, by the way."

"Hah. Got those with some drug-bust money," Groud said. "Along with that fancy police boat we have. You find any more drug money and you can have a shopping list for yourself."

"I'll keep an eye out," Troy said. "But I need officers that get out and hoof it around too. Some of them need haircuts and shaves. They're undisciplined and, I suspect, a little insubordinate. Some are getting soggy around the gut." Troy pulled a paper from his shirt pocket, unfolded it, and handed it to the mayor. "Here's a list of things I need right off. Nothing too expensive."

Les Groud pulled out some reading glasses and looked at the list. He smiled.
"This is going to be fun to watch."

"Hope you enjoy it," Troy said. "By the way. What happened to that kid with the razor blades?"

"He didn't eat any. He thought Bob Redmond was crazy too. Today the kid is in county jail in Naples. I hear Jack DeGrasse, the state attorney there, is asking for the max adult time and likely to get it."

"Kid's thirteen, right?" Troy said. "Isn't that a little young to be tried as an adult?"

"Yeah. But Jack DeGrasse never forgets that he's elected. He rides into office each time on full prison cells, hefty political contributions, and harsh law enforcement. Don't forget that, by the way, or he'll be on your case."

"Kid may have been better off eating the razor blades," Troy said.

Chapter 2

June

'Tats' Michaels rolled over onto his back and gasped for air. "Wow," he said. "That was some fuck. Been saving up."

"Honey-bunny, I could tell," Katie Barrymore said with a laugh. "Lemme clean up." She hopped out of the motel room bed and vanished into the bathroom. Tats sat up and lit a cigarette and looked down at his skinny chest where one of his many tattoos was a golden dragon. He liked the dragon but, at times like this, he wished he'd had the guy put it on upside down, so Tats could admire it better. He pulled the heavy spread up over his skinny torso and reached for the pint bottle of cheap red wine on the small table between the queen-sized beds.

They were in a motel on Marco Island, Katie's favorite meeting place. They rarely met more than the once-per-month when her husband went to Atlanta and Katie drove up to Marco island to pick up Tats. She insisted that he never come to her; she always came to him. Tats hated the waiting, for the next night with Katie, and for the ultimate payoff yet to come.

Katie Barrymore came back to bed and slipped in beside him. She took a drag off his cigarette and a pull off the wine bottle. "Sleep good tonight," she said. "Gotta get up early, though, and get back. Don't want no neighbors seein' me comin' home at dawn."

"We gotta do this more often," Tats said. "When we gonna do your husband?" Tats laughed. "Then we can fuck all the time, and have the money to buy real booze."

"Gotta wait, honey-bunny. You know that. Just a little longer. Year's almost up. I get away often as I can. Lucky for us he goes out of town every month. Lucky for you, anyway."

"Yeah. Right. You screwing him too?"

"Got to. Often as he wants. He doesn't want it too often. He's old. Don't worry, Tats. You're my guy. Always have been. Always will be."

"Always have been, always will be. Sort of our motto. I don't like your fucking another man. Old, rich guy. What's he got that I don' have?"

"He's got money. You don'. He's old and ain't getting it up much any more. You're my stallion."

"Stallion. I like it. Maybe next tat I get will be a stallion."

"Where the hell would you put it," Katie asked. Katie was patient. She had known Tats her entire life. They had grown up together in Goodland and had been screwing each other since she was fourteen and he was fifteen. Tats thought that was love; Katie was more practical. He was slow, she knew. She had a high school diploma, he had dropped out. "We been over this, honey-bunny. This is my job. Marryin' him was my job. For now. In a few weeks you can do your job. Then we'll both be rich and we'll be together all the time."

Tats took another drag and blew a smoke ring at the ceiling. "Always have been, always will be. Still don' like you fucking another man."

"A few more weeks, honey-bunny. Just a few more weeks. Hang in there with me." She felt around under the spread. "Ooh. Why Tats, you devil. Ready again already?"

There was no ashtray in the nonsmoking motel room and Tats stubbed out the cigarette on the top of the night table, leaving a burn mark. He put the bottle next to the butt. He rolled over on top of Katie. "Toldja. Been a long time."

Chapter 3

Monday, July 1

The man clutched his ex-wife tightly, her back against his chest, his left arm around her under her breasts, his right hand holding the big hunting knife to her neck. He looked at the other officers and then sideways at Troy.

"Put down the knife," Troy said. "Nothing is so bad we can't work something out to help you. You don't want to hurt her. You love her."

"I can't go on like this," the man said. The woman was weeping silently, her eyes on Troy as if he were her salvation. "I can't go on without her."

"You can and you will. We'll help you."

The man shook his head. "You'll just put me in jail. I've been to prison before. I'm never going back."

"At least let her go. You know you don't really want to do this. Do the right thing here."

The man shook his head. Troy had his Glock lined up on the man's right ear, about the only thing he could clearly see behind the terrified woman. "I came this far," the man said. "I'll take it all the way."

The man's face tightened. His left arm squeezed even harder and the woman let out a grunt from the pressure. The right hand pressed the knife harder against the woman's throat.

"Don't do it," Troy said. "I can't let you do it."

The man bent his head to look around the woman's throat, the better to aim that first deep cut that would sever her trachea and jugular vein. Suddenly Troy was seeing the man's right eye and part of his skull over the top of the sights on the Glock. Troy started to squeeze the trigger.

"You win," the man said. "I don't really want to do this." He took away the knife. He let the woman go. And Troy's Glock went off and killed him.

Troy woke up, sweating. He lay there a moment, waiting for his heart to stop pounding, staring up at the darkness. But he knew, from experience, that he had to get up quickly, before the nausea came. The room was an unfamiliar one and he bumped into things getting out to the hall and to the bathroom. He vomited into the toilet, waited there, head down, and then vomited a second time. There was usually a second time; he never knew why. He ran cold water and drank some and splashed more on his face.

He flushed the toilet, put down the lid, and sat on it. He had been seeing a psychologist in Tampa and had a referral for one here in Mangrove Bayou. He wasn't sure that any of that had helped in the past or would help in the future.

The condo unit was a single bedroom with a living room, bathroom with small washer and dryer, and a kitchen separated from the living room by a counter with two stools. Intended for tourists on week-long stays, it was plain, but clean, and the view was spectacular. The entire living room end of the unit had glass floor-to-ceiling windows and a sliding glass door.

Troy put on some shorts and went out onto the large balcony. There was a table here and two chairs and room for more if needed. He sat in a chair and looked out at the

early morning darkness. The moon was setting and reflected off the quiet water between Barron Key and the small mangrove islands offshore that lay between the town and the Gulf of Mexico. He heard voices and laughter from his left, where the hot tub and swimming pool were, around a corner from him. *Who sits around in a hot tub at three a.m.* he wondered. No matter. He had the moonlight, a silver tunnel direct from his eyes to the sky in the west.

Troy's unit was on the end of the building. To his right he saw Snake Key, assorted small concrete-block houses faintly visible in the silver light, with an infill-scattering of mobile homes and, beyond them, Snake Key's big boatyard that doubled as the working waterman's marina and storage. He had no view of the pool and hot tub. Mrs. Mackenzie didn't need a police presence so much that she would assign him to one of the larger and pricier units overlooking the pool and garden area. He got the Snake Key view.

After a while he got up and went back inside. He picked up his car keys and went out front, got into his Subaru Forester, and drove slowly around Mangrove Bayou. Anything to take his mind off the dream, and he needed to get more familiar with the town anyway.

Chapter 4

Monday, July 1

Troy woke in the strange bed, momentarily disoriented. The bedside table light was on but daylight was streaming in from a window. His alarm clock was set for six a.m. and, as usual, he woke a half hour earlier than that, dream or no dream. Volume Three of Winston Churchill's *History of the English Speaking Peoples* was still open on his chest. He had worked on that after coming back from his tour of the town. He sat up and put the book on the bedside table. Today was his first day on the new job. Troy smiled. He had to admit that he was a little excited by it.

Troy showered and shaved, put on some jeans and a tan back-vented shirt, almost the uniform here among the fishing guides, and let that hang outside his pants. Unlike the guides, his fishing shirts were all heavily starched. It was probably a holdover from the Army, he knew, but he liked starched jeans and shirts. The people at the dry cleaners always asked if he also wanted a crease in the pants — which puzzled Troy; what was the point of the heavy starch if not to hold the crease in the pants? He took his Colt Commander .45-caliber pistol out of his briefcase, slipped it into the horsehide holster and clipped that inside his waistline at his right hip. He put a spare magazine into his left pants pocket, just in case he got into a World War. But if he didn't take it along then what was the point in having it? From force of habit he checked in the bathroom mirror but the shirt covered the gun with no 'print' at all.

Outside, Mrs. Mackenzie was bustling about rearranging the pool patio furniture. She was a short, stout, fiftyish, tanned woman in yellow hair and a yellow sundress — Troy was to learn that Mrs. Mackenzie had an inexhaustible supply of identical yellow sundresses — who bustled around all day seeing that walks were swept, the pool clean, the hot tub de-germed, and the beach in front clear of seaweed, dead fish or anything else that might remind the tourist renting here that the Gulf of Mexico was an actual sea and not just a very big pool.

Troy walked two blocks down 1st Street to the Sandy Shoes café and had breakfast. The "Shoes" was actually a good-sized restaurant with no walls on three sides, offering a view of the beach to the west across a grassy field named Barron Square, and of the boat ramp to the east. On a July morning, overhead fans and misters did their best to keep the few customers cool.

At eight o'clock Troy paid his bill and walked east past the boat ramps. The town hall was an L-shaped, brick two-story with dark green standing-seam metal roof, on 5th Street between Colorado and Connecticut avenues and the Sunset Bay boat ramp. Most of the rear half of the block was an asphalt parking lot with a low brick wall around it and one exit. West of the brick wall was Sunset Bay and the boat ramps. There were civilian cars parked casually around the lot and two rusting skeletons, that had once been police cars, sat to one side up on concrete blocks.

One of the department's two working Suburbans was parked beside a metal door upon which someone with a large marker pen had written POLICE. The door was locked. Troy walked back and around the town hall to a front door with a frosted glass upper pane with P LICE DE T. in faded gold lettering. There was a doorbell and a sign beside

the door noted that if no one was in the station and the door locked, to call a patrol officer for assistance. There was a phone number to call.

Opening the door jiggled a bell that tinkled. The lobby had several straight back chairs to his left and a low table with some magazines on it. Beyond those was a connecting door that must lead to the town hall offices. There was a door straight ahead that was open and he could see down a corridor with cells on the left and some doors on the right. That corridor ended in the metal door that Troy had tried from the outside.

To Troy's right as he walked in was a waist-high countertop behind which sat a stern, thin, older woman with white close-cropped hair. Beside her was another corridor leading to some offices. The woman wore a white blouse with collar points out and neatly folded down over a blue sweater-vest, light gray slacks and large glasses. She had been looking at a computer monitor in front of her but now she looked at him over the top of her glasses and asked, "Can I help you?" Her tone suggested that she thought it very unlikely.

"Hope so," Troy said. "You must be June Dundee, the dispatcher. I'm Troy Adam, Adam with no 's' on the end. And I'm your new boss."

"Oh. Shit!" She jumped up and came around the counter to shake his hand, shouting "Bubba!" at the same time. Troy was a little startled until a uniformed cop came down the hallway. Apparently, he, not Troy, was Bubba. Bubba took one long look at Troy and said, "You got a carry permit for that weapon?" His hand hovered near his holstered Glock.

"He's the new chief, you dumb shit," June Dundee said.

"You say." Bubba didn't take his eyes off of Troy. "You got some I.D. fella?"

Troy smiled and turned around, hands out to his sides. "Hip pocket." Bubba reached under Troy's shirt and took out the gun first and then Troy's wallet. "Damn nineteen-eleven," he said, looking at the gun. He backed away and flipped through Troy's wallet, read Troy's concealed weapon permit, checked that against Troy's driver license, and handed the gun and wallet back. "Sorry. I knew you were coming but had to be sure."

"No problemo. Good police work. Can't believe you made the gun. What's your real name?" Bubba was two inches shorter than Troy's six feet but thicker in all directions with that hard fat that men and women acquire from too much fried food combined with too much hard work in too much sun. Though a white man, Bubba's skin was the color, and probably the texture, of Troy's shoe sole. He was actually darker than Troy.

"Real name is Bubba. Bubba Johns. Spent a lot of my life bouncing in bars. I can smell gun oil at ten feet."

"I admire your nose, Bubba. What's with the dead cars out back?"

"Chief Redmond insisted we keep them. For parts," June said.

"I see. Can you or Bubba show me around?"

Bubba gave Troy the tour. The station was what he had expected, and actually pretty good for a small town. One of the corridors from the lobby ran back past four offices to the right. The office sharing a wall with Troy's corner office had been converted into an evidence storage room with a locked door and barred window. To the left were a shower and toilet and also a break room.

The corridor ended at a door with 'Fire Exit' and 'Director of Public Safety' stenciled on the glass top half of the door. Someone had scraped the "L" off the sign. Troy smiled. His office was a large corner space with, oddly, a red-painted metal fire

door in the back wall. There were windows behind the desk that looked out onto the dead-end of Connecticut Avenue and the visitor parking there on one side, and, beside the fire exit, across Sunset Bay to the public boat ramps on the other. In the distance, across Sunset Bay, Troy could see the parking lot and front of the Sea Grape Inn.

"What's with the fire door?" he asked.

"The corridor used to run straight back to the fire exit. Chief Redmond knocked out the wall and expanded his office to include that part of the corridor. But we still had to have the fire exit." Bubba grinned. "Any fire, you'll be the first out."

There were two visitor chairs and Bubba sat in one. The desk was a battered wood affair with one short leg broken off and replaced with a stack of old telephone books. Troy hadn't actually seen a telephone book in years. The desktop had a telephone and a charger with a radio in it. There was a lapel mike and an earpiece.

"I was told at my interview that you've been running the department since Bob Redmond left," Troy said to Bubba. He sat down, gingerly, in the chair behind the desk. It didn't wobble and he relaxed. "How do you feel about me taking over?"

"Good. I can do it, but the paperwork, well, I'm no good at paperwork. And the responsibility. Well, I'm glad to see you."

Troy nodded. He had run across people in the Army, good people, who were simply terrified at the thought of being responsible for making decisions, and who would turn down promotions. He had never understood it, just knew it existed.

"I'm on the job as of a few minutes ago," Troy said. "I'd like to go over the roster with you, Bubba. Get your take on each person's strengths and weaknesses, help me come up to speed quicker."

Bubba stared at Troy. "You want me to rat out my friends and co-workers? I don't think I want to do that. You can come up to speed on your own, fella."

Troy stared at Bubba. "Let's all start off on the right foot here. You can call me Troy in private or you can call me Chief at any time. As for my request, I suppose you could see it that way. The way I see it is, you're the last guy to sit in this seat. You don't want to do it any more or the town council would have hired you, not me. We both know that. But I'm here now. I need to know as much as possible and you know what I need to know. Outgoing guy briefs incoming guy. Always. Everywhere. In any job."

"You gonna fire me if I refuse?"

"Of course not. I'll just stumble along making dumb mistakes I could have avoided had you helped me."

Bubba thought a moment, staring at the front of Troy's desk. He nodded. "I'll help you ... Chief."

"Good. Thanks."

Chapter 5

Monday, July 1

June Dundee came in carrying a cell phone, a .40-caliber pistol with two full magazines, a badge and an ID card. "These are all for you," she said, laying them on the desk. She sat in the other visitor chair.

Troy checked the pistol. "Glock 22. Good enough for the FBI," he said. When he leaned on the desk it wobbled. He made a mental note to add something thin to the stack of phone books.

"You gonna use the gun?" Bubba asked. "There's a holster for it, fits on a duty belt.

"I like my Colt."

"Shee-it."

"Good point." Troy looked at the ID. They had taken the photo after his job interview. He looked like someone he would arrest on sight on general principles. Troy put the ID into his wallet and the badge into his shirt pocket. As of this morning, he thought, he wouldn't need the permit for the concealed gun. He was an official law enforcement officer once more.

"What's with the cell phone?" Troy asked.

"We got two of them." June said. "I mean, well, we all got cell phones of our own. These are the same number, department phones. We got land lines, both emergency and business numbers, and radios too, of course. Basically, when the land line rings on my desk, so do both cell phones if they're turned on. This way when I'm not here one of the officers on duty can answer the department cell even if he or she is out driving around."

"Troy nodded. "Makes sense. Saw the sign out by the front door. I keep one of these all the time?"

"Yes. Even the 911 forwards. They each have all the staff numbers already programmed in. Don't use it for any personal calls or I have to kill you."

"Wow. You guys are tough down here."

"Damn right. Now, I work eight to five Tuesdays through Saturdays ..."

"It's Monday," Troy said. "You're here now."

"I get bored. I mean, I'm retired. Took this job to have something to do."

"So at the moment you're off the clock. Not being paid to be here."

"Who gives a shit? Here, I'm somebody. Home, I'm Bob's wife. Bob retired a couple years ago too. Love him to death but he drives me crazy. Anyway, nights and my days off, one of the officers carries the other department cell phone 'case anyone wants to bitch to the Mangrove Bayou po-leece about some fucking disaster."

"What kind of fucking disasters do we get around here?"

Bubba grinned and nodded toward June. "She handles most of 'em. Between her mouth and her scaring the crap outta folks, we actual officers of the law don't have much to do."

"It depends on which island we're talking about," June said. "Snake Key folks — we call 'em Snakers — keep to themselves. They're the old Florida folks, crabbers, fishermen, used to be they hunted 'gators for the skins. Some still poach out of the

national park if they can get away with it. 'While back they all got into smuggling marijuana. Them was good times in this town, goddamn. Everyone had a new Cadillac or a jacked-up pick-em-up truck, or a new flats boat with a two-fifty outboard. Don't think they do much of that anymore 'cause the Coast Guard stops it all farther out. Damn shame."

"I believe we in law enforcement are supposed to be sort of opposed to drug smuggling." Troy said. "I'm almost certain I've read that somewhere."

"Shit," June said. "Anyway, Snakers figure if other people let them get away with whatever it is they're getting away with, then the least they can do is return the favor."

"They're mostly good people," Bubba said. "I'm related to probably half of 'em. Just don't expect folks there to get all smiley sappy over you when you come cruising by in your shiny chief's car and shiny chief's badge."

"Actually," Troy said. "I don't have a shiny chief's car. Maybe I need a bigger badge."

Bubba chuckled. "That would do it. Chief Redmond wrecked the last chief's car and the town council never bought another one."

June went on. "Airfield Key people are mostly rich Yankees. They call us if the trash truck is late, or the postman, like, for God's sake, we have anything to do with mail delivery. Let one raccoon stroll out of the swamp and they act like a fucking Sasquatch is going to eat them."

"We got a wildlife trapper here in town?" Troy asked. "What do we do with 'gators and snakes and all that?"

"Bert Frey has the state trapper license here," Bubba said. "His number's in the phone too. Snakes he kills. 'Gators he skins and also turns the tails into lunch for the tourists." Bubba grinned. "Bert also owns Bert's Crab Shack, south end of 7th Street at the water. All other wildlife he takes out Barron Road and dumps someplace in a new home. Or so he claims. Locals don't eat much at Bert's."

"Breakfast sausage a little ... *gamey*?" Troy said.

"Depends on the season."

"Very funny," June said. "Besides the airport and that Indian mound and museum, the rest of Airfield Key is big houses full of bigger egos. We get half our nuisance calls from them."

"Don't forget the yacht club," Bubba said.

"Oh, yeah. There's a yacht club," June said.

"I know," Troy said. "Seen it, from the river and from the other side, when I was using the little boat ramp next to the Guide Club on Snake Key."

"Right. Well, the director of public safety," June's eye darted to the door and back, "is automatically an honorary member of the Osprey Yacht Club. Wait until they get a load of *you*."

"Is the yacht club crowd a little ... ah ... bigoted?" Troy asked.

For once June didn't say anything. Finally Bubba spoke. "You're not ... you know ... Jewish, are you?"

They all laughed. "The main island is this one, Barron Key," June said. "We got your middle-class people here and some wealthy ones on the north end. They even got their own yuppie shopping mall, across the street from the grocery."

"Crime? Citizen interaction?" Troy asked.

"This time of year it's mostly just locals with a few tourists," Bubba said. "Not much in the way of crime. Some burglaries, lot of too-much drinking. That stuff. In the winter, December through early May, the tourists outnumber us two to one. We get a lot of cars ticketed or towed, drunks, grab-ass by the younger ones, the older ones mostly sit in chairs on their motel balconies and stare at the sunsets. Don't they have sunsets where they come from?"

Troy smiled. He picked up the Glock on his desk, locked back the slide and looked into the chamber. He stuck a little fingernail into the chamber to reflect the overhead light and looked down the barrel. "Dirty," he said. "Let's see yours," he held out his hand and Bubba pulled his own gun out, dropped the magazine and ejected the round in the chamber, and handed it across. "This one's dirty too," Troy said after a moment. He handed Bubba back his gun. Bubba looked like he wanted to say something but he swallowed it.

"O.K.," Troy said. "The trucks look good. We can clean the guns. I will never again see an empty pizza box on the table in the break room, and keep that place cleaner. Buy some roach motels. Get a cat. Something. There will be changes. I hope to make those changes later, after I see how things roll here. I'll try not to be obnoxious about it. But if nobody else likes them I honestly won't give a damn. I'll like them and that's what counts."

"Do you want me to call everyone in now? Let them all meet you at once?" June said. "You can tell us about your changes that you don't give a damn if we like or not."

"Not now. Let's get me settled in for a few weeks and then we'll see. I do want to at least meet everyone right away. But the people off duty deserve to be off duty. I can talk one-on-one with each person, as they come in for shift changes."

"Two people come on at midnight," Bubba said. "Midnight-to-eight shift."

"Then I'll be here at midnight. Who's on duty right now?"

"Me and Milo Binder," Bubba said. "Milo always gets the day shift. He's out patrolling."

Troy was putting his Glock and the two magazines into a desk drawer and something in Bubba's voice made him look up.

"Don't we rotate the shifts here?" he asked.

"Yep. End of each month," Bubba said. "Two people per shift and three per shift on Fridays and Saturdays. And you're on call twenty-four hours. But Milo Binder is the mayor's nephew. His sister's kid. He gets his pick of shifts and his pick is always the day shift."

Chapter 6

Sunday, July 21

John Barrymore looked up from the book he was reading as his wife let herself into the house and came into the den. "Did you find what you needed?" he asked. She had left earlier to get some dirty clothes off their boat so she could take those to the dry cleaners.

"All set, honey-bunny," Katie said. "But I think there's somethin' wrong on the boat. Heard water splashing in the motor thing, you know, under the back bedroom."

"The aft cabin, we call that," Barrymore explained. "The engine space is under that." He had tried, patiently, to teach Kathleen about boats, to get her to help him run the big trawler yacht. She never seemed to pick up any of the terminology and never wanted to do any work on the boat. That was all right, he told himself. He loved her and she was just a little slow to come around. She needed time.

"Whatever, honey-bunny. Maybe you need to run take a look at it."

"I'll do that," John rose from his chair and headed for the door. They lived on Airport Road just a short distance east of the Osprey Yacht Club where he had the boat docked. He wasn't too worried; the boat had excellent bilge pumps. Still, on a boat, splashing water was not something you looked at the next morning.

Tats Michaels waited in the darkness in the forward cabin aboard the boat. He had parked his pickup truck up the road and, wearing his black wetsuit, had swum around the yacht club fence. Katie had lowered the swim ladder for him to climb aboard. He had laid his trap in the engine space and Katie had handed him the electric drill.

"Did you use gloves, like I tole you?" he had asked. She nodded. He was wearing his wetsuit neoprene gloves himself.

He plugged the drill into a convenient outlet and then hid it under a folded towel. "Good girl. Now go get him."

"O.K. honey-bunny. Might be a half hour or so. You be patient, now."

"I know what I'm doing. This is my part of the job, remember."

She kissed him. He felt her rear end, which was not so effective with quarter-inch-thick neoprene gloves. "Soon. Soon we can be together all the time."

She giggled. "You're my guy. Always have been. Always will be."

"Always." Tats had said. "I like the sound of that. Go get him."

It was a half-hour before he felt the boat rock slightly and heard the door open from the deck to the main salon. He waited. He heard footsteps going aft. When he heard the hatch cover being lifted to the engine space under the aft cabin he crept out of the front cabin and moved silently aft too, his wet suit 'booties' making no sound on the carpet covering the salon deck.

John Barrymore was in the engine space, in salt water up to his knees. He had found the leak and stopped that and now was trying to figure out why the bilge pump in the engine space wasn't working. He was leaning on the big diesel engine when he heard a splash beside him and looked down. He felt a paralyzing shock shoot through his body and his world turned to blackness.

Chapter 7

Monday, July 22

Troy was doing paperwork in his office and listening to the morning news on the small television set on top of one of the filing cabinets. A major low-pressure area had formed in the western Caribbean and was slowly headed their way. Forecasters thought it might strengthen into a tropical storm.

June Dundee looked in the open office door that he rarely closed. She didn't usually work Mondays but she had asked for the previous Saturday off and Troy had filled in for her. She said nothing, just looked at him. He had already learned that this was her way of interrupting him. He laid aside the monthly expense report and looked up and to his left. "Yes?"

"Got a customer," June said. She was wearing her sweater vest again today, against the chill in the building. The officers, in their long-sleeve uniforms liked it cold. It occurred to Troy that, once they switched to the new lighter-weight uniforms he had ordered for them, maybe he could turn up the air conditioner a little. That would make both June and Mortimer Potem, the town manager, happy. And if Potem was happy, Lester Groud, the mayor, was happy.

June motioned to someone in the hallway and then came in and stood by the file cabinets to Troy's left. June glanced at the television. "You know," she said, "you can call up the damn weather on your computer any time you want. And they have better information."

"I'm old fashioned," Troy said. He clicked a remote to shut off the television.

"I'll say." She looked at his desk. "You're the only guy I know uses a fountain pen. Might be the only person in town who *owns* a fountain pen."

"I like my fountain pen."

A small woman, mid-twenties, slightly pudgy, white with minimal tan, brown hair shoulder-length, came into the office. June motioned for her to sit in one of the chairs. The woman sat and looked down at her shoes. She wore a shapeless polyester dress, blue with white polka dots, and cheap white tennis shoes.

"This is Wanda Frister," June said. "She says she's being stalked."

"Is that so?" Troy said. Wanda nodded. She looked even harder at her sneakers.

"Sorry to bother you," she told her sneakers. "I know it's not important. But I'm scared."

"My name is Troy. May I call you Wanda?"

"Yes sir."

"Troy."

"Troy."

"Well, Wanda, *you* are important to me. Tell me about this." He picked up the fountain pen and pulled a yellow legal pad in front of him. "Who is the stalker?" Troy knew that most people, even if a stalker was secretive, knew who it was. The trick was deciding if, in fact, any law had been broken and then proving anything.

"My ex-boyfriend. I stopped seeing him."

"What's his name?"

"Billy. William Poteet. He lives on Snake Key, same as me. He works a crab boat, has a string of traps. Helps in the boatyard too. He's mean."

"I see. Why did you dump him?" A better question would have been, 'Why did you take up with him in the first place if he's mean,' but Troy had long since given up on understanding why women fell in love with bad men, or vice-versa.

Wanda burst into tears. June sat in the other chair beside Wanda and glared at Troy. "You might try a little fucking compassion."

"Troy nodded. "Got the compassion. Not showing it too well, I guess." He opened a drawer and took out a small box of tissues and pushed that across. Wanda took one and blew her nose. She looked up at Troy for the first time. She had wide-spaced dark blue eyes. "He kept hitting me. Now he's bothering me."

"How so?"

Wanda stared at Troy. A line from an Edwin Markham poem came to him. *Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?* He rephrased. "What does he do that bothers you?"

"Calls me. Lots. Thirty times yesterday." Wanda felt in a pocket of the dress and produced a crumpled sheet torn from a small spiral notebook and handed that to Troy.

He smoothed it out on his desk. "Each mark here is a phone call?"

"Yes sir. I was at work but that's how many calls he left on my voice mail. And some later, when I was at home. I don't answer when he calls. Does this most every day."

"What does he say?"

"Most times just nothing. Sometimes he swears at me. Calls me names. After a minute or so he hangs up."

"Did you happen to get the number? Do you have caller ID?"

"Yes sir. But it wasn't his home number. And he ain't got no cell phone. Me neither."

"So how do you know it was Billy?"

"Who else would it be, right after we broke up?"

"Good point."

"Sides, I know his voice. When he does talk."

"Of course. What kind of car does Billy drive?"

"He's got an old red F-150 pickup truck. Usually the back's fulla crab traps."

"Where does Billy live?"

"Other side of Snake Key." Wanda recited an address and Troy wrote that down.

"Good. Anyone else in your life right now?"

Wanda stared.

"Do you have a new boyfriend, anyone else after Billy?"

"Oh. No sir."

"Got any family local? Anyone you could stay with if you needed to?"

"No sir."

"Do you live alone?"

"Yes sir. Got me a single-wide out on Snake Key."

"May I have the address? And your phone number." He handed Wanda the legal pad and a ballpoint pen from his desk drawer and she wrote those down. He had learned

not to hand his fountain pen to people who didn't know how to use one. Replacement platinum nibs were too expensive. "Good. Now, where do you work?"

"At the yacht club. I wait tables there."

"Pretty good tips there?"

Wanda smiled. "Sometimes."

"You have a pretty smile, Wanda. You're having a bad patch in life right now. Let's see if we can work together to get that smile back."

Wanda nodded. She did not seem convinced. "Hope so, sir." Troy felt that he was swimming through glue in some dream. Wanda lacked staying power in the conversation department.

Troy looked at June. "Who's on duty?"

"Bubba's out on patrol. Milo's in the break room eating his doughnuts."

"Get Milo in here."

June turned her head toward the open door and yelled, "Milo! Get your ass in here!" Wanda jumped and looked startled.

"That's our intercom system," Troy said. "Modern technology."

"Yes sir," Wanda said.

They heard a distant yell. "Whattya want? I'm eating breakfast."

"I'll be right back," Troy said. He walked the few feet down the hall to the opening into the break room. Milo was at the long table there, slouched back in a chair and sipping coffee from a Styrofoam cup, a Krispy Kreme box in front of him. "Officer Binder," Troy said. "If you could spare a few moments from the carbo-loading, and for actual police work, I'd appreciate your presence in my office."

"Oh. Well, O.K." Milo wiped his lips with a paper napkin, dropped that on the floor, and took a sip of coffee. "Be there in a minute."

Troy stared at Milo as if he could not believe what he was hearing, which he couldn't. He walked back to the office and sat behind his desk. "Wanda, here is what I would like to do. I'll send an officer out to your house to look at the phone and listen to the calls ..."

"I erased them."

"Oh. Well, don't do that any more until we hear them too."

"There's prob'ly more by now today. But they fill up my voice mail."

"Sure they do. Let's put up with that for a few days while we investigate. Go home now and wait for the officer. I'll also have a patrol car swing by your house a few times each shift. If you see Billy hanging around, call us at once."

"I don't want the neighbors to see no police car stopping at my house."

Troy nodded. "I'll send him in a private car. Would that be all right with you?"

"Yes sir."

"Troy."

"Troy. Sir."

"June will show you out. June, get Wanda's phone, car description and plate for the file. Wanda, remember, if anything or anyone bothers you, anything at all, you pick up a phone and call us."

"Thank you sir." Wanda and June left. Troy swiveled his chair and stared out the west windows towards the boat ramp. The town had, years back, dredged out what was then Snake Bayou, renamed it Sunset Bay, and installed four boat ramps, two piers to

service those and a parking lot with the long slots for vehicles with boat trailers. It was popular now with the sport fishing crowd and occasionally hosted tournaments. Beyond Sunset Bay he saw a flash of yellow moving around the front of the Sea Grape Inn. Mrs. Mackenzie was on the job. In a few moments he heard someone walking in the hallway with squeaky shoes. Milo Binder strolled in, a cup of coffee in one hand. "You wanted to see me?"

"Sit down."

Milo sat. He put his Styrofoam cup on Troy's desk. Milo was twenty and cocky, five feet-eight and a sturdy build. Despite the doughnuts, he wasn't fat. He parted his brown hair in the center so that it swept down over his ears on both sides. He was trying to grow a moustache and not having much luck with it. To match the moustache he had a two-day beard which, in his case, was light.

Troy was leaned back in his chair with one foot up on an open desk drawer. He folded his hands across his stomach, turned his head to his left, and stared at Milo, deadpan. Milo stared back for a moment out of blue eyes and some confusion, then looked out the window to his left. He took another sip of his coffee and put the cup back down. He looked back at Troy. "Whattya want?"

"Pick up the coffee cup," Troy said. "I didn't give you permission to use my desk for your goddamn dining table."

Milo grabbed the cup. "Geez, Louise," he said.

"Just curious, Officer Binder," Troy said. "Your mom or dad ever read *Catch-22*?"

"What's that?"

"Book. Novel by Joseph Heller."

Milo thought about that for a moment. Troy let him.

"Don't think so," Milo said at last. "Never heard of it. Why?"

"Never mind. I'm guessing one of them did but it doesn't matter. New rule. When June, me or anyone else connected with this department yells, 'Milo! Get your ass in here,' you will move your ass instantly and swiftly to the sound of the voice. Is that clear, Officer Binder?"

Milo shrugged. "I was eating breakfast. Came as soon as I was done." He looked down, found he was still clutching the coffee cup, and took a sip.

"Milo, I don't give a sweet damn if you were having gall-bladder surgery. When someone calls you, you answer right then. Or don't you like this job?"

"It's O.K. I'm only doing this until I can get on with the sheriffs."

"As I understand, you're only doing this at all because the mayor is your uncle."

Milo grinned. "That's the way it works here. If you got a problem with that, go back to Tampa."

"Good to know where I stand in the chain of command here. Now, I have some actual investigating for you to do. Probably want to add that to your résumé with the sheriffs. Get out to Wanda Frister's house. Can you drive a stick shift?"

"Well, yeah. I can. Why?"

"I hope so." Troy fished out his keys and peeled off his car key. He kept the remote beeper. "Use my car, not the Suburban. It's a five-speed manual, and if you wreck my transmission I'll hang you." Troy copied off Wanda's address onto a fresh notepaper

and handed that to Milo. "She says that she's being stalked by a guy named Billy Poteet. Do you know him?"

Milo nodded his head. "Yep. He's an asshole. Works in the Snake Key boatyard. When he works."

"I think that's Wanda's opinion too," Troy said. "Listen to whatever is on her voice mail. Look around the neighborhood for a red F-150 truck or Billy Poteet or anything else that seems out of the ordinary. Then come back and report."

"Oh. O.K."

"Oh. O.K. Chief."

"I gotta call you Chief?"

Troy reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out his badge. He turned his chair and held the badge angled sideways so the light from the window helped him read it. "Says right here. *Chief*. So, yes, a little courtesy would go a long way, Officer Binder."

"O.K. Chief."

"And Officer Binder. One more thing."

"What's that?"

"What's that, Chief."

"What's that, Chief."

"Don't ever again come to work without having a clean shave. I'll send you home and dock you a days' pay for it. The 'stache is O.K. if it does not extend beyond the upper lip. But conservative haircut and daily shave, if you please."

After Milo left, Troy checked with DMV and, sure enough, William Poteet was the owner of a red Ford F-150 truck. Poteet had a record too, Troy learned with more research, for assault, DUI, assault, bad checks, a long list of traffic offenses, assault, a partridge in a pear tree, and more assault. Poteet had spent some time in prison for some of the charges. As a convicted felon he would not be allowed to legally buy a gun, but that never slowed anyone down in Florida. Troy hit the print button and added all that to the file he had started. *Wanda sure knew how to pick 'em*, he thought. It would probably take a court order to trace the phone that had called Wanda and Troy assumed it was a cheap disposable cell phone anyway, with preloaded minutes and bought off a store rack. By now it would be in a Dumpster behind some apartments somewhere.

He walked out to the lobby. "June, make a note on our shift log. Have patrols swing by Wanda Frister's house a couple times per shift. And have them look for a red F-150 truck there or anywhere else and note its tag, location and the time."

"You got it, Chief," June said.

"And put out the word. Tomorrow at eight a.m. I want everyone here. Total departmental meeting. Anyone not on duty gets an hour overtime."

"Ooh. Major damn announcement? You hiring more people? We could use two more at least."

"I'm only here on probation, remember. Was going to hire someone, I'd hire me. Just have everyone here."

Chapter 8

Monday, July 22

Troy was still standing next to June's desk in the lobby when the phone rang, the 911 line with its distinctive ring. "Shit!" June said, staring at the phone as if it were a rattlesnake. Troy waited while June talked to someone. She mostly listened. She hung up and looked up at Troy. "That was the manager at the yacht club. Dead body on one of their boats."

"The Osprey Yacht Club?"

"We got any other fucking yacht club?"

"What's the doctor's name at the clinic?" The town medical clinic shared the long side of the town hall "L" with the town hall offices and the volunteer fire department.

"Vollmer. Barry Vollmer"

"Get him headed that way ASAP, with a body bag and the town ambulance. Lights, siren."

"What's the hurry? The guy's dead."

"We don't know that. Some yacht club manager thinks that. That's not something we pencil in on our calendars for when we have a spare moment."

June dialed up the doctor and got him headed out. Troy watched. "We need to redo the phone lines here," he said. "The clinic should be a one-button transfer. Same for the fire department. Shouldn't have to dial them up on a regular phone number. Tom VanDyke is our evidence specialist, isn't he?"

"Yep. He was night shift last night," June said. "Probably home sleeping." She looked at a schedule in her computer. June usually made up the monthly shift schedules. "He'll be off until Wednesday now."

"Call him. Tell him he's now on overtime and to meet me over at the yacht club with his evidence kit."

Troy took the one Suburban left in the lot and drove north across the 11th Street bridge to Airfield Key. The airport had one four-bay hangar, but there was no tower or terminal or anything much else. The single concrete runway ran east-west almost the full length of Airfield Key. A few small aircraft were parked in a large field on the far side from the road, tied down.

Troy turned left onto Airfield Road. To his left as he drove were large homes set back on 200- by 400-foot lots that ran from Airfield Road back to the Collier River. Most of the homes were screened from the road, and from the aircraft noise, by trees and shrubs.

The yacht club was a two-story concrete block building with stucco shaded a light brown, with the west side facing the Gulf of Mexico where the Collier River met the Ten Thousand Islands. The north side facing the parking lot had no windows on the ground floor, only a few small windows at one end on the second, and just a double front door. It looked about as nautical as a welding shop. On the east side, behind a chain link fence and member-only parking/unloading area, seawalls and three long piers on the Collier River provided docks for the members' boats. The river's deeper channel winding out

between the islands was the only way for many of the boats to get out to the Gulf, several miles away.

A man leaned on the fence smoking a cigarette by an electronic rolling gate that had been locked open. Behind him was some parking for boat owners, and a few small boats stored there on trailers. The town ambulance truck, red with *Rescue* in shiny gold lettering on the sides, was already there, the back door open, nobody around. The man was about fifty, an inch shorter than Troy's six feet, skinny and tanned and weathered with a mop of loose gray hair. Like Bubba, he was darker than Troy. He wore a white shirt with epaulettes and the club crest, tan chino trousers and tan Topsiders boat shoes. Embroidery on his shirt announced to the world that the inhabitant was *Con Lohen, Dockmaster*.

Troy parked the Suburban to one side of the gate and got out. He was not wearing any uniform. "Who are you?" Lohen said. He eyed Troy and the truck. "And where did you get the police car?"

"I'm Troy Adam, the new police chief. Truck was sitting out back of the station and I just sort of took it."

The man straightened up and dropped the cigarette on the ground. "You got some police identification?" With his right shoe, he scrubbed out the cigarette on the asphalt.

Troy took out his wallet and showed Lohen his police I.D.

"Ain't you got a badge?" Lohen said.

"I don' need no steenking badge," Troy said in his best *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* sneer. The badge was in his shirt pocket but he was getting annoyed. "Where's the body?"

Oh. Sorry. Just ... a nig ... a black police chief. Or sort of one. Lawsey me. I'm Con Lohan. Dockmaster."

"I deduced that," Troy said. He put out a hand. Lohen stared at it a moment. He extended a callused hand to shake.

"First day on the job?" Lohen said.

"First month anyway. Where's this body?"

Lohen led him out onto one of the floating piers and to a forty-foot trawler design. The name on the boat was *Wayward*. A short, fat man, balding, with brown hair in a comb-over, was standing on the dock by the boat.

"This here is the new police chief," Lohen said.

"Troy Adam," Troy said. "Adam with no 's'."

"I'll be damned," the man said, staring at Troy. "Well, anyway, I'm George Trapper, the club manager." Trapper wore a navy blue yacht club blazer with embroidered crest, white trousers and black shoes. Troy, in his fishing shirt, jeans, and .45 semi-automatic in a concealed holster on his right hip, was feeling underdressed. Maybe, for a special occasion like a death at a yacht club, he should have put in new bullets.

"Where's Doctor Vollmer," Troy asked.

"Inside, with some helper. He already told me the guy's dead. Which is what Con, here told me too." Troy deduced that George Trapper had not wanted to brighten his day by looking at a dead body. Troy could relate to that. Trapper was guarding the dock.

"How did you find out about the body?" Troy asked.

"I got a call this morning from Kathleen Barrymore," Trapper said. "She said her husband hadn't come home, that he had gone down to the boat to do some work on it last night and never came back. We don't allow live-aboards here but sometimes people sleep overnight on board, especially if they've just had a fight with the wifey. I asked Con to check on it and he found John Barrymore's body."

"The boat owner was named John Barrymore?" Troy asked. "Like the actor?"

"There's an actor named John Barrymore?" Con Lohen asked.

"Not any more. He's dead."

"Yeah, well, so's this one."

"Had he just had a fight with the wifey?"

Trapper shook his head. "I was just saying that. One of the dumbest things any woman can say to a man with a boat is, 'It's either me or that damn boat.' The guys will take the boat every time. I see it a lot."

"Long as you have a boat," Lohen said, "you can always get another woman. All the women you want. But once you got a woman you can't afford a boat."

Troy looked at Con Lohen. "Well, Con, thanks for sharing that authentic maritime wisdom." He turned to George Trapper. "Why don't you stay here on the dock," Troy said. "Keep away the curious."

"I really should be supervising this," Trapper said.

"You are. But let's not trample any more over the scene than we need to. I have to go see. Con, here, has to show me. The doctor has to do his thing. You take charge out here."

"Well. Sure." Trapper seemed relieved. "No one else actually knows about this yet. I haven't even told his wife. I didn't know quite what to say."

"Keep it that way for now. I have an officer on the way. Let him by. No one else."

The boat had an engine space under the aft sleeping cabin, reached by a hatch set into the cabin flooring there. The hatch was open and, looking down, Troy saw a heavysset man slumped over the engine. The man was wearing a yellow pullover shirt and blue shorts. The engine space was perhaps five feet high, wider at the top than the bottom where the hull curved inward. The engine was a big diesel and it and the transmission and a generator and a lot of piping took up most of the space. There was a foot of water over the flooring down there and Troy saw an electric drill lying in the water next to the body. The cord for the drill came up and out of the hatch. Troy looked and saw that it was unplugged. He leaned in to feel for a pulse. The instant he touched the man's neck he knew he wouldn't find one. The body was cold.

Doctor Vollmer was sitting on the aft cabin double bed next to the open access hatch, writing up some paperwork.

"Well, he's as dead as advertised." Troy said. "Any time line yet?"

Vollmer finished filling in a blank and looked up at Troy. "Rigor's really strong. Probably this happened early last night."

"Cause of death?"

Vollmer stopped writing and looked at Troy. "What do you think?"

"Death by electric drill."

Vollmer nodded. "We don't call it that. But, yes. Electricity, salt water, and a good ground like an engine block don't do the heart much good. I'll do up some fancy wording

for the county M.E. and they'll do an autopsy anyway. But John Barrymore died of heart failure caused by electrocution."

Vollmer and his assistant left and came back in a few moments with the gurney from the ambulance. Tom VanDyke walked up, his evidence kit slung over his shoulder. "Good timing," Troy said. "We're just about to get to the good part."

They waited while Tom took photos. Then they wrestled the body out of the engine space, out the side door of the boat, and onto the gurney on the dock. Hoisting two hundred pounds of dead weight vertically out of the engine space and then through the side door of the boat was hard work and they all sat down on a dock box next to the boat to catch their breath. George Trapper, Troy noted, had vanished. Troy almost smiled. People always had other things to do when it came to looking at dead bodies.

Troy went through Barrymore's pockets and took out a wallet; a pack of cigarettes, now very wet; a cheap lighter and a key ring. He flipped open the wallet. "About fifty bucks here, a couple credit cards. Driver license. It's Barrymore all right. Bag the wallet and we'll go through it all back at the station." He handed the wallet and keys to Tom VanDyke. Vollmer and his driver rolled the gurney away down the docks.

"Who has the code to that electronic gate?" Troy asked Lohen.

"Me, staff. Members who got boats here."

"What about contractors, divers, repairmen, those people?" Troy well knew that B.O.A.T. meant Bring Out Another Thousand, and that large boats like these required a small platoon of maintenance and repair people to help the owners. Electronics, metal and fiberglass didn't fare well in an environment of salt water, heat, ultraviolet, high humidity and barnacles.

"Well, sure. Regulars got the code."

"When is the last time you changed the code?"

Lohen thought. "Well ... never, I guess. Why?"

"So you, the current club staff, any former club staff, boat owners, boat owner families and friends, any visiting boat owners from elsewhere who used your transient docks and their families and friends, most of the boat maintenance people, and probably half the residents of Mangrove Bayou, can all operate the gate. How many people would you say that was?"

"Now that you put it that way, a lot."

Troy nodded. "Not much point in having the gate at all."

Chapter 9

Monday, July 22

Back inside the boat Troy asked Con Lohen. "What did you find when you first saw all this?"

Lohen pointed at the drill-cord and at an AC receptacle set into a cabinet-side. "That was plugged in, up here, to the 120-volt shore power line. These boats have both 12-volt DC internal systems and the AC shore power for when they're tied up at docks."

Troy nodded. "I know the system. Do you have 30-amp or 50-amp shore power?"

"Got both on this dock. Only 30-amp on some of the docks for the smaller boats. He's hooked to the 50-amp. But it doesn't matter. Either one would have killed him."

"You unplugged the drill."

"Damn right. My momma didn't raise no stupid chilluns. Not reaching down and grabbing some fella sitting in water over an engine block that makes a perfect ground, with that thing still plugged in."

"Smart. There's no GFI — a ground fault interrupter — on the circuit? Like you probably have in your bathroom at home?"

"Nope. I guess that's not required."

"Not required? I guess it's only a very good idea. But it would have set the club back eighty cents per slip. Did you notice anything else that was different from what I'm looking at now?"

"No. But you see that water? That's not right."

"No. It's not," Troy said. "But it's not rising."

Lohen pointed. "Hose came loose. Engine's freshwater-cooled but there's a heat exchanger. This line brings in saltwater to that. When this through-hull hose came off he had a leak straight overside."

Troy was puzzled. "Why would a hose just come loose like that? It was clamped on."

"It happens," Lohen said. "Clamps get old or rusted or weren't put on tight in the first place. Rubber hoses get real hard and don't make a good seal any more. Usually happens when you're underway and got the engine vibration and the water pumping through the hose. Kinda odd for a hose to just let go when the boat's sitting here and the engine's shut down."

"Unless it came loose just as he pulled into the dock and then he shut down without noticing."

"It would be pretty obvious," Lohen said. "It's a one-inch pipe. That makes for a good squirt coming in here. You would hear it in the cabin above. Forward, I don't know."

"Wouldn't sink the boat, would it?" Troy asked. "He's got bilge pumps."

"Sure. Automatics. One in here that doesn't seem to be working. Should also be one in the bilge under the main salon. Probably got a manual 'Whale Gusher' in there somewhere too. A leak here would run the pump all the time, though. It's not running now. Let's look." Lohen took off his boat shoes and climbed barefoot down into the engine space. Troy nodded; he was a no-socks man himself when he was wearing boat

shoes. Lohen felt around in the water for several minutes and came up with a small rag. Troy heard the bilge pump start up and the faint splash overhead that always sounded to him like someone taking a giant pee. "Got it." Lohen said. "This was jammed into the float switch on the bilge pump. Stopped it from working. There's an overflow, so when the water got this high it ran into the main bilge forward and that pump kicked in, pumping the water overboard."

"Why isn't the hose leaking now?" Tom VanDyke asked.

Lohen pointed. "Shutoff valve. On proper boats, all through-hulls have stopcocks right up against the hulls to close off any broken hoses. He must have climbed down here and closed the stopcock."

"So why would he need an electric drill," Troy asked.

"Yeah," Tom said. "Damn careless of him too. The drill and leaving a rag where it could get sucked into the bilge pump."

"Don't know about that," Lohen said. "Careless, but it happens sometimes. Engine spaces can get kinda dirty."

"Seems odd to use a 120-volt drill anyway," Tom said. "That'd be useless away from the dock. I'll bet there's a battery-operated drill somewhere on this boat."

Con Lohen nodded. "Most owners got cordless tools."

"Notice something else about the drill?" Troy said to Tom.

Tom looked at the drill. "No. What about it?"

"That's a masonry-drilling bit, not a wood or general-purpose bit."

Tom looked at it. "Well, I didn't know there was a difference."

"There is. And that bit is useless on a boat."

"Had another bit in his pocket?" Tom asked.

"Nope. Nothing in his pockets but what I gave you to bag."

"Might be some other bit down here still," Lohen said. "In the water. We can look when it's all pumped out."

"We'll do that. He probably wouldn't use any sort of drill bit. More likely to have needed a screwdriver bit. Maybe to screw on a new hose clamp. Let's look around the boat a little," Troy said. He helped Lohen climb up out of the engine space and Lohen put his shoes back on. They started searching the boat.

"So, did John Barrymore have a fight with his wife?" Troy asked Lohen.

"All the time. She's young, pretty, white trash out of Goodland. I think she worked in a laundry. He was Yankee money, old, rich and horny, out of Boston I think. Had that accent anyway."

"Not a marriage made in heaven, I take it."

"She twisted him around her little finger. It was sickening to watch. I seen a lot of old guys marrying young girls and it never works out in the long run. But he was full of her, newlyweds I think. Something about turning fifty makes sane men park their brains and pull out their dicks."

"I don't think you have to be fifty to do that," Tom said.

Troy glanced sideways at Tom and smiled. "Cynical, and yet so young," he said.

"This is true," Lohen said. "And she didn't know squat about boats and wouldn't even try to help. He had to do everything on board: steer, navigate, even anchor it by himself. When they went out to cruise around, he told me once, she mostly sat in the

salon watching TV." Troy guessed that, to Con Lohen, a wife who wouldn't lower an anchor was a worthless woman.

Searching the boat, they found several battery-operated hand tools, including a drill with an assortment of bits and drivers. There were no other masonry drill bits and no way to know if anything was missing. They found no other corded hand tools that needed 120-volt AC current.

On the back deck it was Troy who found something odd. The swim ladder on the stern was down.

"So what? Tom asked. "Maybe they were scrubbing the boat bottom or something."

Con Lohen shook his head. "He had a diver to do that monthly. Leave the ladder down like that and you get barnacles started on it."

Troy pulled the ladder up by the line attached to it and fastened it in place. "But if you left the boat this way then once you're in the water you cannot put the ladder back up."

Lohen looked. "I guess that's right. On this one anyway. You can't push a rope."

Troy walked back into the salon. He was looking for water, dampness. If someone left by the ladder that person might have come aboard the same way. But the boat, like most boats of this size, had dehumidifiers and air conditioning to both cool the boat and prevent mildew. Both were running and even had there been any drips on the tough outdoor carpet that covered the salon deck, it was long gone by now. Meantime Con Lohen looked in the now-pumped-out engine space for any drill or screwdriver bit. He came up empty too.

"All right," Troy said. "Tom, bag the drill and the wallet. Use the evidence bags in the Suburban. Dust this boat and that drill for fingerprints. Get Con's here, too, so we can eliminate him."

"What?" Tom said. "You don't think this was an accident?"

"Probably was. No harm in getting some practice, though."

"That drill's been in the water."

"I know. Do your best. And the plug and cord were mostly dry. Be sure to do the swim ladder rails — that's a nice smooth surface — and the railing either side. People grab things when they're climbing ladders like that. When you're done, lock this boat up. Tape the doors, both sides of the cabin. Tape's in the Suburban too. Get all that out before I take the truck."

"Will do, Chief."

"When we're done here, one of these keys on his keychain probably fits the padlock on the side door of the cabin here," he said. "Use the beeper here to find his car and search it too, inside, trunk, outside. If you don't see anything illegal or suspicious, drive it back to his house."

"Where does he live? Where *did* he live?"

"Good question. Let me see his driver license." Troy looked at the address and handed the license back to Tom. "Right up the road. Easy for you to find so you can break the news to the widow."

Tom stared at Troy a long moment. "Isn't that sort of the Chief's job?" he asked.

"It's no one's job. Telling people their loved ones are dead is just one of those perks that we get in lieu of better pay. Don't worry, I'll take care of it."

"Well," Tom said. "They do pay you more."
"Not enough for this."

Chapter 10

Monday, July 22

Finding the Barrymore house was not hard. Troy simply got back onto Airfield Road and drove east while counting down the numbers on the mailboxes on the south side of the road.

Most of the houses here had names posted on discrete signs at the entrances to their driveways. Many had gated entrances with cameras and electronic gate openers. Troy found the right mailbox and a sign announcing *Coté d'Or* and followed a narrow drive up to the back of a house that faced the Collier River across a long lawn. He wondered how big a house had to be to have a name. He supposed one could ask the same question about boats. There was a small parking area in front of a garage, and an entrance door to the house. There were several men working on an extension to the side of the garage. Troy went to look. They were building a concrete-block enclosure and running some electrical and plumbing.

"Building a workshop for the owner, plus a toilet and shower," the foreman explained. "He's some big cheese in the banking world. But he wants more room to do some woodworking."

"I don't think he's going to be doing woodworking any more," Troy said.

The man looked at Troy. He looked at the Suburban with *Mangrove Bayou Police* painted on the side and the lights on the roof. He looked back at Troy.

"Oh," he said.

Kathleen Barrymore let Troy into her five-thousand-square-foot home and listened as he told her what they had found.

She was late twenties, Troy guessed, and five-three with long blond hair. She was pretty, with a good figure, and had learned to emphasize her high cheekbones and cornflower-blue eyes. She had not yet learned to go easy on the black eyeliner and she drew it out at the corners so that Troy thought she resembled a woman in an Egyptian hieroglyph. She had on tight blue jeans and a white tee-shirt cut short enough to show a pierced belly button in front and a 'tramp-stamp' tattoo in back. She was half-drunk and holding a glass of bourbon and smoking a cigarette. She didn't offer Troy either bourbon or a cigarette and he didn't ask.

When Troy finished telling her about how her husband died she took a manly swig of bourbon and a deep drag off the cigarette and said, "So where's the car? He was drivin' one of our two Mercedes. And where's his wallet an' credit cards?"

"Car is probably in the parking lot by the yacht club docks. One of my officers will bring it by here shortly. We have the wallet. I need to inventory it. You'll get it back after that."

"After you takes all the cash, you mean."

"No. After I inventory it."

"So, when do I get the body back and give him a proper funeral," she asked. She took in a lungful of smoke and blew it at the ceiling.

They were sitting in a living room with a good view through the cigarette smoke of part of the town of Mangrove Bayou across the Collier River. Troy wondered how

long it took after moving in for a person to stop noticing the view. Not long, was his guess.

"Practical of you," Troy said.

"Oh, bullshit. Am I supposed to wail and weep?"

Troy shrugged. "I don't know. Up to you, I suppose. Most people do. Your husband is at the clinic at the moment, Kathleen. He'll be sent on up to Naples for an autopsy."

"Katie. My friends all call me Katie."

"That's fine. So, Katie, tell me about yourself and John. Where you came from, how you met."

"That any your damn business?"

"Not if you don't want to tell me, at this time. But, speaking of business, what did John do for a living?"

"Everybody knows that." She stubbed the cigarette out in a full ashtray. She picked up the cigarette pack — Winston Gold 100s — and the box was empty. She put that down next to the ashtray and looked back at Troy. "He made a ton of money in the investment banking business, whatever that is. He's retired but still tells people what to do and sits on some board."

"Sort of a consultant?" Troy said.

"That's it. Consul-ant." She hiccupped and swigged more bourbon. "He flies up to Atlanta once a month for them board meetings. Or did, I suppose. Flew right out of our strip here. There's a woman runs a service. John said it was worth it to not deal with airports and lines."

"I see. And how long were you and John married?"

"A little better'n a year now. Our anniversary was last month. But he was fifty and I'm twenty-five; I always knew I'd have to bury him some day. I din't expect it to be this soon."

"Did you and your husband get along?"

"Of course we did. Like two lovebirds. He weren't so good in the ... you know ... bed thing, but I could help him and I loved him more than anything. And he loved me."

"He owned a trawler yacht," Troy said. "You and he go anywhere on it?" Troy had no idea where he was going; he just wanted to keep her talking a little and drinking a lot.

"Oh, sure. He liked that boat. We'd go out in the Gulf and fish. We went down to Key West sometimes, thass just a day's run. Dry Tortugas. Up to Naples, Venice, St. Petersburg. Once we wen' across to Pensacola. That was a bad trip."

"Why so?"

"Ran into a storm. The boat rolled around a lot. He liked it. I got seasick. Ever been seasick?"

"A few times," Troy said. "Been sailing for decades but anyone can get seasick, you get accustomed to the sea after a while and then it takes more to make you sick."

"Yeah. Well, I hated it. 'Tole him I'd never again go on a trip like that."

"Pretty hard to predict that sort of thing."

"Well, what kinda boat owner can't predict when a storm is coming?"

Troy nodded. "Boats don't move very fast. Storms do. You go out in a boat, you have to expect that sort of thing."

"Well, seemed stupid to me. Run straight through a storm. An' it rains on you."

"Rain? In Florida? Who would have guessed."

"Don' get smart with me."

"Sorry," Troy said. "There's Dramamine, you know."

"Tried that. Made me loopy. Dramamine and bourbon don' mix."

"You could not drink the bourbon and take the Dramamine."

"Don' tell me what I can do and not do."

"Good point," Troy said. "Did John keep any power tools, perhaps out in the garage or in a workshop anyplace?"

"I suppose. He had a few things like that in the garage. He liked woodworkin'. We're buildin' a shop for him to do that in. Or we were, I guess. Why don' you go look there and leave me alone in my grief?"

"I'll do that. Thanks for your time."

She took another sip. "Shit."

Katie stayed in the living room nursing her bourbon and grief. The garage was big enough for two cars and a small workbench at the rear. One Mercedes was parked there. On the workbench there were some hand power tools but they were all cordless. There was a lot of fine wood stacked in corners and a lathe and jigsaw and several other large woodworking tools Troy could not identify were shoved together just beyond the car's front bumper.

Clearly, John Barrymore had needed more space for his hobby. In Troy's experience, ninety percent of all garages were actually used for storage, not to park cars. Two bicycles hung by their front tires from hooks in the ceiling. A separate shed held to an assortment of gas-powered lawn-care tools, including a small riding lawnmower. Apparently, John Barrymore had actually mowed his own lawn. Most people on Airfield Key, Troy suspected, hired it done.

In the distance, even muted a little by the shrubbery, he heard an airplane engine wind up to maximum power, then the sound moved from one side to the other of the front of the lot as the pilot accelerated down the unseen runway and lifted off. The sound faded to a distant drone.

Troy remembered reading a comment by the Romanian poet Andrei Codrescu that, *"I've noticed ... how much quieter the environs of the super-rich get. You don't see the extra silence mentioned in the house price, but it is, sure as grammar, part and parcel of talking rich."* Apparently that was not so on Airfield Key. He wondered if the residents either owned airplanes themselves and liked the noise, or just got so accustomed to it that they didn't hear it, sort of like poor people who lived next to railroad tracks.

Outside, the foreman was measuring something on the wall of the garage. He was shoulder-height to Troy but wider, with the start of a beer belly and unkempt gray hair. He wore white painter's overalls with assorted stains on the front and sawdust sprinkled over him. Troy stepped forward to hold one end of a tape. The foreman drew a line on the wall with a carpenter's pencil, rolled up the tape, and nodded thanks to Troy.

"You missing a DeWalt corded electric drill?" Troy asked the foreman.

The foreman looked at him as if Troy had suddenly pulled a rabbit out of his shirt pocket. "I sure as hell been looking for it. What do you know about it?"

"I'm afraid I have it. It's evidence, but I'll see if I can get it back to you someday." He briefly explained about John Barrymore.

"Crap. Evidence. It'll be years before I see it again. Keep it. I'll get another, least now I know to stop looking for it. It was only a spare anyway, 'case the cordless ones ran out of juice. Usually lose things on job sites. Tools, materials. Unless you fence it off and post a guard, or a dog, things walk off."

"Might need to get your fingerprints," Troy said. "Or those of anyone else on your crew who might have handled it. If we get any prints off the drill we need to eliminate those."

"No problem. But mine would be on file anyway. Got me a CWP. Name's Thomas Dolfe." He spelled it.

"You carrying right now? I didn't see it. I usually do."

"Nah. Where would you conceal a weapon in some overalls? Gun's in my truck. Wear it and it makes my pants fall down."

Troy smiled. "Know what you mean."

"I'm real sorry to hear about Barrymore," Dolfe said. "He seemed a nice gent. He liked to come out and help us, which only set us back a little bit, so we let him. He liked to get his hands dirty."

"Any point to finishing this job now?" Troy asked. "Not like he needs his woodworking shop any longer."

"The foreman shrugged. "That would be up to *her*, I suppose. But there's not much point to leaving it half-done and walking away, either."

While Troy was standing outside, Tom drove up in the second Mercedes.

"Anything in there?" Troy asked as Tom got out.

"Nada. The man actually kept gloves in the glovebox."

"That's almost un-American," Troy said.

They both went inside the house where Troy handed the keys to Kathleen Barrymore. He had kept the boat key.

She noticed at once. "Where's the key to *Wayward*?" Apparently she had found another box of Winstons and she had to take the cigarette out of her mouth to talk to them. Then, since she still had a highball glass in her right hand, she had to put the cigarette back between her lips to take the car keys.

"I'll keep the boat key for a few days while we investigate," Troy said. "Are there any other copies of that key around here?"

"No. But get it back to me. That boat's valuable. I can sell it."

"I'm afraid it's sealed off at the moment. Don't worry. We'll be looking after it. Very, very closely."

Troy drove Tom VanDyke back to the yacht club so Tom could get his own car.

"Tom, go to the hardware store. Buy some padlocks and replace the ones on the two outside doors on that boat. Bring me the invoice and the keys when you're done."

"But she said there were no other keys."

"I know she did. You ever buy a padlock that didn't come with two keys?"

"You always this suspicious?"

"I'm always this careful."

"She sure seemed cold about all that," Tom said. "Her husband's just been found dead and she's more concerned about selling the boat."

Troy nodded. "She didn't blink when I told her there would be an autopsy. Most people would want to know why a medical examiner was going to chop up their loved

ones. Would be upset a little that we might think a crime had been committed. Most people, told that their boat had been sealed off by the police, might wonder why and demand an answer. She didn't."

"Most people," Tom said, "married just a year now, would be screaming their heads off." Troy pulled into the yacht club parking lot and Tom opened his door. "She seemed almost happy about all this."

"You never know how people will react, especially when drunk," Troy said. "For all we know she's back there now, weeping, prostrate on the floor with grief."

"Do you really think so?"

"No."

— end sample —

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