GRIMHAVEN
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BY

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The original intended sequel to Miami Blues, its dissemination prohibited by the Willeford estate and extant, until now, only as a restricted xeroxed copy lodged in a Florida library, read by only a few enthusiasts with privileged access, Grimhaven is a stunning, dark, unflinching masterpiece that sees the light of day for the first time here.

CHAPTER ONE

Sometimes there were nightmares. A hand would appear out of the darkness, and it would either be gripping a handgun or a curved knife. The gun, when it was a gun, would be smoking; the knife, when it was a knife, would be dripping with blood. The looming figure, in the darkness behind the knife or gun hand, would be a darker silhouette against the blackness, of indeterminate sex and unrecognizable; but the hand with the weapon, bathed in light, was always pale, with the knuckles white as it pointed the gun or lifted the knife. At that point in the dream, knowing he was going to be killed - murdered in his bed, he would awake, startled, his heart pounding and his mouth dry. The white ceiling would be aglow from the sodium vapor streetlights outside the window, and he would hear the reassuring murmur of surf rolling in on the wide beach. He could never recall the dream clearly, except that it had been scary and threatening. His body would be damp with perspiration, and he would still be breathing hard through his dry mouth.

Afterwards, sometimes, he could fall asleep again almost immediately. At other times, he wouldn't be able to get back to sleep again for two or three hours. It was probably only anxiety, he thought, but he wished to hell it would stop.

Hoke Moseley's eyes were chocolate brown, a brown so richly dark it was difficult to see his

pupils. During his twelve years on the police department in Miami, this genetic gift had been useful to him on many occasions. Hoke could stare at people for a long time before they realized that he was looking at them. By any aesthetic standard, Hoke's eyes were beautiful; but the rest of his face, if not ordinary, was unremarkable. Hoke was forty-two years old, he looked older. He had lost most of his sandy hair in front, and his high balding dome gave his longish face a sorrowful expression. He wore false upper and lower dentures, and these cheap grayish blue teeth were so patently false they were the first thing people noticed when they met him for the first time. His tanned cheeks were sunken and striated, and there were dark, deep lines from the wings of his prominent nose to the corners of his all but lipless mouth.

Hoke was wearing a yellow poplin jumpsuit and Nike running shoes without socks. The sleeves were rolled up above his elbows, and there was a $19.95 Timex wristwatch on his hairy left wrist. He took a folded white cotton handkerchief out of his left hip pocket, wiped his forehead, and replaced the handkerchief. He glanced at his watch. For the last fifteen minutes, he noted, twisting his mouth, he had been counting wing-nuts. Each time he counted them, he came up with a different total. First 193, then 192, then 195. He shook his head and wrote 193 on his clipboard inventory sheet.

"Dad," he called to his father, "I'm going to pack it in for the day. I counted these wing-nuts three times and came up with a different number each time."

Frank Moseley, Hoke's father, who was working on a puzzle in his crossword magazine, filled in seven blank spaces with his ballpoint: L-A-C-U-N-A-E. "The secret to inventory," Frank lifted his head, "is to write down your first count, at least on small items."

"That's what I decided to do."

"Rodriquez'll be back tomorrow. I'll put him on inventory, and you can wait on customers."

"That's okay. I'd just as soon do the inventory."

"Whatever." The old man shrugged. Frank Moseley was almost seventy, but he looked more like Hoke's older brother than he did his father. He was thin and wiry, and his new wife, who was closing in on forty, took very good care of him.

"Go on home, Hoke. Take your swim. I'll close up. We could close now, but I'm waiting for Captain Reinerth to come in for his new outboard."

"I'll wait for him, Dad."

"No. You look tired. Get along."

"I'm not tired."

"Bored, then. Go ahead. There's something I want to talk to Captain Reinerth about anyway."

Before leaving, Hoke reset the thermostat, raising the store temperature to eighty-five degrees. This small task, taking care of the air conditioning unit, changing the filters twice a month, and dusting the vents, was a duty Hoke had assumed without being told. His father had agreed to take him back into the hardware store, but had never told him what he was supposed to do. When Hoke had asked what his specific duties would be, the old man had merely shrugged. "Make yourself useful, that's all."

That had sounded simple enough, but it wasn't. Jose Rodriquez, who preferred to be called "Joe," and Helen Wadsworth, a divorcee with two kids in junior high school, had both been working for Mr. Moseley as clerks for some years. They had already divided the work between them and there was very little left for Hoke to do in the store. The old man took care of the cash register, and he did all of the ordering and helped Mrs. Wadsworth with her bookkeeping. Hoke, after working in the store for two months, sometimes felt like a fifth wheel. Nevertheless, the store looked much neater and cleaner, thanks to Hoke's efforts.

Moseley's Hardware and Chandlery had expanded considerably since Hoke had worked there as a boy in high school. The chandlery part of the store's sign was mostly exaggeration, but because small boat items had been added over the years, and parts for power boats could be ordered, the old man had added "Chandlery" to the outside sign when he had it repainted. Hoke, trying to make himself useful, kept the bins straightened, learned where everything was stored, and, when he couldn't think of anything else to do, swept, mopped, and dusted.

The more mindless the task, the better Hoke liked it.

When Hoke came back to the store to work, his father had said nothing about how much his salary would be, and Hoke hadn't asked. At the end of his first two weeks, Hoke received a check for $200. When he caught his father alone, Hoke asked him about the salary, just to make certain there was no mistake.

"Is this for one week, Dad, or two?"

"Two. That little apartment I let you have over at the beach usually rents out for four-twenty-five a month, and I've always paid the utilities. So instead of you paying me rent on the apartment, as we agreed on first, you can have the apartment rent-free, as a part of your salary. So that's four-twenty-five. Add another hundred a week, and you're making more than two hundred a week. That's more 'n I pay Rodriquez or Mrs. Wadsworth. Of course, if there's a profit at the end of the year, and there always has been so far, you'll share the same bonuses as Joe and Mrs. Wadsworth. The only way I can justify giving you more money than I give Mrs. Wadsworth and Joe is to have you come in on Saturday mornings. I've been the only one in the store on Saturday mornings for the last thirty years, but now I'm planning on taking Saturdays off and letting you stay here by yourself. Is that fair enough?"

"It's more than fair."

A free apartment, utilities included, was enough for Hoke's needs, now that he had resolved to simplify his life. When he thought about it, he was almost as well off financially in his new situation as he had been as a police sergeant of Homicide in Miami, when he had earned a salary of $32,000 a year. Half of his policeman's salary had gone to his ex-wife each month for alimony and child support for his two teenaged daughters. Out of the remaining $15,000, or thereabouts, he had to pay taxes, union dues, retirement, and everything else. He had never had a spare cent left over, but now he had a small bank account started in the Riviera Beach National Bank, and a few dollars in his pockets besides.

When Hoke resigned from the police department, he had received a lump sum of $12,000, all of the money he had paid into the retirement fund throughout the years. He could have left the money in the retirement fund, and drawn a reduced retirement for life when he reached fifty years of age, but he had opted to draw it out instead, pay the punitive taxes on it, and split the remaining money with Patsy, his ex-wife. He sent Patsy's share, $3,200, to Patsy in Vero Beach, Florida, where she lived with his two daughters. He enclosed a letter of explanation with the check, telling Patsy that this was the termination of his alimony and child support payments. If she wanted to take him to court, that was okay with him, but he had no job and no more money, and the judge would be unable to get any blood out of a turnip. Later on, he had added, when he obtained some more money, or had any left over when he got a job of some kind, he would send her what he could spare.

But for now, the $3,200 was it.

Patsy had not taken Hoke's letter with good grace, nor had he expected her to; she had never taken anything he ever did with good grace. She

had, after cashing the check, written him an angry, bitter letter. But she did not take him back to court--not yet, anyway. Patsy was a cunning woman, in Hoke's opinion, and a sharp businesswoman as well. As a realtor in Vero Beach, she was making at least $30,000 a year, so if she took Hoke to court for non-support and back alimony, the chances were better than even that the judge would reduce the child support payments substantially, and take away her alimony altogether.

The financial circumstances had changed considerably for both of them in the last decade. Patsy had been an unemployed housewife and fulltime mother when they got their divorce, and Hoke had had a secure future with the Miami Police Department. Now Patsy was a fairly well-off businesswoman, and Hoke was no longer on the force. He could also prove, in court, that his take-home salary at the hardware store was only a hundred dollars a week. No, knowing Patsy, and Hoke thought he knew her very well, she would wait, believing that Hoke would come eventually to his senses and obtain another cop's job somewhere. And then she would take him back to court.

That left out the matter of vindictiveness. Patsy could still take him to court to be vindictive, but Hoke didn't care. They rarely jailed a man who could not pay alimony and child support, so the worst that could happen to him would be the loss of his three-year-old Datsun Li'l Hustler pick-up truck he had purchased with his pension money. Even jail, Hoke thought, if it came to that, would be better than remaining on the Miami, or any other police department. Now that he had made up his mind to simplify his life, he knew he could keep it simple in jail, too.

Hoke's small white truck was parked next to his father's new Buick Riviera in the parking lot behind the store. He rolled down the windows and opened both doors for a minute or so to let the baked air out

of the cab before getting into the driver's seat. The steering wheel, after its all-day bath in the Florida sun, was almost too hot to touch.

Hoke left Riviera Beach, the city proper, and took the Blue Heron causeway over to Singer Island. Singer Island, which was part of the Riviera Beach township, had grown tenfold since Hoke had been born. The old man's island property, which he had bought back in the early 1930s before the causeway had been built to the island, had made him a rich man. Singer Island was filled now with expensive homes and tall condominiums, but it still had the widest beach in Florida, except, perhaps, for Daytona Beach. The sand on the Riviera Municipal Beach, however, was whiter, cleaner, and deeper than the hard-packed beach at Daytona.

When the old man had first built the duplex, where Hoke lived now in the southern half of the upstairs apartment, there were no other homes for five hundred yards or more on either side of it. But now the duplex had almost disappeared as it became a small part of a burgeoning shopping center.

Frank Moseley had built the duplex in 1946, right after the war, and the building was on sturdy concrete stilts. The two apartments, high above the ground, caught the breezes from the Atlantic, and the open spaces beneath them had been used for parking and storage. Steep outside staircases led up to each apartment. They both had screened porches then, but now the two porches had been enclosed with jalousied windows. The prospect across the beach was still the same, but little else was. On either side of the duplex, shops had been constructed, and at the northern end of the center there was a three-story office building. The two parking spaces beneath the duplex had been enclosed with walls and remodeled into shops. Instead of car ports, there was a gift and shell shop

beneath Hoke's apartment, and a scuba gear rental shop beneath the other apartment. There were pink concrete sidewalks on both sides of the shopping strip, and Hoke had to find a parking space in the crowded municipal lot, now that his former parking space was a shell shop.

Hoke could still remember vaguely when the duplex was the only structure this close to the beach. Sometimes, as a boy he had walked to Niggerhead and back along the shoreline without seeing a single swimmer or sunbather. But not now; the beach was always crowded, winter and summer, and those were the only seasons Florida had. No one, except for Frank Moseley, could have foreseen this phenomenal growth, and even the old man must have been surprised a little, although he would never admit it. At any rate, Frank Moseley had, at one time, owned all of the lots on both sides of the duplex; and the sales of those lots had made him a very rich hardware store owner.

But all the same, and despite all of the people, Hoke's life was beginning to go exactly the way he had always wanted it.

CHAPTER TWO

Hoke parked and locked his truck in the asphalt lot, dodged a kid on a forbidden skateboard as he crossed the pink concrete sidewalk, and climbed the steep stairs to his apartment. There was no mail in his box. He opened the jalousied windows on the porch, checked the length of the shadows on Ocean Boulevard, and took a look at the ocean. The snot-green water was glassy. Three black tankers skirted the Gulfstream on the horizon. Because of daylight savings time, the sun wouldn't set until almost eight p.m., which gave Hoke more than two hours of sunlight for his afternoon swim and daily run on the beach.

Hoke removed his poplin jumpsuit, emptied the pockets, and washed it while he took his shower. He put on his swimming trunks, twisted his jumpsuit as dry as he could with his powerful hands, and hung the jumpsuit on a plastic hanger in the doorway from the living room to the porch, where it would catch the breeze coming in through the windows. The jumpsuit would be dry by morning, and he could wear it to work again. Hoke had reduced his wardrobe to two yellow poplin jumpsuits, but he liked to wash the one he wore each day every evening so he could wear the same one again the next day. He felt that this daily chore simplified his life even more, and he would also have the other, fresher and newer, jumpsuit in reserve.

The apartment had a living room, one bedroom, and one bathroom. Instead of a kitchen, there was a narrow galley and counter with two stools in the

living room. There was an accordion Naugahyde curtain that could be closed to conceal the galley, but Hoke had never closed it. The rooms were large, however, having been built during the postwar construction boom, and the ceilings were fourteen feet high. There were ceiling fans in the living room and in the bedroom--installed and left behind by an earlier tenant--and Hoke rarely turned on the air conditioning. Although free utilities were a part of his deal with his old man, Hoke had no intention of running up a high electric bill on his father. Besides, the Hunter fans were effective enough to cool the apartment and there was almost always a breeze coming through the windows off the water.

Hoke pinned his house key into the small pocket of his faded trunks, slipped into rubber-soled skivvy slippers, and went down to the beach, dodging the one-way traffic on Ocean Boulevard. The white stretch of sand was too hot for his bare feet, so he always wore his slippers until he reached the littoral. He took off his slippers and sunglasses and waded into the warm waters before diving into a breaking wave. The temperature of the water was the same as the air--about eighty-seven degrees--and the water, except for being wet, was not refreshing. The ocean was as warm at night as it was during the day, and sometimes a night swim was better because the air was cooler than the water at night. But Hoke tried to take his swim at the same time every day, hewing to his schedule. He counted to himself, after he got beyond the breakers, adding one count to every two arm strokes, until he had completed what he considered the equivalent of thirty laps in an Olympic-sized pool.

He floated on his back for awhile to rest, and then swam leisurely back to the beach. He put his dark glasses on, and, carrying his slippers, one in each hand, ran a half-mile up the beach to a driftwood log. During the summer, the condos along

the shore were only about thirty-percent occupied, and most of the condo dwellers preferred their swimming pools to the sea. They liked to look at the Atlantic, but they preferred fresh water for swimming. Hoke sat on the log for five minutes, then ran back to his starting point. He went into the water again to rinse off the perspiration, then returned to his apartment. His arms and legs ached with fatigue, and his chest felt as if there was an iron band around it. He took a long hot shower, slipped into his gray gym trunks, and stretched out on his canvas Army cot to rest. He followed his daily regimen whether it rained or not, seven days a week, but it didn't seem to be getting any easier. His deep tan got darker every day, and his muscle tone had improved, but the swimming and the running still exhausted him. If and when the routine became easier, Hoke planned to extend it--to run one or two miles, to swim forty "laps" instead of thirty. Not only was it not easier each day, on some days, like today, it seemed to be harder. What would be pleasant now, after his swim and run, would be a cold bottle of beer and a cigarette. He had given up smoking and drinking as an important factor in simplifying his life, so he tried, without success, to think of something else. But he wanted a cigarette so much he couldn't think of anything else, so he got up from the cot and went into the galley. He poured sugarless iced tea into a glass, added ice cubes, and looked out of the living room window into the municipal lot as he drank his tea.

The lot was beginning to fill with a different crowd. The sunbathers were going home, but the kids from the mainland who came over to the beach to play the games in the arcade were taking up the empty parking spaces, and soon there would be another rush as working people came over to eat dinner at Joey's or Portofino's Italian restaurant; to shop; to eat hotdogs and burgers, or just to sit in the Green House garden patio drinking beer.

Tourists from the motels and condo dwellers would also wander over, having nothing better to do, and the sidewalks on both sides of the shopping center would be busy and noisy until after ten-thirty. Then, except for the booming of the jukebox at the Green House, which played until the beer garden closed at midnight, there would be relative quiet. On some nights, Hoke could go to sleep as early as ten p.m. and not be bothered by the jukebox, but on most nights he couldn't sleep until the beer garden closed and there was no noise at all. It was just a matter of time, he thought; eventually he would be able to shut out the music, and it wouldn't bother him.

In every other respect, the small apartment suited Hoke perfectly. It was small enough so that he could keep it scrupulously clean, and there was very little furniture to polish or dust. Except for a canvas sling chair, a folding TV snack table, and a reading lamp, the living room was devoid of furniture. There were no pictures hanging on the white walls. There was an Army cot in the bedroom that Hoke had purchased from the Eagle Army & Navy store, a standing bedlamp, and an aluminum footlocker at the foot of the bed. The footlocker held his few personal possessions, and they were papers mostly--birth certificate, Honorable Discharge from the U.S. Army, his marriage and divorce papers plus a thick folder of letters and commendations from the Miami Police Department.

Hoke wore Nike running shoes, red and gray striped, the most conservative colors he could find in the store, and because the shoes were padded and lined with leather, he had thrown away all of his black lisle policeman's socks. He had kept a half-dozen T-shirts to sleep in at night, but he had dispensed with his boxer shorts. He didn't need shorts with his jumpsuits as long as he wore a clean one every day, so he had tossed out the shorts with the socks. His other yellow jumpsuit hung in the closet, together with a heavy Navy blue pullover

sweater and a light and expensive well-worn Burberry trenchcoat. In Florida, Hoke might wear the sweater three or four nights in a year, but when it did get cold in Florida, he knew he would need it. So he had kept the sweater; and the trenchcoat would be useful during heavy rains or hurricanes. He kept a half-dozen large bath towels in the bathroom, however, which he took to the Laundromat on Saturday afternoons after closing the hardware

store at noon. His toilet articles were in a leather Dop-Kit in the bathroom, and he had a large cardboard box filled with little bars of soap he had taken with him when he left the Eldorado Hotel, his longtime residence in Miami Beach. He figured it would take at least three years before he ran out of the tiny hotel-sized bars of soap.

The small galley-kitchen was well-furnished with pots, pans and a coffee-maker, all left by previous tenants. There was almost a complete service for four in orange Melmac. One cup, a salad plate and a soup/cereal bowl were missing, but inasmuch as Hoke had no intention of ever inviting anyone to his apartment for a meal, there was no need to replace the missing dishes. There were a couple of dozen assorted glasses and a chipped martini pitcher with a glass stirring rod. The refrigerator, a new Kelvinator that the old man had installed when the old one conked out, had an ice-maker as well as a freezer compartment. There was a small but effective two-burner electric stove with a waist-high built-in oven next to the sink. Hoke ate his meals at the narrow counter, usually sitting at the open end to the kitchen, where he could look out at the ocean while he ate. When it wasn't too windy, he sometimes ate his meals on the porch, sitting on his cot, and using his footlocker as a table.

Hoke took the crock-pot out of the refrigerator, plugged it in, and turned it on to Hi. There was only enough beef stew in the crock-pot for one meal. That

meant he had run out of stew a day early, because today was only Thursday. Perhaps he was measuring his servings wrong? He had intended for his last meal to be on Friday, not Thursday. Hoke did his shopping for the week on Saturday afternoon at the Grand Union, buying everything he would need for the next week. Then, on Sunday, he made a four-quart crock-pot full of either beef stew one week or chili con carne, which he ate each evening for dinner through the week. This made his cooking problem simple, and he did not have to worry about what he was going to have for dinner every night.

Hoke's breakfast consisted of one poached egg, one slice of rye toast, and three or four cups of thick Cuban coffee. The Cuban coffee was the only thing Hoke missed about Miami. As a cop, he had picked up the Cuban's habit of having eight or ten one-ounce hits of Cuban espresso during the day at the dozens of small cafeterias in the city. But now, when he made his own in an espresso pot, it didn't come out exactly the same as what the Cubans made in Miami. To make it perfectly, a person probably had to be a Cuban, but at least his coffee was strong enough to get him through his long days at the hardware store. He also packed a thermos of Cuban coffee for his lunch, together with one hard-boiled egg and an apple. At night, after eating either one bowl of beef stew, or one bowl of chili, depending upon which week it was, he ate another apple for dessert before going to bed.

On this diet, Hoke maintained his regular weigh- of 180 pounds, down from a paunchy 205 pounds in only two months time. The daily exercise had helped him reduce, too. Although Hoke had been ravenous on this diet during the first two weeks, now he was merely hungry most of the time instead of ravenous. But it disturbed him to run out of the beef stew on Thursday, because now he would have to do something different on Friday night. Any deviation from his planned routine made him apprehensive

and irritable. Hoke was like a machine held together with one loose lug nut, and with the daily vibrations of life the machine loosened the lug nut a little more each day instead of tightening it. Hoke was fully aware of his condition. If he kept his life simple enough, he was fairly sure that he could keep the machine running indefinitely. The only real pressures he had now were of his own devising, and he remonstrated with himself for getting so upset simply because he had eaten all of the beef stew a day early. There was no big deal involved here. Tomorrow night he could go out and eat a Big Mac at MacDonald's for dinner. Perhaps a small break in his routine would do him good. A slight deviation, in fact, would only serve to make his strict routine more attractive.

Hoke washed the crock-pot, his bowl and spoon, and took his chessboard out of the closet. He set up Problem Number 28 from his book of chess problems. He had thought hard about the matter at first, whether to get a radio and a TV set when he had moved into the apartment, but he had decided against them. Instead, to fill the long evenings before he could fall asleep with any degree of safety, he had decided on the chess board and the beginner's book of chess problems instead. He allowed himself one problem each night, and when he had finished solving all of the problems in the book, he planned to get a book with more difficult problems. Right now, this beginner's book was already getting to difficult for him, because he had been working on Problem Number 28 for two nights now without mating the white king in three as the problem indicated. He was tired of 28, even though he couldn't solve it, and he wanted to move on to Number 29. But he had to finish 28 first; otherwise he would be cheating on his system. As he studied the board, the maudlin voice of Jimmy Buffett singing "Stars Fell on Alabama" came drifting in through the open windows from the jukebox in the

beer garden. Some nostalgic cracker sonofabitch was playing the song for the fourth time in a row. If it wasn't Jimmy Buffett it was The Clash on the jukebox, although, once in a long while, someone played Ferlin Husky's "Don't blame the chirren, it's the parents to blame," an idiotic song if there ever was one. As long as the record changed each time, Hoke didn't mind the music too much, but when someone played the same song three or four times in a row, it was damned distracting for a man who was trying to work a chess problem that was either impossible or designed by some Russian Commie sadist--Hoke swept the chess pieces to the floor, stared at them for a long moment, and then put them back into the box. He folded the board and returned the chessmen and the board to the shelf in the closet.

Hoke felt his clean jumpsuit, but it was still too damp to wear. He pulled his other jumpsuit over his gray gym trunks, and slipped into his running shoes. He tied the strings tight, tucked in the loose ends, and left the apartment. He crossed the parking lot and walked toward the Blue Heron causeway. If someone is fishing, Hoke thought, I'll strike up a conversation with him. Fishing from the bridge was illegal, but old men fished there anyway. Hoke had been on the Riviera Police force for three years before he went down to Miami, and he knew that the 'no-fishing' law was rarely enforced. At most, a cop would tell a fisherman to go home. No one was ever arrested because there were still enough poor people in Riviera Beach who needed fish for their dinners.

Years ago, Riviera Beach had been almost all Conchs, just like Key West had been before the Gay Invasion, and old Conchs who had fished all of their lives had never been keen on regulations of any kind about fishing. Besides, the 'no-fishing' from the causeway law wasn't concerned with fishing; it was passed by the city commission because motorists

were afraid of getting hooked by some fisherman as they drove across the bridge. Something like that, as far as Hoke knew, had never happened. Perhaps it had happened once or twice, and then they had put in the law to prevent it from happening again. All the same, it was a foolish law.

But tonight, no one was fishing from the bridge. Hoke watched the bridge lights dance and shimmy on the water for a few minutes, and walked back to the 7-Eleven store in the square. The night manager was cutting the strings of The Miami Herald for Friday morning. The bundle had just been delivered. Hoke wandered aimlessly around the store, but there was nothing he needed. He picked up a copy of the Herald, however, and put a dollar bill on the counter. The manager, a bald, middle-aged man in an orange 7-Eleven shirt, made change.

"When I was a kid," Hoke said, "there used to be a grocery store over on Division Street where you could buy cigarettes for a penny apiece. The owner kept them loose in a water glass on the counter. He couldn't sell you a pack if you were under eighteen, you see, but he'd sell you one cigarette for a penny. That way he beat the law. You can't sell cigarettes to a kid under eighteen, but one cigarette is singular, not plural, so he figured he wasn't really breaking the law."

The bald man shook his head and smiled. "He was breaking the spirit of the law, and he knew that no cop would bust him and do all the paperwork for only selling one cigarette."

"That's right, " Hoke nodded, "he was never busted. A cop would've felt like an asshole, busting a man for selling just one cigarette to a minor."

"Today," the bald man reflected, "he'd have to sell a single cigarette for seven cents if he wanted to make a profit."

"I'm trying to quit. If I bought a full pack, I'd probably smoke the whole thing."

"Here," the night manager said, taking a package

of king-sized Kools out of his shirt pocket. "Have one of mine."

"Thanks." Hoke took a cigarette from the pack.

"Need a light?"

"No. I'll just save it for now, and maybe I'll smoke it later. In fact, I may not smoke it at all."

"If you do, you'll probably be back up a pack a day by tomorrow. Anyway, give me seven cents."

Hoke put two nickels on the counter. "Keep the change."

The manager pushed the coins back toward Poke. "I don't want your money. I was only kidding, for Christ's sake."

Hoke shook his head and slipped the cigarette into the breast pocket of his jumpsuit. He left the store and headed back toward the lights of the shopping center. He tossed the Miami Herald into a trash can at the corner of the parking lot. The sodium vapor street lights that encircled the shopping center made it a small island on another island in the dark night.

When Hoke reached his duplex, there was a teenaged girl sitting on a suitcase alongside the narrow stairway leading up to his apartment. She was wearing headphones and she held a tiny Sony Walkman primly in her lap. She was wearing jeans, open-toed high-heeled pumps, and a light blue T-shirt. There were black palm trees imprinted on her cotton shirt, with white lettering between them that read, FORT 'LUDERDALE.

She was blocking Hoke's way to the stairs. He looked down at her.

"If you're waiting for the bus back into town, it stops on the other side of the center, in front of the arcade."

She looked up at Hoke and smiled. She removed the headphones and clicked off the tape-player. She gave Hoke a long luminous brown-eyed stare. Her eyes reminded Hoke of Patricia Neal's hot-eyed look in the movie, Hud, in the scene where she was

raped by Paul Newman.

"Hello, Daddy," she said. She stood up, wrapped her arms around Hoke's waist, and managed to kiss him on the chin as he pulled his head back. Hoke didn't recognize the girl, but he didn't doubt for a single second that this was one of his daughters. She had his eyes.

The last time Hoke had seen his daughters, one had been six, and the other four. He didn't know whether this girl was Sue Ellen, the sixteen-year-old, or Aileen, the fourteen-year-old. In Florida, girls developed early, and Hoke could rarely tell the difference between a fourteen-year-old and a sixteen-year-old girl, even though he saw them every day on the beach.

"Where's your sister?" Hoke said, disengaging her arms from his waist.

"She went to Grandpa's house. Aileen was afraid you wouldn't take us in..."

Sue Ellen began to cry.

"Hey, hey," Hoke said. "Come on upstairs. I'll get you settled in, and then I'll drive over and get her."

Hoke picked up the suitcase, and Sue Ellen, wiping her eyes with the backs of her fingers, followed him upstairs. Hoke unlocked the door, flipped on the light in the galley, and turned on the reading lamp by the sling chair.

Sue Ellen, calmer now, put her Sony on the counter and climbed onto one of the stools. She took a package of Lucky Strikes out of her leather drawstring purse, and lit a cigarette with a Bic disposable lighter.

"Let me borrow your lighter," Hoke said. He took the crumpled Kool out of his breast pocket and lit it with his oldest daughter's lighter. Hoke's first long drag, after not smoking for almost two months, made him a trifle dizzy, but nothing had ever tasted better, and he knew that he was going to start smoking again.

CHAPTER THREE

Hoke had tried two or three times to see his daughters after the divorce, but he had to admit that he hadn't tried very hard. He had merely made token gestures. One of the reasons Patsy left him in the first place, she said, was because he spent so little time at home with the children. But the two little girls made Hoke nervous and when he hung around the house with nothing much to do, he soon got into an argument of some kind with his wife. She had been a quiet studious girl in high school, and a more or less dutiful wife in Riviera Beach, but after they moved to Miami her character had changed radically. After she joined a neighborhood "consciousness raising" group, she had started to have "opinions."

Hoke was studying for the sergeant's examination at the time they separated and it was difficult to concentrate on his books at home with two boisterous little girls running around screaming. He was relieved, in a way, when Patsy had packed up and left for Vero Beach. Perhaps, if the girls had been boys instead of girls he could have established some kind of rapport with them, but they were girl girls, not even tomboys. When he had tried to play with them a few times, one or the other would get hurt and start crying.

He spent as much time at the police station as he could, and took overtime and off-duty assignments every time they became available. During the

football season, he had worked crowd control at the Orange Bowl every weekend until he finally got out of uniform and became a detective.

At any rate, the personal insults that Hoke and Patsy had hurled at each other during the last three months or so before she left for good had been too vitriolic and nasty for either one of them to ever forgive. There was absolutely no chance of reconciliation. Even so, they hadn't filed for a no-fault divorce for three years after the separation, although Patsy lived in Vero Beach, and Hoke remained in Miami. He was paid twice a month, and he sent the first check to Patsy and lived on the second check. She sent him a receipt each month, but never volunteered any information about the girls. Not even a note--just a receipt, with an occasional curt request for extra money to buy Easter outfits for the girls, or to pay a pediatrician bill. He often ignored the requests for money--not having any to send--even though, according to their separation agreement, he was supposed to pay all of the doctor bills. Then, when she started to make a good deal of money selling real estate in Vero, she wanted to claim the kids on her income tax return. He had to go along with it because she could prove that she was paying more than half of their living expenses.

What little news Hoke received about the two girls came from his father. Patsy remained on good terms with Frank Moseley by writing fulsome letters to him and by bringing the girls down to Riviera Beach from Vero occasionally so the old man could see them. Patsy knew how rich the old man was and undoubtedly wanted the girls to be provided for in his will. How much they would get now that the old man had married a woman the same age as Patsy was a matter for conjecture. They would surely get something, enough to go to college on, perhaps, if they were smart enough to get into college, but Patsy certainly wasn't going to do anything to

alienate the old man from his grand-children.

Hoke had written Patsy a couple of times, asking her to let the girls come down to Miami for a visit of a week or so, but she had refused. She also told him that she didn't want him to visit the girls in Vero Beach, either. She was dating again and it would upset the girls to have him visit them and try to play father, especially when he had never been a real father to them while they had been married. Hoke had called his father once, and asked him to call when the girls visited, so he could go up to Riviera Beach and see them. But his father told him he wouldn't be a party to any such deception, and that Hoke would have to work out his own visitation rights with his ex-wife. The old man had probably been afraid that Patsy would cut him off from his granddaughters if he made any private deals with Hoke. In any event, Hoke had never tried very hard to see his daughters, and, except for a photo of the two girls, taken by their grandfather when they were eight and six (a photo Hoke carried in his wallet), Hoke had no recollection of what the girls looked like.

For that reason, he'd had to trick Sue Ellen into finding out whether she was Aileen or Sue Ellen. As he looked at her now he realized that although she wasn't pretty, she wasn't plain, either. She would soon have Patsy's figure, and she had his eyes, so she wouldn't have any difficulty in finding a husband.

"You hungry, Sue Ellen? I can scramble you some eggs."

Sue Ellen shook her head. "Me and Aileen split a pizza at the bus station before she went off to Grandpa's house."

"Why didn't she come with you?"

Sue Ellen shrugged her narrow shoulders. "I already told you. She was afraid you wouldn't take us in, even though I told her that you were our father, and you'd have to take us in whether you

wanted to or not."

"I can't imagine how she would get such an idea," he grimaced. "On the other hand, perhaps I can."

"She doesn't remember you, that's all."

"And you do, I suppose?"

"Of course I do. I'm going on seventeen. You told me that when I reached sixteen you'd teach me how to shoot your gun."

"I don't remember telling you that."

"I do. I also remember the time you handcuffed me to the glass table out in the Florida room."

"Well, I don't have a gun any longer, or handcuffs either. I'm not a policeman now, you know."

"I know. Momma told us. That's why she sent us down here." Sue Ellen got down on her knees, opened her suitcase, and handed Hoke a letter in a sealed envelope. Hoke's name and address were on the envelope, but there was no return address. "She said to give you this letter."

Hoke had finished his cigarette, and he snubbed it out in a Melmac saucer in lieu of an ashtray. He opened the envelope and read the letter:

Dear Hoke,

I've had the girls for ten wonderful single years and now it's your turn. I'm going out to California with Curly Peterson, and we're going to get married before the end of the season. Curly likes the children all right, but it would be inconvenient to have them travel with us, and besides, the season won't be over till long after school starts again. So you take them for the next few years, and I'll be back to see them when I get a chance, probably next spring. Now that you're back working for your father and not on the force you can provide them with a nice home environment in Riviera Beach. The girls know I love them but they want me to have my chance at happiness, and I know you do too.

I'm pretty rushed right now, getting ready to

leave, but I'll send down their records for shots and stuff and the rest of their clothes before I get away tomorrow.

What ever else you were, you were always a responsible man, and I know the girls will be safe and happy with you.

Sincerely, Patsy

Hoke read the letter twice. "Let me have one of your Luckies."

Sue Ellen passed Hoke her package of Lucky Strikes and her disposable lighter. Hoke shook a cigarette out of the pack and lighted it.

"Who's Curly Peterson?"

"That's the man Mom's been living with--you know, the pinch hitter with the Dodgers. Sometimes he plays right or center field. She met him two years ago when the Dodgers came to Vero Beach for spring training. He just signed a new five-year contract for three hundred and twenty-five thousand a year."

"How much?"

"Three hundred and twenty-five thousand a year."

"That's what I thought you said. I think I remember the name now from somewhere. Didn't he once play for the Astros?"

"Uh huh, and before that the Cubs. He played right field on the Cubs for years, and then went to the Astros for a year before the Dodgers signed him as a free agent."

"What's his batting average?"

"Two-ninety."

"That's pretty good. Nowadays, anyway."

"It's awfully good for a pinch hitter."

"He took you to the games, did he?"

"We had passes to all the spring training games in Vero."

"Do you like baseball?"

"Not particularly, and I don't like Curly Peterson

at all. But Momma's going to marry him, not me."

"Why don't you like him?"

"Well, one time, he was having his agent and lawyer over to dinner, and he told Momma he wanted everything just so. Me and Aileen helped, cleaning the house and all, and Curly came over early to check everything out. The house looked really good. We vacuumed, dusted, and we even washed the inside of the windows with Windex and all, while Momma cooked dinner. Then Curly took out his Zippo lighter, got up on a chair, and flicked his lighter in a corner of the ceiling. When he did, the spider webs in the corner turned black and showed up. You couldn't even see 'em before, but the smoke from the lighter turned them black, you see. "'You call that clean?' he said. He didn't say nothing about how nice the rest of the house looked. He just showed us the cobwebs that way, and then went off to the kitchen."

"I used to have a first sergeant in the Army who did stuff like that."

"That wasn't the only awful thing he did. That's just a sample. But I didn't mind so much, because if you looked at it without taking it personally it was kinda funny. I guess I really didn't like Curly because he didn't like me or Aileen. We were in his way. He was in love with Momma, not us, but there we were, always in the house, hanging around. We we're just a big nuisance to Curly."

"You've thought it all out, haven't you?"

Sue Ellen frowned. "I've been trying to figure it out. Aileen is just confused. She can't understand why everyone in the world doesn't just love her to death."

"D'you know what's in this letter?"

"No, but I've got a pretty good idea."

"Here. Read it." Hoke passed the letter to Sue Ellen. She read it slowly, and nodded.

"What did she say to you girls when you left?"

"Not much. Just that we were to come down here

on the bus, and not to talk to anybody. That she'd send our other things down later. That it was time you took us for awhile. That she was going out to L.A. with Curly and that they were going to get married out there."

"D'you think Curly will marry her?"

"I don't think he wants to, no. He's only thirty-one, but Momma usually gets what she wants."

"She's still thirty-nine, your mother. I haven't seen her in ten years, but she was a good-looking woman then. I've lost a lot of hair and all my teeth in the last ten years."

"Momma's pretty, all right, and she doesn't look anywhere near forty. But usually it's the other way around, isn't it? The man is always older, and the woman is eight or ten years younger when they get married. Her hair is beautiful, and she had her teeth capped in front. She bought our tickets down here on the Greyhound, and gave us fifty dollars apiece. And here I am."

"And your sister went to Dad's house. Did she say why?"

"I told you already."

"I mean her exact words."

"I don't remember her exact words. She just said she knew that Grandpa loved her, and she didn't think you did, or you'd've had us for visits and things like that before."

"Your mother wouldn't let you girls visit me in Miami. I never fought her on it because I thought it was best that way. Maybe I was wrong to cave in so easily. I don't know you or your sister at all now. And you don't know me. You must feel like you've been sent to live with some stranger in a foster home or something."

"I'll be okay, Daddy." Sue Ellen shrugged. "I know I'll miss some of my friends, but I'm going to like living right on the beach. I won't like going to a new high school, not knowing anybody or anything, but I've got all summer to worry about that."

"You don't have to worry about that at all." Hoke shook his head. "You won't have to go to a new school."

"I can't commute all the way up there to Vero."

"I can't afford to send you to high school. You'll have to get a job and help me out financially. I only make a hundred dollars a week, and that won't be enough money for all three of us to live on. I'll have to send Aileen to school for two more years, because that's the law. But when she reaches sixteen she can drop out and get a work permit, too."

"Maybe I can go to school part time?"

"You mean you want to learn a trade? Like beauty operator or secretary?"

"No, I mean, like going to high school at night. I want to go to college when I finish high school. My grades are good, and I had sorta planned on going to Gainesville."

"Forget it. You're finished with high school as far as I'm concerned. When I get your stuff from Vero, and your birth certificate, I can get you a work permit. Then we'll see about finding you a job of some kind."

"Maybe Momma will send us an allowance every month? That way, we can both at least finish high school."

"I can see right now that I know your mother a lot better than you do. She had to give up her job in Vero if she went out to California with Curly, so now she'll have to ask him for every cent she gets. And he doesn't owe you girls a thing."

"What about Grandpa? Won't he give us enough money to live on while we finish school?"

"Your grandfather's married now to a woman the same age as your mother. You'll never get a dime from him. She'll see to that. She's already unhappy that I'm living here free in Dad's apartment. Not only does she lose four hundred and twenty-five bucks in the summer for the rent, but she'll lose close to eight hundred a month on this place during the

season. During the season, a one-bedroom place like this, right on the beach, would bring in eight hundred a month easily."

"My life's going to change a lot more than I thought."

"It won't be so bad, all things considered. You won't be working all the time, and the kids around here seem to have a good time all summer. You'll make some new friends. And Aileen, who won't be working, will cook and take care of the apartment for us. So everything'll balance out in the long run."

"Is it all right to use the bathroom?"

"Through the bedroom, on the left."

As Sue Ellen started toward the bedroom, there was a knock on the door. She turned as Hoke opened the front door. Aileen Moseley, followed closely by Helen Moseley, came into the room. Helen was carrying the girl's suitcase and a stuffed canvas laundry bag. Helen, the girls step-grandmother, was a handsome woman with bright blue eyes, tight blonde curls, and wide hips. She wore black velvet slacks, gold sandals, and a lavender tube top that exposed her tanned pudgy shoulders. She dropped the suitcase and laundry bag and put both of her hands on Aileen's shoulders, pushing her ahead slightly.

"Go ahead," Helen said brightly. "Kiss your father, Aileen. He won't bite you."

Aileen, a slight, brown-haired girl with dark sienna eyes, and with braces and rubber bands on her upper and lower front teeth, glanced shyly at Hoke, and then looked down at her feet. She was wearing tight jeans, a pale blue KISS T-shirt, and low-cut blue-and-white tennis shoes. She carried a brown leather drawstring purse in her left hand. She swung the purse to one side, and then let it bump against her leg.

"I was just leaving to come over and get you, Aileen," Hoke said, not unkindly. He bent over and kissed the top of her head. Her scalp smelled like

unwashed pennies.

"I would've called, if you had a phone," Helen said. "But with two teenaged girls in the house, you'll have to get one now, or they'll nag you to death. And when you get it, with two pretty girls like these, it'll ring all the time, driving you crazy." Helen laughed. Her shrill laugh was high-pitched, but Hoke realized she was merely apprehensive about his reaction. Hoke didn't like Helen, but he didn't dislike her either. If the old man wanted her and if she made him happy, it was none of Hoke's business.

"Is Dad with you? Hoke said. "In the car, I mean?"

"Are you kidding? It's Thursday night." She looked at her diamond-encrusted wristwatch. "'Hill Street Blues' will be on soon, and he's never missed an episode yet. He even watches the reruns."

"Someday I'll tell Dad what it's really like in the police department. Right now, I'm trying to forget what it was like. Would you like some coffee, Helen? I haven't got anything stronger, I'm afraid."

"No, I've got to hurry back. I brought Aileen right over because I knew you'd be worried about her. All right, Aileen, kiss Auntie Helen good night." She kissed the girl on the cheek. "I've got a hug for you, too, Sue Ellen."

Sue Ellen came over and kissed Helen on the cheek, and received her hug. "It's nice to see you again, too, dear," Helen said. She patted Sue Ellen lightly on her arm.

Helen backed to the door, and felt for the doorknob.

"You're all to come to dinner Sunday night, Hoke. Sixish, so we can talk some before dinner. Good night."

Hoke nodded, and Helen left the apartment.

"I've really got to go to the bathroom," Sue Ellen said.

"Go ahead, and take Aileen with you."

The two girls left the room. After they closed the bathroom door, Hoke took their suitcases into the bedroom, turned on the reading lamp, and picked up his light canvas cot. He took the cot out to the porch and placed it beneath the open windows. He tucked in the bottom sheet around the foam rubber pad that served as a mattress, and spread the top sheet over the bed. He turned the pillow over.

"Okay," he said, when the girls returned to the living room. "We're all going to take a little ride. We'll drive over to the hardware store and get you girls a couple of sleeping bags. You can decide what color you want on the way over. The choice is a little limited, however. We carry blue, brown, and some smaller sizes with a Pepsi-can imprinted on it. I like the Pepsi-can design myself, but remember, if you take a patterned sleeping bag like that you might eventually get tired of it, and then it'll be tough shit."

The girls giggled, and got their handbags.

Later that night, well after midnight, Hoke was still awake. The girls had finally fallen asleep in the bedroom; or, at least, their whispering had stopped.

Even with the girls living with him, he would still be able to keep his life simple if he worked out a plan of some kind and stuck to it. But his mind couldn't focus on any plan. He kept thinking about Curly Peterson and that annual contract of $325,000 a year--for five full years. $325,000 in a single year; the thought made him a little sick. That was more, much more, than he had made during his twelve full years as a Miami cop. And with that kind of money, surely Peterson, if he wanted Patsy so damned bad, could have made other arrangements for the two girls. Peterson could have boarded them out, sent them to a private live-in school, placed them in a convent, or made any number of other arrangements.

But now, just when everything in his life had been going so well, here, well, here they were...

CHAPTER FOUR

Hoke awoke at six on Friday morning, his usual time. On his way to the bathroom, he shook the girls awake. After he shaved, he turned the bathroom over to them and made a pot of espresso. There were eggs, but there wasn't any bread, and he knew the girls would be hungry if all they had had for dinner was a shared pizza.

When the girls came into the living room, Sue Ellen in jeans and a clean white T-shirt, Aileen wearing red canvas hiking shorts and the same KISS T-shirt she had worn the night before. Hoke told them that they were going out for breakfast. They had to have a family conference.

They all got into the front seat of the truck, and Hoke drove to the Galley Restaurant on the southern tip of the island. They found an outside table on the narrow veranda overlooking the marina and Peanut Island. The huge white fishing boats wobbled in their slips. Crew members were out already, and hosing off the salty dew that had collected during the night.

The girls ordered Eggs Benedict on homemade biscuits, and Hoke asked for his usual breakfast of one poached egg and a slice of dry toast. Before their food arrived, Hoke took out his notebook and ticked off his orders for the day. Aileen was to take the grocery list he had made out to the Singer Island Grand Union, which was only two blocks away from the apartment, and do the shopping. He gave her

thirty dollars and the list. She could take the shopping cart home, but then she would have to wheel it back to the store after she brought the groceries inside the apartment. She was to prepare dinner that night. Hoke suggested a large beef stew because it was simple to make. All she had to do was to buy two pounds of chuck, cut it into one-inch cubes, brown it in the large stewpot, dredged with flour, and then cover the meat with two quarts of water. While the meat was simmering--an hour or two would be about right--she could chop up carrots, onions, potatoes, turnips, celery, and maybe one or two tomatoes, and add these vegetables to the pot when the meat was fairly tender. No salt would be needed, but she could drop in a bay leaf and a handful of peppercorns for seasoning. The condiments were on the shelf above the kitchen sink. If she gauged everything just right, dinner would be ready when he got home from work at five-thirty. After their swim, they would eat dinner. During the day, she should also clean the bathroom, and sweep and dust the apartment. She had all day to do these tasks, which would still give her plenty of time to walk around the shopping center and become acquainted with her new neighborhood.

Sue Ellen, on the other hand, was to start at the beer garden on the southern end of the shopping center, and ask for work at each establishment on the island complex. If she got a job in the center, it would be best, because then she could come home for lunch each day from her job.

"Maybe, " Sue Ellen interrupted him, "Grandpa will give me a job in the hardware store. That way, I could ride back and forth with you every day."

Hoke shook his head. "He doesn't have a job to give you. Dad works in the store himself, and we also have Mrs. Wadsworth and Joe Rodriquez. Sometimes, in the middle of the afternoon, when nobody comes in, it's like Siberia. If I wasn't family, Dad would have to let me go. As it is, I do more than

my share, and Rodriquez has shaped up, too, afraid he'll be fired. No, your best bet, Sue Ellen, is, to get on as a bus-boy at a restaurant, or maybe at the skating concession. Do you roller skate?"

"Some. I'm not an expert, though."

"Well, you have to pad out your experience with creative explanations at each place you ask for work. It won't hurt to tell them where you live, either. That way, they'll know you won't be late for work if they hire you, and you're already a member of the permanent Singer Island community. When you talk to the guy who runs the arcade, tell him you're my daughter. He remembered me from the stories in the Miami Herald when I was in Homicide. I don't know what kind of manners your mother taught you, but be sure to say 'Yes, sir,' and 'Yes, Ma-am' to every one you talk to. It gives adults a good impression of young people when they're polite. Okay?"

"Yes, Sir, " Sue Ellen said, smiling.

"That's it. Now if you take your time, and compose your sales pitch a little differently at each place you ask for work, it should take you most of the day. If you don't get a job today in the shopping center, we'll think of something else tomorrow. But for today, confine your efforts to the shopping center.

"I've only got one key to the apartment, so I'll have to take it with me to the store. I'll make two more keys today with our key machine. So one of you will have to stay home at all times to let the other one in. While Aileen does the shopping, you'll have to stay home, Sue Ellen, and when she gets back you can resume your rounds again. I don't want you both out of the house at the same time, leaving the door unlocked."

"There isn't a heck of a lot to steal," Sue Ellen said. "It's more like an unfurnished apartment."

"Maybe so, but if someone stole your sleeping bags, which I haven't paid for yet, you'd be sleeping

on a hard terrazo floor. And keep the door locked while you're inside. Don't let anyone in. I don't want you girls raped or killed. Singer Island isn't Miami, but sometimes killers and rapists drive up here to the island. If you don't believe me, take a look some time at all the Dade County licenses in the parking lot."

"What about swimming? Can't we go swimming?"

"Not till I get home. When I get home, we'll all three go swimming, according to schedule. Don't worry about swimming, because we go swimming every afternoon at five-thirty, or shortly after I get home from work. Now--any questions?"

"With Sue Ellen out all day, I'll be alone, " Aileen said. "And there's no TV, not even a radio."

"Don't you have a Walkman like your sister?"

"I'm supposed to get one on my birthday."

"Maybe Sue Ellen will let you use hers? She can't wear earphones and carry it around while she's looking for a job. Only blacks do that. Another thing, Sue Ellen, put on a little make-up and some lipstick and tell them you're seventeen. With your tits, you can pass easily for seventeen."

Sue Ellen turned to Aileen. "I guess you can use my Walkman, Sis, but you won't be alone all day. And you can go out and look around during lunchtime. Lunchtime isn't a good time to ask for a job."

"Good," Hoke said. "That's settled. Now finish up. I've got to go to work. I open the store at eight, and if I'm not there on time, Mrs. Wadsworth and Joe are out there standing on the sidewalk."

At ten a.m. Hoke was measuring lengths of plastic garden hose, unrolling the hose from the rack a yard at a time as he made check marks on a yellow pad, when his father interrupted him.

"Let's go out for coffee, Hoke."

Hoke nodded and wrapped the tape measure around the hose to mark his place. He knew that his

father wanted to talk privately to him, because they rarely went out for coffee at the same time. Hoke preferred the Cuban espresso in his thermos and usually volunteered to watch the register when any of the others went out for a coffee break. Mrs. Wadsworth had a coffee-maker in her work area, but she still went out for a break every morning and afternoon.

"Don't touch that hose, Joe," Hoke admonished Rodriguez as they left.

They walked down a block to Eighteenth Street, and then a block off Broadway to the All-Star Cafe. Frank ordered a heated bearclaw with butter to go with his coffee and Hoke asked for a small glass of tomato juice.

"I talked to Helen last night," the old man said, "and we want to help you, Hoke. It isn't going to be easy, now that you've got the girls with you, and we were wondering what you were going to do, and how we could help."

"I don't need any help, Dad. This isn't just a short visit, you know. Patsy's going out to L.A. with this ball player, and apparently they're going to get married."

"I know. I talked to Patsy last night on the phone. She's flying out to L.A. tonight. If she'd said something to me before she sent the girls down here, I'd've asked her not to do it. But her mind's made up and now you've got 'em. I wouldn't mind taking the girls myself. We've got all kinds of room in our new house, but it wouldn't be fair to Helen."

The old man cut his bearclaw into bite-sized squares.

"Besides, son, I didn't tell you this before, because Helen hadn't quite talked me into it yet, but we're going on a world cruise. We'll be gone for ninety-one days altogether. The ship leaves next week from Port Everglades, in Lauderdale. The Queen Elizabeth Two and our reservations have been made and confirmed. Eighteen thousand

dollars for an inside stateroom, not counting tips, or shore excursions."

Hoke smiled. "You know how to keep a secret, don't you? I'm real happy for you, Dad. I can't remember the last time you had a vacation."

"I can. We flew over to Freeport for three days last year on our honeymoon. They had a nice floor show at the casino, but I don't gamble, so after we saw the show there wasn't anything to do in Freeport I couldn't do twice as cheap right here in Riviera Beach."

"A cruise is a lot different, Dad. They've got a lot of activities going on all the time, and you'll like the sightseeing, too."

"I want to see Hong Kong," but the other places don't interest me much. I'm just going because of Helen. Anyway, whether I want to go or not, I'm going. I couldn't go before. That is, I had a good excuse because of the store. But now, you can run the store, and that was my plan--I just hadn't got around to telling you yet."

"No problem. I can handle the store. And if I do run into a problem, I can call you on the phone."

"On the boat?"

"Sure. They've got a satellite phone. I can call you anywhere in the world. There's a few seconds delay on both sides, when they bounce your voice off the satellite, and you have to wait a few seconds before answering each other, but that's all. Especially when I call you in Hong Kong."

"I'll be damned! I never knew you could phone from the ship. I knew you could cable, but I didn't know you make phone calls."

"You'll probably have a phone in your stateroom."

"Okay, that's good. Don't call me, Hoke. I'll call you. Every day. Before we leave, I'll arrange a time, and then I can call you at the same time, Riviera Beach time, every day. I feel a lot better about the trip already."

"I don't foresee any problems at the store, Dad.

You won't have to call me every day."

"Maybe not every day. But at least once a week. I'll call you every week, on Sunday."

"I don't have a phone in my apartment, Dad."

"That's the other thing, Hoke. Helen thinks you and the girls should move into our house while we're gone. It's a lot better than locking it up and putting up storm shutters. Somebody might break in, and there's always the chance of mildew. So if you and the girls are there while we're gone the house'll be safe. Besides, you can rent out the beach apartment for three months, and you can keep the rent money. The apartment rent's a part of your salary anyway, and you'll need some extra cash now that you've got the girls."

"I can't do it, Dad. Once those girls got into that big house of yours, with the swimming pool and all, how d'you think they'd like it when they had to move back to the beach after ninety days? It's better for them to get used to the way things are going to be right now. I already sent Sue Ellen out today to look for a job and Aileen's going to stay home and keep house for us."

"I could give Sue Ellen a job in the store."

"Doing what?"

"I don't know. Want some of this bearclaw? It's got lots of butter, the way I like it."

"No, thanks. I'm sorry I can't stay in your house, but I've imposed on you enough already. At least now, with you gone, I can feel like I'm pulling my weight in the store--at least while you're away."

"That isn't true, son. The store's never looked any better since you've been there. But I'm still worried about my granddaughters. How're you fixed for money?"

"I've got plenty. I've got more than four hundred dollars in the bank."

"Living alone, that might seem like a lot to you, Hoke, but with two girls, that isn't very much. I could lend you a couple of thousand, at no interest,

if you like?"

"I don't need it, Dad."

"Well, if you do, just ask for it. I'm glad we had this little talk. Did Helen tell you about dinner on Sunday?"

"We'll be there."

"Then let's go back to work. The store'll be all yours tomorrow. I won't be in. Helen and me are driving down to Bal Harbour. She wants me to get some cruise clothes, she says." The old man winked and wet his thumb. "She says I need me a tuxedo. To dress for dinner on the boat." He grinned and tugged at the ends of his black leather bow-tie.

"Not on the first night, Dad. The first night aboard ship is casual, but you dress up after that. You'll enjoy the trip, you really will."

"Hong Kong, maybe, but not the rest of it. But if Helen wants to go, what the hell?"

At noon, someone at the Greyhound bus station in West Palm Beach called and said that there were some packages there for a Hoke Moseley to pick up. Hoke drove to the West Palm Beach station and picked up a small steamer trunk and several cardboard cartons. He drove back to the hardware store and received a phone call a few minutes later. It was Captain Bobby Stukes, the pilot who rented the apartment next to Hoke's.

"I just got back from Aruba this morning," Stukes said, "and I noticed these two young girls in your apartment. I checked them out and they said they're your daughters. I believed them all right, the way they were making themselves at home. When a girl is sweeping the steps, she isn't likely to be a burglar. But I still thought I'd better call and check it out with you."

"Thanks. Bobby. But they're my daughters, all right. They're going to be living with me from now on."

"Better you than me, Hoke, but congratulations anyway. I didn't know you had any daughters."

"I'd almost forgotten myself. How long're you going to be in town this time?"

"Four days. Drop by for a drink. Bring the girls over."

"Why don't you come over for coffee and meet the girls? I'm still on the wagon, as I told you."

"Still? Okay, I'll come by. Not tonight, though, but maybe tomorrow some time. And if you need anything, let me know."

"I could use a card table and some folding chairs. When you leave town, I mean, Bobby. I don't mean now, when you'll probably need the table yourself."

"No sweat. I've got a convertible poker table you can have. You can turn it over and use the flat side to eat on."

"That'll be fine, Bobby. I'll come by and pick it up."

"You need any blankets? Pillows?"

"No, but the three of us can't sit at the counter with only two stools. It would be too short to eat at, even if I had another stool. Next week, when I get a chance, I'll buy a table, and then get your poker table back to you."

"Keep it as long as you like. One other thing, Hoke. You'd better lay in a big supply of toilet paper. You'll find, with two girls in the house, that it disappears as fast as you can buy it. I was raised with three sisters, and I know what I'm talking about when it comes to toilet paper."

"Thanks for the tip, Bobby. I'm glad you're back for a few days, and I'll see you this evening."

Bobby wasn't a friend friend of Hoke's, but the two men were friendly. What Hoke liked best about Bobby was that he was almost never home--but he thought it was damned neighborly for Bobby to call him and to let him use the poker table. He knew the kind of table Bobby had. The legs folded so it could be put away. But he suspected that once it was up, it would never be folded and put away again. Things, with girls around, would start piling up on

the table, as they did on every flat surface when women were around. He was going to have to lay down some stringent ground rules, what with three of them living in the apartment. Otherwise, the place would be a mess in no time, and items he could now put his finger on in a second would get lost in the confusion. Stukes was right about the toilet paper, too. He'd better pick up a half-dozen rolls on his way home.

Hoke got home at five-forty, just in time to save the stew from burning. Aileen had fallen asleep on her sleeping bag in the bedroom with the Walkman earphones on and almost all of the water had boiled out of the pot. She had also forgotten to put the lid on, which hastened evaporation. The vegetables were mushy because she had been cooking the stew since ten-thirty that morning. Hoke added two quarts of water and clicked the electric burner to LO-LO heat. He hadn't told Aileen to stir the vegetables once in awhile, or to add water when the pot got low.

Hoke woke Aileen and told her to turn off the Walkman and to help him carry the trunk and the boxes upstairs. The trunk was heavy, and they had to make three trips to the parking lot to get everything into the bedroom.

"Your can unpack your stuff later," Hoke told Aileen. "Just find your bathing suit now and we'll go for a swim when Sue Ellen gets back."

Hoke went into the bathroom, changed into his trunks and washed out his jumpsuit. He hung the damp jumpsuit on the porch. He also moved his footlocker to the porch and took his other jumpsuit, sweater, and trenchcoat out of the closet. "You girls will have to share the closet. I'll keep my stuff out on the porch."

Sue Ellen came in looking tired, and shook her head when Hoke greeted her. "No luck, Daddy. I'm much too late to be looking for a job. The only jobs

around here are part-time anyway, and the Beach teenagers had them all locked up even before school let out. The people all seem to know you. Not everyone knows your name, but they all seem to know the man in the yellow jumpsuit."

"Don't be discouraged on the first day, Sue Ellen. Get into your suit, and we'll all go for a swim and cool off."

Hoke was astonished by the skimpiness of Sue Ellen's string bikini. It was more like a shoestring around her hips holding a vulva valance than it was a bottom, and he could see the pink nipples of her hard little breasts through the loosely knitted top. Bikinis like Sue Ellen's were common enough on the Riviera Municipal Beach, but he hadn't realized how mature his oldest daughter had become until he saw her in her bikini. Aileen, on the other hand, with her thin stick figure, and wearing a black tank suit, looked like a skinny boy badly in need of a haircut.

The girls played in the surf while Hoke did his thirty "laps" beyond the breakers. They didn't want to jog with him, so they sunned themselves while he took his half-mile jog down the beach. While he sat on his driftwood log to rest at his usual place, he was overwhelmed by all of the things he had to do. He had to get the poker table and chairs, first of all, but the routine he had mapped out for himself, the simplification, would soon go by the board. When the old man left on his 'round-the-world cruise, he would be in sole charge of the store. He could already foresee the arguments ahead with Mrs. Wadsworth, and her stock answer to everything: "That's the way we always do it." He wouldn't be able to take any time off to see to the girls' needs and he realized now that he had greatly overestimated the girls' maturity, and perhaps, abilities.

When he was sixteen, he had worked summers on bait boats, going out after ballyhoo, and he had always helped out in the store on Saturday

mornings. The old man hadn't believed in allowances, and Hoke had always had to earn his own spending money. But it had been different for a boy. What could the girls do? Patsy, apparently, hadn't even taught them how to cook. There was no way that the three of them could live on a hundred dollars a week. If they lived austerely, yes, they could manage; but the girls would need sanitary napkins, he supposed, and he had already forgotten to get any extra toilet paper on his way home. He had charged the two sleeping bags, seventy bucks apiece, not counting tax, to his account at the store, and he would have to pay them off a little at a time. The four hundred odd bucks he had in the bank, once he started to tap into it, would disappear in no time. There was no medical insurance plan at Moseley's Hardware and Chandlery. Frank Moseley didn't believe in socialism, so there was no company retirement plan either. The old man was generous with bonuses at Christmas, but this was only July.

Instead of jogging back to where the girls were, Hoke walked back. He was too weary to run, and he had a headache. Preoccupied with his thoughts, he stepped into a pile of dog shit. Dogs weren't allowed on the beach, but the condo owners ignored the rules, believing erroneously that the short stretches of beach in front of each condo were their own private property. As Hoke scraped the shit off with a sliver of clam shell, pain clamped hard on his head like a tightening steel band and he could feel sharp darting pains behind his eyes. This was a tension headache and a familiar enemy; an enemy he had almost conquered with his new and simple life. Christ, it was like being back in Homicide, the kind of headache he used to get every time he kneeled down and went through a freshly dead victim's pockets in Miami.

Hoke told the girls to take their showers first and while they were in the shower he went over to Bobby Stukes's apartment and got the folding poker table.

Bobby brought the three folding chairs and helped Hoke unfold the table in the living room, showing him how to turn the tabletop over to the flat, plywood side. The locking devices on the tabletop were a little tricky, and if the top wasn't secured exactly right it would slide.

"Listen, Hoke," Bobby said. "I've got all kinds of shit you can use. Tablecloths, napkins, dishes, you name it. I've been in the apartment for two years now and I accumulated a lot of shit I don't need."

"I'm okay, Bobby. I appreciate the table--and the chairs. As you can see, we couldn't all sit at the counter, even if I had another stool."

Stukes was a short man, barely five-seven, but he had wide shoulders and a powerful chest. He was in his early forties, but looked much younger because of his boyish smile and close-cropped auburn hair. Although he lived with his wife in New York, which was considered his permanent base with Eastern, he used the beach apartment as his "official" residence so he wouldn't have to pay New York state income taxes. He stayed married, he told Hoke, as a matter of convenience. His wife was an executive with a New York publishing house, and they remained married as a protection policy. So long as they were married, there was no chance of a serious involvement with anyone else. Stukes liked Florida as much as his wife disliked it, and he spent as much time on Singer Island as he could between flying trips. He had an active social life on the Gold Coast, and was a popular man at parties in Palm Beach and Hobe Sound. During his absences from from Singer Island, he kept his Porsche in the Eastern employees garage at the West Palm Beach Airport, and Hoke was supposed to keep an eye on his apartment.

"I got to run now, Hoke. But I'll drop by tomorrow for coffee and fill you in on what I've been doing lately."

"Any time, Bobby. And thanks again for the

table."

Hoke rapped on the closed bedroom door.

The girls emerged, all dressed again, and Hoke told them to set the table for dinner while he took his shower. The girls had left their towels on the tile floor, and the bathroom was so steamy he couldn't see his face in the mirror. The hot water ran out halfway through Hoke's shower, and he felt lucky they had left him one dry towel. He wrapped the towel around his waist and went out on the porch to put on his dry jumpsuit.

There were no paper napkins, but Aileen had improvised with paper towels. Aileen returned seven dollars that were left over from the shopping trip. The dinner was unsuccessful. The vegetables were a mushy mixture after boiling all day and although the meat was tender, it had lost most of its flavor. The stew was watery because Hoke had added the extra water. They ate the stew with white Wonder bread spread with margarine and Sue Ellen complained every time she bit down on a peppercorn. Aileen had taken Hoke at his word and had put in a full handful of peppercorns.

"What did you girls have for lunch?" Hoke said.

"Peanut butter sandwiches and Cokes," Aileen said.

No one ate a second helping of beef stew, and there was no dessert. "What I usually do for dessert," Hoke said, "is eat an apple. But if you girls are used to eating your desserts right after dinner, you can have your apples now."

Neither girl wanted to eat one of the green Granny Smith apples.

"Okay," Hoke said, "go and get the money your mother gave you when you came down. It was fifty apiece, isn't that right, Sue Ellen?"

"We spent some of it."

"I figured that. Just bring me what's left."

Sue Ellen had $45 left, but Aileen only had $35 and two twenty-five cent tokens from the arcade.

"Are you sure this is all you've got left out of fifty bucks?" Hoke said to Aileen.

She nodded. "I spent some playing games in the arcade. I've still got the two tokens though."

"Why didn't you change them back into quarters?"

"I tried. He'll change a dollar for four tokens, but he won't change tokens back on account of Tuesday nights. On Tuesday, which is a slow night, he gives out six tokens for a dollar, you see. So he can't change tokens back. If he did, everybody would come in on Tuesday night, get six tokens, and then change them all the next day and make fifty cents on the dollar."

"You're pretty good at arithmetic. "

"Not really. I'm just telling you what the manager told me, that's all. But those tokens'll fit almost any quarter machine, in case Sue Ellen needs them for cigarettes. I think the way she smokes all the time is disgusting."

"I don't want you to criticize your sister, Aileen. Or me. Because I'm confiscating this money. I'll give you each a dollar a week, as long as I can manage it each week, but any other money you girls make you'll have to turn over to me. Did they ever tell you about the Spartans in school?"

"I remember about the boy who had the fox inside his shirt," Sue Ellen said. "He was trained not to cry out, and while he was talking to his father or somebody, the fox was eating his stomach and he didn't say nothing."

"I was told the same story," Hoke said, "when I went to school. And that's what we're living here, the Spartan life. You girls are no longer living a lush life with your mother, who could dip into the pockets of a man making three hundred and twenty-five thousand bucks a year. I'm making four hundred a month, so we're down to what you might call a survival income. That much will pay for our food, if we eat plenty of vegetables and rice and beans, but

that's about all. You can forget about games in the arcade, both of you, or buck-eighty-five ice cream cones. The name of the game we're playing is called 'Austerity.' Luckily, your mother shipped your clothes down today. Save the cardboard boxes. You'll need the trunk and the boxes to store your stuff.

"But just remember, there'll be no money for movies, eating out, or anything else. Spend your dollar a week allowance as wisely as you can. When it's gone, you'll have to wait another week for the next one."

"Can we have our dollar now?" Aileen asked.

"No. You've already wasted a lot of money in the arcade. I get paid every two weeks, but I'll give you your allowance next Friday."

"You can't buy much of anything with only a dollar," Sue Ellen said.

"I'm not forcing you to take the dollar," Hoke said.

"I didn't mean I didn't want it."

"Fine. So long as we understand what's going on. I don't want to hear any bitching, either. When you start to bitch, just remember that fox eating your stomach. You aren't pretending to be Spartan girls, you are Spartan girls. Of course, Sue Ellen, after you get a job, the money problem will improve a little bit. The same with you, Aileen. After we get to know a few people, you might be able to get some baby-sitting jobs. I'll get some cards made up, and then you can leave cards offering your baby-sitting service at the condos and at all the houses down toward Peanut Island. What do baby-sitters get nowadays? I can remember paying fifty cents an hour when you girls were little, down in Miami."

"It's three to three-fifty an hour now, Daddy," Sue Ellen said. "At least in Vero."

"That much? That sounds a little high. What do you think, Aileen?"

"I don't know nothing about babies. What am I

supposed to do if something happens?"

"The parents always leave instructions and a number to call. You don't have to worry about that. You put the kids to bed as soon as the parents leave, clean out the ice-box, and watch their television set. That's what they always did to me."

"I think," Aileen said, starting to cry, "I'd rather go back and live with Momma."

"You can stop crying now, and wash the dishes. Your mother sent you to me. If you're real lucky, maybe she'll send you a Christmas card with a check in it. Wipe your eyes, now, and start clearing the table."

"Be nice to her, Daddy," Sue Ellen said.

"I am being nice. Reality is always a pain in the ass, but she'll have to get used to it. By the way, I had your keys made today."

Hoke gave them keys to the apartment. He had strung the keys on bathtub chains, so the girls, if they wanted to, could wear them around their necks.

"Cheer up," Hoke told them. "After you've cleaned up the kitchen, I'll teach you girls how to play chess."

While Aileen started on the dishes, Hoke got the two brown paper sacks full of garbage and took Sue Ellen with him to show her where the Dempsey Dumpster was behind the pizzeria.

"This'll be your job from now on," he told her, "to get rid of the garbage every time the paper sack gets full."

"All right." She tugged at his sleeve. "Let's talk a minute, Daddy, before we go back. I think I'm tough enough to go along with everything you were telling us, but Aileen isn't. Please go easy on her. She's always been the favorite around the house, and this sudden move and all has been a shock to her. She doesn't have a good image of herself anyway, and I know what she's going through because I had to wear braces for over a year myself. Also, you use a

lot of big words she doesn't understand."

"What words? I talk fairly plain, in my opinion."

"Austerity." Sue Ellen smiled. "I'll bet she doesn't know that word."

"She will, soon enough, especially if we start calling our apartment 'Austerity City.'"

"What I mean is, Daddy, go easy on her. That's all."

"Okay. Maybe I laid it out too fast for both of you, but you need to know the truth of our situation."

After the dishes were done, Hoke set up the chessboard on the table, explained how the different pieces moved, and gave the girls some ideas about the rules and the purposes of the game.

"The main idea is to think two or three moves ahead of your opponent--if you can. I can't, so I've never been a very good player. But I like to play, and maybe you will, too."

Hoke played Sue Ellen, who had white, and on her fourth move she beat him with a Fool's Check. For a long moment, Hoke couldn't believe it. He stared at the board, and the expression on his face was so bewildered that both of the girls began to laugh.

"How in the hell did you know about that?" he said.

"I don't know." Sue Ellen shrugged. "I just saw the move and took it. I guess you didn't notice."

"I knew about the Fool's Check. It's one of the first things you learn, but I wasn't expecting it. My mind simply isn't working tonight. You girls go ahead and play each other. I'm going out for a walk."

Hoke left the apartment, and walked to the Blue Heron bridge to stare at the water for a few minutes. On his way back he stopped at the 7-Eleven and bought a pint of strawberry ice cream to take back to the girls. They were damned nice kids, both of them, but he knew damned well it wasn't going to work, and he didn't know what to do about it.

CHAPTER FIVE

Hoke woke Aileen, but not Sue Ellen, the next morning, and showed her how to poach eggs by putting a little vinegar in the water and how to set the toaster so she wouldn't burn the bread. He made the espresso and told her that he would always make the coffee himself. If the pot wasn't handled right, it was easy to get burned fingers.

"What should I fix for dinner tonight, Daddy?" she asked as she set the poker table.

"We'll eat the rest of the stew tonight. There's a lot left over. Tomorrow, we're all going over to Grandpa's for dinner. By the way, what do you call Helen? You don't call her 'Grandma,' do you?"

"She told us to call her 'Auntie Helen,' so that's what I call her. Sue Ellen just calls her 'Helen.'"

"I didn't think she'd go for 'Grandma.' Get your sister up now, and tell her to come to breakfast."

Before he left for the hardware store, Hoke told the girls to unpack all of their stuff, see what they had, and sort out dirty things for the laundry. That afternoon, they would go to the laundromat with him when he came back at noon.

"I'll fix you a nice lunch, Daddy," Aileen said.

"I usually eat a hard-boiled egg for lunch, but if you want to boil one for me, go ahead. I'll eat it with you girls when you have your peanut butter sandwiches."

"I thought I might make tuna fish sandwiches today."

"Whatever."

Both girls kissed Hoke on the cheek, running over to catch him before he got out of the door. They

had probably kissed Curly Peterson, too, he thought, the man with the steel wrists, when he left each morning for batting practice. But maybe not. The girls seemed to like him all right, even though he had nothing to offer them, including love or affection. He didn't have any emotional or fatherly attachment for the girls; he knew that much, and if they were suddenly to disappear, as they had appeared, he sure as hell wouldn't miss them. From now on, he had better remember to take his shower first after his swim to make sure he had enough hot water. He was dismayed by all the little things he was supposed to remember.

Before he got to the hardware store, he pulled into a Publix and bought six rolls of Great Northern toilet paper. The Express Lane was closed, and Hoke had to wait in line behind an obese black woman in a purple mumu, who had food stamps, a personal check to cash, newspaper coupons to redeem, and seventy some odd dollars worth of groceries. As a consequence, he was ten minutes late in opening the store. On a Saturday it didn't make any real difference, because he had the store all to himself and there were no customers waiting, but it bothered him that he hadn't opened the store precisely on time.

Hoke enjoyed working in the store by himself on Saturday mornings because the time passed swiftly and he didn't have to think. For one man, it was a busy morning: a good many husbands, home for the weekend, came in to pick up small items for do-it-yourself home projects, buying everything from a dozen eyelet screws to a can of spray paint to change the color of a chair. Sometimes they asked Hoke questions about how to do certain jobs, but he could rarely help them out because he had never been particularly handy with tools around the house. In difficult cases, Hoke gave them Joe Rodriquez's home phone number and told the inquirers that Rodriquez was always available for

home repair advice.

Hoke knew a good deal about fishing, however, but very few fishermen ever solicited advice on fishing, even though they often sorely needed it. But Hoke had learned, while he was still in high school, never to volunteer any advice to a fisherman.

An old lady with blue hair, who couldn't decide whether to buy a red wheelbarrow for her garden, caused Hoke to close the store at twelve-fifteen instead of at noon. And then, because she couldn't get the wheelbarrow into her tiny Honda Civic, he put it into his truck and followed her home with it. She gave him a fifty-cent tip for taking the wheelbarrow to her house in North Palm Beach, and Hoke accepted the two quarters and put them in his pocket. Odinarily, Hoke would have refused a tip for a small favor, but now that he had the two girls, he figured he would need every cent he could muster. Besides, he had used more than a dollar's worth of gas in driving to her house, and then back to Singer Island.

By the time Hoke found parking in the municipal lot and got upstairs it was almost one-fifteen. Nevertheless, the girls had waited for him and they ate lunch together at the poker table beneath the Hunter fan in the living room. Aileen had cut Hoke's hard-boiled egg into eight slices, and placed the crumbly pieces in a flower-like circle on a lettuce leaf. She had sprinkled the egg with a little paprika as well.

The girls ate tuna salad sandwiches on white Wonder bread, and Aileen had made a pitcher of iced tea. The girls had spent most of their morning unpacking and then repacking and rearranging their clothes in cardboard boxes. Both were unhappy with the things their mother had sent them. The trunk, for example, had been filled with a lot of old toys, teddy-bears, and children's books and records that they had long outgrown, and both claimed that favorite T-shirts and dresses were missing. A lot of

their clothes had been shipped down dirty because their mother had hurriedly grabbed clothes out of the closets without checking them first.

"It's partly our fault," Sue Ellen admitted, "because sometimes, if you're in a hurry and all, you'll hang up a dirty blouse, figuring you can get another wear out of it later on. But you never do, because when you take it down later and sniff it, you realize you can't wear it again, and throw it in the hamper. But if it had been me, I would've washed everything before packing it into the boxes. Some of that stuff in the pile for the washeteria's probably clean, but it got dirty because it was packed with something else and got all scrunched up."

"That's all right," Hoke said. "Your mother was in a rush to leave. We'll just wash everything you think is dirty and get a fresh start. You have to watch out for mildew, living this close to the ocean. The main thing is, do you have enough clothes to get you through the summer?"

"Jeans and T-shirts, yes," Sue Ellen said. "But if I get a job in an office where I have to wear pantyhose, no. Except for one dress, a dress I hate, I don't have anything nice enough to wear in an office."

"Do you type? Take shorthand?"

"I type a little, about twenty words a minute, but I never took any shorthand."

"Well, don't worry about office clothes. You need secretarial training for that. And if you get work in a restaurant, they furnish you with a uniform. How about you, Aileen?"

"I've got plenty of shorts and jeans, Daddy, but my teeth hurt. I'm supposed to go to the orthodontist every Thursday, but I didn't go this week. They're too tight, and they hurt a lot."

"When we get back from the laundromat, I'll take those braces off for you. Then they won't hurt any more. You'll look a lot better, too, without all that

wire and rubber crap in your mouth."

"Do you know how to do that, Daddy? It took Doctor Liss more than two hours to put it all in."

"No problem. I'll just snip it all out. Then your teeth'll feel fine. Unless a girl is going to be an actress, or maybe a model, straight teeth aren't all that important. You're both nice-looking girls but you aren't exactly movie star types. What you girls inherited from me is bad teeth and beautiful eyes. When you fill out, as you will soon enough, you'll probably have your mother's shape. And with her figure, you won't have to worry about your teeth. You'll catch a husband when you want one."

"I'm never going to get married," Sue Ellen said. "Never."

"Me either," Aileen said. "I'm always going to stay with you, Daddy."

"Wonderful. Now that that's all settled, let's go to the laundromat."

They returned from the laundromat at three-thirty. While the girls took the clean, folded clothes and towels upstairs, Hoke climbed the steps next door, knocked, and awakened Bobby Stukes.

"I'm glad you woke me up," Stukes said, when he finally came to the door. He scratched his head and blinked in the strong sunlight. "I didn't get home till five this morning and I'm supposed to go to a cocktail party in Palm Beach at six. I wanted to get in a swim first, and maybe a little sun. I'm supposed to have coffee with you now, right?"

"Actually, Bobby, I could use your help with a small problem. You know a lot about mechanics, don't you?"

"Something wrong with your truck?"

"No, the truck's fine. But I promised to remove my daughter's braces, and I'm not too sure about how to go about it."

"What kind of braces?"

"Teeth. Gold wire and shit. Rubber bands. The

orthodontist put 'em on too tight, and I'm going to take 'em off. They hurt her teeth, and really bother her."

"I'll do it for you, Hoke, if you want me to. I've got some fine German-made toenail clippers, and they'll do the job if anything will."

"I don't mind doing the clipping myself, but if you'd do it, it would be a lot easier for Aileen. If you told her, for example, that you used to be a dentist before you became a pilot, she'd have more confidence. I can hold her head still, and she won't think anything about it."

"No problem. Give her a couple of aspirins now, and I'll be over as soon as I take a quick shower and wake up a little."

"I don't have any aspirins."

"Just a sec." Stukes went into his bathroom, and returned with two Tylenol-3's and a Valium. "Give her the two T-three's now, and half the Valium. Then, when I finish, we'll give her the other half-Valium."

"Okay, and I'll make you some espresso. What about breakfast? Are you hungry--I imagine you are?"

"Just scramble me a couple of eggs. And one piece of toast'll be plenty. There'll be a lot to eat at the party, but I could probably use something on my stomach. I know your coffee."

"It'll wake you up."

"I need that. If I told you what I did last night, you wouldn't believe it. Jesus."

"I also need a few old wire coat hangers, if you have any extras. If you don't, don't worry about it."

"I can probably-bring a few over. I got to pee now and take a shower, Hoke--"

"Right. Just come in when you're ready. The door'll be open."

Hoke ran down the stairs, and Bobby closed his door.

"We're in luck," Hoke told the girls, when he

returned to his apartment. "I didn't know it before, but Captain Stukes was a dentist in the Air Force before he became a pilot. And he's going to take off your braces for you, Aileen. He said to take these two pills now--" Hoke broke the Valium in half "--and half of this one now. You take the other half after he's finished. It'll be absolutely painless, he said. He wants some breakfast first, so will you scramble two eggs and make a piece of toast for him, Sue Ellen? I'll make the coffee."

"I thought I was supposed to be the cook around here," Aileen said.

"You are, Aileen. But those pills might make you a little dizzy. Go ahead and take them now with some water, and then sit down in the sling chair."

"I'll bring you some water," Sue Ellen-said. "I know how to scramble eggs, Sis, but believe me, I don't want your job."

Hoke made a pot of espresso, while Sue Ellen scrambled the eggs and dropped two pieces of bread into the toaster.

"He said he only wanted one piece of toast,"' Hoke said.

"He might change his mind, and if he doesn't I'll eat it to keep him company."

Bobby Stukes, wearing a pair of baggy green surfer's trunks imprinted with a pineapple pattern, arrived a few minutes later. He wore a matching beach shirt with four patch pockets, and white tennis shoes. He looked for a place to dump the dozen wire coat hangers he was carrying, then placed them on the floor under the front window.

"I hope you girls don't mind," he said, "but I didn't shave. I'm going to take a swim after I remove your braces, Aileen, and salt water stings your face when you've just shaved."

"We don't mind," Sue Ellen said. "Here, I scrambled you two eggs and made some buttered toast. Sit down right here."

"Thanks."

Hoke poured two cups of espresso, and sat down across from Stukes. Sue Ellen took the other chair and watched Stukes eat his breakfast.

"I'm feeling a little dizzy," Aileen said from the sling chair as she placed the back of her right hand against her forehead.

"That's good," Stukes said. "You're supposed to feel a little dizzy. That's the medicine working. I'll be with you in another minute or so."

"Let Doctor Stukes finish his breakfast," Sue Ellen said.

"Captain Stukes," Stukes said. "After I gave up dentistry for flying, I took on a new title."

"I just happened to mention I was dizzy, that's all," Aileen said.

The operation went quickly. While Hoke held Aileen's head steady, cupped in his large hands as she sat back in the sling chair, Stukes clipped off the rubber bands first, and then the wires and the knobs that held the gold bands together. There was a thin flat band on her lower teeth that he couldn't remove, however.

"This lower one is glued on," he said, "and it'll need a special solvent to dissolve the glue. It won't hurt you though, because there's no tension on it. Eventually the glue will either wear off, or you'll have to go to a dentist with the right stuff to take it off. I'm sorry, but I no longer have all my dentistry equipment. Except for my wire-snippers, I gave it all away when I started flying."

"Does the gold band bother you, Aileen?" Hoke said.

"Nothing bothers me, Daddy. I'm kinda floating like."

"Good. We'll see how it goes for a few days, and if it hurts you, I'll bring home some solvent from the store and we'll soak it off. Right now, you'd better go into the bathroom, rinse out your mouth, and take this other half-pill and lie down. Go with her, Sue

Ellen."

Sue Ellen, with her arms around her sister, led her into the bathroom. Hoke poured more coffee.

"She's got a lot of guts, that kid," Stukes said.

"I appreciate it, Bobby. You saved me at least a hundred bucks. Thanks for the hangers, too."

Stukes shrugged. "Don't use any commercial solvent to take off that strip of gold, Hoke. You're liable to burn the kid's mouth."

"I wasn't planning to. If it has to come off, I'll ask a pharmacist what to use, but if it doesn't bother her..."

"It shouldn't."

"I'll just let it stay there. It's hardly noticeable on her lower teeth, anyway."

"Want to come swimming with me, Hoke?"

"Sure. I'll only be a minute."

Hoke went out to the porch, changed into his trunks, and slipped into his skivvy slippers. Sue Ellen wanted to go with them, but Hoke told her to stay with her sister and see that she got a nap. He also told her to heat up the stew for dinner. He didn't want to leave Aileen alone, but he didn't want Sue Ellen to go swimming with them either. He'd had enough of the girls for one day.

CHAPTER SIX

After their swim, Hoke and Stukes went to the Green House. They got a table by the concrete balustrade where they could look across the wide beach at the ocean. The patio was shaded by opaque plastic roof panels and the breeze off the water reduced the intensity of the sun, if not the humidity. Most of the eating and drinking places in the island center had posted signs that read:

No Shoes. No Shirt. No Service.

The owners of the Green House, however, did not have such a sign. As a consequence, the beach beer garden did four times the volume of business the other refreshment establishments did in the center. Sometimes, a man wearing slacks or a woman in a skirt sat in a wet cane chair, but the proprietor had posted warning signs on the pillars: CHECK YOUR SEATS FOR DAMPNESS!

The double meaning of the sign was a source of many ribald jokes that Beach teenagers came up with from time to time at the expense of their female companions.

Stukes ordered two Coors and frosted mugs from the waitress.

"I'm supposed to be on the wagon, Bobby," Hoke said.

"Beer doesn't count."

"Beer counts, all right, but I've never tried a Coors."

"They've only been in Florida a few months."

"I know. I've seen their ads. I spent three years at Fort Hood, and all I ever drank in Texas was Lone Star."

"You still can't buy Lone Star in Florida."

"Or we'd be drinking it, right?"

The waitress brought the beer and poured it into the frosted glass mugs. Before she got away, Hoke told her to bring another round.

"And two more frozen steins," Bobby added.

"See that guy's moustache over there, Hoke?" Stukes pointed to a young man at a nearby table. The man's moustache, dark and wet, drooped well below the corners of his mouth in the current fashion. "I had one like that last year, but Eastern made me trim it. After I trimmed it, I looked like the clown in Jimmy Buffett's song, the guy with the pencil-thin moustache. So I shaved the damned thing off. You ever have a moustache, Hoke?"

"In the army. I grew one at Fort Hood. All I did for three years was wave cars in and out of the gate as an M.P. I had the time, so I grew a moustache. But I shaved it off the day I was discharged. Once, in Miami, when I was trailing a guy for a couple of days, I wore a fake moustache. But you sweat so damned much, you can't keep the thing stuck on very well in Florida."

"I don't know a hell of a lot about you, Hoke."

Hoke shrugged. "What do you want to know?"

"I don't know that I want to know anything. I'm not a prying type--which doesn't mean that I'm not curious. I thought I had you fairly well pegged, but I didn't even know you'd been in the army till just now. I knew you were a homicide detective in Miami--"

"A sergeant in Homicide."

"--and you quit. Did you retire, or did you just quit?"

"I resigned. I had another eight years to go for retirement."

"I'll never quit flying. We have a mandatory

retirement now at fifty-five, but I hope that before I reach fifty-five they'll raise the age limit to sixty or sixty-five. It's crazy making a man quit flying at fifty-five--so long as he's still in good shape, I mean."

"I never told anyone why I quit, although my partner, Bill Henderson, had a pretty good idea. But I didn't tell him, either. We were pretty close, as partners, and if I'd've told him, it might have damaged our relationship. I was damned near the verge of a nervous breakdown and Bill wanted me to talk to the department psychiatrist before I turned in my resignation. But I knew what was wrong and I didn't need any confirmation from a fink police psychiatrist. All the police psychiatrists are finks, you know. They pass on what you tell them to the higher ups."

"They're not supposed to do that, Hoke. What you tell a doctor is privileged, just like talking to a priest."

"I've had some tips from priests, too." Hoke grinned. "That's how I picked up a wife-beater once who'd killed his wife. A tip from a priest. He told me in confidence, of course, but the guy was exactly where the priest said he'd be. I can't prove that police psychiatrists pass on their confidential information, but most of the guys on the force think they do. You can make an educated guess from what happens, and it always happens. A troubled cop is advised to make an appointment. He sees the shrink on a regular basis for a few weeks or months and then the next thing you know he's no longer on the force.

"What d'you think happened?"

"The shrink couldn't cure him? It might be that simple."

"You're right, Bobby. A shrink can't cure everyone, but he can get rid of troubled cops that might embarrass the department. He either talks the guy into quitting, or he passes on some private information that catches the cop with his hand out

or something else. Then they let the man resign."

"So why did you quit, Hoke?"

"Did you ever kill anyone, Bobby?"

"Sure. In Vietnam I bombed entire villages and then I strafed the fuckers when they ran into the rice paddies. I killed a lot of 'em, Hoke, no telling how many."

"Did it bother you?"

"Hell, no! That's how I got promoted to major."

"But you just killed gooks, right? Did you ever kill a white man? A face-to-face personal killing?"

Bobby Stukes shook his head. "The occasion never came up. I could do it though, if I had to, if it was him or me. Is that what you did?"

"That's about the size of it. The possibility was always there, and, like you, I always knew I could do it if I had to--and then I had to. Except I didn't really have to kill the man. All those years of carrying a gun--three on the Riviera Beach force, twelve in Miami--I never had to use it. I'd pulled it a few times, but I never had to shoot anybody. But when I finally did it, I liked it. And that's what scared me. I could've wounded him, or I could've let him get away. But after he went down with my first shot, I executed him by shooting him again in the back of the head. I wanted to make damned sure the sonofabitch was dead, you see. And he was."

Hoke took a long swig of beer, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"I got out of it okay. He was a psychopath from California; he'd killed three men in San Francisco and two more in Miami. And luckily for me he was white instead of a black, if he'd been black there would've been an investigation. In fact, if he'd been black there definitely would've been an investigation and it would've gone to the Grand Jury. They could've charged me with Murder Two, or at least Manslaughter. But he was a white man and a wanted killer, so I got a commendation out of it."

"There doesn't seem to be any great loss there."

Stukes shrugged. "If he went to prison, he'd get out again eventually, and probably kill a few more. Right? You did the taxpayers a favor."

"I know all that, Bobby. But that isn't the way the system's supposed to work. As a cop, I should've apprehended him and turned him over to the courts. Just because I knew he was guilty didn't give me the right to kill him. But I enjoyed killing him, I really did. And I knew that if I stayed in the department it would happen again. It was so damned easy, and I felt so good about it afterwards I got scared. So I quit, and came back here to work for my old man and to put myself in a position where I'd never have to kill anyone again."

"I think you made a mistake, Hoke. You shouldn't let guilt destroy your entire career—"

"I don't have any guilt. That's the problem. If it was just a matter of guilt, I could handle it. I've done plenty of things that made me feel guilty, but I could always live with them. But I didn't want to spend another eight years on the force looking for men who needed to be killed. And I could've killed at least five more without any problems."

"I don't understand."

"They've got an unofficial police department rule that limits the number of felons you can kill in line of duty, even though the killing is justified in each case. There was a study made up in New York and they decided that after a cop kills six men, even though each killing is justified, it's beyond the laws of chance. Six is beyond chance, and they know they've got a killer cop on the force. So after the sixth victim, or killing, I'll say, the cop's either retired or given a desk job where he won't be on the street anymore."

"I didn't know that. That's interesting."

"They don't publicize it, for obvious reasons. But six is the magic number. I don't know how the psychiatrists arrived at six instead of seven or five, but six it is. So I could've killed another five men,

and then I could've gotten an early retirement. I could've been choosy, very careful, and made each killing legitimate, too. Any cop could do it, if he wanted to, but I decided to resign instead."

The waitress arrived with the second round of beers.

"You might feel differently after a few more months in the hardware store, Hoke. With your record, you could get on with any police force."

"No, I won't change my mind. All I want is a simple life, although it won't be simple now, now that I've got Sue Ellen and Aileen to worry about."

"You're going to have your hands full, all right, with two girls, especially here on the island. How'd you get 'em anyway?"

Hoke pursed his lips. "My ex-wife sent them down from Vero on the bus, that's how. She's marrying a ballplayer on the L.A. Dodgers, and apparently--"

"What color is he?"

"What are you talking about?"

"The ballplayer. What color is he? At least half the players on the Dodgers are black."

Hoke smiled. "He's white, I imagine. I don't think that--"

"What's his name?"

"Curly Peterson."

"He's a black man, Hoke. When Peterson played for the Cubs he was Tyrone Peterson. Then he let his curly hair grow down to his shoulders, and sportswriters started calling him 'Curly.'"

"That doesn't make him black. Blacks have kinky hair, not curly hair."

"Peterson isn't a dark black. His color's somewhere between Reggie Jackson's and a Puerto Rican's. But he's a black man all right. Plays outfield, either right or center."

"He's a pinch hitter with the Dodgers. Damn it, Bobby, I wish you hadn't told me he was black!"

"What difference does it make? You'd've found

out sooner or later. It merely explains why you got the girls back. He wouldn't want two white teenaged girls around, or at least your ex-wife wouldn't, because he couldn't pass 'em off as his own."

"She must've married him for the money--although they aren't married yet, just going to be. He makes three hundred and twenty-five thousand a year."

"He's worth a lot more than that."

"Nobody's worth that much, Bobby."

"A good personal manager could get him more. That's not much money for today's baseball salaries. Didn't the girls ever mention to you that he was black?"

"We haven't talked much yet. I don't know exactly what to say to them. I haven't even seen them for ten years. They could be any two teenage girls on the beach. But I'm their father, so I had to take 'em in."

"They seem like nice enough girls, Hoke. But there's a tough crowd here on the island, too, and you don't want 'em to get mixed up with the wrong people. Working all day, you won't know what they're getting into, either. Last time I came down, a girl, maybe fifteen, or not even that, wanted to give me a blow-job in the parking lot for five bucks. That's right, only five bucks. Wanted to buy some tokens to play the games in the arcade, she said."

"That could happen in any shopping center, not just on Singer Island. Twelve and thirteen-year-old prostitutes are picked up in Miami all the time."

"This wasn't some black girl from the ghetto, Hoke. She was wearing designer jeans and she had a ten-speed bike. She was the daughter of some home-owner here on the island."

"What did you do?"

"I had some change on me. I gave her two or three quarters and let it go at that. I don't need any amateur five-buck blow-jobs."

"She might've conned you, Bobby."

Stukes grinned, and shook his head. "Now you sound like a father, not like a cynical Miami cop."

"I may sound like a father, but I don't feel like one."

"Have you talked to the girls about sex yet? Did you tell 'em about V.D., herpes? Have they been fitted with coils or diaphragms?"

"How the hell do I know? These are nice middle-class girls."

"Nice girls give blow-jobs, Hoke. They may be sexually active already. I'd be surprised if they weren't. If I were you, I'd sit down and have a long talk with 'em. I'm serious, man. If you don't, they could both be pregnant before school starts again."

"I'll get my old man's wife to talk to them. She'll know what to say, although I imagine Patsy's already given them the facts of life. But it would probably be better for Helen to talk to them than me."

"Patsy's your ex-wife, and Helen's the grandmother?"

"Not hardly. I think Helen's a few months younger than Patsy. You haven't met her, but she certainly knows something about sex. She's talked my old man into taking her on an around-the-world cruise."

"Then you'd better have her talk to them before she leaves, or else do it yourself. See those two women over there in the bikinis, the ones drinking strawberry Margaritas? We could--you and I--could pick those women up in five minutes."

"What would you talk to them about?"

"Anything. First, we could send a drink over to their table, and then I could tell them a dirty joke. For example, 'How can you tell if you're sleeping with a fag?"'

"What?"

"I said, 'How can you tell if you're sleeping with a fag?"'

"How?"

"His dick tastes like shit!" Stukes laughed, but Hoke did not.

"I don't see anything funny about that," Hoke said.

"That's because you're a man. But women always laugh at it. It's a good ice-breaker, Hoke. Women identify with fags, you see, so if you can combine fags and sex they'll laugh every time. Let me tell you another one--"

"I don't want to hear anymore. Another round?"

"No. I'd like another, but I've got to qet ready to go over to Palm Beach. I'll take the tab, Hoke. I talked you into the beer, so hand it over."

"Gladly. Two-fifty a pop for a bottle of beer is robbery. You can get a six-pack for that."

"Not Coors. It's two-ninety-nine a six-pack. But here you get a frosted stein with each bottle and a seat with a lovely view."

"Yeah. They open the bottles, too. And don't forget to leave a tip for the girl."

They left the Green House and walked back to the duplex together. Hoke could feel the effects of the beer, as well as a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. How in the hell could Patsy go off to California with a Negro? The pain in the pit of his stomach increased. It was as if a fox were gnawing away at his insides. He used to get the same feeling every time he drove across the MacArthur Causeway from Miami Beach to go to work at Homicide.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The girls were subdued during dinner. The watery, warmed-over stew hadn't improved from the night before, and the girls left most of it in their bowls. Aileen got up from the table, took the peanut butter jar out of the cabinet and started to make a sandwich. Hoke stopped her.

"Put it back," he said. "If you don't like the stew, that's tough shit. You made it, and you'll either eat it or go hungry. I'm not going to have you filling up on peanut butter at ninety-nine cents a jar. "

"It tastes awful, Daddy," Aileen whined.

"Put some Tabasco in it and give it a little taste. I like mine all right."

"Tabasco's too hot. It burns my mouth."

"Then eat it the way it is."

"Are we really that poor, Daddy?" Sue Ellen said, "that we can't even have peanut butter?"

"We've got peanut butter, haven't we? But we can't waste good food and eat anything we like. We can get more variety though. After dinner we'll plan next week's menu if you like. We can cook some rice and black beans, bake sweet potatoes, or Idahoan and if you girls don't like apples for dessert, we can make up a batch of grape or lemon jello. As long as we're frugal, we can manage okay. There won't be a dime left over, but we can survive."

Aileen sat across from Hoke again and put two spoonfuls of sugar into her iced tea as she glared at her father.

"That's another thing," Hoke said. "If you add the sugar while the water's boiling it'll get dissolved all

the way. But if you add sugar to the glass when the ice is already in it, half the sugar doesn't mix and it's wasted at the bottom of the glass." He pointed to Aileen's glass. "If there's a corner to be cut, we've got to cut it. You girls can reduce the laundry bill, too, if you wash out your intimate things when you take a shower, and then dry them in your room."

"What intimate things, Daddy?" Aileen asked.

"Panties, bras, pantyhose, and like that."

"I don't wear a bra or pantyhose."

"You will. Do you have your periods yet?"

Aileen flushed, nodded, and looked down at her congealing bowl of stew.

"You're embarrassing her, Daddy," Sue Ellen said. "You don't have to ask questions like that."

"On our budget, I have to know everything. The money for sanitary napkins'll have to come out of the market budget, and we have to plan for your periods every month just like everything else. I'll ask you girls some more embarrassing questions. Did your mother put you girls on the pill yet? Have you got diaphragms, or what?"

"Oh, Daddy. . !" Sue Ellen said.

"Are you sexually active with boys? Or other girls? Did your mother ever explain to you anything about the clap, herpes, shit chancres?"

The girls looked at each other and giggled.

When they giggled, Hoke realized that he was wasting his time. The girls would undoubtedly do whatever they felt like doing, but he would tell them anyway.

"There's nothing funny about it," Hoke said. "If you're both menstruating already, you can get knocked up. And that's something else we can't afford--abortions or babies. And curing V.D. can be expensive. Herpes, as you should know by now, can't be cured at all. And you don't get any of these things by sitting on a toilet seat." Hoke frowned and shook his head.

"I was going to have your Auntie Helen talk to

you about this shit, but it's really my responsibility. And I need to know. Are you or are you not sexually active?"

"No." Sue Ellen said, lifting her chin. Aileen shook her head, and nibbled at her lower lip.

"Good. In that case I've got one word for you: don't! There are teenaged boys running around on this island with perpetual hard-ons, and they're going put a lot of pressure on you to put out. But I'm telling you not to do it, and I mean it. If someone wants to marry you, that's different. You bring him to me, and we'll sit down and talk about it. In Florida, you can get married at fourteen with your parents' permission, and I'm not an unreasonable man. If some boy or man wants to marry you, bring him around. I'll talk to him, and if you want to get married and move out I'll give you my permission. But don't put out to some asshole just because he says he wants to marry you. Wait until after you're married and you'll be okay. If you're putting out without being married, why would any man be interested when he's already got himself a free lay? D'you understand?"

"Mother's talked to us about all of this," Sue Ellen said.

"That goes for blow-jobs, too," Hoke said. "I don't want you girls going down on these boys around the beach, either. You can pick up herpes that way, too--and even syphilis. D'you have any questions?"

"What about masturbation?" Sue Ellen said.

"It doesn't hurt anything, but I say, 'don't do it. If you jack some guy off, you see, it usually leads to something else. So just don't get into any situations where they talk you into it. I'm going to be at the store all day and I just have to trust you, that's all."

"I mean," Sue Ellen looked out of the window, "like myself."

"Oh. That's different, and it's okay. But these are private performances, you understand. That's why it's called the 'solitary vice.' Just go into the

bathroom and lock the door. Don't do it together and don't do it to each other, and you can masturbate as much as you like. But in private. Any more questions?"

"Can't we talk about something else?" Aileen said. "This is all so grungy."

"It isn't grungy at all. Sex is a beautiful thing, but save your cherries for your husbands. That's all I'm saying. What else d'you want to talk about?"

"Dinner at Grandpa's tomorrow," Aileen said. "What do we wear?"

"Whatever you like. Shorts, jeans, T-shirts are okay. After all, we're just the poor relations getting a free dinner, so you don't have to dress up for your grandpa and your Auntie Helen. I'm going as I am, in my jumpsuit."

"Is that all you've got to wear, Daddy?" Sue Ellen asked. "Just two jumpsuits?"

"By choice, yes. If it were possible, I'd cut my wardrobe down to one, but that would be too inconvenient."

"Why, Daddy?" There was genuine puzzlement in Sue Ellen's voice. "Grandpa always wears nice slacks with a white shirt and little leather bow-tie. Doesn't he want you to look nice at work, too?"

"I always wear a clean jumpsuit. They're wash-and-wear, so they don't have to be ironed, and they're always clean and comfortable. When I was a kid, your grandfather told me exactly what to do, as I'm telling you two now, because you're my kids. But I'm forty-two years old now. Grandpa doesn't give me any advice or criticism because he knows I'd tell him to piss up a rope. As soon as you girls are eighteen, and officially adults, I expect you to tell me the same thing. But until then, any advice you get from me is in the nature of a direct order from your commanding officer.

"Now, wash the dishes, and then we'll all go for a walk on the beach. We'll walk down to Niggerhead Rock and back and see if we can't collect a few pop

bottles and get the deposits. You girls can split the deposit money between you."

The girls took their time clearing up and doing the dishes, and they did not show much enthusiasm during the two hours they spent on the beach collecting discarded soda bottles.

Hoke got up at six on Sunday morning, as usual, and counted the soda bottles while the girls slept. There were forty bottles in all, but two were plastic non-returnables that had been collected inadvertently, unnoticed by the girls in the dusk. At a nickel apiece, that would be $1.90 for the girls to split. He would add a dime, to make it come out even, and he could send Sue Ellen with the bottles to the 7-Eleven after breakfast. Perhaps, with money to spend, the girls would cheer up a little bit.

They might be able to adjust, given time, but he wasn't so certain that he could adjust to having them around all the time. Their problems and needs seemed endless, and they didn't know how to do anything that girls their age were supposed to be able to do. They didn't know how to cook or sew and their mother hadn't even taught them to wash out their underwear when they showered. Such basic things. Not only that, they were ignorant about books, history, geography and common current events. Neither girl had known that Bob Graham was the Governor of Florida, and Graham was almost a year into his second term.

He couldn't blame Patsy for everything, of course. The girls' lack of common knowledge was caused in large part by the integration of the public schools. He had been lucky in that respect and had attended Palm Beach High School before integration, when blacks still had their own high schools. But there was so much the girls needed to learn, Hoke felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of it all. How could he find the time and the patience to fill in these two surly girls on all of the things they should have

learned already?

He wanted to wake the girls because it was seven-thirty already; on the other hand, the longer they slept, the fewer hours he would have to put up with them during the rest of the day. But if he let them sleep until noon, as they probably would, they wouldn't be sleepy at bedtime. And the evenings were going to be interminable because the girls were incapable of entertaining themselves. They were used to television and stereo records, and, as Sue Ellen phrased it, "hanging out" with their friends. "Hanging out" meant driving around aimlessly in a car full of other kids, visiting each other's houses, playing records, and going out for a pizza somewhere. In plain English, "hanging out" meant "killing time" as a group activity. He didn't feel like sitting through another evening like last night, trying to work out his chess problem while the girls wandered about the apartment emitting long, audible sighs of boredom.

Hoke finished his coffee, went down to the parking lot, and drove down to the Gulf Station to wash his truck. He wasn't concerned with the looks of the vehicle, but parking in the lot on Singer Island had caused a lot of rust to under the fenders. The truck had been rustproofed, but rustproofing didn't help much when a man lived as close to the ocean as he did.

The girls were up and dressed when Hoke got back to the apartment. Sue Ellen had cashed in the bottles and had bought a Sunday Miami Herald with seventy-five cents of the money before splitting the remainder with Aileen. Sue Ellen was reading Tropic magazine, from the Herald and Aileen had taken over the comic pages. Hoke said nothing about how Sue Ellen had spent the money; he was glad to see them reading something, even if it was just the comics. He didn't read the Herald, or any other Florida newspaper, because he already knew what

was going on in Miami--it was always bad news.

"We were waiting for you before fixing breakfast," Aileen said.

"On Sundays, I'll fix breakfast," Hoke said. "You girls go ahead and read the paper."

Hoke made another pot of espresso and scrambled a half-dozen eggs together with chopped onions and green peppers. He divided the omelet into three equal parts, and made toast for the girls.

"Okay," Hoke said, as they sat at the table. "You kids can do what you like today. You can spend your money at the arcade, go swimming, or whatever you want. Just be back at the apartment by four-thirty so we can get ready to go to Grandpa's house. We have to be there by six for dinner and we should get there by five-thirty so Helen won't worry."

"You mean we can spend our money anyway we want to?" Sue Ellen said.

"That's right." He handed each girl a nickel. "That makes two dollars total for the bottles, or a dollar apiece. You girls can do the cleaning up first, however. I've got other business to take care of. I'll see you back at the apartment at five, or thereabouts."

"Aren't you going to pay for the Sunday paper?" Sue Ellen asked.

"No, Hoke said. "I don't read the paper. But I'm glad you bought it with your own money. Not only does it show initiative, but it'll keep you occupied for a couple of hours."

After breakfast, Hoke left the apartment and drove to the hardware store. He let himself in the back door and, without turning on the lights, picked up a shovel, a pick, and a small two-celled flashlight. He unreeled thirty feet of clothesline from a spool, cut it off, and formed a coil. He put these items in the bed of his truck and tucked his tarp around them.

He made a pot of coffee in Mrs. Wadsworth's Mr.

Coffee coffee-maker and sat in his father's comfortable chair behind the counter. He enjoyed the quiet of the store, the odors of cedar and turpentine, the coffee, and the solitude. The venetian blinds were closed tightly over the windows at the front of the store, and except for a single beam of light that came into the store where one of the blinds had been broken, the store was dark, quiet, and hot. At intervals, when the temperature climbed above eighty-five degrees, the thermostat kicked in the air conditioner and fan which roared into life. After five or six minutes, when the temperature was below eighty-five again, it shut off automatically. During the week, when the store was open, the store was kept at seventy-five degrees, but on weekends, when no one was there, it would be wasteful to keep the temperature that low. Hoke had explained this to his father and Hoke figured that they now saved about forty dollars a month on Florida Power bills.

The hardware store was a perfect place to be when a man needed solitude, Hoke thought. No one knew he was here and there would be no customers coming in to irritate him. Perhaps, when his father left on his 'round-the-world cruise, he could fix up a cot in the storeroom and spend his nights in the store. If he did that, he would only have to visit the apartment once a day. He could check on the girls, take his swim and daily run, and then return to the peace and solitude of the empty store. He wouldn't even have to eat with them. He could plug in a hotplate and eat in the storeroom too. But he knew he couldn't escape that easily. The girls were too young to live by themselves. If they were left alone, they would get into all kinds of trouble. And if they did, he would be in trouble too, with the authorities. No, that wouldn't do at all.

Hoke shook his head, turned on the counter lamp and began to make notes on a long legal pad. If he made his plans carefully, step by step, he could

return to the simple life again. Hoke worked on his notes for two hours, read them and reread them, and then tore the paper into strips before flushing the pages in the employee's toilet. At five p.m., he locked the store, and drove back to the beach.

CHAPTER EIGHT

In addition to Helen's silver Porsche and Frank Moseley's Buick Riviera, there was a dark blue LTD parked in the circular driveway in front of Hoke's father's house. To avoid having to move his truck later to let one of the other cars to pull out, Hoke parked in the street at the curb. The house, after a style popular in Palm Beach during the mid-1950s, had a Grecian appearance at first glance. The white block house was concrete and stucco, but the wide front terrace was terrazo and four marble Corinthian pillars were spaced evenly along the front edge of the terrace. The ten-foot Alabama marble columns supported nothing, but as decorative additions, they were supposed to give the house a "Classical" look. A three-foot marble statue of a bearded faun, between the two center columns and facing the front lawn, reinforced the idea. Otherwise, Frank's house was merely an ordinary and quite comfortable five-bedroom ranch house, with a swimming pool in the back garden encircled by a low fieldstone wall. The back lawn, behind the swimming pool, had an almost imperceptible slope down to the inland waterway. At one time Frank had owned a twenty-five-foot fishing boat, but he had sold it a few years back. The short pier was still there, however, and Helen went down to the pier each morning and fed large chunks of lettuce to a manatee that visited the pier on a more or less regular basis.

Helen opened the door when Frank pushed the buzzer. She took the girls off to her room to show them the new clothes she had purchased for the

cruise, and told Hoke that his father and a visitor were out back by the pool.

Maria Benitez, the Nicaraguan cook, was working in the kitchen, and Hoke said "Buenas tardes" to her as he passed the kitchen door.

"What will you drink, Mr. Hoke? I'll bring it out to you."

"Nada, Maria, nada, por favor."

Frank Moseley was wearing a lime green polo shirt with a small white fox head sewn onto the left breast, blue linen slacks, white patent leather shoes, together with a matching patent leather belt with an initialed gold belt buckle. He got up from his lawn chair, but didn't look directly into Hoke's eyes when they shook hands.

"My new cruise clothes," he explained, when Hoke stepped back a few feet to look him over. "They're a little on the loud side, aren't they?"

"Not at all, Dad." Hoke grinned. "Good thing you're gonna have Helen along. Otherwise, with those slick Yankee clothes, you'd have to beat women off with a stick."

The other man, who rose when Hoke had skirted the pool to shake hands with his father, shifted his glass of whiskey to his left hand and shook hands with Hoke. He was in his mid-fifties, and a few pounds overweight, but his bare arms below his short-sleeved sport shirt, were muscular. He wore the shirt tails out, as if to hide his thick middle, over straight-legged jeans. His shoes were cowboy-style slip-ons, with heels high enough to add an extra inch to his height.

"This is Chief Davis, Hoke, of the Riviera Police Department. Chief, my son, Hoke."

"It's nice to meet you in person, Mr. Moseley," the chief said. "I was talking to your old boss about you yesterday."

"Captain Brownley?"

"That's right. I called him yesterday."

"How is the captain?"

"Busy, he said."

"Homicide is always busy in Miami."

"What d'you want to drink, Hoke?" Frank said. "Would you like a Pepsi, or some ice tea, maybe?"

"Nothing, Dad. Thanks."

"How about you, Chief? Can I freshen that for you?" Frank took the chief's glass. "Sit down. I'll be back in a minute."

Hoke moved around the circular class table, and sat in a webbed chair under the shade of the aluminum umbrella that rose from the center-of the table. It was uncomfortably hot in the direct sunlight, and both men were perspiring freely. A knot formed in the pit of Hoke's stomach, and he was sorry now that he hadn't asked his father to bring him some iced tea. There was a half-smile on the chief's red, sunburned face, and Hoke did not want to hear what he suspected the chief was going to say.

"Let me get right to the point, Moseley."

"Sure thing, Chief. Why not?"

"I understand that you're getting ready for a family dinner, and I don't want to keep you. Your father left us alone so we could talk, because I need another drink the way I need another ten pounds."

"You look in pretty good shape to me."

"I try to play a little handball, but I can't get used to these Florida summers that last eight months. It was hot in Philadelphia in the summer, but at least it cooled off at night so a man could sleep."

"Is that where you're from? Philadelphia?"

"Originally, no. I was born in Cleveland, but I was on the force in Philadelphia for fifteen years before I applied for this job. Frankly, I didn't expect to get it, but I did, and here I am."

"Retired?"

"No. I had a few years to go yet, but I got tired of Philly politics."

"You'll get tired of 'em down here, too."

"I know, I know. You can't avoid politics

altogether in a job like mine, but it was more than that." He smiled and nodded his head twice. "I had the usual mid-life crisis--a little Police burnout--and I wanted a less hectic life."

"Tell me about it," Hoke said. "I could write a book on police burnout."

"It's not so bad down here. The town is growing, and there have been a lot of burglaries of condos on Singer Island. People lock up and go North for six or eight months and when they come back they've been cleaned out. No telling when the burglaries took place, either. With the condos two-thirds empty most of the year, security on the beach is a real problem. But that's not what I wanted to talk to you about."

"I think I know."

"Fine. That'll make it easier for both of us. As I said, I called Captain Brownley because I wanted to ask him about you. Your father told me that you had your children with you now, and that you were going to need a larger income."

"My father is keenly interested in money."

"Rumor has it that Mr. Moseley owns half of Singer Island."

"Not exactly. He sold a lot of it, but not that much."

"At any rate, Captain Brownley recommended you highly. He said you could come back to his division with your rank of sergeant any time you wanted to, and he'd be glad to have you back."

"I think he would, too. But he also knows I'm not going back. Captain Brownley's coming up soon for retirement himself."

"I can see why you wouldn't want to work Homicide in Miami, but Riviera Beach is not Miami. They give me a pretty free hand here. I can offer you a commission as a lieutenant and put you in charge of our detective division. The line item is open, and I have the authority to make the appointment. You won't have to take any tests and you'll get a uniform

allowance for two new uniforms. You haven't registered it with me, but I imagine you've still got your thirty-eight?"

"No, I haven't got a gun. But if I did, I probably wouldn't have registered it."

"Of course, it won't be all detective work, as we don't have more than two or three homicides a year. I'll need you as an instructor, too. Most of my cops are young and they all need a lot of help. When I do get a good patrolman broken in, he usually quits and moves to Tampa or Miami for more money. Riviera can't pay Miami salaries and we don't have a police union. But I can offer you twenty thousand a year."

"As a lieutenant? I was making more than thirty as a sergeant in Miami."

"But you don't want to work in Miami."

"I don't want to work as a policeman anywhere."

"Think about it. I need some experienced people and they're hard to find. You sure as hell can't support two daughters on five thousand a year. Sorry about that, but I asked and your father told me how much you make."

"That's all right. I think we can make out okay. Besides, my oldest daughter's getting a job. I was going to come down to the courthouse tomorrow to get her a work permit."

"Think about it first, then. Don't give me your answer now. Come by tomorrow and see me. I'll show you around and give you a full job description."

"Did you know I was on the Riviera force for three years before I went to Miami?"

"Of course. I looked up your record. You had a good record here, but if you hadn't spent twelve years in Miami, I wouldn't be offering you a lieutenancy here. If you'd stayed here, you'd probably still be in a patrol car. It's hard for a Conch to make a reputation in his own hometown." The chief grinned. "They almost always bring in someone

from the outside. Someone like me--or you."

Frank Moseley, carrying a full glass of whiskey and ice carefully, came across the terrace from the house. He handed the fresh drink to the chief. "Here you are, Chief. Bourbon on the rocks. That's just eighty-six proof Wild Turkey, not the one-oh-one, so I didn't put any water in it."

"Thanks." Chief Davis took a short sip from the full glass, then placed it on the table. "But I can't finish it, I'm afraid I've still got some work to do tonight. It was nice to meet you Moseley, and if you get a chance, drop by and see me Monday morning."

"All right. But I can't promise you anything."

"I don't want you to. As the fellow said, I want you to sleep on it."

The chief shook hands with Hoke and Frank took him back through the house to the front door. Hoke waited for his father to come back, but he didn't. Hoke picked up the glass of whiskey and took it with him down to the pier. He looked for the manatee, but it wasn't there. A speed boat, ignoring the NO WAKE sign, ploughed down the middle of the waterway at thirty-five knots an hour. A teenaged boy had his trunks pushed down to his knees and was pissing over the side. As the boat passed Hoke, the boy gave Hoke the finger with his free hand. Hoke drank the whiskey and sat under the umbrella until Maria called for him to come in to dinner.

Maria had baked a turkey and she served it with a thick, rich black mole sauce. The girls didn't like the tarry sauce, but they were made to taste it. They were both given drumsticks, but without the sauce. The girls thought the Aztec soup was too hot and spicy, so they refused to eat it too. They did, however, eat their portions of Avocado salad and Spanish rice, and they both took large helpings of dessert--melon balls, topped with vanilla ice cream.

Frank and Helen sat at each end of the long mahogany table in the dining room, and the girls sat across from Hoke. Frank and Hoke had iced tea with their dinners and Helen drank two bottles of San Miguel beer. The girls drank chocolate milk.

"I talked to the girls while you men were outside," Helen said, "and they both said they'd love to stay here in the house while we're on our cruise."

Hoke put some more mole' sauce on his thinly

sliced, but ample portion of white meat.

"I really don't understand your objection, Hoke," Helen continued. "Frank said you'd rather stay in that dinky apartment on the beach. The girls would love it here, and we wouldn't have to put up the storm shutters and risk mildew on everything. The rainy season's due any day now, and you know how hard it rains during July and August."

"How come, Dad," Hoke turned to his father, "you talked Chief Davis into offering me a job? Who would take care of the store while you're gone?"

"A man can't be selfish, Hoke. Mrs. Wadsworth can handle the store. She's been there for ten years. And it seemed like the right job for you. I was on the committee, you know, that picked Chief Davis, but he wasn't doing me any favor. He really needs a man with your experience. Riviera isn't a small town anymore, Hoke. Eight new condos have gone up in the last year alone."

"I just wish you'd talked with me first, that's all."

"I thought it would be better if the chief talked to you instead. It didn't hurt to listen to the man, did it?"

"I suppose not. But I told you when I came back to the store that I was through with police work."

"The pool service," Helen said, "will come every two weeks whether we're here or not, Hoke. So the girls could use the pool every day, too. You like to swim, so you could swim every day here when you came back from the store."

"At any rate, Dad, I liked Chief Davis. Looks like the town picked a winner."

"We had more than a hundred applicants. He's got a Master's Degree in Criminology from Ohio State."

"Are you sure? Ohio State?"

"His degree's in Sociology, but he majored in Criminology."

"What did he do in Philadelphia?"

"He was the head of the Community Relations

Division. A lieutenant. He told me they had three hundred thousand unemployed niggers in Philadelphia, so he had himself a tough job."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Hoke," Helen said. "If you and the girls'll stay here while we're away, I'll keep Maria on, too. She can do the cooking and cleaning, and all you'll have to buy is what you eat. I'll pay Maria's salary. I know Maria would be happy, because she's planning to go down to Miami and live with her relatives while we're gone. And I know she hasn't got a job lined up yet in Miami."

"I'm sorry, Helen," Hoke said.

"Please, Daddy," Sue Ellen said, staring across the table at her father.

"What about you, kid," Hoke said to Aileen. "Don't you want to put in your two cents?"

Aileen shook her head and looked down at her plate. "You know best, Daddy."

"Thanks a lot!" Sue Ellen jabbed her sister in the ribs with an elbow. "I really appreciate your support. I really do!"

"That's enough," Hoke said. "Go out and sit in the truck."

"I'm not finished yet."

"Yes, you are."

"Let her finish her ice cream, Hoke," Helen said.

"Hoke's already told you his decision, Helen," Frank said. "Chief Davis'll have a man drive by from time to time to check the house while we're away." Frank turned toward the kitchen. "Maria! Bring-in some coffee, will you, please! Would you like some brandy, son?"

"Why not?"

"You girls go into the Florida room and watch TV," Frank said, going to the sideboard, "Say when, Hoke."

"Just make it a double, Dad."

"I don't want any coffee or brandy," Helen said. "Not on top of the beer. I'll just join the girls and see what's on the cable."

Maria came in with the coffee and filled their cups. Hoke drank half of his brandy, and chased it with a mouthful of hot black coffee.

"That's good brandy, Dad."

"El Presidente. I'll give you a bottle to take home with you."

"I'm still technically on the wagon, Dad, but thanks."

"I'm sorry about Helen, but you know how women are."

"Yes, I do."

"I wish I weren't going on that damned cruise."

"You'll enjoy it, Dad."

"Hong Kong, maybe. I'm looking forward to Hong Kong, but not the rest of it."

"I'm sure you'll have a good time. And so will Helen."

"At least I won't have to worry about the store. Mrs. Wadsworth is a good woman, make no mistake, but she gets flustered at times. Did I ever tell you how she got shortchanged out of a ten-dollar bill last year?"

"You told me. Three times you've told me."

"Another brandy?"

"I'd better not."

"Let's join the girls then. 'Sixty Minutes' has already started."

When Hoke and the girls left a few minutes after eight o'clock, Frank gave each one of the girls two quarters. He told them they could use the money to play some games at the arcade and have a good time.

CHAPTER NINE

Much later that night, at three a.m., Hoke strangled his daughters. There were a few variations on the plan he had thought out, but all in all, it went about as well as he had expected. Plans of any kind, as he knew from experience, never worked out precisely.

On the way home from his father's house, while they were still in the truck, Sue Ellen had tried to argue with Hoke about staying at the house during the three months of the cruise.

"That's enough," Hoke said, finally, "I don't want to hear another word out of you tonight."

Sue Ellen took him literally, and he did not hear another word from her, of any kind, all evening. She pressed her lips together and did not respond to anything Aileen said either, except to shake her head, pinch her lips together with her fingers and shrug her narrow shoulders. She did, however, sigh often and at length, until Hoke sent her into the bedroom and closed the door after her. She still continued to sigh, forcing air audibly through her throat and the exasperation was loud enough to come through the closed door.

Hoke was unable to keep his mind on his chess problem. Aileen, sitting on a stool at the counter with her collection of shells, bottle caps, worn stones, and smooth shards of colored glass that she had picked up on the beach, arranged and rearranged these pieces into various patterns. Occasionally she said, "Look, Daddy!"

Hoke would look, nod, and say, "Very nice." He

wondered if his youngest daughter was slightly retarded. But he knew she wasn't retarded. She was just a naive, bored and incredibly ignorant girl who, for the first time in her life, had been thrown onto her own resources. As a consequence, her arrangement of shells, stones and shards of glass were an attempt to put some kind of order into her new life. After all, as he moved his chess pieces, he was trying to do the same thing, or something quite similar.

Hoke moved his black castle two spaces to the left, looked at the board, and to his astonishment, discovered that he had finally solved the problem--but in reverse. In Problem Number 28, white was supposed to mate in three. But by moving his black castle two spaces, he had checkmated the white king instead. He could hardly believe it as he studied the board, but there had been no mistake. The game was over and he had inadvertently defeated the author of the beginner's book of problems. He took no pride in his solution, however, because he still hadn't solved the problem posed by the author--white was supposed to mate in three.

Hoke put his board and his chess pieces away under his cot on the porch, and suggested to Aileen that they take a walk.

They left the apartment, crossed the Plaza Circle and walked over to the public tennis courts. Two young Latin men were playing tennis under the lights. Both wore pastel headbands and matching sweatbands on their wrists and they argued in Spanish over every point. There was more arguing than action, so Hoke and Aileen left the courts and walked to the Blue Heron Bridge. A teenaged boy riding a mini-bike passed them, stopped a few yards ahead, and asked over his shoulder if were interested in buying a dime bag. Hoke shook his head and the boy raced his mini-bike over the bridge without looking back.

"What's a dime bag, Daddy?" Aileen asked.

"That's a ten-dollar bag of marijuana."

"Oh. I've heard of a nickel bag, but not a dime bag."

"A dime bag is usually a nickel bag that someone's trying to sell for ten dollars. If I'd offered that kid five bucks, the chances are that he would've sold his so-called dime bag to me. Are you and Sue Ellen into pot already?"

"I tried it once, but it made me cough. It just burned my throat and I didn't feel nothing."

"Anything," Hoke corrected. "I've tried it myself and it didn't do much for me either. To get an effect, I think you have to smoke a lot of it. The problem with pot is that kids who get heavily into it are disappointed. So they try something stronger--' ludes or speed."

"Speed kills." Aileen pursed her lips and nodded her small head. "We had a movie on drugs at school."

"Yes, it does. Speed kills. Let's go back to the apartment and get away from these bugs."

When they got back, Hoke turned the thermostat on the air conditioner down to seventy and flipped the switch to Cool/Auto. He closed the windows on the porch and told Aileen to close the bedroom windows without, if possible, waking her sister. The cool air was refreshing after the sultry night air.

Aileen came back into the living room, eased the door closed and said that Sue Ellen was sound asleep. Hoke poured two glasses of tea, added ice cubes and sat at the card table. He told Aileen to get the legal yellow pad and ballpoint pen from the counter and to join him at the table.

Here," he said, "I want you to write something for me. You write as I dictate. 'Dear Dad.'"

Aileen wrote "Dear Dad" on the pad.

"'I'm sorry.' Period."

Aileen wrote. "I'm sorry."

"'But me and Sue Ellen--'"

"Shouldn't that be: 'Sue Ellen and me'?"

"Just write it the way I tell you."

"It's considered polite to put the other person first."

"Just do it my way. Write, 'But me and Sue Ellen"--Aileen shrugged and wrote, "But me and Sue Ellen"--

"'would rather live with Mom.'"

Aileen put the pen down. "That isn't true, Daddy. We'd rather live with you! I know Sue Ellen's mad at you right now, but she'll be over it tomorrow. Everybody gets mad once in awhile. And I know I don't want to live with Mom. Not just because of Curly, but because I love you, Daddy."

"I don't know why it is, but every time I ask one of you girls to do the simplest thing, I get a fucking argument."

Aileen began to cry.

"Stop crying," Hoke said, "and write what I said."

Aileen wiped her eyes with her fingers and, still sniffling, wrote "would rather live with Mom."

"Okay, sign it now, 'Love, Aileen and Sue Ellen.'"

Aileen wrote, "Love, Aileen," and put the pen on the table. "I won't sign Sue Ellen's name because she'd get mad at me if I did. I don't think she'd sign it, anyway. She likes being here with you and especially the idea of getting a job. She told me so."

"Why d'you think I'm having you write this letter!"

"I don't know. I just know it isn't true."

"I didn't say it was true. What it is, you see, is a gimmick. I'm going to send this note to your mother along with a letter I'm going to write to her myself. In my letter I'm going to say that because both of you girls would rather live with you--Patsy--I'm going to send you out to Los Angeles on the bus unless she sends me some money every month to help support you. That's all. She doesn't want you girls back, see, so she'll start sending me a check every month. D'you see now what I'm trying to do?"

"But suppose Mom doesn't send any money? Will

you send us out there?"

"No. If she doesn't, she doesn't, that's all. I think she will, but if she doesn't, that's the end of it. I don't plan to send you back to her."

"Why didn't you tell me all this before you had me write the note?"

"Because it's complicated, and I wasn't sure you'd understand. Besides, I don't have to give you girls a reason for everything I tell you to do. I'm your father, for Christ's sake, and you should do it because I tell you to."

"All right. I'm sorry, Daddy." Aileen wrote "Sue Ellen" after her name on the note.

Hoke tore off the sheet of paper, folded it into a neat square, and put it into the breast pocket of his jumpsuit.

"Do you want to dictate your letter to Mom now? I can write it as you dictate."

"No. Your mother knows my handwriting."

"I can print it."

"That would look strange if she thought I went back to printing again. No, I'll just write the letter tomorrow, on the typewriter at work. Now drink your ice tea and go to bed."

"I don't want anymore."

"In that case, just go to bed. I'll pour your tea back in the pitcher."

"Good-night, Daddy." Aileen hugged Hoke around the neck and kissed him on the cheek. She went into the bedroom and closed the door.

Sue Ellen's drawstring bag was under the sling chair.

Hoke picked it up, went back to the card table, and rummaged through the bag until he found Sue Ellen's pack of Lucky Strikes. There were three cigarettes left in the pack. He lit one and went outside to sit on the steps to smoke it. He had a slight headache, and he attributed it to his argument with Aileen and the chilliness of the apartment. He knew that he would have to get it

much colder inside than seventy degrees. Sitting on the steps, he could hear Jimmy Buffett singing "Star Fell on Alabama," but the music rose and fell, and he could only make out every other word. The mall was closing down. Most of the shops were closed and the parking lot was nearly empty. The arcade would stay open, he knew, as long as there was one moron left with a quarter to play Donkey Kong, but Sunday nights were always slow at the mall.

At eleven-thirty, as Hoke was finishing Sue Ellen's last Lucky, Bobby Stukes came home. He was sober and a little disgruntled.

"I phoned the airport earlier this evening," he told Hoke, "and I've got to fly to Bogota tomorrow morning. My other bid for Tuesday was turned down and I'll have a seventy-two hour layover in Bogota. So all evening, I've been drinking Gatorade instead of Scotch and putting up with some incredibly dull people. How're the girls?"

"Asleep. Otherwise, I'd ask you in for coffee."

"How'd you like a beer instead?"

"I'd rather have something stronger." Hoke smiled. "I more or less fell off the wagon today."

"How come?"

"The girls have decided to return to their mother. So while we were at Dad's for dinner, I had a couple of drinks at his house."

"Depressed, huh? Come on up."

Hoke followed Bobby up the steps to the other apartment in the duplex. Bobby Stukes was wearing a saffron silk dinner jacket with a matching tie and cummerbund. His tuxedo trousers were standard black and so were his patent leather pumps. As soon as he closed the door behind Hoke, Bobby took off his jacket revealing a pink dickey instead of a shirt. He didn't wear an undershirt.

"Jesus, Hoke said, "a dickey. It's been a long time since I've seen one of them--and I've never seen a pink one before."

Bobby laughed. "We went to the Everglades Club

after dinner and you have to wear a jacket. But it's too damned hot for a jacket, so I usually cheat with a dickey." He removed his tie and threw it on the leather couch.

A six- by four-foot painting, in muted earth tones, took up most of the wall above the couch. There was a glass-topped coffee table on a redwood burl base in front of the couch. The leather chair, with matching ottoman, was angled so that Bobby could watch his television, which was complete with a VHS recorder.

Hoke admired the painting. The first time he had seen it he had asked Bobby what it was supposed to be, but Bobby wouldn't tell him. He just laughed and told Hoke to look at it for awhile. After a few minutes, Hoke had recognized that the painting was that of an adobe wall and he was glad that Bobby had made him decide for himself instead of telling him. Every time he looked at the picture it seemed to change, but this was the first time he had seen it under artificial light. Looking at the painting now, in the soft glow of the lamp, it was like an adobe wall at night lit by moonlight instead of the sun.

"I've got bourbon, Scotch and Boodles, Hoke. What'll it be?" Bobby stood behind the counter in the small galley and was emptying a tray of ice cubes into a leather ice bucket.

"Bourbon."

"You pour it, then. I'm going to have one beer. I've got a rule, you know. I don't take a single drink for twenty-four hours before a flight. Of course, one beer doesn't count. Or sometimes, even two."

Hoke poured two ounces of Early Times into a crystal glass and added two ice cubes.

"I really need a drink tonight, too," Bobby said. "Let me tell you a horror story you won't believe. I thought I was going to get laid, but when I took the lady home, she said she couldn't invite me in because the neighbors might see me. So I drove down to the Embarcadero and she gave me a blow-

job in the car. She didn't know much about it, but I didn't say anything, figuring she was probably nervous. Anyway, it made her sick and she damned near threw up in the car. I barely got the door open in time. She told me then that she'd never done it before. Can you imagine that? Thirty years old and she'd never sucked a joint. That was a real turn-off, Hoke, although it probably explains why her husband leaves her in Palm Beach all summer when he returns to New York."

"The world is hard on women, Bobby."

"It's hard on men, too." Bobby took a long swig from his bottle of Coors. "If I hadn't got the door open on time, I'd've had her dinner on my new Philippine straw floormats. And that stuff would be hard to get out."

Hoke took a sip of bourbon. "I thought you told me yesterday you didn't need any more amateur blow-jobs?"

"That's right!" Bobby laughed. "I did, didn't I? But this woman is married and thirty years old. Nothing ever works out exactly, does it? Like your two girls. One day they're here to stay and the next day they're gone. What happened, anyway?"

"They consider my lifestyle too austere."

"I do, too. But they didn't give you a chance. I sometimes think your way's better than mine--except for the flying. I could never give up flying. But I won't be back now for two weeks. My wife wants me look at some property in the Poconos. It looks like a good deal, and if it is, we're going to go in on it together and buy it. I've got to start thinking about security. The way airlines are folding up these days, my pension money doesn't look as safe as it used to."

"According to General MacArthur, 'There is no security, there is only opportunity.'"

"Did he actually say that?"

"Yeah. I remember reading it some place."

"That really sounds profound, coming from

MacArthur. He sucked on the government tit from the day he entered West Point till the day he died. When are the girls taking off?"

"Tomorrow. Either tomorrow or Tuesday. I've got to call their mother first, but they're definitely leaving. Do you mind if I have another?"

"Help yourself."

Hoke poured a larger drink and added two more ice cubes. He turned to look at the painting again and this time it seemed as if the painting was a foot higher on the wall. He took a long sip from his glass and said:

"I really like that painting, Bobby. What's the artist's name?"

"Mike Klempser or Klemsrud, something like that. I don't remember exactly."

"He didn't sign it. That's why I asked."

"I like it, too. Bought it in Sante Fe. Cost me more to insure and ship it down here than I paid for it. The artist who painted it told me he worked on it off and on in his studio, whenever he wasn't doing something else, for more than a year. And he sold it to me cheap because he wanted to get it the hell out of his studio. It was the wall of the house across the alley from his place, you see, and every time he looked the light changed and he had to make new changes in the painting. He never considered it finished, so he wouldn't sign it."

"I can see that." Hoke finished his drink. "What time are you leaving in the morning, Bobby?"

"I've got to be at the West Palm terminal by eight, so I probably won't get to say good-bye to the girls. You tell 'em good-bye for me, will you?"

"I will. What about your poker table? Want me to bring it over now?"

"I don't need it. I'll be back in a couple of weeks. Why bother? You'll need it for a couple of days."

Bobby took the empty crystal glass from Hoke and poured a plastic tumbler full of Early Times and handed it to him.

"Jesus, Bobby, that's almost six ounces of booze."

"Take it for the road."

"Maybe we can go out and have a few when you get back?"

"Let's do that."

Hoke sipped a half-inch off the top of the glass and went to the door. "Have a good trip, Bobby."

"Thanks. And be sure to tell the girls good-bye for me."

Hoke returned to his apartment. He put the full glass on the counter and listened at the wall. He could hear Bobby's television rumbling. Bobby was all keyed-up from his experience in Palm Beach and wanted to relax with a movie, Hoke concluded. Well, there was no hurry. Bobby would go to sleep soon; he had to fly a plane to Bogota in the morning. Hoke turned the thermostat down to sixty degrees.

Taking a stool, Hoke went out to the porch. He got his heavy police sweater from the top of the footlocker. He brought the whiskey out and set the glass on the window ledge. He could feel the numbing effects of the two drinks he'd had in Bobby's apartment, but the alcohol hadn't warmed his body against the gelidity of the apartment. He put on the sweater, sat on the stool, looked across the moonlit beach and watched the silvery sparks of phosphorescent light on the breakers as they smashed and spread across the shore. He counted waves, trying to determine if every seventh wave was larger than the other six, but they all seemed to be the same. At infrequent intervals, to maintain his gentle buzz, he took a small sip of bourbon from the plastic tumbler. He wanted the whiskey to last; when it was finished, he knew he would never have another drink.

At one-thirty, he listened at the wall. Bobby had turned off his television and was undoubtedly asleep by now, but Hoke decided to wait a little longer.

Between three and five a.m. he recalled, people supposedly slept their soundest. He was sleepy himself, probably from the booze, and wanted some strong espresso, but he would wait and make the coffee afterwards. If he turned on the water for coffee, he was bound to make a little noise.

After lighting a good-sized cigarette butt he found in a saucer by the sink, Hoke returned to his stool on the porch. The time passed much slower now, or seemed to, as he glanced at his Timex wristwatch. He finished the cigarette butt and spent a little time crushing out the burning coal between his thumb and forefinger. The pain was minimal, but it was enough to sharpen his senses. It was an old trick to stay awake that he had learned as a patrolman in Miami when he had worked graveyard shifts.

At three a.m., Hoke opened the bedroom door and looked at the sleeping girls. They had slept on top of their sleeping bags the night before, but the frigidity of the air conditioning, which he had counted on, had driven the girls inside them tonight. Aileen had zipped her bag up all the way, but Sue Ellen had simply crawled under the top cover without pulling the zipper behind her. Aileen's sleeping bag was against the wall with her head facing the bathroom door and Sue Ellen slept beneath the closed window. Enough light came from the galley behind Hoke to make everything in the room stand out clearly.

Hoke straddled Aileen's sleeping bag, lowered himself to his knees and encircled the girl's skinny throat with his hands. As he dug his thumbs deeply into her throat she made a "Gggghhh" sound. Her body became rigid and then limp. He tightened his grip, nevertheless, to make certain she was dead.

Sue Ellen awoke, propped herself up slightly on her elbows and looked in his direction.

"Daddy?" she said tentatively, still half-sleep.

"Lie down. Go to sleep." Hoke said, getting up and moving toward her.

She started to sit up instead and her right leg was free of the sleeping bag by the time Hoke reached her. He was afraid she might scream, which would waken Bobby next door, so he brought his right fist down in a clubbing motion, catching Sue Ellen at a point an inch below her ear on the bony edge of her jaw. He heard her jaw snap as it broke. He reached for her throat with both hands, but couldn't, for a long moment, get a firm grip. His fingers were still numb from strangling Aileen and when he had clubbed Sue Ellen on the jaw, he had broken the little finger on his right hand in two places. Unlike Aileen's, Sue Ellen's arms were free and clawed wildly at his eyes, making him rear back so she couldn't reach his face with her nails. His grip tightened, however, and his thumbs pressed down firmly on her trachea. She was unable to make a sound, although for a moment or so, Hoke thought the heavy breathing he heard was coming from Sue Ellen instead of himself. Her arms dropped limply, but Hoke's did not. Her body collapsed, but he continued to dig his thumbs into her bruised throat. Sharp pains from his broken little finger darted up his arm all the way to his armpit.

Hoke sat back, finally, breathing heavily through his mouth. When he was breathing normally again, he realized that both girls had voided. There was an acrid smell of urine and feces in the cold air and he knew that both girls were irrevocably dead.

CHAPTER TEN

Hoke soaked his right hand in the bathroom wash basin in water as hot as he could stand, dried his hands, and then made a clumsy splint with adhesive tape, taping his broken little finger to his ring finger. The throbbing continued and the tape wasn't tight enough, but Hoke decided it would hold until he could get Joe Rodriquez to rewrap it for him at the store. The two fingers stuck out stiffly and it was awkward to slip the black Hefty plastic trash bags over the dead girls in their sleeping bags. Hoke used two plastic bags for each corpse pulled over the bodies from each end so that there was an overlap in the middle. He had intended to wrap each body with clothesline to reduce the bulkiness, but he decided to wait. There was no hurry. It would be another five days before his father and Helen left on their cruise.

There was still some leftover stew in a large Tupperware container in the refrigerator. Hoke picked out shredded chunks of cold meat that were left and made a damp sandwich to eat with his coffee. He took a shower, put on his clean jumpsuit after washing out the soiled one while he showered, and locked the apartment before driving to the hardware store. Before he reached the store, he stopped at a 7-Eleven and bought two packages of Lucky Strikes and a disposable Bic lighter. He didn't like the toasted taste of Luckies, so he figured, now that he was going to start smoking again, he would probably smoke fewer cigarettes if he didn't like the taste.

When he unlocked the back door to the store, it was only six a.m. Hoke tried to nap in his father's padded chair behind the counter, but the pain in his hand was too great. He opened the drawer where Mrs. Wadsworth kept her personal items, found her Bufferins and took three of them. His hand, he noticed, had swollen considerably and the tape he had wrapped around the two fingers was much tighter than when he had put it on. He wouldn't have to ask Rodriquez to rewrap it for him.

Hoke unlocked the front door and opened the venetian blinds in front at a quarter to eight. Mrs. Wadsworth and Rodriquez arrived a few minutes after the hour. They had formed a two-person car pool to save gas with Mrs. Wadsworth driving one week and Rodriquez the next. When Mrs. Wadsworth drove, they were always a few minutes early, but when Rodriquez drove they were always a few minutes late. When Hoke had mentioned this to his father (who usually got to the store at nine-thirty or ten), the old man shrugged and said:

"One hand washes the other."

He meant, of course, that the few minutes early cancelled out the few minutes late, but Hoke, who didn't look at time that way, didn't understand.

After Hoke reset the air conditioner thermostat for seventy-five, he confessed to Mrs. Wadsworth that he had taken three of her Bufferins.

"That's all right," she said. "What happened to your hand?"

"I closed the truck door on it."

"Hey, hey--I done that once," Rodriquez said, whistling and shaking his fingers loosely, "and that smarts!"

"You should see a doctor, Hoke," Mrs. Wadsworth said. She shook her red curls, which Hoke suspected were dyed. "It could be serious, you know."

"Maybe I will. I've got to leave now, anyway. I've got an appointment with the Police Chief, so you can

tell Dad when he comes in that I don't know exactly when I'll be back. Dad knows about my appointment."

"You in trouble, Hoke?" Rodriquez asked.

"In a way. The chief wants to offer me a job."

"You gonna take it?"

"I don't know yet, I'm just going to talk to him about it, that's all."

Hoke left by the back door and drove back to his apartment. Stukes' Porsche wasn't in the community lot in its usual area, but Hoke knocked on the pilot's door to see if he was there anyway. There was no answer, so Hoke entered his own apartment and spent the next hour and a half repacking the cardboard boxes with the clothing Patsy had sent down from Vero Beach. He put the girls' purses into their suitcases. He then wrapped the bodies of both girls with clothesline, put the bundles into the closet and closed the door. He piled the boxes of clothing and the suitcases in front of the door. He deliberated for a moment, trying to decide whether to bring his cot back into the bedroom now that there was room again, but decided against the idea. After a few days, he knew, the bodies would ripen, and the air conditioner wouldn't help that much. He closed the bedroom door, locked the apartment, and drove to the Riviera Police Department to have his talk with Chief Davis.

The desk sergeant at the station was no more than twenty-five. The three wide white stripes on his blue sleeve looked too large for him, as if he were wearing his father's shirt. His blond hair was much too long, in Hoke's opinion, even for a rock star, much less a policeman. When the sergeant left to tell the chief that Hoke was waiting, Hoke wondered if there was anyone left in the department from his own day, but concluded that it was unlikely. The Riviera department had an early retirement policy at fifteen years, or a full retirement at twenty. Most

cops opted for the early retirement. If they were still young enough, they could go to work for more money in another city as a cop again, or if they were middle-aged, they could always get security jobs at Pratt & Whitney in North Palm Beach. To stick around for an additional five years wasn't worth it, unless they were lieutenants, and, as Chief Davis said, the few upper ranks in the department were invariably filled by someone brought from the outside.

Hoke went into the chief's office. He sat across from Davis and lit a cigarette.

"That's the youngest looking desk sergeant I've ever seen."

"Sergeant Holman? I guess he is young, but he destroyed the curve for everyone else on the test scores with a ninety-nine. The next man to him on the list had an eighty-four. Now Holman's studying for the lieutenant's exam. But as you know, memorizing books doesn't necessarily make a good detective."

"I never took the lieutenant's exam in Miami." Hoke shrugged. "I preferred the streets, but I still spent too much time at a desk. Sitting full-time behind a desk never appealed to me."

"You'd spend some time at a desk here, too. I wouldn't lie to you about that. But on the other hand, you'd be a working detective, and there's plenty of work to do."

"I could've called and told you on the phone, but I'm not going to take the job, Chief. I really wanted to wait a few more days to think it over, but I decided against the job this morning for two reasons. First, my daughters left and went back to live with their mother. And two, my father, as he told you, is going to be gone a three-month 'roundthe-world cruise. So I'm going to have to mind the store."

"I can't hold the position open for three months, Moseley--"

"I don't expect you to, but perhaps, later on, there might be another opening. I truly appreciate your offer, but I no longer have any pressing need for money. My situation, since yesterday, has changed."

"This came up pretty suddenly, didn't it?"

"The girls, you meant? Yes, it did. They just left and they didn't even tell me good-bye." Hoke took Aileen's note out of his pocket, unfolded it, and handed it across the desk to the chief. "I woke up and they were gone. Ordinarily, I would've heard them because I'm not that sound a sleeper. But last night I had a few drinks with my next door neighbor, Captain Stukes, and I'd been on the wagon so long, they hit me pretty hard. When I woke up, all I found was this note."

Hoke took the note back, refolded it, and put it back into his breast pocket.

"How'd you hurt your hand?"

Hoke smiled. "Slammed the car door on it. I couldn't even shave this morning. Well I could've shaved, but I was upset, and as soon as I read the note I drove down to the bus station to see if I could still catch them. But they didn't take the bus. They must've caught the airport limousine instead and taken a plane out to Los Angeles."

"Want me to check?"

"What's the point? They both had credit cards their mother gave them and she told them that if they weren't happy with me they could come back any time they wanted to use the cards. That's the way I figure it, anyway. To tell you the truth, Chief, I wasn't all that happy to have them turn up, anyway. With me at work all day and them running around on the beach, they could've got into a lot of trouble."

"Things have been pretty quiet on the island lately."

"Summers usually are, but wait'll the season hits--you'll see."

"I'd appreciate it if you kept an eye open for me

over there, Mosely."

"Don't worry. If I see anything going down, you'll get a call all right. After all, I live there. There's a kid on a mini-bike who peddles pot, but you'll never catch him with more than a nickel bag on his person."

"I don't care about pot, but coke's something else."

Hoke got to his feet. "I don't run in circles that have that kind of money, Chief." Hoke extended his left hand and the chief shook it. "But if I hear anything, well..."

"I'm sorry things didn't work out differently. But I appreciate your coming in instead of phoning. And if there's anything I can do?"

"You might have a patrol pass the old man's house while he's gone on his cruise. I'm going to be in and out of the house myself. So pass the word to your patrolman that if they see a man in a yellow jumpsuit in and out from time to time that it's okay."

"D'you always wear the same jumpsuit?"

"No, I've got two. I wash one out and wear the other the next day. "

"I mean, don't you ever wear anything else?"

"No. I'm trying to make do with less instead of more."

Chief Davis nodded thoughtfully. "Okay, I'll pass the word. I'm sorry about the girls leaving you that way."

"I'm not. I mean, I was for a few minutes, but I think it's all for the best now."

Chief Davis smiled. "I meant I'm sorry for my own selfish reasons. We could've used a man with your experience in the department."

When Hoke returned to the store, he asked his father to go with him to the All-Star Cafe for coffee. The old man, who was busy with a column of figures, shook his head.

"I just got here, Hoke. Maybe Joe'll go with you?"

"This is important, Dad."

Frank Moseley arched a white eyebrow, shrugged, and dropped his pen on the counter. They walked to the All-Star Cafe and Hoke took a small table for two against the wall back by the door to the kitchen. Hoke ordered an English muffin and coffee and the old man asked for a heated bearclaw to go with his coffee. When the waitress left, Hoke handed Frank the note Aileen had written. Frank read it and pursed his lips.

"This doesn't mean anything, son. The girls are probably just homesick, that's all. They miss their friends and their mother. Once they--"

"They've already left, Dad."

"Left? Where?"

"I wasn't a detective for nothing, Dad. It was easy to figure out. Their mother told them that if they weren't happy, they could always get airplane tickets on their credit cards and fly out to L.A. And that's what they did. To avoid arguing with me about it, they waited until I was asleep last night and then took a taxi to the West Palm Beach air terminal. Right now, they're somewhere over Texas."

"Are you sure? Girls that young shouldn't have credit cards."

"I'm positive. Patsy gave them the credit cards in her own irresponsible way. I talked to Chief Davis already this morning and then I found the cab driver who took them to the airport."

"What's the chief gonna do about it?"

"Nothing. I had an appointment to see him and I told him about the girls because it decided me against taking the job he offered."

"Maybe you should reconsider, Hoke. That's a damned prestigious position--"

"I was going to take it, Dad. I made up my mind last night, but without the girls to support, I no longer need the money. My life'll go on as before and I can mind the store for you while you and Helen are

gone. It's too bad about the girls. I think they should've at least tried it for a couple of weeks. After they got to know a few other kids on the beach, they might've liked it. After all, there are worse places than Singer Island to spend a summer."

"I guess they missed their mother too much."

"Have you got Patsy's address and phone number in Los Angeles?"

"At the store."

The waitress brought their orders. Frank asked for Sweet 'n Low and she took two pink packets out of her apron pocket and handed them to him. He opened both and emptied them into his coffee before adding half and half from the pitcher. He spread two pats of butter on his bear claw and waited until it melted before he spoke:

"You gonna call Patsy, Hoke? Or d'you want me to?"

"I'll call. It's my responsibility, Dad, not yours. I don't want Helen to call her, either."

"That's unlikely. Helen doesn't care very much for Patsy. Last time she came down here from Vero she told Helen she needed a decorator to color coordinate the living room. Helen designed that room herself and she didn't appreciate Patsy's remarks."

"I can understand that, Dad. Patsy's always had the notion that putting other people down made her a superior person. Of course, it doesn't work that way. But I'll call her and take the abuse, if any, and acknowledge my faults. I just want to make sure Patsy meets them at the airport. L.A.'s a big city and the girls could get lost out there. I know they haven't been out there before."

"I haven't either."

"I took a three-day pass to El Paso once. They say El Paso's a lot like L.A., only L.A.'s about ten times bigger. I had fun in El Paso, but I wouldn't want to live there all year 'round."

"Helen and me were talking last night, Hoke,

after you and the girls left. Helen said if you didn't take the police job I should give you a raise at the store. I said I would because, after all, you'll be in charge while I'm gone. Of course, if you'd gone into the police department, I wouldn't have mentioned it."

"I didn't think Helen liked me that much."

"It isn't a matter of liking, Hoke, and you know it. It's a matter of being fair. Helen doesn't like or dislike you because she doesn't know you that well. She thought the girls were a little too fresh for their own good, but she blames Patsy for that--not you. Anyway, starting the day we leave, you've got a twenty-dollar raise."

"A week? Or every two weeks?"

"A month. Twenty dollars a month. I'm also giving Mrs. Wadsworth and Joe a ten-dollar raise."

"A month?"

"A month, same as you. I couldn't very well give you a raise without giving them something too, could I?"

"That's very generous of you, Dad. Thanks a lot. I know Mrs. Wadsworth and Joe'll be happy, too."

"Their raise'll start when we leave, same as yours. I'll tell Mrs. Wadsworth to make the changes on her payroll this morning."

"I know she'll be pleased, Dad. One other thing and then we'd better get back. After I drive you and Helen to Port Everglades to catch the boat, you'd better give me the keys to the house. I'll go by the house once a week and check on things. I can start your cars in the garage to keep the batteries up, and--"

"I was going to disconnect the batteries."

"It's better for the engine and the batteries to run for about fifteen minutes a week. I can also check the inside of the house for mildew and see that the air conditioners are working okay. The pool and lawn service people will get lax if nobody keeps an eye on them. They're supposed to mow the lawn

every two weeks, but if nobody checks they'll skip a week or two. After all, three months is a long time for a house to be empty."

"I know it. I appreciate you watching the house, Hoke. But you'd better tell Chief Davis you're going to be there once in awhile, because I already asked him to have a patrolman keep an eye on the house."

"I did, Dad, when I talked to him this morning."

"Good. I guess I was right to give you a raise, wasn't I?"

"I'm not doing it for the money, Dad. I'm doing it because we're family."

Hoke paid the tab at the cashier's desk and they walked back to the hardware store.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Hoke got Patsy's address and new home phone number in Glendale, California from his father. He left the store, ostensibly to make a phone call to his ex-wife and to see a doctor about his broken finger.

He did not, of course, make the phone call, but drove to Dr. Edwyn Lewis's office instead. Years ago, when Hoke's mother was still alive, Dr. Lewis had been the Moseley's family doctor. In recent years, because of a drinking problem, Dr. Lewis's practice had deteriorated and he no longer kept a nurse in his West Palm Beach office. His Florida driver's license had been suspended indefinitely, but he would still make house calls if someone picked him up and drove him to the house and then returned him to his home or office. His lips were very red and wet, and his shoulders were so stooped Hoke hardly recognized him as the man he had once known so well.

There was only one patient ahead of Hoke when he got to the doctor's office which was two flights up in an all but deserted office building on Clematis Street. The barefooted patient, a young man wearing cut-off jeans and a dirty Dolphins T-shirt with the number twelve on the back, left with a prescription for Qualudes. Dr. Lewis, who was glad to see Hoke and recognized him immediately, took him into his small clinic and cut away the crude adhesive bandage.

"I should take X-rays, Hoke," he said, "but I can feel exactly where the finger's broken, so I can set it all right without taking any. But if you want X-rays,

I can send you up to the lab on the fourth floor."

"I know it's broken, Doc. I want as much movement as possible so I can use my hand. I don't want a big cast on it because I'd lose time at work."

"No problem. Just let me shoot a little novacaine in there first and you won't feel a thing."

Dr. Lewis straightened the swollen finger. He made splints with tongue depressors and wrapped the finger in gauze and adhesive tape with his shaking, but skillful, fingers. He wrote a prescription for Tylenol-3 and told Hoke to take one every four hours. He then said he wanted to make out a patient's card for Hoke.

"You should already have one, Doc."

Dr. Lewis looked through his Rotofile, but couldn't find a card for Hoke.

"When were you here last?"

"Either 'sixty-eight or -nine. I don't remember exactly, but I broke two ribs on a ballyhoo boat and you taped me up."

"Well, there's no card now. I must've lost it. I'll just add the info to your father's card. How is Mr. Moseley? He used to drop by every three months or so for a prostate massage, but I haven't seen him in more than a year now."

"He got married again. He's in good shape, Doc."

"At least that explains why he hasn't been in."

Hoke paid the fifteen-dollar fee for the office visit and took the stairs down to the street because the elevator was out of order. He filled the prescription at an Eckerd's drugstore on his way back to Riviera Beach and took one of the T-3's, knowing that his finger would begin to hurt again as soon as the novacaine wore off.

Across from the old International Shopping Center which had failed as a nucleus for foreign shops and now housed real estate offices and lawyers, Hoke bought four fifty-pound blocks of ice at the commercial ice-house and drove to his apartment. He carried the blocks of ice, one at a

time, up to his apartment and put them in the bathroom shower stall. He had realized on his way back to Riviera Beach that there was no air conditioning duct into the closet. To keep the bodies of the girls in the airless closet would accelerate the deterioration instead of slowing it down. After he placed the bodies in the shower stall there was room in the closet for the boxes of clothes and the suitcases, but not for the small trunk. He stacked the boxes and suitcases inside the closet, closed the door and blocked it with the trunk. He didn't remove the bodies from their mummy-like sleeping bags but figured they would keep much better now in the stall with the four blocks of ice. The drain was open and as the ice melted, the water would run out freely. After work each day, he would get another two hundred pounds of ice and keep the bodies iced down until it was time to move them. Hoke drove back to the store and went to work, taking up the inventory where he had left off.

For the next few days, Hoke tried to return to his familiar routine, but he could no longer follow it exactly. He couldn't swim very well because of his injured finger, so instead of swimming, he floated on his back, jumped into breaking waves, and then took long walks on the beach instead of running. Running not only jarred his sore hand, but he was much too tired to run. He slept very little at night. He would fall asleep immediately after eating, and then awaken an hour later. It would then be three or four hours before he could fall asleep again.

His work at the store increased and he had to turn the inventory over to Rodriquez and work with customers at the counter. His father, busy with preparations for the cruise, drove Helen various places to shop and to say goodbye to their friends, and he only made brief, impatient visits to the store. Frank would stay for fifteen or twenty minutes, check matters out with Hoke and Mrs. Wadsworth,

and leave in a hurry. As the time got closer to departure, it was as if Frank Moseley had, at last, accepted the idea of the cruise as a fact, and now he was eager to leave. He was impatient with Mrs. Wadsworth and his questions bordered on the abstract. After he left one afternoon, following a harried, petulant visit, she pouted and said to Hoke:

"I'll swear--Mr. Moseley's driving me crazy. If he doesn't leave pretty soon, I don't know what I'm going to do."

"He'll come back a new man," Hoke said.

"I certainly hope so."

On Saturday morning, Hoke drove his truck to his father's house at eight a.m. The Queen Elizabeth Two didn't leave Port Everglades until late in the afternoon, but passengers embarking at Fort Lauderdale were allowed to board the ship at eleven. Frank and Helen wanted to get aboard as early as possible because Helen had heard from someone that if she was one of the first to give the dining room steward a hundred dollars, he would get them seats at the captain's table. Helen sat in the back of the Buick with the extra luggage that didn't fit into the trunk and Frank sat in front with Hoke. Frank wore a new white suit and Helen wore an apricot-colored travelling suit with a wide-brimmed rafia straw hat. The hat was too large for her and she spent a lot of time holding it on her head with her left hand.

"You may not get a seat at the captain's table, Helen," Hoke said, over his shoulder, "but a hundred bucks ought to get you a window table at either the first or second sitting."

"We must have the second sitting. The first is much too early for breakfast, and then, as I understand it, they have to rush you out at dinner to get the dining room ready for the second."

"A hundred dollars is still a lot of money for a tip, " Frank said. "Let's see if we can get the second

sitting first without the tip, which we're entitled to, anyway, and then see if a smaller tip'll get us the captain's table."

"Money up front always means better service than money promised," Helen said. "On a short cruise, like to Nassau, it's okay to tip at the end. But with a ninety-one day cruise, I plan to tip every week, in advance."

"We've already paid enough in advance, it seems to me," Frank said. "Then there's all the extra money to put out for shore excursions, too."

"If I were you, Dad," Hoke said. "I'd skip the shore excursions and hire a cab instead. A cab driver'll show you and Helen the high spots and it'll be a lot cheaper."

"I don't intend to miss anything," Helen said. "And a foreign cab driver without any English could rob you and leave you dead in an alley somewhere. We'll be much safer in a group excursion party."

"I may not go ashore at all," Frank said.

"You'll go ashore with me, all right!" Helen said. "We aren't taking this trip just to sit on a boat for three months."

"I reckon I'll go ashore when the time comes," Frank said. "Even if it's just to get my feet on some solid ground. But I won't go ashore in Nassau tomorrow. I've been to the Bahamas and I've seen all of it I ever wanted to see."

"A night in Nassau's like a night in Liberty City down in Miami," Hoke said.

"I don't see much point in walking around in Nassau, either," Helen said. "I can spend the day unpacking and putting things away in the cabin."

"Don't forget to dress casually tonight, Dad," Hoke said. "On the first night out, you don't dress for dinner."

"Yes, we do," Helen said. "This may be our first night out, but most of the passengers got on in New York. So I'm not going to wear casual clothes when they're all dressed for dinner. Frank's tux is pressed

and he can wear it."

"What I mean," Hoke said, "is that you can get away without dressing on the first night and nobody'll say anything."

"The British are very formal and there might be royalty aboard. So if you have to wear a coat and tie anyway, Frank might as well wear his tuxedo. A white dinner jacket is never out of place at dinner."

"If you can find it, that is," Frank said. "I don't know where anything is."

"I can find it. I know where everything is."

Although Hoke took his time and drove U.S. 1 instead of taking the Sunshine Parkway, they arrived at Port Everglades at ten-fifteen. Frank helped unload the car and after all of the luggage was stacked in a pile, Hoke left to find a porter. The luggage was pretagged with cards from the ship that had their deck and stateroom number preprinted on them by the steamship company. Hoke returned with two black men wearing blue overalls.

"How much should I give 'em?" Frank asked Hoke, as they piled the luggage on a wheeled cart.

"A buck apiece is plenty. They just take the luggage inside the terminal, then the ship's crew takes it aboard to your cabin. That's the hard part. Save the biggest tips for your room steward."

"Have you got any dollar bills? The smallest I've got is a twenty."

"Sure, Dad. I'll take care of it."

The black men finished loading the wagon and Hoke gave each man a dollar bill. They trundled the baggage away and Hoke said good-bye to Frank and Helen.

"Don't you want to wait with us and see our stateroom?" Helen asked, holding onto her hat against the wind.

"No. I've taken cruises to Nassau and Freeport, and if I wait around I'll have to park the truck and pay a five-dollar parking fee. I'm sure they've given you a nice room."

"I'll call you, Hoke," Frank said.

"Call next week if you want to, but you don't have to worry about the store. In fact, the store will be the least of your worries. Just have a good time while you can."

Helen waved to him as he drove away. Hoke waggled his fingers out the window as he turned the corner.

On the way back to Riviera Beach, Hoke turned on the radio, found a rock station, and listened to the entire "London Calling" Clash album. He thought the music was monotonous and discordant and he tried in vain to understand the lyrics. The British accents were impossible to decipher and the drumbeats cancelled out the sense of the key words, but Hoke somehow got the impression that what the group was trying to say was important, even though they were unable to communicate what they were singing about in an intelligible way.

Hoke parked in the back lot and entered the store through the rear door. This was the first time in months that the store had not been open for business on a Saturday morning and it was too late to open it now because it was almost noon. Hoke left the CLOSED sign in place and didn't raise the front venetian blinds. He flipped through the store's checkbook for a dozen pages and tore out a check. It would be a week or so before Mrs. Wadsworth reached the missing check and it would be another month before she discovered how much he had cashed the check for at the bank. A month would be more than enough time. Hoke made out the check for $3,000.00, signed it, and put it into a long business envelope before putting it away in his hip pocket.

Hoke left the store and drove to Joe Rodriquez's house on Division Street; a neat two-bedroom bungalow of sprayed stucco that had been built during the Great Depression. The front yard was

fenced and Joe's two little girls were playing in there. They ran squealing around to the back of the house as Hoke opened the gate and entered the yard. Rodriquez was twenty-four and his wife was nineteen, but they were both Roman Catholics, and it looked as if Mrs. Rodriquez was pregnant again. Hoke wondered if Joe's new ten-dollar-a-month raise would take care of the new addition, and decided that it would not.

Mrs. Rodriquez told Hoke that Joe had gone to the cockfights out at the Military Trail Game Club and she didn't know when he would be back.

"That's okay," Hoke said. "I just brought the keys to the store for him. I don't have to talk to him." Hoke handed her the store keys. "You can give Joe the message for me. I think he told you I used to be a detective in Miami?"

"Yes, yes. Won't you come inside for coffee?"

"No, I really haven't got the time. But thanks. I'm going down to Miami tomorrow or maybe early Monday morning because an old case I worked on is getting a new trial. I'm a primary witness in the case and rather than drive back and forth every day, I'm going to stay in Miami with a friend until the trial's over. It'll be cheaper than driving a hundred and fifty miles roundtrip every day. So Joe'll have to open the store on Monday. Just tell him to let the inventory go until I get back and he can help Mrs. Wadsworth with the customers."

"I'll tell him. When will you be back?"

"It's hard to tell, you never know when your turn will come in the witness box. If it comes early in the week, they may let me go. But if I'm not called by the end of the week, I'll just stay over, that's all. Anyway, if my father calls the store next week, Joe can tell him why I'm down in Miami."

"Did Mr. and Mrs. Moseley get away all right?"

"I left them at the terminal all excited." Hoke took out his wallet, removed a twenty-dollar bill, and handed it to Mrs. Rodriquez. "I almost forgot. Mr.

Moseley said to give this to you so you could get birthday presents for your children. He'll be gone three months, you know, and he didn't want to forget their birthdays."

"They won't have birthdays until next November and December."

"Take it anyway." Hoke smiled. "Dad's getting forgetful in his old age and maybe when their real birthdays come along he'll forget about this twenty and kick in with another."

"I can find a use for it." She put the bill into her shirt pocket. "Especially on the days Joe goes to the cockfights." She shrugged and turned her lips down at the corners. "Joe always takes two-to-ones, so he always loses. He thinks he'll win more at two-to-one, but doesn't realize that the reason he can always get a two-to-one is because he's bet on the worst rooster."

"He must win sometimes."

"Oh, he does. But when he wins, he doubles up on the next fight. "

"Maybe today he'll be lucky."

"I hope so. I know I am, as long as you don't tell him about my birthday gift."

"How can I? I'll be in Miami."

Mrs. Rodriguez laughed, walked Hoke to the gate and closed it after him as he got into the Buick.

Hoke drove to the icehouse, bought one fifty-pound block of ice and returned to his apartment on Singer Island. He carried the ice upstairs and put it into the shower stall. The apartment, down to sixty degrees, was extremely cold after coming in from outside. He packed his extra jumpsuit and his toilet articles in a paper grocery bag and left the apartment. He locked the brown bag inside the Buick and walked down to Portofino's at the northern end of the mall. He sat in a booth, dodging to avoid a hanging plant above the seat. A basketball player, Hoke reflected, would be unable to sit in this booth because the bottom of the pot

was only three inches above his head after he was seated. Hoke ordered spaghetti with meat sauce, garlic bread and a bottle of Coors. He wasn't going to drink again, but he agreed with Stukes' theory that beer didn't count, especially on a day as hot as this one. As he leaned back in the booth, he could feel the clamminess of his wet back. The small exertion of carrying the block of ice up to his apartment had raised a sweat and he was still perspiring from his walk to Portofino's.

The waitress brought the beer immediately and he told her to bring him another one when his spaghetti was ready. He ate slowly, trying to fill time and his spaghetti was almost cold by the time he finished it. He drank the second beer and ordered a double espresso. He smoked two cigarettes and decided to go to an air conditioned movie. He hadn't been to a movie for more than a year, so it didn't make any difference what was playing; the chances were positive that he hadn't seen the film, no matter what was playing.

Hoke left the restaurant and drove to the West Palm Beach Mall. There were five small theaters to choose from, each sharing a ticket booth and lobby. Hoke sat through Death Hunt and came to the conclusion that Lee Marvin, as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police sergeant, had played the situation poorly from the beginning. Marvin should have gone by himself to pick up Bronson instead of taking a bloodthirsty posse with him, but the movie was supposedly based on a true story, and this was the way it had actually happened. Old Bronson wanted to be let alone in his trapper's cabin, but even in the wilderness of Canada the violent world found its way to his door.

Hoke drove to his father's house, parked the Buick in the circular driveway behind his truck and went inside. The thermostat on the air conditioner had been set at eighty-five by Frank, but Hoke reset it now for sixty degrees. He locked the house and

drove back to Singer Island in his white truck, leaving the Buick in the driveway.

It was dark when he parked in the community lot, but it still wasn't dark enough for his purposes. Hoke rolled up his sleeves, and, carrying his shoes, walked up the beach to sit on his favorite log in front of the eight-story condo.

He sat there patiently, smoked three cigarettes, and walked the beach back to the mall.

Hoke returned to his apartment and took the bodies, one at a time, out of the shower stall. He carried them into the living room and placed them by the front door. Despite the Hefty plastic bags he had encased the sleeping bags in, water had seeped through the spaces in the center. Both body bags were soggy and were heavier than he had anticipated. Sue Ellen weighed 110 pounds and Aileen had weighed less than 90, but they seemed almost twice as heavy in their watersoaked bags. Some of the water had come from the melting ice but Hoke realized now that he should have taken the bodies out of the stall when he had taken his daily showers and washed his jumpsuits.

At ten p.m., Hoke got his truck from the lot, parked it in the street by the steps to his apartment, and brought the bodies down one at a time and placed them in the truck bed. There were still a few ambling pedestrians in the mall and an elderly jogger who huffed by saw Hoke struggle down the steps with Sue Ellen's body. But the jogger didn't look at him closely or even break his short stride. The black plastic bags, tied with clothesline, made his load resemble garbage or trash, despite the unwieldiness of the packaging. Hoke covered the bodies with his canvas tarp, tucked it in and returned to his apartment. He raised the air conditioning thermostat to eighty-five and it stopped immediately. He turned off both overhead fans. He put the keys to his apartment into an envelope and wrote a note for Captain Stukes:

Dear Bob.

Here are keys to my apt. Gone to Miami for a few days. After you get your table just drop the keys back into my mailbox.

Hoke.

Hoke enclosed the note with the keys, sealed the envelope, climbed the stairs to Stukes's apartment and slipped the envelope through the slot in the door. Bobby Stukes, who was often away for long periods, had put the mail slot in his door because the apartment mailbox wouldn't hold all of his mail while he was away. But Hoke, who received no mail except junk mail, still used the original conventional mailbox.

Hoke returned to his apartment and looked around. He tried to think if there was anything else he needed; all he had to remember was to take his toilet articles and extra jumpsuit out of the Buick when he got to his father's house. At the last moment, however, he took his heavy sweater and his trenchcoat. He pushed the inside button on the door to lock the apartment and drove to his father's house.

He parked in the driveway, unlocked the garage door and backed the truck inside beside Helen's silver Porsche. He closed the garage door again, unlocked the inside door to the kitchen and went through the house, turning on lights in each room. The blinds in Frank and Helen's bedroom were closed and the outside storm shutters were closed. Helen had also covered all of the chairs and couches in the house with sheets to act as dustcovers. Frank stripped the kingsized bed and started for the garage to get the bodies. He brought Sue Ellen's corpse in first and placed it on the bed. As he reached the hallway, halfway back to the garage, the doorbell rang.

Hoke went to the front door, opened it, and

turned on the porch light beside the doorway. There was a black policeman in uniform at the door. The policeman had a long five-celled Kel-light in his left hand. He clicked it off when Hoke turned on the porch light.

"What can I do for you, Officer?" Hoke asked.

The big policeman smiled. "I saw the lights come on behind the shutters here and the Buick in the driveway, so I parked up the street aways and came back to check. I was wondering who you might be?"

"I'm Hoke Moseley, Frank Moseley's son. I'm taking care of the house while he's away. I'll probably stay at my own house during the week, but I'll spend weekends here."

"I see. In that case, you won't mind showin' me a little I.D.?"

Hoke removed his driver's license from his wallet and handed the license to the officer. "I told Chief Davis to mention that I'd be in and out. Didn't anyone tell you?"

"I wasn't told nothing about you being here. This is just another house on my clipboard. D'you realize, Mr. Moseley--" he returned Hoke's license "--how many people close up for the summer down here?"

"That's okay. I appreciate the fact that you checked the place out. What's your name? I'll call Chief Davis and put in a good word for you."

"Never mind. Don't do me no favors. I'd be blamed for not getting the word on you, not the sergeant. And then the chief would eat his ass out for not telling me. See what mean?"

"I do indeed. I was a cop myself for fifteen years."

"Then you know what I'm talkin' about. Good night, Mr. Moseley."

"Good night, and thanks again."

Hoke waited until the officer reached the sidewalk before turning off the porch light and closing the door. He put on the chain lock and then put his back to the door, breathing heavily for a moment through his mouth. Technically, the officer

had needed a warrant to enter the house, but a man wearing a jumpsuit and sweating from every pore was enough cause to enter on suspicion and make an arrest. Hoke realized how close he had come to jumping the big black officer when he had first opened the door.

Hoke relaxed; the cop wouldn't return again. He went into the garage, got Aileen's body and carried it into the master bedroom. He covered both bodies with the sheets, the blanket and the comforter. He then took clothes from Helen's closet and piled them on top of the bodies, insulating them from as much air as possible. He then took some sheets from the chairs and couches in the living room and spread them over the small mountain of clothing. The air conditioning and the insulation would keep the odors inside the house for some time, but not forever. But then, nothing lasted forever. The girls had wanted to spend the summer in the big house, and now they were here for the entire summer--unless they were discovered sooner.

Hoke took a shower, then washed out his jumpsuit and put it on a hanger to dry. He slipped into Frank's comfortable, seersucker shaving robe, knotted the belt loosely at the waist and padded into the kitchen. There was nothing except an opened box of baking soda in the refrigerator and the door was propped open with a metal chair. The electric plug had been pulled.

Hoke opened cabinets, found the canned food and mixed a can of string beans and a can of hominy together and boiled the mixture on the electric stove. There was meat in the freezer in the garage, but it would take too long to thaw and he was hungry for something now. The hot mixture of hominy and string beans was unappealing, but it was filling.

Hoke turned out the lights, and went into the back guest room--the room with sliding doors to the pool--and fell asleep on top of the covers. An hour

later he awakened shivering, opened the drapes and looked at the moonlight on the pool. He went through the dark house to the garage, took two porterhouse steaks out of the freezer and put them on the kitchen table to thaw. In the morning he would have one of them for breakfast. But first he would have to go buy some eggs and bread and a carton of Lucky Strikes. He had gotten used to the Luckies now and they tasted good and he knew he would run out of cigarettes before dawn.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Hoke slept for an hour, and toward dawn awoke with a start. He opened the sliding door, and, without swimming trunks, jumped into the swimming pool. The pool temperature was at least seventy-five, but the fresh, slick water was refreshing to his body. He swam two slow laps, then climbed out of the pool. The swelling in his right hand had gone down completely and except for a sharp, occasional twinge, there was minimal pain. He wanted to take the bandage off and look at it, but decided to wait a couple of more days. Hoke took a shower, put on his shoes and jumpsuit, and drove to the L'il General Store, three blocks away. He bought a dozen eggs, a jar of instant coffee and a loaf of brown Hollywood bread. He drove back to his father's house, backed the truck out, parked the Buick in the garage in its place, and locked the door. He left his truck in the driveway and fixed his breakfast: a fried sirloin steak, three eggs fried in the same pan, with two pieces of toast. Hoke didn't care for the mild dry taste of the instant coffee, but drank two cups of it anyway.

After eating breakfast, Hoke went through his father's desk. There was little there that interested him, but he was looking for his father's pistol, knowing that Frank always kept a gun of some kind in the house. The pistol wasn't in the desk, but in the bottom drawer he found a red cardboard accordion file that had been sealed with wax. Hoke broke the seal and emptied the contents on the desk. There were letters to Frank from Hoke's

mother and to his mother from Frank, dating from before their marriage. Frank had apparently met Aileen Moseley, nee' Persons, one summer when she had visited her Aunt Martha--long dead now--for the summer. She had been a naive young girl from Frostproof, Florida, and Frank had wooed her by mail after she had returned home. Hoke was mildly surprised by some of the flowery language in his father's letters. Hoke's mother's letters to Frank were shorter, duller, and quite formal, at least at first, as she detailed her sundry activities in Frostproof. She sang in the Baptist choir, she went to church, and she helped her mother in the kitchen. Someone gave her a white kitten and she had named it "Tinkerbell." Apparently, there hadn't been a hell of a lot going on in Frostproof. The frequent references to the good times she'd had in Riviera Beach during the summer indicated that Frank was on the right track. Aileen Persons had clearly wanted to get out of Frostproof. Frank had visited her there, too, and then, not long after his return, there were no more letters. They got married, and because they never parted until she got leukemia and died, there was no need for any more letters. Hoke's mother had died while Hoke was stationed at Fort Hood, and Frank had delayed telling Hoke about it until it was too late to come to the funeral. Hoke had written a good many letters to his mother, but they were not preserved in the red accordion file. His mother--or perhaps Frank--had thrown them away. At any rate, Hoke enjoyed reading this romantic correspondence; he had been unaware of its existence.

There were also some snapshots wrapped with brittle rubber bands. These included photos of Frank, Aileen and a good many of Hoke, taken when he was a boy. Hoke had been a chubby baby, a sturdy boy of ten, and then he shot up quickly. There was a photo of Hoke sitting on his new Harley wearing a leather jacket that was taken on his

eighteenth birthday. Hoke wore a flat-top haircut and the top of his head looked absolutely square. He had worked all summer on a ballyhoo boat to pay for the Harley and had totaled the motorcycle two weeks later on a run to Naples.

There was also a good photo of Rex, the dog the family had owned for at least nine years. Rex was part Airedale and something else and he had black kinky hair. No one in the family had liked Rex and Hoke had liked him least of all. Hoke had been responsible for feeding the dog and for putting him outside at night and never had any respite from these chores.

The dog looked unhappy in the photo, and with good reason. People only spoke sharply to Rex if they talked to him at all, and no one ever petted him. His black curly coat was oily and was rough to the touch. Frank Moseley smoked a pipe in those days and he used to call Rex over and knock the dottle out of his pipe on his head. Rex didn't like it of course, and he would cringe as the pipe went thunk, thunk, thunk on his head. But he never ran away because he knew that was just about as close to any affection as he would ever get. To his surprise, Hoke was suddenly lonely for the dog and wished that old Rex were still alive. He would give him that other steak in the kitchen and pat him on the head. While Rex was alive, Hoke had had no feelings for the animal whatsoever, except to think what a nuisance he was, but now all these years later, he truly missed him.

Hoke put the letters and the photos back into the red file and returned it to the bottom drawer. Frank's extra credit cards were in the desk. The only cards Frank and Helen had taken with them were their American Express cards--plus plenty of traveler's checks. Hoke took Frank's MasterCard and two gas credit cards out of the cubbyhole in the desk and put them into his wallet. Hoke had no credit cards of his own and Frank's might come in

handy. He closed the desk and searched the house for the pistol. He found it, a .25 calibre automatic with pearl handles, wrapped in a washcloth under three hats in one of Helen's hatboxes in her closet in the bedroom. Hoke wrapped it again and put it back into the hatbox, considering the small-calibered gun useless. Hoke knew how to search a house and he still suspected that Frank had a better gun somewhere, but he didn't find it.

For lunch, Hoke opened a can of tuna, made toast in the toaster and fixed a sandwich. Without mayonnaise the sandwich was dry, so Hoke drank two six-ounce cans of prune juice with the sandwich. The combination didn't go well together and Hoke didn't finish the sandwich. The house was so cold now, so Hoke put on his trenchcoat and made a pot of hot tea. He took the tea into the family room, turned on the television, and sat in Frank's big leather chair clicking through all twenty-two cable channels without finding anything he wanted to look at for more than a moment or two. He turned off the television and leafed idly through Helen's stack of Vogue magazines. The articles were all written in sentence fragments and most of the magazine consisted of advertisements for women's clothing. Frank didn't have a library and the only magazine he subscribed to was TV Guide.

Hoke went into the guest bedroom, pulled the blinds closed and napped for an hour. He woke with a start, shivering with cold, and realized he should have undressed and got under the covers. He made a fresh pot of hot tea, returned to the television set, and found a golf tournament. This program was so boring it was relaxing. The announcer spoke in awed, hushed tones, as if he were afraid of disturbing either the golfers or the viewers at home. On the tenth hole, with a Puerto Rican golfer two up on everybody else, Hoke fell asleep in the chair.

It was dark when he awoke again. Hoke stripped and went into the pool again. He swam a leisurely

thirty laps. The tepid water warmed him through, and he was reluctant to leave the pool. Swimming every day and running on the beach had given Hoke a deep and lasting tan; he was in better shape than he had been in many years. When he climbed out of the pool, the bandage and splint slipped off. His little finger, a mottled reddish blue, was still a little crooked. He bent it and it hurt. After he showered, he found tape in the medicine chest and taped his injured finger to his ring finger.

As he wrapped his finger he realized that he might have taken his last swim. He would miss the ocean and the swimming. During his years in Miami he had only gone to the beach three or four times. He regretted it now; he could have gone every day in Miami, but somehow, he had never gotten around to it. The few times he had gone, renting a cabana for the day at Crandon Park, he had enjoyed himself, saying to himself that he would go again soon, but he simply hadn't done so. What a waste. When he looked back, what a waste his entire police career had been altogether.

Hoke's long swim in the pool had given him an appetite again. He broiled the thawed steak in the oven and heated a can of stewed okra-and-tomatoes to go with it. He broiled the steak a few minutes too long and it was well-done instead of the medium he liked, but it still tasted good with the okra-and-tomatoes.

After eating, Hoke put his dishes and utensils in the sink and drove down to the L'il General Store and bought a paperback copy of The Glitter Dome, by Joseph Wambaugh. He returned to his father's house, sat in his leather armchair and finished reading the novel by midnight. The cops in Los Angeles, he concluded, were much crazier than the cops in Miami and a good deal of the novel read like sheer fantasy. The L.A. cops' preoccupation with male attire and their difficulties in getting laid also struck him as unusual. But the author was an ex-

police sergeant of the L.A.P.D., so he had to know what he was talking about. The most surprising thing of all was the $3.95 price of the paperback. The last time Hoke had purchased a paperback novel--although he couldn't remember the title--he was positive that he hadn't paid more than a dollar for it, and he thought it was less than that.

Hoke washed his jumpsuit in the guest bedroom, hung it on the shower curtain rail to dry, and went to sleep, remembering to pull the covers up. When he awoke at six a.m. it was to the drumming of heavy rain as the wind buffeted the outside metal shutters. Hoke got his toilet articles and dry jumpsuit out of the Buick in the garage, and put it on. The jumpsuit in the bathroom was still damp, so he rolled it in a dry bath towel before putting it and his toilet articles back into the paper sack.

There were nine eggs left, so Hoke hard-boiled all of them. He ate three for breakfast, together with two pieces of toast, and drank three cups of instant coffee as he listened to the rain. He then watched the "Today Show" on television until eight-thirty before clicking it off. He checked all of the windows and doors in the house to make certain everything was secure, then put his jumpsuit, toilet articles, and hard-boiled eggs into the truck. He deliberated whether to wear his trenchcoat, then decided it would be too warm, so he rolled his sweater into the trenchcoat and stuffed the garments behind the front seat of the truck.

Hoke stopped for gas and to have the oil checked at the Exxon station, paid cash for the gas, then reached the bank at nine a.m., just as it opened. He cashed the store check for three thousand dollars, asking for hundreds and fifties. Hoke was well-known at the bank because he made deposits and withdrawals four or five times a week for the hardware store.

"Did Mr. Moseley get away on his cruise all right?" the lady teller asked Hoke, after she had

counted out the money.

"Yes, he did. I took them down to Fort Lauderdale myself."

"I wish it was me going," the young woman said, shaking her head.

"I do, too," Hoke said. "But three months is a long time to spend on a boat."

"It isn't just a boat! It's the Q.E. Two."

"I suppose you're right."

After Hoke left the bank, he took the Sunshine Parkway north at the North Palm Beach on ramp. He didn't look back at Riviera Beach when he turned left on U.S. 1. He had a long drive ahead of him, more than four hundred miles just to get out of Florida, but he welcomed every mile of it. The rain stopped suddenly and the sun appeared. The truck was his small island in the middle of nowhere and all Hoke had to listen to was the rush of the rain-cleansed air by his open window.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Hoke drove at a steady fifty-five, not wanting to get a ticket for speeding, but was overtaken again and again. Some of the drivers who hurtled past him had to be driving more than eighty-five miles an hour. The state troopers had apparently given up on the 55 mph speed limit, but Hoke didn't increase his speed. He had purchased time and he would take it. If he made three hundred miles a day, or a little more, that would be plenty. No one else had the keys to his father's house, and Frank and Helen wouldn't be back for three months. Hoke's initial plan of burying the bodies somewhere had been a poor idea, although the pick and shovel in the back of the truck still might come in handy if he got stuck somewhere on the road to Los Angeles. The Florida soil was much too thin for deep burials, and the first hard rain--like this morning's hard drumming rain--had a tendency to uncover bodies buried in shallow graves. Bodies that were dumped into canals were found every day by fishermen and fornicators. No, nothing stayed hidden for long in Florida, so leaving the bodies in his father's house had been the wisest course of action to follow.

Hoke had a vague plan in mind about what he was going to do next, but had not worked out the details. He was positive, with all of the time he had to think things through, that he would know exactly what to do and say by the time he reached Los Angeles.

When he passed Orlando, he realized ruefully that he had never visited Disney World, which was

something else he had put off and never got around to doing. People came from all over the world to visit Disney World and Epcot, and yet he had never taken off a couple of days to see these places for himself. Well, he thought, there were New Yorkers who had never gone up to the top of the Empire State Building, but that wasn't a valid excuse. He could have, on several occasions in the Miami Police Department, obtained discount tickets for Disney World, but had never asked for them. It was too late now, and besides, he hadn't missed anything important. After all, Disney World was just the Dade County Youth Fair writ large, and he had worked the Youth Fair several times, both in and out of uniform.

The sky was turning orange when Hoke reached Lake City. He left the highway and checked into the Alligator Motel, the first motel he saw that had a Vacancy sign. He paid the $24.00 tab, plus tax, in advance for a single, and then walked down the highway to a barbecue restaurant, following his nose. He ate a plate of barbecued pork, requesting all outside meat with french fries and cole slaw. Except for the hard-boiled eggs, he hadn't eaten since breakfast and the charred pork was the best barbecued meat he had eaten in as long as he could remember. As he left the restaurant, a tipsy one-legged veteran from the Veteran's Hospital in Lake City dinged Hoke for a dollar. Hoke gave the man five dollars, walked back to his motel, took a shower, washed his jumpsuit, and went to bed.

Early the next morning, Hoke left Lake City and took I10 across the state, passed Tallahassee and reached Pensacola by five-thirty that afternoon. It was taking forever, it seemed, to get out of Florida, so Hoke decided to drive on to Mobile instead of stopping, just to get out of the state. He drove past Mobile, however, and found a small, six-unit motel in Irvington, Alabama, where he paid ten dollars for a room with three double beds in it and no chairs.

He obtained a Colonel's takeout chicken dinner and ate it in his room. His back was aching from the bouncing he had taken on the highway. The interstate was smooth enough, but the truck springs were designed for a full load, not for travelling empty, and Hoke regretted not taking his father's new Buick instead of the truck. He still had a long way to drive, and the big and easy-riding Buick would have been much more comfortable. But perhaps it was just as well; the old man was going to have enough on his mind when he got back from the cruise without worrying about what had happened to his Buick.

The next morning, under a drizzling rain, Hoke stayed on I10 until he reached Gulfport. During breakfast at a truck stop, Hoke studied his map and decided to take the northern instead of the southern route across the country. It would be a little cooler while the distance was about the same. Hoke took U.S. 40 to Jackson and then got on I20 until he reached Monroe, Louisiana where he spent the night in a downtown hotel. He soaked for an hour in the bathtub to ease his back, called room service, and ate a steak and a baked potato in his room. The next morning he had breakfast in the hotel dining room and asked the waiter to have the kitchen put up a box lunch for him, telling him he would be back for the lunch after he checked out. Hoke drove to a nearby gas station, left the truck to have an oil change and lube job and returned to the hotel lobby. He bought a New Orleans paper and leafed through it looking for news from Florida. There was nothing of interest, and he concluded that even if the girls were found, it would not, in all probability, make any out-of-state newspapers. The New 0rleans paper was concerned mainly with a long story about four local black men allegedly beaten to death by a half-dozen white cops.

Hoke paid his hotel tab, which included the box lunch, in cash, picked up his lunch in the dining

room and got his truck from the service station. As a consequence, it was almost eleven a.m. before he got back on the highway.

Hoke stayed on I20 through Shreveport, then got a flat tire, right rear, after passing Tyler, Texas. Instead of changing the tire, he drove on the flat until he got to Canton and then had the spare put on. He also bought a new tire as a spare. He used Frank's credit card to pay for the new tire and the labor and ate his box lunch (two ham sandwiches made with butter, a wedge of apple pie, and a small acrid tangerine) while he waited.

The mechanic, who had all of his upper teeth missing, explained how Hoke could avoid downtown Dallas and Fort Worth altogether by taking I635 and I35. He marked the route on Hoke's road map and rejected Hoke's offer of a two-dollar tip.

"I charged a fair price for the job," he said. "I don't work for tips, and you won't find many white men in Texas who do."

Although it was dark by the time Hoke reached the cut-off, he found the marked route without difficulty and checked into a Ramada Inn in Denton, Texas. Hoke asked the desk clerk if there was a good restaurant in town and the clerk told him that a lot of townspeople came to the Ramada Inn for dinner.

"But we require a jacket," the clerk said.

"I don't have one with me."

"What size are you?"

"Forty-two regular."

"Let me see what I can do." The clerk left the desk and returned from the locker room a few minutes later with a soiled camel hair jacket.

"Try this on for size, Mr. Moseley."

The jacket was a forty-four long and the sleeves were too long, but Hoke folded them back, and said it would do for dinner. Hoke had fried catfish and hush puppies for dinner, followed by blueberry cobbler and coffee.

Hoke returned the jacket after dinner, tipped the

clerk two dollars for the use of it, and the clerk accepted the money, even though he was a white Texan.

Hoke left Denton at nine a.m., Friday morning, taking Federal Highway 380 to 287, and then drove north on 82, bypassing Wichita Falls, and stayed on 287 until he reached Amarillo. He bypassed Amarillo and then took I40 to Tucumcari, New Mexico. He bought a pair of swimming trunks, checked into the El Indio Motel which had a swimming pool, and stayed until noon the next day. He had huevos rancheros for dinner, ordered them again for breakfast, and lounged around the pool, swimming and taking the sun, until noon checkout.

As Hoke took I40 again, driving toward Albuquerque, he recalled that this highway was once the old Route 66, and he remembered snatches of Nat King Cole's song. For the first time, Hoke paid close attention to the scenery. The red, desolate landscape was appealing to him, and although it was sweltering now, he imagined that it would be miserably cold the winter with no trees to slow down the freezing winds.

Hoke drove through downtown Albuquerque, a dark brown city, and because he liked the name, spent the night in an adobe boarding house in Bluewater, New Mexico. There were ten boarders, all Chicanos, and Hoke enjoyed the family-style dinner of roast chicken, rice and beans, with corn and flour tortillas. The Chicanos were polite and soft-spoken and bore no resemblance to the abrasive Cubans Hoke had known in Miami. Although some of the boarders had jobs in town, most of them were either unemployed or gandy dancers on the Santa Fe railroad. Hoke had a small windowless room to himself in the rambling adobe house and there was a candle burning under a gaudy picture of the Virgin Mary above his single bed. Hoke blew out the candle before he went to sleep.

In the morning, eating with the other boarders

outside on the patio at three tables where they shared benches instead of chairs, Hoke felt well rested. Breakfast consisted of scrambled eggs, tortillas, hot sauce and refried beans. After breakfast, Hoke took a close look at the brown adobe wall surrounding the patio. In his mind, he tried to compare the wall with the painting of the wall in Bobby Stukes's apartment. The real wall was downright ugly as it caught the fierce morning sun and the red dust-balls that powdered the rounded top of the wall rose and fell crazily as he looked at them. There was no doubt about it; the artist who had painted Stukes's picture had painted something from inside his head--not the real thing. No wonder he hadn't been able to finish the painting.

Although Hoke's tab for dinner, his room, and breakfast was only twelve dollars, he decided that he would stay at more expensive motels with swimming pools for the rest of his trip. He had trunks and swimming in the pool at the El Indio Motel in Tucumcari had cleared his mind.

Before he did anything else, when he got to Los Angeles, he would find a lawyer and put him on retainer. That way, when the police allowed him his single phone call, he would have someone to call.

Hoke gassed his truck before leaving Bluewater and a teenager wearing hiking boots and bearing a backpack asked him for a ride to Gallup. Hoke told him to throw his pack in the back and to hop into the cab. The kid started to tell Hoke about his travels and Hoke told him that he didn't want to hear about them. The kid nodded, and then, a few minutes later, started to tell Hoke about a party he had been to in Taos that had lasted for two days and three nights. Hoke stopped the truck and told the kid to get into the back. When Hoke reached Gallup, he dropped the kid off at the edge of town and drove on through. Late that afternoon, when Hoke checked into a motel with a small pool in Flagstaff, he discovered that the kid had stolen his flashlight.

At any rate, the flashlight was missing and he had to assume that the kid had taken it, probably by wrapping his poncho around it when he climbed off the back of the truck with his backpack. Hoke still had the folded tarp and the pick and shovel, however, and he hadn't really needed the flashlight, but he should have realized that the kid would do something or other to get even with him for having to ride in the open truck bed and eat all of that red dust.

After a long swim in the pool and a steak, Hoke slept until six a.m., and got an early start, not stopping for breakfast until he reached Kingman. In Kingman, he bought a desert water bag, filled it when he gassed the truck, and purchased a blue bandanna in a sundries store next door to the gas station. He knotted the four corners of the bandana, poured water on it to soak it through and then wore the bandanna as a hat. The bandanna dried completely after twenty minutes and he poured water on it again and replaced it on his head. Small red blisters had formed on his left arm, so he rolled the left sleeve of his jumpsuit down to keep the sunburn from getting any worse. He had had such a good tan, he hadn't realized he could get so sunburned. The blisters had appeared gradually as he drove with his left elbow on the window ledge and he hadn't noticed them.

The temperature was almost 110 degrees when Hoke reached Needles, California, and he pulled into the first motel that had a pool. After he checked in, he went for a swim. After climbing out at the far end, his body was dry and he was shivering by the time his feet cleared the ladder. The water was too hot to be refreshing, so Hoke showered in his room, turned the air conditioning to Coolest and took a nap until seven p.m. His jumpsuit, which he had washed when he showered, was bone dry and was slightly powdered from the alkali in the water. Hoke had a hamburger and two glasses of ice tea down

the street, and checked out of the motel. He reached Riverside, California, at five a.m., and was too tired to drive any farther. He was only forty-some-odd miles from Los Angeles now anyway, and Riverside seemed as good a place to stop as any.

Hoke checked into a Howard Johnson's Motel, and, after a short shower, fell asleep on top of the bed without getting under the covers. The last thing he remembered as he fell asleep, was that this was the first time on his cross-country trip that he hadn't needed air conditioning.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Los Angeles, sprawling in all directions with its hazy skyline limned with freeways was a confusing city for the uninitiated driver. Hoke's major problem, after leaving Riverside, was to determine whether he had reached the city or not. He noticed little or no difference between Azusa and Pomona and he had driven all of the way through Pasadena before he realized that he was still looking for Pasadena and had somehow missed seeing the sign that marked the city limits, if, indeed, there had been such a sign. He avoided getting onto the freeways because he wasn't sure where to get off, and, as a consequence, he was subjected to a lot of stop and go traffic and unfamiliar street names.

But Hoke recognized City Hall when he found downtown L.A., having seen it hundreds of times on the old Dragnet TV series. He turned into a parking lot on Olive, surrendered his truck key and $8.00 in advance for parking, and started to walk back toward the Los Angeles Civic Center. There were more Asians on the street than Hoke had expected, but not nearly as many Chicanos as he had anticipated. Downtown L.A. was every bit as seedy as downtown Miami. The streets, if anything, were dirtier and derelicts stood in clusters on every street corner. He left Olive at Third Street, walked over to Hill Street, and checked the lobby of a four-story brick office building. He searched the white-lettered board for attorneys and arbitrarily chose J. B. Peralta because he had known a cop by that name in Miami who had been a fairly decent guy for a

Cuban. He took the elevator up to the fourth floor. The office, 414, was one room with two desks. Juan Peralta was behind one of them and an old lady occupied the other.

The grayhaired woman, with a wispy gray moustache, was reading a copy of Vanidades. The walnut-colored lawyer was adding a column of figures, with the aid of a tiny pocket calculator, at the desk by the shadeless window.

"I'm looking for J. B. Peralta," Hoke said to the old woman, "Attorney-at-Law."

"Yes, sir, " she said. "Do you have an appointment?"

"No."

"Juan," she said, swiveling her chair, "are you busy right now?"

Peralta put down his calculator, got to his feet, and shook hands with Hoke. He smiled. "I'm Juan Peralta," he said, "and this is Miss Peralta, my aunt. She's been helping me out the last few weeks."

"How do you do, Miss Peralta?" Hoke said, shaking the woman's hand. "I'm new in town," Hoke said to Peralta, "and I'm looking for a lawyer to put on retainer."

"Are you in trouble?" Peralta asked. He was a short man in his early forties, and he frowned with concern.

"Not yet." Hoke jerked his head slightly at the elderly woman, who had returned to her magazine.

"Perhaps you'd like some coffee?"

"Black, no sugar."

Peralta gave his aunt a dollar bill and asked her, in Spanish, to get a cup of coffee from the Coffee Dan's downstairs. She left, taking her magazine, and Hoke sat in the customer's chair by Peralta's desk.

"My name is Hoke Moseley. That's spelled l-e-y at the end, not l-y."

Peralta wrote the name on a yellow legal pad with a felt-tipped pen.

"Yes, sir."

"What's your specialty, Mr. Peralta? Do you specialize in criminal law, or what?"

"No. I've had traffic and divorce cases, of course, but I do closings mostly. Real Estate. Wills, like that."

"But you're familiar with criminal law? You know how to get a man out of jail on a bail bond, don't you?"

"On occasion, I've gotten clients out of jail on bail. That's a simple matter."

"And you've heard of Miranda?"

Peralta smiled, exposing, white teeth beneath his black moustache. "If you'll tell me what you've done, I'm sure I can advise you. And whatever you tell me is, naturally, privileged--"

"I haven't done anything. But if I do, and I happen to need a lawyer, I want him to come running. D'you see what I mean?"

"To protect your rights?"

"Exactly."

"I'm not what you'd call a highly successful lawyer, Mr. Moseley, but I know my way around the courthouse. And if you need references, I can provide you with several. Who sent you to see me, anyway?"

"No one. I picked your name from the board down in the lobby. It's always best, when you're in a strange city, to have a lawyer on retainer. Don't you agree?"

"What kind of business are you in, Mr. Moseley?"

"I'm retired. More or less."

"In that case," Peralta shrugged, "a simple retainer..."

Hoke counted out $1,000 in hundreds on the desk and put his reduced roll of bills back into his right front pocket.

"Will that be enough to start you running to give me a little advice--just in case I phone you?"

"That's ample. Yes."

"Good. Just give me a receipt on the back of your business card. Do you have your home phone number on your business card?"

"No, but I'll add it."

Peralta wrote a receipt for $1,000 on the back of his card along with his home telephone number and his address in Boyle Heights, then handed the card to Hoke. Hoke placed the card in his wallet.

"As your attorney," Peralta smiled, "I would like to advise you already. If you're contemplating something illegal, I suggest that you don't do it."

"Thank you."

"Is there anything else I can help you with? If you're new to the city, and you're looking for a place to live, perhaps I--?"

"Where's Glendale?"

"Glendale?"

"Yes. The Verdugo Woodlands, in Glendale."

"D'you have a car?"

"Yes."

"I've never been to Glendale, but I know something about the town. It was the last WASP enclave in L.A. County. Up until nineteen forty-nine, Glendale didn't allow any Mexicans or Jews to buy property out there. That's all changed now, of course, but the Verdugo Woodlands section is still an exclusive area. I know a little bit about Glendale, but as I said, I haven't been there. All you have to do, I think, is drive North on Broadway and look for the signs. It's about a half-hour drive from downtown, or maybe forty-five minutes after four-thirty. If you're looking for an address in the Verdugo Woodlands, stop at any gas station in Glendale and ask for directions. Or you can probably get a map from the Glendale Chamber of Commerce, if they have one."

"A map?"

"A Chamber of Commerce. I imagine they do."

"Never mind. I'll find it."

Miss Peralta returned to the office with the coffee.

She handed the paper cup to Hoke and arched her gray eyebrows when she saw the money on the desk.

"Do you want me to leave again?" she asked her nephew.

"Sit down, Miss Peralta," Hoke said, getting to his feet. "I'm leaving now."

"Just a minute, Mr. Moseley," Peralta said. "I'll need your address."

"I don't have one at present, but I'll call you when I get one. I suggest you find out how to get to Glendale."

Hoke left the office, carrying his coffee, and drank it in the hallway while he waited for the elevator.

In Eagle Rock, Hoke stopped at a Sears store and bought a double-barrelled twelve-gauge shotgun and a box of double-aught shells. He loaded the shotgun when he returned to his truck and put it on the floor of the cab. He covered the shotgun with his trenchcoat. At the next gas station, a Korean gas attendant showed Hoke a giant small-scale map of Los Angeles County that was nailed on the wall and traced Hoke's route from the gas station to Glendale and the Verdugo Woodlands.

"You'll recognize Eucalyptus Avenue when you see it," he said. "It's a divided street and there's a double row of eucalyptus trees planted down the median."

"What's a eucalyptus tree look like?"

"They're tall gray mothers and the branches start way up there. The bark, when they have bark, looks like it's ready to fall off. Besides, they smell like eucalyptus."

Hoke thanked the Korean and left the station. He was pleased with how well everything was going so far. He had discovered a hungry lawyer and he had picked up a bargain in the shotgun, which had been on sale for $79.95, plus tax, and he had found an articulate Korean who had given him a vivid description of what eucalyptus trees looked like.

Before he got to Glendale, Hoke spotted a good many of the trees, which were usually in rows in empty lots. There had been a lot of them beside the highway when he drove down from Riverside but he hadn't known what they were.

The Verdugo Woodlands above Glendale had more oaks than eucalyptus, however, and the roads curved steeply as he climbed the hills in second gear. He drove by Patsy's house without noticing it, and then parked on the median when he realized he had passed the number. He walked back, spotted the small numbered plate on a concrete block in the thick grass and examined the four cars parked in front of the house in the circular driveway. The cars were a Mercedes convertible, a Chrysler New Yorker, a Continental Mark IV, and a pink, well-preserved 1949 Jeepster with a fringed white canvas top. Patsy and Curly had company, apparently, but at least he had found the house. The two-story house was an old building with a double-garage in the rear, and the foundation, for the first four feet, had been reinforced with round field stones and concrete. The rest of the wooden house was painted green, but the paint had been applied several years back.

Hoke returned to his truck, made a U-turn through the trees on the median and drove into downtown Glendale. He parked on the street and had lunch in a drugstore, ordering the Blue Plate Special at the counter (meatloaf, mashed potatoes and canned green beans) and drank a glass of iced tea. He returned to his truck, parked in an A-OK park-and-lock lot a half-block from the Rialto Theater, and went to the matinee'.

The movie, Local Hero, had little or no plot and took place in Houston and in a small Scottish fishing village. It featured Burt Lancaster as a crazy financier and a young actress with webbed toes. There was no explanation given for her webbed feet, but because she spent most of the time in the water, and because there was talk about mermaids, Hoke

guessed that the audience was supposed to believe that the girl was, indeed, a mermaid. The small bay in Scotland, washed by the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, looked like a nice place to swim. But the story ended unhappily. An old man, who lived in a driftwood cottage on the beach, was forced out of his home by the Texas oil company.

After the movie, Hoke returned to the A-OK park-and-lock lot and discovered that someone had stolen his truck. Hoke had his parking stub and keys, but the attendant, a college student wearing an S.C. T-shirt and cut-off jeans, said he couldn't remember seeing anyone drive out of the lot in a white Datsun truck. Hoke pointed out his empty space and the boy became upset about the missing vehicle. Hoke agreed that it was possible that he had parked in a different space, and the two of them checked the lot--about forty cars--but the truck was definitely missing. The boy telephoned the police department and they waited almost five minutes before a squad car pulled up and parked by the tiny office.

Hoke showed the patrolman, a tall, rangy red-faced man, his keys and parking stub, and explained that the truck had been stolen while he was in the movie down the street. The officer's plastic name tag read "Arthur," and Hoke wasn't able to tell whether "Arthur" was the man's first or last name, nor was he going to ask. After reading Joseph Wambaugh's book, anything was possible out here.

"At least you didn't leave your keys in the ignition," the patrolman said.

"The windows were locked, too," Hoke said. "It's no trick getting the door open with a coat hanger, but whoever took the truck had to hot-wire the ignition."

"I'll tell you what," the policeman said, "sometimes kids steal a vehicle for a joy-ride. Why not take a ride with me, and we'll look around for it. Sometimes, when they get through riding around,

they just park the vehicle at Carl's Market, and leave it. I've found three stolen cars at Carl's in the last six months."

Hoke got into the front seat of the squad car and they drove to Carl's Supermarket.

"The tag number's Florida EYK-796," Hoke said, "with a Dade County designation."

"You drive all the way out here from Florida?"

"That's right. Just got in this morning."

The truck wasn't in Carl's lot. The patrolman parked the squad car. "It isn't here, but that doesn't mean that it won't show up later. I'll put it on the radio, and then I'll check back later here myself. Where are you staying. I'll drive you home."

"I don't have an address yet. As I told you, I just got in this morning. To tell you the truth, Officer, the reason I came out here was to get a reconciliation with my wife. She lives in Glendale now and that's why I drove out from Florida. We have two daughters, and they're staying with their grandparents back in Florida. They need their mother and I hope to take my wife back with me."

"She ran off, did she?"

Hoke lit a Lucky and looked out of the window.

"She ran off with a Negro."

The tall cop shook his head, and looked out his own side window for a moment. "Jesus." His red face turned a deeper shade of red.

"Listen, Officer," Hoke said, "I was a cop in Miami for twelve years. Homicide. It isn't easy for me to tell you about this and if it wasn't for the two girls, I'd say to hell with it."

"Are you sure they're in Glendale? We don't have many niggers living in Glendale. There's no regulation against it, but they just can't afford to live here, that's all."

"He can afford it. He swings a bat a couple of times a day for the Dodgers, and then he goes home."

"Curly Peterson? The pinch hitter?"

"Yeah. He lives on Eucalyptus Avenue."

"That explains everything, doesn't it? He must be a millionaire by now, for Christ's sake."

"Right. So if you'd drive me up to their house, I'd appreciate it. I'll make my little pitch, and then take a cab back to the police station and check with you on the truck."

"I take it you're not on the force any longer, is that right?"

"I quit the department. I work in my father's hardware store now."

"I don't like to discourage you, Mr. Moseley, but you may not be able to effect a reconciliation."

"I've got the girls and she's their mother. I've got to try. And if it doesn't work out, I'll just fly back to Miami. I wasn't going to drive back anyway. It's a brutal trip to drive out here all alone, believe me."

"You got enough money? I mean for the plane and all?"

"Plenty."

"Let's go, then." The tall cop drove out of Carl's parking lot.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

When they reached Curly Peterson's house and Hoke started to get out of the squad car, the patrolman cleared his throat.

"Just a second. You aren't going to cause any trouble, are you?"

'No." Hoke shook his head. "I've been planning what to say all the way across the country. I'm a little nervous right now, but that's because my truck was stolen. It gives you a funny feeling in your stomach to see the missing space where you know damned well you parked and locked your vehicle."

"I can understand that, but all the same, I'm trying to put myself in your place the way they tell us to do in sensitivity training, you see. And if I was in your shoes, I'm sure I'd be a little pissed-off."

"I'm not pissed-off. I've had time to think things out, and all I want to do is talk some sense into the woman. That's all." Hoke looked toward the house. The Mercedes was gone, but the other cars were still parked in the driveway. "The house needs paint, doesn't it? You'd think a rich ball player like Peterson could afford a better house."

"This is California. You may not believe it coming from Florida, but that there two-story house, in this particular location, probably cost him five or six hundred thousand dollars."

"You're shitting me."

"Hell, the lot alone would go for three-fifty. Real estate's real crazy out here, Mr. Moseley."

"If you say so, I believe you. In some places, it's just as bad in Florida. Down in Miami, even one-

bedroom condos sometimes start at seven-fifty."

"Condos cost out here, too. There're beach shacks, actually wooden shacks, on Malibu Beach, that sell for more than a million bucks. It's the land, you see, the location--not the house itself."

"I guess I'd better go in and get it over with."

"If you want me to, I'll wait and take you back to the station."

"No, thanks. If nothing else, she'll at least invite me to stay for dinner. I haven't seen her in awhile and she'll want to know all about the girls."

"I'd never eat dinner in a man's house who stole my wife."

"I'm trying to be civilized about this. As a marriage, ours is all washed-up, I guess, but the girls need their mother. And there's no way I can send them out here to be raised by a Negro, even if he is rich."

"Well, good luck, then. You're a lot more tolerant than I'd be, Mr. Moseley. That's a nice-looking little Jeepster there, isn't it? Maybe your wife'll drive you down to the Station and you won't have to call a cab."

"Whatever."

Hoke got out of the patrol car and walked up the driveway. He climbed the porch steps and knocked on the door with the brass knocker. The cop was still parked in the street. He smiled, waved to Hoke, and drove away as soon as Patsy opened the door.

She was wearing white linen slacks and a black silk blouse with puffed sleeves. There was a string of pearls around her neck. She wore her black hair in a short modified afro and false black-beaded eyelashes. Her azure eyes stared at Hoke as though she could see clear through him. Hoke thought for a moment that she didn't recognize him.

"What are you doing here?" Patsy said through clenched teeth.

"I came to see you. I want to talk about the girls."

Patsy closed the door and stepped forward. Hoke

backed up a step on the porch. She looked around him, frowning when she didn't see a car. "Are the girls with you?"

"No. They're back at Grandpa's house."

"Oh. Well, you've seen me. What else is on your mind? Make it quick, because I've got company."

"You mean you're living here alone?"

"We've got company. What d'you want, Hoke? What happened to all your hair? Christ, I hardly recognized you."

"In front, you mean? I lost it, I guess, banging my head against stone walls. You certainly look prosperous--"

Look, I can't talk now--"

"Aren't you going to invite me in?"

"I've got company, I told you. Why don't you call me later and perhaps I can meet you somewhere for a few minutes?"

"Don't you want to know about the girls?"

"Of course I do, but not now. Have you got my number? No, I'll call you. Where're you staying?"

"I thought I'd stay here with you."

"You can't. This isn't my house, it's Curly's. If he sees you here, I really don't know what he'll do."

"A real savage, huh? Can't you control him, Patsy? You never had any trouble with me--"

"I'm asking you in a nice way, Hoke. Please leave. Just call me later tonight around ten and I'll talk to you then." She reached behind her for the doorknob. As she turned to open the door, Hoke pushed quickly past her. As soon as he got inside the foyer, he took out his package of Lucky Strikes and his lighter.

Patsy shrugged and closed the door. "God, you're a stubborn sonofabitch! At least wait here. I'll be back in a moment." Patsy hurried down the hall with her heels clicking on the polished hardwood floor, took the second door to her right, and disappeared.

Hoke lit his cigarette and opened the door to the

left of the foyer. It was a small, crowded room used as a combined study and trophy room. There were an old-fashioned wooden rolltop desk, a faded Bokhara carpet on the floor, and a wall with shelves holding a dozen or more silver athletic trophies. The wall above the desk was filled with photographs in black wooden frames. Most of them were in black and white, but a few were in color, and they all had grinning images of Curly Peterson in various baseball uniforms. And he was definitely a black man with a nose almost as broad as his wide smile. Nevertheless, according to the photos, every person he met wanted to shake his hand.

Hoke went to the desk, rolled back the top, picked up a two-edged brass letter-opener, and slid it into the back pocket of his jumpsuit. He swiveled the desk chair around to face the doorway and sat in it. There were no ashtrays in the room, so he flicked his ashes on the carpet. He finished his cigarette and dropped it into a silver two-handled loving cup. He stood up, walked to the window and looked across the unmowed lawn and through the tall eucalyptus trees on the median. Downtown Glendale was down there somewhere, but the smoky haze started a hundred yards or so down the steep hill, and he couldn't see any of the downtown buildings. From this vantage point high above the city, it was like looking down on clouds as seen from an airplane. Perhaps, Hoke thought, part of the cost of a house like this came from being above the smog line, but he still didn't believe that an old wooden house like this one was worth five or six hundred thousand dollars.

Patsy appeared in the doorway holding an opened can of Lucky Lager.

"I brought you a beer. They'll all be leaving in a few minutes, Hoke. If you'll just wait in here with the door closed, Curly and I will both talk to you."

"Thanks," Hoke said taking the can of beer. "My mouth's a little dry. How long did you say?"

"Not long. Just a few minutes. Please, Hoke." She backed into the foyer and closed the door.

Hoke went back to the window. He took a swig from the can, placed it on the window ledge, and lit another Lucky. There were four more cigarettes in the pack and after they were gone, he was going to quit smoking again. He would have to quit because smoking in prison is considered a privilege; and privileges can be taken away from a man at the whim of a corrections officer. If he could break the habit again, and he knew he could because he had already proved it to himself, he would no longer need the so-called privilege of smoking. When there's no need, no loss is involved.

He could hear the guests talking outside in the foyer. As Hoke watched from the window, pulling the lace curtain to one side for a better view, he saw a bulky black man wearing a blue serge suit and a gray fedora, and a small blonde woman get into the Mark IV. The black man drove away and the little blonde woman waved good-bye to Patsy from the front seat. Patsy held the hand of a husky six-foot white man, who was wearing tennis shorts, a white polo shirt, and carrying a white, long-sleeved sweater in his left hand. She walked him to the pink Jeepster. He kissed Patsy on the cheek, jumped behind the wheel of the Jeepster, and spun the wheels as he tore down the driveway. He turned downhill on Eucalyptus Avenue without looking either way for traffic. Fortunately for the dumb bastard, Hoke thought, there was no traffic on the divided road. An odd mix of guests, Hoke thought, especially when he added himself to the list. The Jeepster driver was probably a ball player, too

and the formal old black guy with the paunch and the blonde was probably Curly Peterson's manager, or lawyer--or possibly, his father. At any rate, he had enough money to buy a Mark IV and a small blonde.

Hoke finished his beer, but his mouth was still

dry. He tossed the empty can into the wastebasket by the desk, and then flattened his back against the wall by the doorway. His hands were perspiring, so he wrapped his bandanna handkerchief around the flat handle of the brass letter opener and then held the letter opener point down against his right leg.

The door opened. Patsy walked into the room, followed by Curly Peterson. Peterson was six-four, at least 220 pounds and his bare brown legs beneath his red-and-blue plaid Bermuda shorts were completely hairless. He was wearing white tennis shoes without socks and a powder-blue T-shirt. His thick wrists were almost as large as his upper arms at the biceps. His thick curly black hair sprouted in a wild, tangled foot-long mass from his round head. His skin was the color of coffee heavily diluted with canned milk and he was not nearly as black in person as he appeared to be in the photographs on the wall.

When she didn't see Hoke, Patsy turned around with a puzzled expression, but before Curly could turn too, Hoke lunged and with an upward sweep of his arm, tried to stick the point of the letter opener into the back of Curly Peterson's thick neck. But the blunt, unsharpened point merely gouged a quarter-sized chunk of meat out of Curly's muscular neck. Hoke hadn't expected the ball player's reflexes to be so fast, knowing that he held the advantage of surprise, but a moment later, before Hoke could get in another stab, his right wrist was gripped so hard by Curly's right hand that his paralyzed fingers opened and the letter opener dropped silently to the carpet. Curly then hit Hoke in the solar plexus with a short left jab, releasing his wrist at same time. Hoke sat down hard, unable to breathe for a long moment. Gasping, he clutched his stomach, leaned forward, and as his breath returned, vomited most of his Blue Plate Special between his spread legs.

Curly backhanded Patsy sharply across her face. Red marks from his fingers rose into mottled welts

on her powdered cheek.

"Why didn't you tell me the crazy mother-fucker had a knife?" Curly asked.

Patsy rubbed her cheek, which was swelling rapidly. She pointed to the letter opener and Hoke's bandanna on the carpet. "He didn't have a knife. That's your letter opener."

Curly picked up the letter opener and the bandanna. He pressed the handkerchief against the hole gouged in his neck. The wound was bleeding profusely, so he held the handkerchief on it, turned, and kicked Hoke in the face with the toe of his right foot. Hoke's upper plate was knocked out of his mouth and it skittered across the carpet.

"What were you trying to do, you crazy redneck, kill me?" Curly said. "Hell, I don't even know you!"

"Don't hurt him, Curly," Patsy said. "Can't you see how pitiful he is?" She touched Curly lightly on his left arm. She crossed the room, picked the upper plate up from the floor and handed it to Hoke. Hoke regained his breath and walked on his knees to the swivel chair. His mouth was bleeding, but he managed to get into the chair. He shoved the plate into his bloody mouth and adjusted it.

"I said, why did you try and cut me, man?" Curly said. "I don't know you from Adam's house cat, for Christ's sake! Will you explain what's going down? I'd like to--"

"Calm down," Patsy said. "Take it easy--"

"What d'you mean, take it easy? You bitch! For all I know you set me up for this cracker!"

"You know better than that, Curly. I tried to get rid of him, but he wouldn't leave. I told you that. I didn't know he was going to stab you. But you aren't hurt. If you calm down a little, I'll get a bandaid and stop the bleeding."

"This ain't no little thing, girl. It burns like a sonofabitch and I want to get to the bottom of it."

Hoke felt dizzy. He put his head between his legs, leaned forward, and when his head cleared, he sat

erect. He held up his right hand.

"It's because of the pellets," Hoke explained. "The gas pellets. Florida still uses the electric chair, you see, and I thought if I got tried in California, I could get gassed instead of electrocuted, that's all. It just didn't work out right. Maybe I wasn't thinking straight. My shotgun was in my truck, you see, when it was stolen. But then the cop offered me a ride up here, and I figured I could improvise. For a man as big as you, you move awfully fast. I should've waited and got another vehicle and shotgun."

Curly shook his head and looked at Patsy. "What the fuck's he rambling about, anyway?"

Patsy shrugged. "He said somebody stole his shotgun. He was going to kill you with the shotgun, but after it was stolen he decided to stab you instead."

"I heard what he said," Curly said. "But what does he mean? I never did anything to this crazy bastard, so why would he want to kill me with a shotgun? "

"It isn't important anymore," Hoke said. "You can call the police if you like, but from now on I stand on my rights to remain silent."

"Shall I call the police, Curly?" Patsy asked.

"Are you crazy? How d'you think it would look in the papers? Your ex-husband trying to kill me? You've been divorced from this fucker for ten years, but reporters would eat this shit up like candy, for Christ's sake!"

There were three peremptory knocks on the front door.

Patsy looked at Curly. "Should I answer it?"

Curly nodded glumly and glared at Hoke. His thick fingers clenched and unclenched. "Go ahead. See who it is."

Patsy left the study, closing the door behind her.

Hoke was breathing normally again. There were blood splatters down the front of his jumpsuit and

trickles at the corners of his mouth. He looked down at his jumpsuit and shook his head. "My other jumpsuit was in the truck. I don't know whether I can wash the blood out of this one or not. I'll probably have to buy another jumpsuit."

"Look, Moseley," Curly Peterson said quietly after Patsy closed the door, "I'm going to turn you loose. But I want you to get the hell out of town. You can go back to Florida or wherever you came from, but I don't want you in L.A., d'you understand? I've got friends and we'll be looking for you. And if we find you in L.A. two hours from now, your white ass has had it. D'you understand what I'm saying, Cracker?"

"You don't have to worry. I had my chance and I blew it. I'll leave just as--"

Patsy opened the study door. "The policeman found your truck," she said, looking at Hoke.

"In that case," Hoke said, getting to his feet, "I'll be leaving now."

Curly Peterson stood between Hoke and the door and he didn't move. Hoke made a sidling circle around Curly as he walked to the door. Patsy stepped to one side and followed Hoke into the foyer. The front door was standing open and the tall, rangy cop, smiling, was standing on the porch.

"Found it at Carl's, just like I said. Some joyrider took it, that's all, and there's still gas in the tank."

"Thanks," Hoke said. "That's damned fine police work. Could you give me a ride down the hill?"

"I'll take you to the garage."

The moment Hoke stepped onto the porch, Patsy slammed the door behind him. The cop took in the blood on Hoke's jumpsuit and grinned.

"You all right?"

"The big fucker hit me in the mouth."

The policeman laughed as they walked down the driveway to the squad car, which he had parked at the curb. "What did you expect?"

"Not that, but at least I can say I tried."

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained," the

policeman said, as they got into the car. "You look okay, but your ignition was all fucked up. I had the truck towed to the garage across from Carl's. The mechanic's a friend of mine and he should have it fixed by the time we get there. It's a little steep, I know, to pay twenty-five bucks to have your vehicle towed less than two hundred yards, but towing's a flat fee. He won't overcharge you on the ignition job. Besides, I figured you'd be happy to get your truck back."

"I am, I am," Hoke said. "I'd've had to have the ignition fixed anyway. I appreciate the favor."

"'Then you can do a favor for me. When we reach the garage, pay your bill, get in your fucking truck and then get the hell out of Glendale. We've got a quiet little town here, d'you understand?"

"I understand perfectly." Hoke nodded. "By the way, is Arthur your first name or last name?"

"Both. "

"That's what I thought."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The truck wasn't ready yet. While he waited, Hoke changed into his clean jumpsuit in the men's room of the garage and washed his face and hands. His upper and lower gums were cut and bruised, but the bleeding had stopped. It could have been much worse, he knew, if Curly had been wearing leather shoes instead of tennis shoes.

Hoke's toilet articles and extra clothing were still in the truck, but the shotgun and the AM-FM radio were missing. Hoke concluded that the thief took the radio (although he hadn't ripped out the speakers), but he suspected that Officer Arthur Arthur had appropriated the shotgun. Otherwise, the officer's attitude toward Hoke wouldn't have changed so radically. When Hoke told Arthur that everything was there except the radio, he had merely grinned, and said:

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure. And all my car papers are still in the glove compartment."

"If I had your luck," the cop said, "I'd carry them in my wallet."

Arthur drove away and Hoke went into the office to pay his bill. The bill for parts, labor and towing was $91.57. Hoke charged the rip-off to his father's credit card.

As Hoke drove West on Santa Monica Boulevard toward the beaches he tried to put the botched assassination attempt out of his mind. At least it had been nice to see old Patsy again and to see her

looking so well. Except for losing ten or twelve pounds, she hadn't changed all that much in the last ten years. She could still pass easily for twenty-nine instead of thirty-nine, but the heavy make-up she wore made her look a little harder than he had remembered. But, as a businesswoman selling real estate in Vero Beach, she had had to be hard to survive in a highly competitive racket. If Patsy thought Curly Peterson was going to marry her, however, she had another think coming. She was living in a dream world. But then, women were like that; when all was said and done, they couldn't face up to reality the way men could.

In Santa Monica, Hoke parked in the J.C. Penney lot, went inside, and bought a khaki poplin suit off the rack. He bought a blue shirt, a black knit tie, black silk socks, and a pair of black winged-tipped shoes to go with the suit. He paid for the clothing in cash, and returned to his truck, carrying his purchases in two plastic J.C. Penney sacks. He still had plenty of cash left, although he hadn't expected to pay $158.00 for a cheap poplin suit. But he would need the suit when the police picked him up. Very few cops would rough up a man wearing a suit and tie, whereas a man in well-worn work-clothes simply had to take his chances.

Hoke thought that Santa Monica was too crowded for his purposes, so he turned South on U.S. 101 toward San Diego. He drove slowly through the beach towns, looking for a motel on the ocean side of the highway where he could go swimming without having to cross the busy highway. He saw a perfect motel in Redondo Beach, but he didn't stop because it was Redondo Beach. He shuddered. Every cop in America had heard about Redondo Beach. Hoke didn't find what he wanted until he reached Seal Beach.

He checked into the Seal Beach Grotto Motel and asked for the last unit on the row. He signed in using his father's MasterCard and then asked the

old lady behind the desk where he could get some decent seafood.

She put down her Enquirer, and sucked her teeth for a moment. "You like sand dabs?"

"I don't think I've ever eaten sand dabs."

"Well, I can recommend the dabs at the Seaview, 'bout two miles down, but not the abalone steaks. They charge you sixteen-fifty for abalone and the little piece they give you ain't no bigger around than that--" She made a circle with her thumb and forefinger. "But if you like sand dabs, you can get a whole plateful of dabs and fries for only six-ninety-five."

"Sounds good. Thanks."

"But you can't go in like that. You gotta wear a jacket. It don't make no sense, because I've seen women in there in hot shorts, but they still want men to wear jackets."

"It's the double-standard."

"It's something, I guess."

Hoke took his room key, got back in his truck, drove to the end cabin and backed into the carport. He took his new clothes and toilet articles inside and dumped them on the bed. He opened the vertical venetian blinds on the window facing the ocean. The sun had gone down, but there was still enough filtered light left to see the narrow beach and the dark water below his window. The cabin was on the edge of a rocky and fairly steep cliff, but there was a rough discernible path down through the rocks to the beach. The jagged, barnacle-encrusted boulders in the water were huge and incoming waves swirled through them in a lacy froth.

Hoke undressed, slipped into his trunks, and picked his way down through the rocks to the beach. He waded into the surf, plunged in, then got quickly to his feet and scrambled back to shore as fast as he could wade through the receding waves. The water had frozen him to the marrow and he

couldn't stop shivering, even when he returned to his room. The water temperature had to be somewhere in the low fifties, he surmised, and this was in July! Perhaps, tomorrow, when the sun was out, he would try it again, but he knew he could never enjoy swimming in water that cold. But it would have to do, because the Seal Beach Grotto Motel didn't have a pool.

Hoke took a shower and put on his new shirt and suit, but not the tie. The wing-tipped dress shoes were heavy and made him feel clumsy after wearing his light Nikes for so many weeks, but he left them on, knowing he would have to break them in some before they became comfortable. He drove down U.S. 101 to the Seaview and got a window table at the pier restaurant overlooking the Pacific. The tide was coming in strong and he could feel its strength as it crashed around the pilings beneath the plank floor.

Hoke ordered the sand dabs and fries. The sand dabs were preceded by a cup of Manhattan clam chowder and a small Caesar salad. Hoke enjoyed the sand dabs and finished his dinner by ordering a piece of hot apple pie. He would have preferred Key Lime pie, but knew better than to ask for it.

He drove back to the motel, changed into his jumpsuit and then tossed the dirty jumpsuit with blood on it into the wastebasket. The night had turned cold and the wind had risen. Hoke put his blue sweater on over his jumpsuit, walked down the cliff for a hundred yards or so, and sat on a smooth rock. Down the beach a quarter of a mile away, there were some young people sitting around a bonfire drinking beer. They had a giant ghetto-blaster with them and Hoke could hear the music as it rose and fell, and occasional laughter. He was out of cigarettes. Hoke walked back to the motel and got a package of Luckies out of the machine in the office. He walked back to his vantage point on the cliff and sat on the rock again before lighting a cigarette. The smoke tasted good so soon after

dinner and he decided to keep right on smoking up until the moment he was apprehended. Why not? While he was still free, he could at least smoke.

Everything was working out well.

Patsy would call Frank in Riviera Beach, but she would not get an answer. Tomorrow she would call the hardware store and then she would find out, if she didn't already know it, that Frank and Helen were aboard the Queen Elizabeth Two. She would then call Frank aboard the QE II and he wouldn't know what to tell her. By this time, Patsy would be a little panicky. She would probably call the store again and talk to Mrs. Wadsworth, who would tell her that he, Hoke, was down in Miami at a court trial. But Patsy would know differently from that and she would call the Riviera Beach police. The Riviera cops would check Hoke's apartment on Singer Island, and then they would--as soon as they could get a court order--search Frank's house. They would find the bodies.

And then the search would be on for the father of the two girls.

At best, then, Hoke had three days left, three days to swim and smoke at the Seal Beach Grotto Motel. He would make that four days and then he would call his lawyer, Juan Peralta. Wearing his new suit and tie, Hoke would accompany Peralta to the downtown L.A. Police Station and ask if they were looking for him. In four more days they would indeed be looking for him. But Hoke wouldn't say a word; with Peralta at his side, they wouldn't pressure him.

He would sign over the Datsun truck to Peralta, because a thousand dollars didn't go very far with a lawyer, even a Mexican lawyer like Juan Peralta. The truck would sell for at least $2,500 and that would be enough money for Peralta to fight his extradition to Florida. That meant at least three months in a single cell in Los Angeles before he was extradited. He would then go back to Riviera Beach-

-to a single cell--then to Palm Beach County Jail--another single cell, and ask for a public defender. He could request a change of venue and perhaps the trial would take place in Tampa or Jacksonville.

If he pled Guilty, he would get life, which meant a minimum of twenty-five years at Raiford Prison. As an ex-cop, with all of the enemies he had at Raiford, he wouldn't last twenty-five days in the general population. No, he would plead Not Guilty, as planned, and gratefully accept his deserved sentence to the electric chair.

At Raiford, however, there were more than a hundred condemned men already between him and the chair and they would all go first. His appeals would mean from eight to as long as ten years of peace and silence in a single cell, all by himself, on Death Row, before all of his appeals and stays were exhausted.

Privacy at last and no more hassles. He could work uninterrupted on his chess problems and perhaps read the Great Books, something else he had always wanted to do. He would have the time now, with no one to bother him, and with no one forcing him to do anything he didn't want to do. Once a man fully understands the joys of a life without struggle, he is equipped with the basic means of salvation.

In the end, of course, they would fry him in the chair, but by that time he would be at least fifty years old. He still had many quiet years ahead and a much happier existence than he had lived up until now.

Hoke, watching the moonlight on the black ocean, lit another cigarette. He sat there quietly, smoking, and waiting.

Waiting for absolutely nothing.

The End

HOG PIT Sty
CHICKEN POR
ALA CARTE E
SANDWIC
SLAB OF RIBS
ROAST BE
½WESTERN CHICK
PIG PILED
PIG PILED
WESTERN
ROLL TAT