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ELMORE LEONARD

FIRE IN THE HOLE

I.

They had dug coal together as young men and then lost touch over the years. Now it looked like they'd be meeting again, this time as lawman and felon, Raylan Givens and Boyd Crowder.

Boyd did six years in a federal penitentiary for refusing to pay his income tax, came out and found religion. He received his ordination by mail order from a Bible college in South Carolina and formed a sect he called Christian Aggression. The next thing he did, Boyd formed the East Kentucky Militia with a cadre of neo-Nazi skinheads, a bunch of boys wearing Doc Martens and swastika tattoos. They were all natural-born racists and haters of authority, but still had to be taught what Boyd called "the laws of White Supremacy as laid down by the Lord," which he took from Christian Identity doctrines. Next thing, he trained these boys in the use of explosives and automatic weapons. He told them they were now members of Crowder's Commandos, sworn to take up the fight for freedom against the coming Mongrel World Order and the govermint's illegal tax laws.

Boyd said he would kill the next man tried to make him pay income tax.

The skinheads accepted Boyd as the real thing, his having seen combat. Boyd had caught the tail end of Vietnam, came back with three pairs of Charlie's ears on silver chains and an Air CAV insignia on his arm, the tat faded from having been there now some twenty-five years.

Raylan Givens, a few years younger than Boyd, was now a deputy United States marshal. Raylan was known as the one who'd shot it out with a Miami gangster named Tommy Bucks—also known as the Zip—both men seated at the same table in the dining area of the Cardozo Hotel, South Beach, when they drew their pistols. Raylan had told the Zip he had twenty-four hours to get out of Dade County or he would shoot him on sight. When the Zip failed to comply, Raylan kept his word, shot him through china and glassware from no more than six feet away.

The day the Marshals Service assigned Raylan to a Special Operations Group and transferred him from Florida to Harlan County, Kentucky, Boyd Crowder was on his way to Cincinnati to blow up the IRS office in the federal building.

II.

Boyd was making the run in a new Chevy Blazer, all mud from wheels to roof after coming out of the hollows and forks of East Kentucky. The Blazer belonged to his skinhead driver, a new boy named Jared who'd just finished his sixty-day basic training and indoctrination, a skinhead from Oklahoma. Boyd said to him, "You see where out'n Oregon a militia group threw a stink bomb in their IRS office?"

"A stink bomb," Jared said, his eyes holding on the road, the view all trees, sky and semis. He said, "Shit, throw a pipe bomb in there, a grenade, you want to get their attention."

It sounded good, but did he mean it? Boyd had his doubts about this Jared from Oklahoma.

They had come out of deep woods five hours ago and were now following 75 on its approach to Covington and the Ohio River. Riding with them in back, covered in plastic wrap, were a pair of Chinese AKs, ammo and an RPG-7 antitank grenade launcher, another Chink weapon Boyd had used in the Nam, a little honey that fired a 40-millimeter hollow-charge rocket grenade.

He said to Jared, "I want you to tell me if there's something you don't understand about what you been learning."

Jared moved his shoulders in kind of a shrug, eyes straight ahead as they came up on a line of big diesel haulers. He had that lazy manner skinheads put on to show they were cool. He said, "Well, a couple of things. I don't understand all that Christian Identity stuff, their calling Jews the progeny of Satan and niggers subhuman."

Boyd said, "Hell, it's right in the Bible, I'll show it to you we get back. Okay, what're the Jews behind?"

"They control the Federal Reserve."

"What else?"

Jared said, "ZOG?" not sounding too sure.

"You betcha ZOG, the Zionist Occupational Government," Boyd said, "the ones set to rule us we let the government take away our guns. You see Chuck Heston on TV? Chuck said they'd have to take his out of his cold dead hand."

"Yeah, I saw him," Jared said, not sounding moved or inspired. Then saying, "There's Cincinnati up ahead. You see it before you get to the bridge."

This Jared had come recommended from an Oklahoma group, the Aryan Knights of Freedom, Jared saying he heard of Crowder's Commandos he couldn't wait to drive his new SUV over to Kentucky and join up. Saying he was anxious to get into high explosives 'stead of chasing niggers down alleys and spray-painting synagogues; shit. He said he was in Oklahoma City for the Murrah Federal Building, got there just a few minutes after she blew. He said it had inspired him to get in the fight. Sometimes talking about the Murrah Building it would sound like he had taken part in that mission with Tim and Terry.

No, Boyd and others weren't all that sold on this Jared from Oklahoma. How come he didn't have any Aryan tattoos? How come he was always touching his head? Like wondering if his hair would ever grow in again. Boyd didn't personally care for that bare-skull look, but allowed it since it was what they were known as. He preferred an inch on top and shaved sidewalls like his own regulation grunt cut, now mostly gray at fifty, steel bristles crowning his lean leathery face.

They were coming on to Cincy now, its downtown standing over there against a sky losing its light. A few minutes later they were on the northbound span of the Ohio River bridge. Boyd said, "Get off on Fifth Street."

"Another thing I don't understand," Jared said, "there's all these white power outfits around but nothing holding 'em together, no kind of plan I ever heard of."

"Except purpose," Boyd said. "Militias, the Klan, your pissed-off Libertarians and tax protesters, your various Aryan brotherhoods, we're all part of the same patriot movement."

They were on Fifth now passing hotels and that big fountain there.

"Also you have your millions who don't even realize yet they're part of the revolution. I'm talking about all the people caught up in white flight. You know what that is?"

"Yes sir, people moving out of town."

"White people moving to the suburbs. You think it's 'cause they're dying to cut grass and have barbecues in the backyard? Shit no, it's to get away from the niggers and greasers. And Asiatics, Christ, we got 'em all. Anybody wants in, sure, come on. Look at all the fuckin' Mexicans… "

He paused to give directions, but Jared was already turning left onto Main—without being told where they were going, now or anytime before.

Boyd gave him a look, but then had to hunch down as they passed the John Weld Peck Federal Building, Boyd trying to see up to the seventh floor of the nine-story building,

where the IRS office was located. All he saw was a wall of tall rectangular windows up no more than a few floors. Sitting up again Boyd said, “Take a left on Sixth and come around the block.”

They passed the Subway sandwich shop on Sixth his recon man Devil Ellis had told him about. Boyd didn’t mention it or say a word the rest of the way around the block, not until they were coming up on the federal building again.

“Lemme off on the corner over there and make your circle. I’ll be waiting.”

Jared turned left, pulled up in front of the yellow Subway awning, and Boyd got out. He went inside the shop—no one here but the woman behind the counter—and stood at the plate-glass window smelling onions. The view showed most of the John Weld Peck Building diagonally across the way. From here, Devil Ellis said, he’d have a clear shot at the corner windows up there. Which was how much Devil—what they called him—knew about firing a grenade rocket at a target this close and high up. It was the kind of stunt Devil would try, stoned or just crazy, stand here chewing on a roast beef sub dripping onions and decide, yeah, shoot through this big window.

Devil was the one drove down to the Tennessee line one night and set off a charge in the Jellico post office, and all the pissed-off retirees had to wait and wait to get their social security checks, which didn’t help the cause. Got the post office bombing listed with the abortion clinic Boyd was supposed to have blown up—the dumbest thing he ever heard of. What did you gain by it? Rob a bank and spray-paint White Power on the wall, you make your point and get away with a bag or two of cash.

It was Devil told him to keep an eye on Jared—both Devil and Boyd’s baby brother, Bowman, suspecting Jared had been planted among them by the FBI, the Federal Bureau of Imperialism, or was an agent himself, although pretty dumb.

Boyd walked out to the corner and stood watching for unmarked cars creeping around, vans parked where they shouldn’t be, spotters inside. It was getting dark already.

The muddy Blazer rolled up. Boyd got in and Jared said, “Which way?”

“Straight ahead.”

Boyd sat there and didn’t speak again until they were up Main Street a ways, crossing East Central Parkway now, and Boyd said, “We coming to it, Niggaville,” Boyd looking at dingy old buildings, run-down storefronts, people he saw as winos on the street. Another couple of blocks and he spotted the place Devil told him to look for. Sure enough, up on the right. “There it is,” Boyd said. “Go past slow.” He could read the sign now sticking out from the front of the building:

TEMPLE OF THE COOL AND BEAUTIFUL J.C.

A thin coat of whitewash covered the front, the place a dump, the sign blasphemous, calling Jesus cool and beautiful, for Christ sake.

“Turn left that next street and stop. I believe I can take ‘er from over there.” Boyd stuck his butt in Jared’s face pushing his way between the seats to get in the back. Jared raising his voice now:

“You gonna blow up that church?” Sounding surprised, then in kind of a panic. “Boyd, we’re in the middle of fucking Cincinnati.”

Now Boyd, in the back end of the Blazer, getting his Chinese grenade launcher unwrapped, raised his own voice to tell Jared, “You always have a secondary target, just in case.” He looked out the rear as Jared came to a stop. “This is good, I’m gonna have a clear shot.”

“Boyd, there’s people on the street.”

“I don’t see none. Just some niggers.”

“They gonna see us. I.D. my car.”

Boyd loved times like these he could show how cool he was under fire, so to speak. “You worried about your car, huh?”

“They’s people right up the block, watching. Boyd, you see ‘em? They watching us.”

Even if this Jared wasn’t a snitch, which could be, he sure as hell wasn’t commando material. “Fuck ‘em,” Boyd said. “We’re about to raise a whole lot of hell.”

He had the RPG just about put together. He’d screwed the propellant cylinder to the back of the missile grenade and slipped it into the tube, sticking out now like a fat spear. Next, he removed the nose cap from it. Shit, he could do this in the dark drinking from a jar of shine. He pulled out the pin, the safety, and called to Jared to get ready.

Now Boyd dropped the tailgate and slipped out to the street with his rocket gun, hefted it to his shoulder, flipped the sight up and took aim. He called out to no one in particular, “Fire in the hole!” Squeezed the trigger and that Temple of the Cool and Beautiful J.C. blew up before his eyes.

III.

Boyd got rid of the RPG crossing the Ohio River south, stuck his head and shoulders out the back end of the vehicle and flung the weapon out into the night. He told Jared to look for 275. That took them over to the airport, where he got Jared to follow the signs to long-term parking and find a spot a good ways from the terminal. “Over there toward the fence,” Boyd said, still crouched down in the back end.

Once they were parked, Jared said, “Now what?” sounding like all his energy had drained out of him.

Boyd didn’t answer. He had one of the Chink AK-47s unwrapped and armed with a magazine. He heard in his mind the familiar words lock and load and was ready for business.

Jared said to the rearview mirror, “What’re you doing?”

Boyd could see just the top of his head above the cushion on the front seat.

“How’d you know where we was going?”

“What?”

“You heard me.” It was quiet in here, neither of them moving.

“How’d you know we’s going to the federal building?” Now Jared’s voice in the dark said, “Was your brother told me. Him and Devil.”

“You mean you heard ‘em talking?”

“Uh-unh, Bowman told me and then Devil goes, ‘But don’t let on you know.’ “

“I think you spied on ‘em.”

“No sir—you can ask ‘em.”

“I think you listen in on things you shouldn’t, and then report it to who you work for. Is that what you are, a snitch for the feds?”

Jared had his head raised to the rearview mirror. “Boyd, you got no reason to say that, none.”

“I saw how you acted, I’m setting up to blow out that nigger church. You didn’t want no parts of it.”

“They was people around, watching us.”

Sounding like he was starting to panic again. Boyd asked himself, You want to argue with him or get ‘er done?

He laid the barrel of the assault rifle on the backrest of the seat close in front of him and bam, shot Jared through the headrest of the driver’s seat—the round going through the fat cushion, through Jared, through the windshield, through the rear window of the car in front of the Blazer and through its windshield—Boyd discovering this once he was outside and took a look.

From the terminal he called Devil Ellis at the Sukey Ridge church to tell him he’d arrive at the London-Corbin airport on the late shuttle. Devil was full of questions on the phone, but Boyd managed to satisfy him with, “Yeah, I had to let Jared go. I’ll tell you about it when you get me.”

Now in Devil’s pickup, trailing its headlights along pitch-dark roads toward Sukey Ridge, Boyd filled him in: how he’d knocked out the nigger church—Devil letting out a Rebel yell—and then how, not taking any chances, he shot Jared, wiped down the Blazer pretty good where he’d sat, and stashed the rifles and extra RPG loads and parts along that cyclone fence there separating the lot from the airfield? They’d send one of the skins, see if he could pick ‘em up.

Boyd sipped from a jar Devil kept in his truck, then looked over at him with his dark beard and black cowpuncher hat Boyd allowed, the look being the man’s style, Devil’s devilish, go-to-hell image.

“Jared said you told him where we’s going.”

“Yeah, me and Bowman.”

Boyd took another sip of the shine. “Even thinking he was a snitch?”

“Bowman figured Jared’d fuck up and you’d see he knew more’n he was supposed to and you’d get on him about it.” Boyd said, “Yeah…?”

“Jared’d say it was us told him and you wouldn’t believe it.”

Boyd said, “Then what?”

“We figured you’d work on him in your way and get him to confess.”

Boyd said, “That he’s a traitorous snitch.”

“Yeah, in the pay of the govermint.”

“But he didn’t tell me nothing like that.”

“You work on him?”

“I started in but, hell, I knew he’d lie to me.”

“I know what you mean—those people. So you put him down. I’d have done the same.”

Boyd didn’t say anything to that. They drove through the dark in silence till Devil said, “You know how he was always talking about the Murrah Building, saying he was there like a minute after she blew? Me and Bowman don’t believe he was anywheres near it. Saw it on TV like everybody else.”

Boyd said, “Was it you didn’t trust him or you just didn’t like him much?”

Devil said after a moment, “I guess both.”

They were coming to the church now, way up there where that speck of electric light showed on the ridge. Across the front of the property, coming down to the dirt road they followed, was a pasture, a good five acres of cleared land and no road leading up. It was around the next bend where the pickup slowed to turn into the trees past the sign that said PRIVATE PROPERTY TRESPASSERS WILL BE SHOT.

Boyd said, “You watching for claymores?”

“You think you’re funny,” Ellis said. “If I believed you planted any I’d move clear to Tennessee.”

They followed switchbacks up through the trees finally to top a rise and coast into the barnlot back of the old church, not used for services since Ike was President. Boyd had bought it cheap, had it painted and turned into a dormitory for when his skinheads were here. Anybody complained it looked like a prison dorm, Boyd would tell ‘em to go sleep in the barn—with a mean rat-eating owl lived there. He got out of the truck stiff, tired from riding.

Three skins watched him from the back porch where a kerosene lamp sat on top the fridge. The two fat boys were locals Boyd called the Pork brothers. The one without a shirt this cool evening, his dyed-blond hair spiked, was a boy named Dewey Crowe from Lake Okeechobee in Florida. He wore a necklace of alligator teeth along with the word HEIL tattooed on one tit and HITLER on the other, part of the Fuhrer’s name in the boy’s armpit.

Walking toward them Boyd said, “What’s going on?”

It was Dewey Crowe who spoke up. “Your brother got shot.”

The words came at Boyd cold, without any note of sympathy, so he took it to mean Bowman wasn’t shot any place’d kill him.

But then Dewey said, “He’s dead,” in that same flat tone of voice.

And it hit Boyd like a shock of electricity. Wait a minute—in his mind seeing his brother alive and in his prime, grown even bigger’n Boyd. How could he be dead?

“Was his wife shot him,” Dewey said, “with his deer rifle. They say Ava done it while Bowman was having his supper.”

IV.

It was Art Mullen, marshal in charge of this East Kentucky Special Op Group, who had requested Raylan Givens, now seated in Art’s temporary office in the Harlan County courthouse. It was an overcast morning in October, the two sipping coffee, getting acquainted again.

“I remember you were from around here.”

“A long time ago.”

“You still look the same as you did at Glynco,” Art said, meaning the time they were both firearms instructors at the academy. “Still wearing the dark suit and wing-tip cowboy boots.”

“The boots’re fairly new.”

“Don’t tell me that hat is.” The kind Art Mullen thought of as a businessman’s Stetson, except no businessman’d wear this one with its creases and just slightly curled brim cocked toward one eye, the hat part of Raylan’s lawman personality. He said no, it was old.

“What do you pack these days?”

“This trip my old Smith forty-five Target.” He saw Art grin. “You and your big six-shooter—born a hundred years too late. You ever get married again?”

“No, but I wouldn’t mind some homelife. I can’t say Winona ruined it for me. I stopped to see my two boys on the way up. They come down to Florida every summer and I get ‘em jobs.”

There was a lull. Raylan looked toward the gray sky in the window, trees starting to change color. Art Mullen, a big, comfortable man with a quiet way of speaking, said, “Tell me what you remember of Boyd Crowder.”

Raylan, nodding his head a couple of times, went back to that time in his mind. “Well, we dug coal side by side for Eastover Mining, near Brookside. Boyd was a few years older and had become a powderman. He’d crawl down a hole with his case of Emulex five-twenty and come out stringing wire. You’d hear him call out ‘Fire in the hole,’ to clear the shaft. She’d blow and we’d go back in to dig out the pieces. We weren’t what you’d call buddies, but you work a deep mine with a man you look out for each other.”

Art Mullen said, “Fire in the hole, uh?” in a thoughtful kind of way.

“I hate to say he was good at it,” Raylan said, and sipped his coffee, still back all those years in his mind. “I remember when we struck Eastover and Duke Power brought in scabs and gun thugs? Their cars’d drive in, Boyd’d be waiting to swing at ‘em with a wrecking bar. He was put in jail twice. Then when he shot one of the scabs, almost killed him, Boyd took off and I heard he joined the army. Came out and what happened, he went to prison?”

“Came out pissing and moaning,” Art said, ” ‘cause we quit in Vietnam ‘stead of getting it done. He bought a truck and went to work hauling timber for the mines. Ten years never paid his income tax, refused to, claiming he was a sovereign citizen. The U.S. attorney sent him to Alderson. That’s where he got into what they call the patriot movement. You read his sheet?”

“I’ve only had time to skim it so far,” Raylan said. “He’s been busy, huh? Has his own army now, bunch of serious morons sieg-heilin’ each other?”

“More serious’n you think,” Art said. “Boyd’s got ‘em making horseshit bombs, fertilizer and fuel oil. They drive to a town like Somerset, blow up somebody’s car to get the police busy and go rob a bank.”

Raylan was nodding. “I saw it in a Steve McQueen movie.”

“Well, these people aren’t movie actors.” Art leaned forward, resting his arms on the desk. “Lemme tell you about this guy they found at the Cincinnati airport, sitting in his new Chevy Blazer shot through the back of the head. This is Jared, on file with the Bureau as some kind of Aryan knight. Oklahoma driver’s license and registration.”

“You put him with Boyd?”

“Lemme get to it,” Art said. “This is good. Just the night before, a black church in

Cincinnati—they called it a street mission in the paper—was blown up."

Raylan was frowning. "It was a church? I caught only part of it on the news."

Art held up one hand. "Listen to me. Four witnesses say a guy got out of the Blazer with what looked like a bazooka and fired it into the church. But right before, you know what he said, yelled it out? 'Fire in the hole.' "

Raylan straightened. He said, "Come on …" his interest picking up.

"All four witnesses heard it. So now evidence techs go through the Blazer. They find this little cardboard cylinder you hook onto the back of an RPG rocket. It holds the juice, the propellant. One he must've missed."

"So you got the dead guy with Boyd."

"It would seem, huh? But first," Art said, "we want to put Boyd and the dead guy at the church. What's interesting, it's only kind of a church. The pastor, it turns out, Israel Fandi, is one of the witnesses. Only at first he won't admit who he is till people start pointing at him. Israel wears an African outfit, a dashiki and a little pillbox hat and talks like he's Rasta-farian. You know what I mean?"

"Ethiopian," Raylan said. "By way of Jamaica. I remember now on the news they said it was believed the people smoked ganja as part of the service."

"They smoked it, they sold it—the place was a dope store passing as a church. It blew," Art said, "there was free grass all over the block. This was three days ago. Since then we got the Cincinnati police to loan us Israel Fandi. He's in a holding cell downstairs, but claims he didn't see the man's face had the bazooka. I said to him, 'Israel, you see him in a lineup, the man we know blew up your church, you might change your mind.'"

"The power of suggestion," Raylan said. "Without holding the marijuana over his head. We'll save it. Next thing is to pick up Boyd, if he's still around."

"What've you got on him otherwise?"

"The U.S. attorney wants to collect indictments under a charge of sedition. That he did willfully and knowingly et cetera conspire to overthrow, put down and destroy by force the government of the United States."

"But what've you got you can take to court?"

"Only bits and pieces of evidence."

“Then he’s most likely still around,” Raylan said.

“Well, he’s got sympathizers. Half the people living up in the hollers around here,” Art said, “are on welfare but still don’t trust the government, won’t talk to census takers. Boyd’s mother and his ex-wife are in Evarts. His skinheads train at a place up on Sukey Ridge, what he calls his Christian Aggression Church. Signs on the trees say you approach at your own risk, as the road’s been mined.”

“You let him get away with that?”

“ATF swept it. There aren’t any mines. Another house, one he used to own up on Black Mountain? It’s been under foreclosure since he went to prison. We want to sell it to cover his back taxes, but Boyd’s put the word out, anybody buys the house, he’ll blow it up.”

“I remember,” Raylan said, “they used to raise marijuana crops up there, acres of plants all the way down across the Virginia line.”

“They’re still growing it, but that’s not our business, busting dopers.”

“No, but what I was thinking,” Raylan said, “Israel being into weed, what if you sold the house to him? Say for a hundred bucks or so.” He had Art starting to grin. “And you let Boyd know a black guy’s living in his house.”

Not a bad idea, Art saying yeah, that could bring him out. Saying then, “There’s another situation could do it. You know Bowman, Boyd’s brother?”

Raylan saw him in a football uniform. “Sorta. He was a star running back in high school—this was after I got out. Boyd was always talking about him, how Bowman had the goods and would go on to play college ball and become a pro. I was never that sure.”

Art said, “You remember the girl he married, Ava?”

Raylan’s tone came alive as he said, “Ava, yeah, she lived down the street from us.” He remembered her eyes. “She’s married to Bowman?”

“Was,” Art said. “She ended the union the other day with a thirty-ought-six, plugged him through the heart.”

It stopped Raylan. He remembered a cute little dark-haired girl about sixteen and how she tried to act older, flirting, working her brown eyes on him. He remembered her sassy cheerleader moves on the field Friday nights, the girls in blue and gold doing

their routines, and his eyes would be on Ava the whole time. Too young or he would've gone after her.

He said to Art, "You talk to her?"

"She admits shooting him. Ava said she got tired of him getting drunk and beating her up. She was arraigned this morning. Her lawyer had her plead not guilty to first and second degree and she was released on her own recognizance. Unusual, but the prosecutor, knowing Bowman, would just as soon not bring her up. They'll work out a plea deal."

"Where is she now?"

"Went home. I told her, you know Boyd's gonna come looking for you. She said it's none of our business. I told her it is if he shoots you. You want to talk to her?"

"I wouldn't mind," Raylan said.

She'd be fixing her face to go to work at Betty's Hair Salon, and Bowman would say, "Who you think you are, Ava Gardner? You don't look nothing like her."

Ava had quit trying to get it through his head no one ever said she did. The day she was born her daddy named her Ava on account of Ava Gardner saying she was a country girl at heart with a country girl's values. He had read it somewhere and believed it and would remind her as she was growing up, "See, even a good-looking woman don't have to put on airs."

She married Bowman a year out of high school because he was cute, because he was sure of himself and told her he'd never work in a goddamn coal mine. He'd wear the blue and white of the University of Kentucky and after that get drafted by a pro team; he wouldn't mind the Cowboys. But colleges either wouldn't accept his grades or didn't think he was good enough. He blamed her for their getting married and taking his mind off staying in shape so he could try out at some school as a walk-on. She said, "Honey, if your grade-point average sucks …" Uh-unh, that had nothing to do with it, it was her fault. Everything was. It was her fault he had to dig coal. Her own fault he hit her. If she didn't nag at him he wouldn't have to. Unless he slapped her for the way she was looking at him. He'd start drinking Jim Beam and Diet Coke—ate like a hog and drank diet soda—and she'd see it coming as his disposition turned from stupid to ugly and pretty soon he'd be slapping her, hard. She ran way to Corbin and got a job at the Holiday Inn waiting tables. Bowman found her and brought her back saying he missed her and would try to tolerate her acting up. It was her fault she miscarried after he'd beat her with his belt. Her fault he didn't have a son he could take hunting with him and his creepy brother. She told Bowman there were times he wasn't home Boyd would stop by wanting a drink, and if she gave him one he'd start getting funny,

“your own brother.” Bowman whipped her for telling him, kept after her with his belt till she fell and hit her head on the stove.

This was the other night. She got up from the floor knowing he would never hit her again.

The next day, Saturday, he walked in smelling of beer and gunfire, like nothing had happened the night before. She had his supper on the table, ham and yams, cream-style corn and leftover okra fixed with tomatoes, because she wanted him sitting down. Once he’d poured his Jim Beam and Diet Coke and took his place at the table, Ava went in the kitchen closet and came out with Bowman’s Winchester. He looked up and said with his mouth full of sweet potato what sounded like “The hell you doing with that?”

Ava said, “I’m gonna shoot you, you dummy,” and she did, blew him out of the chair.

When the prosecutor asked if she had loaded the rifle before firing it, she paused no more than a second before telling him Bowman always kept it loaded.

Raylan was told Bowman himself couldn’t find his house when he was drunk. Go on up along the Clover Fork, or take the Gas Road out to the diversion tunnels and turn right down to a road bears east where a sign says JESUS SAVES, and it ain’t far; start looking for a red Dodge pickup in the yard.

It was one-story with aluminum awnings set high among pines. Raylan got out of the Lincoln Town Car—one Art had taken off some convicted felon and given to Raylan to use— and crossed the yard past the Dodge pickup to the front door.

It opened and he was looking at a woman in a soiled T-shirt worn over an old housedress that hung on her, her dark hair a mess. Ava was forty now, but he knew those eyes staring at him and she knew him, saying, “Oh my God—Raylan,” in kind of a prayerful tone.

He stepped into a room with bare walls, worn carpeting, a sofa. “You remember me, huh?”

Ava pushed the door closed. She said, “I never forgot you,” and went into his arms as he offered them, a girl he used to like now a woman who’d shot and killed her husband and wanted to be held. He could tell, he could feel her hands holding on to him. She raised her face to say, “I can’t believe you’re here.” He kissed her on the cheek. She kept staring at him with those eyes and he kissed her on the mouth. Now they kept looking at each other until Raylan took off his hat and sailed it over to the sofa. He saw her eyes close, her hands slipping around his neck, and this time it became a serious kiss, their mouths finding the right fit and holding till finally they had to breathe. Now

he didn’t know what to say. He didn’t know why he kissed her other than he wanted to. He could remember wanting to even when she was a teen.

“I had a crush on you,” Ava said, “from the time I was twelve years old. I knew you liked me, but you didn’t want to show it.”

“You were too young.”

“I was sixteen when you left. I heard you got married. Are you still?”

Raylan shook his head. “Turned out to be a mistake.”

“You want to talk about mistakes… I told Bowman I wanted a divorce? He goes, ‘You file, you’ll never be seen again.’ Said I’d disappear from the face of the earth.”

“I hear he used to beat you up.”

“That last time—I’ve still got a knot where I fell and hit my head on the stove. You want to feel it?” She was touching her scalp, fingers probing into her wild-looking hair, and her expression changed. She said, “Oh my God, don’t look at me,” pulling the T-shirt over her head, the hem of the housedress rising to show her legs hurrying away from him. “Close your eyes, I don’t want you to see me like this.” But then she stopped before going in the bedroom and looked back at him.

“Raylan, the minute you walked in I knew everything would be all right.”

The bedroom door closed and he wanted to go knock on it before she started assuming too much. Show her he was a federal marshal and tell her why he was here. But then had to ask himself, Why are you? Art had said she didn’t want protection. He’d offer it anyway. No, he was here to get a lead on Boyd. Kissing her had confused his purpose there for a minute.

Raylan walked over to the table where they said Bowman was sitting. He looked in the kitchen at a pile of dishes in the sink—Ava letting her housework go, letting herself go, not knowing what was to become of her. But she had all of a sudden pulled herself together, ashamed of the way she looked, and it sounded like she was expecting him to see her through this. And if she was, what was he supposed to do? For one thing they’d better quit kissing.

It wasn’t a minute later the front door banged open and a guy wearing alligator teeth walked in the house.

V.

Gator teeth, spiked hair dyed blond and a tattoo on his chest, part of it showing the way his shirt hung open. He stood there looking Raylan over before saying, “Who in the hell are you, the undertaker?”

Raylan got his hat from the sofa and set it on his head the way he wore it. He said, “I might be undertaking a situation here. Lemme see what you have on your chest,” wanting this skinhead with hair to open his shirt.

He did, held it apart to show Raylan his HEIL HITLER tattoo, no weapon stuck in his belt. Raylan decided not to mess with Adolf Hitler, saying now, “You buy that necklace or poach the gator and yank her teeth out?”

It got the skin to squint at him but still wanting to tell, because he said, “I shot her and ate her tail.”

Now Raylan squinted to show he was thinking. “That would put you in Florida, around Lake Okeechobee.”

It got the skin to tell him, “Belle Glade.”

“Is that right?” Raylan reached into his inside pocket for his ID case. “I sent a boy to Starke was from Belle Glade, fella name Dale Crowe Junior.” He flipped open the case to show his star. “I’m Raylan Givens, deputy United States marshal.” He flipped the case closed. “You mind telling me who you are?”

The skin was staring now like he did mind and had to decide whether or not to tell. Raylan said, “You know your name, don’t you?”

“It’s Dewey Crowe,” the skin said, putting some defiance into the sound of it. “Dale Junior’s my kin.”

Raylan said, “Man, that’s some family you belong to. I know of four Crowes either shot dead or sent to prison. Tell me what you’re doing here.”

Dewey said, “I come to take Ava someplace,” and started toward the bedroom.

Raylan held up his hand and it stopped him.

“Lemme tell you something, Mr. Crowe. You don’t walk in a person’s house ‘less you’re invited. What you better do, go on outside and knock on the door. If Ava wants to see you I’ll let you in. She doesn’t, you can be on your way.”

Raylan watched him, curious as to how this boy wearing alligator teeth would take it—big, ugly teeth but no apparent weapon on him.

What he said was, “All right.” Keeping it simple to show he was cool. He said, “I’m gonna go out.” Paused to set up the rest of it and said, “Then I’m coming back in.” He turned and went out the door, leaving it open.

Raylan came over to stand in the doorway. He watched young Mr. Crowe hurrying toward his car standing in the road, an old rusting-out Cadillac, and watched him raise the trunk lid.

Raylan took off his suitcoat and hooked it on the doorknob. He wore a blue shirt with a mostly dark-blue striped tie. He reset his hat on his head. Now his hand went to the grip of the revolver on his right hip, the .45-caliber Smith & Wesson, but did not clear it from the worn leather holster.

He watched Dewey Crowe bring a pump shotgun out of the trunk and start back this way, all business now, his mind made up, his dumb pride taking him to a place it would be hard to back out of.

Though he hadn’t racked the pump to put a shell in the breech.

Still hadn’t as he slowed up seeing Raylan in his shirtsleeves, Dewey Crowe taking careful steps now, holding the shotgun out in front of him.

Raylan said, “Mr. Crowe? Listen, you better hold on there while I tell you something.”

It stopped him about fifty feet away, his shoulders hunched.

“I want you to understand,” Raylan said, “I don’t pull my sidearm ‘less I’m gonna shoot to kill. That’s its purpose, huh, to kill. So it’s how I use it.”

Speaking hard words in a quiet tone of voice.

“I want you to think about what I’m saying before you act and it’s too late.”

“Jesus Christ,” Dewey said. “I got a fuckin’ scatter gun pointed right at you.”

“But can you rack in a load,” Raylan said, “before I put a hole through you?”

Raylan stepped out to the yard. He said,

“Come on,” pushing the barrel of the shotgun aside to take Dewey by the arm and walk him out to the car, a piece of junk but still a Cadillac.

“Where’d you want to take Ava?” Dewey said, “Man, I don’t understand you.”

“Boyd want to see her?”

“It’s none of your business.”

“You know Boyd and I were buddies? We dug coal and drank beer together.” Raylan opened the car door. “You see him, tell him I’m in Harlan.”

Dewey didn’t say anything getting in the car. He had to turn the key a few times before it caught. Raylan reached through the open window and put his hand on his shoulder. “I was you, boy, I’d drop this Nazi bullshit and get back to poaching gators, it’s safer.”

Dewey looked up at him. As he said, “The next time I see you …” only got that far before Raylan took a handful of his spiked hair and brought his head down hard on the windowsill. Raylan hunched over now to look into the face tightened with pain.

“Listen to me. Tell Boyd his old buddy wants to see him, Raylan Givens.”

VI.

He went back in the house to find Ava in the kitchen pouring Jim Beam, Ava in a tank top and shorts, her hair wrapped in a towel that was like a white turban around her head. She said, “Who was that?” not sounding too interested. He told her and she said, “Oh, the one with Heil Hitler on his chest, he was one of Bowman’s buddies.”

“He came to take you someplace.”

“Most likely to see Boyd. You want something with yours? I’ve got Diet Co’Cola, RC Cola, Dr Pepper… “

“Just ice, if you have some.”

“I ever forget to fill the trays Bowman’d start slapping me. ‘What’s wrong with you? Don’t you know how to keep house?’ “

The towel covering her hair made the rest of her seem more exposed, white and kind of puffy, more to her, like she had gained a good twenty pounds since taking off the housedress that hung on her. He saw now it was that wild hair that had made her face appear drawn. He noticed bruises on her pale skin, on her arms and legs, that made her appear soiled, and, oh man, her behind filled out those shorts—Raylan watching her carrying their drinks to the table where she had shot her husband.

“I cleaned it up good. Had to scrub the wall there with Lysol to get, you know, the

stains off it. I think Lysol's the best cleaning product you can buy."

Raylan sat down at the table with her. "You haven't seen Boyd, have you? I mean since?"

"No, but he'll be after me, I know. He's been after me."

"That's why we want to keep an eye on you," Raylan said. "You know I'm with the Marshals Service."

"I believe was your mother told me, before she passed." Ava lit a cigarette from a pack lying on the table and blew a stream of smoke by him. "I made the mistake of telling Bowman about his brother coming around and he whipped me with his belt. Didn't want to believe it." She drew on the cigarette again. Smoke came out as she said, "Here's a man was so jealous he'd stop by Betty's to check on me."

"Betty's?"

"Hair Salon, where I work, or did. I trained under Betty washing hair, giving perms. I do hair now for special occasions, weddings, graduations I do a bunch of the girls. Yeah,

Bowman'd stop by and look in He'd get on me for the least thing. Like if he found a hair in his baked possum? Or I didn't get out all the scent glands? He'd have a fit, throw his supper at me, the plate, the whole mess."

Raylan listened, sipping his drink, wanting to get back to Boyd.

"I wish I could move, go someplace and open my own hair salon. Where do you live?"

"West Palm Beach."

"Is it nice?"

"Palm trees and traffic, if you're going anywhere."

Ava drew on her cigarette and started to grin. She turned it off exhaling the smoke and said, "I think Bowman's problem, besides being stupid, he wasn't raised properly. He had the worst table manners. Like he'd be sitting here, he'd lean over to one side and get a look like he was concentrating on some deep thought? Furrow his brow and let a fart. It didn't matter he was having his supper. But the worst, oh my Lord, were the beer farts, the next morning when he was hungover? I'd have to leave the house."

Raylan managed to smile, nodding his head.

“That’s the way he always was, either drunk or hungover, or gone. Off playing soldier with his brother.”

“You have any idea where he is?”

Ava looked at him funny. “I imagine he’s in Hell. Where else would he be?”

“I mean Boyd.”

“Boyd’s on his way there. You gonna arrest him?”

“We have to catch him in the act first. Robbing a bank, blowing up a church… making an attempt on your life… “

“Mine?”

“You said yourself he’ll be coming after you.”

” ‘Cause he likes me. Boyd don’t want to shoot me, Raylan, he wants to”—she shrugged in a cute way—”go to bed with me.” Ava stubbed out her cigarette, her eyes warm as she looked at him and put her hand on his. “You want me to help you catch him?”

Raylan sipped his drink. “How about if you get him to talk to me?”

“I could do that.”

Ava got up and Raylan’s gaze followed her into the kitchen. He said, “I hear he has a place up by Sukey Ridge.” Then had to wait for Ava to come back to the table with the Jim Beam and a bowl of ice.

“It’s his church,” Ava said, freshening their drinks. “He’s only there when he gets his skinheads together. There’s a fun bunch. They sit around drinking beer and listening to black-hater bands, different ones like the Midtown Boot Boys, Dying Breed, all bopping their bald heads. They are so creepy.”

“Boyd doesn’t stay there?”

“Bowman said he has places around nobody knows about, not even all the skins.” Ava took a drink and said, ” ‘Cept I know of one,” giving Raylan a sly look with those brown eyes he remembered. “Was Boyd, not Bowman, told me where he stays most of the time.”

Raylan took a drink. “You want to tell me where it is?” Ava said, “What do I get if I do?”

VII.

It was Devil Ellis saw the car headlights out the window, moving up the grade, and told Boyd somebody was coming. Boyd folded the map full of arrows and circles they were looking at and shoved it into the table drawer.

Devil, at the window now, peering out from under his black hat, said, “Who do you know drives a Town Car?”

Walking to the door Boyd said, “Why don’t we find out,” each being cool in front of the other.

Devil said, “Ain’t anyone I’ve seen before.”

Boyd opened the door and watched the man in the cocked Stetson approach out of the dark. Boyd, grinning now because he was glad to see him, said, “It’s my old buddy, Raylan Givens.”

Raylan had to smile seeing the way Boyd was waiting for him, holding out his arms now, Boyd saying, “God damn, look at you, a suit and necktie, all dressed up to look like a lawman.” He gave Raylan a hug, patting his back, Raylan letting him for old times’ sake. As they stepped apart Boyd looked over at Devil. “Here’s how you wear a hat, casual, not down on your goddamn ears.”

Raylan looked him over, recalling a Devil Ellis on Art Mullen’s skinhead list. This one was giving Raylan a dead-eyed look, showing he wasn’t impressed, as Boyd was saying,

“I hear you called on Ava. Boy name Dewey Crowe said he ran you off.”

“You believe that?”

“Not if you say it ain’t so. Ava’s the one told you I was here?”

“I talked her into it. Told her I wouldn’t tell anybody.”

“How do you know she didn’t send you to me?” Boyd winked. “So I could decide what to do with you.”

“I’ll take care of him,” Devil said, wanting in on what was going on.

Raylan didn't bother with him. He said to Boyd, "I doubt she even knows this is the house was foreclosed on. Pretty slick, move back in figuring nobody would look for you here." Raylan saying it as he began to look around at the front room of this farmhouse that was spare of furnishing—a table and a few straight chairs on the linoleum floor—but looked like a gallery with all the white supremacy symbols framed on the wall. There were emblems representing the KKK, Aryan Nations, the Hammerskins, SS thunderbolts, RAHOWA with a death's head that stood for Racial Holy War, swastikas on an Iron Cross, over an eagle, Nazi Party flag with swastika… Raylan said, "You all sure like swastikas," and looked over at Boyd. "What's the spiderweb?"

"You get it tattooed on your elbow if you done time or killed some minority, Jew or a jigaboo."

"Boyd, you know any Jews?"

"A few. I also know they run the economy, control the Federal Reserve and the IRS. I recruit skins don't know any more'n you, have to show 'em why we have a moral obligation to get rid of minorities. Read your Bible."

"It's in there?"

"Part of Creation. Back at the beginning of time you got your mud people, referred to as beasts 'cause they don't have souls. Okay, Adam jumped Eve and she begat Abel, the beginning of the white race as God intended. But then Satan in the form of a snake jumped Eve. She begat Cain and things got out of hand. Cain began fucking mud people, the women, and out of these fornications came the Edomites. And you know who the Edomites are?"

"Tell me."

"The Jews."

"You're serious."

"Read your Bible as interpreted by experts."

"Are you born again?"

"Again and again."

"I think you're putting me on," Raylan said, noticing silver chains now hanging from deer antlers, on the wall with photos taken of Boyd in Vietnam. Raylan walked over and Boyd followed him.

“They look like dog turds now, but they’s ears I took offa dead gooks I killed. After I got back I use to offer a pair to different women I was seeing.”

“No takers, huh?”

“It was like a test. A woman that won’t accept a pair and wear ‘em proudly ain’t the one I’m looking for. We invite these little Nazigirls up to the church? Chelsea girls they’re called—shitkickers, hair under their armpits—any one of ‘em would wear a pair of the ears, fight over ‘em, but they’re not my type. I like a woman ain’t afraid of nothing but more feminine in her ways, more womanly.”

“Like Ava,” Raylan said.

“Listen, I called her up—” Boyd stopped and looked over at Devil. “Go on get us a jar and a couple glasses.” He raised his voice, “Clean ones,” as Devil went out to the kitchen. Boyd turned to Raylan. “He just got his release, so he’s looking for action.”

“I can tell,” Raylan said.

“Was down three years on a marijuana conviction—you know it’s grown all around here. Devil couldn’t convince the court what he had was for personal use. Four hundred pounds in two refrigerators.”

Raylan sensed a connection between Devil and the marijuana church in Cincinnati and said, “We were thinking to sell this house to a black man, see if it might bring you out in the open.”

Boyd said, “Your nigger would never’ve known what hit him.”

Devil came with a jar of shine no meaner-looking than water, a few specks of charcoal in it, his fingers in the three glasses he placed on the table.

Boyd shoved one of the glasses back to him. “This is me and Raylan’s party. You aren’t invited.” Devil seemed to want to argue, give a reason to stay. Boyd told him go on, get outta here.

Now he poured their drinks, a few inches of pure corn into each glass. “I don’t like him hearing things he’s liable to take the wrong way.”

Raylan said, “How you feel about Ava?” He took a sip. It was smooth, but caused saliva to rise in his mouth and made him swallow a couple of times.

“I called her up,” Boyd said. “I told her the only reason I didn’t take her out and shoot her, I saw she had no choice in what she done. I told her she showed spunk for a

woman, not knowing what I'd do about it. I told her another reason was the Bible saying a man should see to the needs of his brother's widow, and that I intended to take care of her."

"Bless your heart," Raylan said.

"Don't get smart with me. I meant it."

"Boyd, you use the Bible to get what you want, same as you use all this white supremacy bullshit to rob banks and raise hell, blow up a church in Cincinnati for the fun of it. See, I'm giving you the benefit you aren't mental. I know you aren't stupid enough to believe that mud people story."

They stood facing each other across the table, the quart mason jar of moonshine between them, Boyd showing his size in a khaki shirt pulled taut across his chest. He appeared calm, his eyes showing interest.

He said, "Raylan, the whole world's gonna become mulatta we don't separate the races quick. I believe that much and it's enough."

Raylan only shrugged. "Then you'll die for it or go to prison."

Boyd looked at him now like he was trying to decide something in his mind.

"You'd shoot me, you get the chance?"

"You make me pull," Raylan said, "I'll put you down."

Devil had the map spread open on the table again, the one with the circles and arrows. He said to Boyd coming back in the house, "You kiss him goodbye?"

Boyd said, "You want your jaw broke?"

"I'm kidding with you," Devil said, waited for Boyd to sit down and hunched over next to him to point out on the map. "Here, we take 421 down across the Virginia line. East on 606 and we come to Nina, not an hour from here."

"How many people?"

"Less'n four hundred. Nearest deputies are at Big Stone Gap. Hit the town, the bank, the stores, bang bang bang, any place there's a cash register. Run up the flag…Which one?"

"Rebel battle flag."

“That’d be my choice. We show how a town can be taken over and secured with fifteen militia. How, the time comes, it can be done all over the Jewnited States.”

Boyd put his finger on a line Devil had drawn. “I don’t see a road here.”

“It ain’t on the map, Boyd, it’s a four-wheeler trail through marijuana country, one of many the growers use. It takes us up to near 38 and we’re back home.”

Now, as Boyd studied the map, Devil said, “Why’d you let him go? I could’ve put him away, easy.”

Boyd looked up. He said to Devil, “Stick to your recon.” Looked at the map again and said, “What I do with Raylan’s my business.”

Boyd had come outside with him to stand with his hands in his pockets, nodding toward the crest of a slope that had been strip-mined and stood bare against the night sky. He told Raylan they were cutting the tops off of mountains and letting the slag run down to ruin the creeks.

Shaking houses to pieces with their blasting. He reminded Raylan how their dads had dug coal ten hours a day for eighty cents. How “me and you” would go into worked-out mines and chop into the pillars of coal holding up the roof, and run like hell if she began to cave. Remember? It was called robbing the mine. And how they stood on the picket line the year they struck Eastover and watched the courts back the company scabs and gun thugs. “Whose side’s the govermint always been on, Raylan, us or the people with money? And who controls the money and wants to mongrelize the world?” That was his argument, why he felt he could rob banks and kill anyone wasn’t white. There was no talking to him.

Raylan said, “You’re gonna stand in a lineup tomorrow, Harlan County courthouse, nine o’clock.”

“What’d I do now?”

“You can show up or we’ll come get you.”

He made his way down the mountain and through Evartspast his high school, the Home of the Wildcats, going toward Harlan till he swung off 38 to follow dirt roads dark as pitch, no sign other than JESUS SAVES, and would have missed the house if a light wasn’t on—Raylan thinking that if he’d stayed he’d be living up a hollow in a house like that, a pickup truck in the yard But what would he be?

Ava hugged him and gave him a kiss on the cheek and held on bringing him inside, Ava

wearing a loose sweater now with her shorts, wearing her hair in a softwave that came close to one of her brown eyes and a nice scent that he liked—Raylan sitting with her on the sofa now, their drinks on the coffee table Bowman must've put his steel-toed work shoes on to get it scarred like it was, Bowman a presence, his wife until a few days ago sitting at the end of the sofa by the lamp shining on her hair. "Did you see Boyd?"

"I told him he has to come in tomorrow. Boyd blew up a church in Cincinnati and we have a witness who'll take a look at him."

"Well, that was quick. Boy, you work fast," Ava said, raising her eyebrows at him. "And I oughta know."

Right there, Raylan knew he should tell her wait, he wasn't making a move on her. But what he said was, "Boyd might not show up. Even if he does, I'm pretty sure he won't be made, identified."

"So you'll be staying around? Cool."

Ava got up and went to her CD player. She put on Shania Twain and came back singing along, " 'Men's shirts, short skirts, oh, oh, oh, really go wild, doin' it in style…"' The phone rang. Ava turned down the volume on her way to the kitchen. Raylan heard her say, "Who?… Oh, yeah, I remember. Listen, hon? I can't talk to you right now, I've got company." Now she was laughing as she hung up the phone. Ava turned the volume back up and joined Shania again singing, " 'Oh, oh, oh, get in the action, feel the attraction… ' Fella name Russ. Can you believe he's the second one's called me? I kinda knew 'em from a Fourth of July party we went to. Couple of showoffs. They made a bet, see who could throw down a blue blazer the fastest. You know, you light a shot glass of whiskey? That's a blue blazer. They both threw theirs over their shoulder and banged their shot glasses down at the same time, on the picnic table." Ava shook her head, smiling at the memory. "Cute guys, I'd see them watching me. Now I'm single again they're calling me up. You believe it?"

Ava fell into the sofa to sit low, her head bent against the backrest, her legs apart in the shorts. She turned her head against the cushion to look at Raylan. "Jealous?"

For a moment there, listening to her on the phone, the flirty way she used her voice, he did get a feeling he didn't like. In his head and out again, but it was there.

She said, "Hey, I'm just teasing you. I know you have a life. You must, a cool guy like you? No, I just thought, you're here, why don't we party? I can still do those old Wildcat cheers I know you liked to watch. I still have all the cute moves. Get your motor turned on. You want, Raylan, you can spend the night. How's that sound?"

VIII.

Six A.M. they brought Boyd Crowder down to the courthouse under guard, Art Mullen not trusting the man to walk in on his own. Raylan believed he would. Last night when he called Art, he said the idea of walking in past a gathering of law enforcement people would appeal to Boyd, the man confident he'd walk out again, after.

Raylan made the call from Ava's house after telling her he wouldn't be able to stay the night. She said if he had to get up real early she could set the alarm, it wouldn't bother her none. She said she knew he wanted to. He said well sure he did— and it was true, he was tempted—but, see, an officer of the law wasn't supposed to go to bed with the defendant in a murder investigation. Ava said oh, she didn't know that. She said well, couldn't they like just fool around? It was hard to get out of there but he did.

Now he stood in the main corridor of the courthouse. Art Mullen motioned to him and Raylan went over to where Art was standing by an office door, the top part glass. He looked in to see Israel Fandi sitting alone in his dashiki, all different shades of brown with some orange.

"Izzy was telling us," Art said, "how his family from Ethiopia goes back seven hundred years. I said I didn't think Mobile, Alabama, was that old. That's where he's from originally. We turn the lights out in there and line up Boyd out here in the hall. We thought at first with some miners. But you know what Boyd looks like?"

"A cop," Raylan said. "I see his buddy's here, the one they call Devil? And a skinhead from Florida with dyed hair."

"I saw them."

"You let 'em hang around?"

"They raise a ruckus, we can bust 'em."

It wasn't long after, Devil himself strolled up, Dewey Crowe trailing him. Devil said, "What time's the show?" As he looked in the office Art stepped in front of Devil and shoved him aside, Devil saying, "Hey, come on, me and Iz are buds." Art told him to keep away from the door and Devil said, "He never saw Boyd up there in Cincy. Even if he says he did to please you, you know he didn't. But why would he? Iz's going down anyway for the weed."

They brought Boyd along the corridor and stood him in line with three marshals and two ATF agents and turned out the light in the office. It was off a good ten minutes, the lineup standing in place, before it came on again. Raylan noticed Boyd was the only one didn't move or fidget during that time. Now Art came out with the Bureau

people who'd been in there with Israel and told Boyd he could go. Boyd saw Raylan and came over.

"I'm gonna sit down with my lawyer when I leave here. They went through my house saying they had probable cause to look for guns. They tore up my posters and threw 'em in the trash barrel with my gook ears, burned up my private property."

"It wasn't yours," Raylan said. "The house belongs to the Marshals Service. You can understand they don't like all that Nazi shit hanging on their walls."

"It's some govermint can take a man's house from him," Boyd said. He looked up the corridor to where Devil and Dewey Crowe were waiting for him, then back to Raylan.

"Last night this marshal's telling me how one time you gave this fella twenty-four hours to get out of town or you'd shoot him on sight. Is that true?"

"Was a gangster I saw shoot an unarmed man," Raylan said. "I didn't feel he deserved any special favors. I gave him the option and he turned it down."

"Well, all the trouble you're causing me," Boyd said, "I thought I'd make you the same offer. Get out of Harlan County by tomorrow noon or I'll come looking for you. That sound fair?"

Raylan said to him, "Now you're talking."

When he told Art Mullen Boyd had set this deadline, Art said, "It's become something personal?" frowning, at first not liking the sound of it.

"That's what it looks like," Raylan said, "since Boyd and I go back, but it isn't. You're the one gave him the idea while you're busting up his house last night."

"Our house," Art said.

They were having their noon dinner of steak and eggs at the Western Sizzlin Steak place out on the 421 bypass.

"I see you and him both cut from the same stock, born a hundred years past your time."

Art had said it once before and it reminded Raylan of a woman named Joyce saying pretty much the same thing but in different words. He was seeing her at the time he shot the gangster in Miami Beach, and Joyce had trouble accepting the fact he had deliberately shot and killed a man. She told him he had an image of himself as a lawman, meaning an Old West lawman but without the big mustache, and he believed

it might be true in some deep part of his mind. Another time Joyce said, “The way you put it, you said you called him out. What did you think, you were in a movie?” Her saying it caught him by surprise, because at times he did see it that way, as something he had borrowed from a western movie. He liked westerns a lot.

By the time they were into their flame-kist steak and eggs, both dipping toast into the yolks, Art had come to appreciate Raylan’s situation.

“We’re like big-game hunters, you know it? Only you’re the bait, like a goat tethered to a post. All we have to do is keep you in sight.” Art took time to chew up a bite of steak. “What’d he say exactly, he’s coming for you or we’re coming?”

“He said he was.”

“But we don’t know if he wants to shoot you or blow you up, do we?”

Raylan, mopping up his plate, didn’t comment, letting Art have his fun.

“Or, Boyd might jump the gun,” Art said, “do it ahead of time, when you aren’t looking. I was you I’d check under the car before you turn the key.”

He said later on when they were having their pie, “I knew bringing you here was a good idea.”

IX.

Boyd didn’t hate Raylan any more’n he’d hated those dead gooks without ears. Taking Raylan out was like a military objective, better to look at with a clear head than get emotional about it. Up at Sukey Ridge he told the skinheads gathered for the raid into Virginia he was putting it on hold, there was a matter he had to settle first. The skins gave him their shrugs and popped open beers.

He had already put the two locals, the Pork brothers, up on that hill that was behind the Mount-Aire Motel, where Raylan and the rest of the feds were staying. The brothers had Russian binoculars, deer rifles, an AK-47 and a cell phone and were told to stay in the trees and watch for Raylan Givens. Call and report whenever his Town Car came or went, a big shiny Lincoln losing its shine. One of the Pork brothers said, “What if we get a clear shot at him?”

Boyd wasn’t sure they could hit the motel from beyond two hundred yards, but it gave him an idea. How to set Raylan up and get him off by himself. He told the Pork brothers to sit tight, he’d let them know.

He told Devil Ellis and the skin who wore the alligator teeth, Dewey, he was thinking

of taking his shot that night. It was Devil said, “I thought you were giving him twenty-four hours.”

Boyd said what that actually meant was the next time you saw the person, not the next day to the hour. Hell, the guy would be dug in waiting on you. He said, “I know Raylan ain’t leaving, so I may as well hit him when it suits me.” He told them he had considered waiting across the road from the motel with an RPG and when the Town Car pulled in blow it to hell. “But there’s no cover over there to speak of, the mall close by,” Boyd said, “and I’d as soon plug him face-to-face anyway.”

Both Devil and Dewey said they wanted to be there when he did, and Boyd surprised them saying they would, as they were gonna be his backup. They acted tickled to death till he said, “You know Raylan will have his own people,” and could tell they hadn’t thought of that. But then he said, “How’d we keep the law busy when we robbed those banks?” It got their heads nodding, both of ‘em grinning, showing they still wanted to be along. “I’ve thought of a way to keep the feds out of the picture,” Boyd said, “if we can get the timing down. The idea, separate Mr. Givens from his pack of suits and get him off by hisself.”

Oh boy, they liked the sound of that, asking how they’d do it, blow up a car? Boyd said, “I got another plan. What I want you fellas to do is locate Raylan and let me know where he’s at, from now on.”

Late afternoon, Raylan came out of Art Mullen’s office in the courthouse to see Ava coming along the corridor in a beige outfit, skirt and sweater, pearls, Ava getting better-looking by the day, her expression becoming a big smile as she came up to him.

“My lawyer’s still talking to the prosecutor, but it’s looking good. Come on with me while I have a smoke.”

She took him outside, saw the benches on Central Street occupied—”Geezers’re always sitting there,” Ava said—and they went over to the bench in front of the Coal Miners Memorial: six columns of dead miners close to ten feet high, Raylan’s dad’s name among them. He found it as Ava, smoking her cigarette, told him she was pretty sure she’d get off with no more’n probation. “I plead to some kind of manslaughter and I won’t have to go to prison. Hey, why don’t you come by for supper? I’ll fix you something nice.”

Raylan said, “Baked possum?”

“I only cooked that for Bowman. I got mad at him one time and put roach powder in it? He goes, ‘Honey, this is the best possum I ever et.’ Didn’t even get sick. I’ll pick up a couple of nice fryers and fix you some hot biscuits and gravy.” She grinned at him. “Look at you licking your lips.”

Raylan said all his life fried chicken was his favorite, but he had to hang around, didn't know when he'd be off.

Ava said, "I'm fixing it anyway." She looked him in the eye saying, "You're a big boy, Raylan. You want to come, there's nothing on earth gonna stop you."

Devil had his hair cut and beard trimmed at the Cumberland Barber Shop, across the side street from the courthouse. He put on his hat and got in Dewey's junk Cadillac, parked in front of the shop. Dewey said, "You missed it. He come out with Ava, they talked and he went back in again. You said you thought that red Dodge over on Central was Bowman's? It was. Ava got in it and drove away."

Devil said, "Wasn't for Boyd I'd have me some of Ava."

Dewey said, "Wasn't for Boyd me and you could have us the marshal. Say we took him out, what would Boyd do, kick and scream? He does that anyways."

Devil said, "You got the nerve to shoot a marshal?"

Dewey said, "I got the nerve and a reason to."

They were silent, thinking about it, till Devil said, "That barber didn't say one goddamn word to me the whole time he's cutting my hair."

Ten of six they watched Raylan come out of the courthouse with four other suits and go to their cars parked on Central.

Dewey said, "We get out on the highway—you're driving 'cause it's my idea—I reach in back for the twelve-gauge and blow him away. What's wrong with that?"

Devil said there wasn't nothing wrong with it.

Except once they got to 421 two other marshal cars were on Raylan's tail all the way to the Mount-Aire Motel. Devil called Boyd to tell him Raylan was back in his room.

"Roger that," Boyd said, and told Devil,

"Okay, he should be leaving again pretty soon. I got a way to bring him to me I think'll work. He leaves, you stay on him."

Devil's voice said, "Where you at?" sounding surprised.

"Down the road from Ava's. You stay on him, hear?"

Boyd sat in his Jeep Cherokee by the JESUS SAVES sign, the road here like a tunnel through the trees, dark as night. He called the Pork brothers on the hill behind the motel and told them to get ready. “You saw him come back?… Okay, you see his car pull out again, you let it go. understand? But then any other cars pull out to follow him? You open up on ‘em. Pour it on, as many rounds as you can squeeze off.”

The Pork brother on the phone said it was near dark, how would they see the cars? Boyd said, “Jesus Christ, they put their lights on, don’t they? Aim back of the headlights.”

Boyd believed the suits would spot ‘em and swarm up there with sheriff’s deputies and state police and shoot those two fat boys down, but didn’t see losing them would handicap him any. It was the reason the Pork brothers were up there.

He drove through the tunnel of trees to a semidry creekbed he turned into and stopped about fifty yards in to leave the Jeep. It was a place he’d used to slip up on the house, make sure Bowman wasn’t home. It was close by. Boyd moved through the pines toward a light shining in the front room, meaning she was home. He rapped on the door. It opened, and he saw right away Ava was expecting company.

X.

She had on her party dress, the shiny green low-cut one with the straight skirt she’d worn to Bowman’s funeral. Seeing Boyd instead of Raylan gave her a start and all she could say was, “Well, hi,” disappointed. There was nothing to hide, so she told Boyd she’d invited Raylan for a home-cooked supper but didn’t know if he’d make it or not.

Boyd came in sniffing, saying, “Mmmmmm, fried chicken.” Saying, “Why don’t you call Raylan and remind him? Go on, he’s at the Mount-Aire.” And gave her the phone number.

Well, then she became suspicious. Why would Boyd know that? “You’ve talked to him?”

“Honey, me and Raylan are old buddies. I thought you knew that?”

She hesitated because it sounded fishy.

“Go on, give him a call. But don’t say I’m here.”

“Why not?”

“I’m not staying,” Boyd said, “so why mention it. I can see you want to flirt with him some.”

“We was neighbors,” Ava said, “that’s all.”

“I know, and you want to talk about old times and so on. Go on, call him.”

Raylan picked up the phone to hear Ava asking if he could smell the chicken frying. “It’ll be done by the time you get here.” Raylan, sitting on the side of his bed, took a few moments before telling Ava he was on his way.

He went next door to Art Mullen’s room to let him know he was going. Art said, “You don’t see it as Boyd using her?”

“I would,” Raylan said, “except she asked me this afternoon, at the courthouse.”

“She could’ve been setting you up then,” Art said. “I think we’ll tag along.”

Raylan didn’t argue. He drew Art a quick map showing how to get to Ava’s and left.

Dewey saw headlights pop on, the Town Car out from the motel, and hit Devil’s arm, Devil still behind the wheel, Devil adjusting his hat as he turned the key and the starter groaned without catching. “You’re gonna flood it,” Dewey said. “Pump the gas pedal twice and try it.” It worked, the engine roaring to life, and they took off east after the Town Car, Dewey saying, “Now catch the son of a bitch, will you?” He reached over his seat for the shotgun and saw out the rear window another car pulling away from the motel and heard gunfire, an automatic weapon, and saw sparks jumping off the road behind the car, the car swerving, u-turning back to the motel with its headlights off. Now a rifle was firing along with the bursts from the AK, Devil hunched over the wheel saying, “Jesus Christ,” and Dewey saying, “It’s the fat boys, up on the yan side of the motel, holding ‘em down. Come on, man, put your foot in it.”

Raylan saw the headlights trailing him. He came to the diversion tunnels, drilled through the mountain to run off floodwater, made his turn south and slowed down to watch. Now the headlights behind him made the turn and Raylan took off, holding the car in deep ruts all the way to the JESUS SAVES sign, where he made his turn into the deep tunnel of trees, the dirt road here not much wider than the car.

They saw they weren’t going to catch him, no way. They’d drive on up to Ava’s and do what Boyd said, back him while he made his play. Dewey said he hoped they’d get there before Boyd shot him. Man, that was something he wanted to see.

Devil, his eyes stuck on the narrow road, said, “Christ Almighty …” The Cadillac headlights coming onto the rear end of the Town Car sitting in the road, its lights off, the Cadillac creeping now, Devil taking his time, saying, “The hell’s he doing?” as they came to a stop about twenty feet short of that black rear deck shining in their

headlights.

Dewey said, “He must be sneaking up on the house.”

Devil looked toward Dewey and said, “No, he ain’t,” because there was Raylan standing at Dewey’s side of the car, resting his hands now on the sill right next to Dewey. They had to say something to him, Devil wanting to know what the hell he thought he was doing, Dewey asking why he was blocking the fuckin’ road.

Raylan didn’t say a word, not till he opened the door and slipped into the back, picked up the shotgun and rested the barrel on the front seat, between the cowboy hat and the gator killer’s dyed hair.

He said, “Tell me what’s going on.”

Silence, neither one of them saying a word.

Raylan racked the shotgun and saw them jump.

“I didn’t hear you.”

“There ain’t nothing going on,” Devil said. “We’s out riding around.”

Raylan squeezed the trigger, putting a big hole in the windshield with the explosion, and the two skins clamped their hands over their ears, turning their heads back and forth.

Raylan racked the pump again and Devil said, “Boyd wants to talk to you is all.”

“He told me he’s gonna shoot me.”

Dewey turned his head to say, “Then what’re you asking us for, asshole?” and Raylan laid the shotgun barrel across his face, a quick hard stroke that drew blood from his nose.

Raylan said, “An outlaw’s life’s hard, ain’t it?”

He fished handcuffs from his belt and gave them to Devil on the muzzle end of the shotgun, telling him to cuff his right hand, put it through the steering wheel and cuff the gator killer. “Now hand me your pistols.”

“We don’t have none,” Devil said.

“All right,” Raylan said, “but if you’re telling me a story I’m gonna break your nose like

I broke Mr. Crowe's. That okay with you?"

It got him a couple of Beretta nines.

"And the car keys."

Raylan got out, went around to the back of the Cadillac and called Art Mullen's pager. While he waited he opened the trunk to see a couple of Kalashnikovs inside, threw the pistols in there and closed the trunk. He looked in the car again, on Devil's side this time, and said, "You fellas wait here, okay?"

His cell phone buzzed as he was moving through the trees toward Ava's house. It was Art Mullen, Art telling how they were bushwhacked by a couple of baldheaded kids with a machine gun. "Fired at the cars but didn't hit either one, so nobody's hurt. We went up after 'em with sheriff's people and the kids threw down their weapons. I'm still up on the hill, behind the motel. Where're you?"

Raylan told him and Art said, "Wait for us, we won't be long."

"I'll go slow," Raylan said. "If I see he's laying for me I'll hang back. But let's find out where he is."

He was still holding the shotgun, pointed down at his side, going up to the door. Ava opened it and stood there. He didn't care too much for the green dress or the way she was looking at him. He said, "Don't feel you have to say anything."

But she did. "I swear to God, Raylan, I didn't know he was coming."

He believed her and told her so in a nice tone of voice. He wanted to tell her it was a pretty dress, but couldn't. He waited and now Ava motioned with her head as she moved aside. Raylan stepped through the doorway to see Boyd at the table that was laid out with a platter of chicken, bowls of mashed potatoes, peas and carrots, a plate of biscuits and a gravy boat. It looked like Boyd had already started, white gravy covering everything on his plate, a pistol lying next to it. Boyd picked it up.

Raylan saw it was an old Army Colt .45 as it came to point at the shotgun he was holding at his side. Boyd said, "No shotguns allowed." He told Ava to take it and throw it outside, then motioned with the .45 for Raylan to come over to the table.

"Sit at that end and help yourself. The gravy ain't bad, but not as good as your mama's. It never is, huh?"

Raylan took his place and Boyd said, "When you shot the guy, that wop? You were sitting at a table like this?"

“We were a little closer.”

“There was food on the table?”

“No, but it was set, glasses, dishes.”

“Have something.”

Raylan picked up a drumstick and held it in his left hand to take a bite.

“You had your gun—what was it?”

“That time? A Beretta nine, same as your two morons were packing.”

Boyd said, “I believe I heard one shot.”

“That’s all it took. They’re waiting in the car.”

“Which one’d you shoot?”

“Neither, but they’re out of business.”

Boyd said, “You’re sitting at the table,” getting back to it. “Where was your gun—where mine is?”

“It was holstered.”

“Bullshit.”

“It was holstered.”

“Where was his?”

“In a beach bag, between his knees.”

“He’s going swimmin’ and stops off?” Raylan didn’t answer that one.

“What’d he have in the bag—what kind of piece?”

“I don’t recall.”

“How’d you know when to pull?”

“Somebody yelled he had a gun.”

Boyd paused, staring the length of the table, about eight feet, at Raylan. “You give him twenty-four hours—the time was up when you shot him?”

“Pretty close. I’d remind him how much time he had left. Ten minutes, two minutes… I believe we got down to around twenty seconds…”

“You’re looking at your watch?”

“Estimating the time.”

“How much you think you got left now?”

“I thought till noon tomorrow.”

“I’m saying it’s right now, less you want to eat first.”

“You can call it off,” Raylan said. “I don’t mind.”

Boyd shook his head. “If you’re gonna keep after me, we may as well get ‘er done.”

“Your forty-five’s on the table but I have to pull,” Raylan said. “Is that how we do it?”

“Well, shit yeah, it’s my call. What’re you packing?”

“You’ll pay to find that out,” Raylan said.

“Ice water in your veins, huh? You want a shot of Jim Beam to go with it?” Boyd looked away from the table saying, “Ava, get Raylan—” and stopped.

Ava had the shotgun pointed at him, stock under her arm, finger on the trigger.

She said to Boyd, “You want to hear my story, how I shot Bowman? He never sat on the end, he liked the long side of the table so he could spread out, rest his elbows when he was eating fried chicken or corn’n the cob. You want to know what Bowman said when he looked up like you did and saw me with his deer rifle?”

Boyd said, “Honey, you only shoot people when they’re having their supper?” He looked at Raylan for appreciation and got a deadpan stare.

“Bowman’s mouth was full of sweet potato,” Ava said. “I watched him shovel it in as I come out from the kitchen with the rifle. He said, ‘The hell you doing with that?’ “

Boyd said, “Honey, put it down, would you, please?” He picked up a paper napkin and began wiping his hands.

Raylan took one and stuck it in his shirt collar. He kept his hand there, the right one, smoothing the napkin, the hand that would slide down the lapel of his suitcoat, sweep it open and in the same motion cover the walnut grip of his gun and pull it high to clear the six-and-a-half-inch barrel. He saw himself doing it.

And saw himself in the Cadillac with the shotgun blowing a hole in the windshield and tried to remember if he’d racked the pump after, because he sure didn’t hear Ava rack it.

She was telling Boyd, “And you know what I said to Bowman? I said, ‘I’m gonna shoot you, you dummy.’ “

Raylan saw her jerk the shotgun to her cheek.

Saw Boyd bringing up the Colt, putting it on her.

And had no choice. Raylan pulled and shot Boyd dead center, the force of it punching him out of his chair as Ava in her party dress fired the shotgun and a 12-gauge pattern ripped into the bare wall.

It told Raylan he must’ve racked it.

Ava said, “I missed, huh?”

She watched Raylan get up, the gun still in his hand, walk around to Boyd and stoop down over him. “Is he dead?”

Raylan didn’t answer. She saw him go to his knees then to bend close to Boyd’s face. She believed Raylan said something, a word or two, but wasn’t sure.

“Isn’t he dead?”

Raylan got to his feet saying, “He is now.”

Art Mullen arrived wanting to know how the rear end of the Town Car got fragged, but saved asking when he saw Boyd on the floor. Raylan stood by, relating the scene step by step as Art rolled Boyd over to look at the exit wound. He said there wasn’t any doubt in his mind, a single shot from a high-caliber weapon had done the job. Art looked up at Raylan.

“He have any last words?”

“He said I’d killed him.” Raylan paused. “I told him I was sorry, but he had called it.”

Art was frowning now. “You’re sorry you killed him?”

“I thought I explained it to you,” Raylan said in his quiet voice. “Boyd and I dug coal together.”