

## In the Lake of the Moon

### Prologue

It seemed to Saturnino Barcena that the entire world was shrouded in clouds and rain. His flight's departure from the smoggy Benito Juárez International Airport in Mexico City in the late afternoon had been delayed by a sudden deluge, a caprice of the rainy season. When the plane finally received clearance to take off after half an hour's delay, it roared down the tarmac in the bruised light of a sodden dusk, its windows streaked with blasted water as it rose into the nether zones of a night storm, climbing steeply to clear the volcanic mountains, heading north across the Tropic of Cancer.

He sat in a seat next to a window, the overhead light turned off, while the two women to his left read silently in the bright shafts from above their seats, leaving him alone in the dark pocket of his own solitude. For a while he stared at his reflection in the glass, trying to be detached, trying to see himself objectively: a man in his early forties whose wavy, black Mexican hair was receding slightly toward a widow's peak above a high forehead, a man whose cedar-brown eyes were prone to hooded lids, whose hawk-nosed good looks were passing into middle age without appreciable damage. He saw a professor of anthropology with a modest professional reputation, but with no professional ambition, a man who had never married, who slept with his women students, who lived alone. He saw a man who had never achieved what might have been expected of him, a man who had been deceived and cheated, whose entire life had been

wrenched and twisted by someone else until it had become the perverted thing of others, not his own.

Barcena's thoughts could easily fester in this vein for hours at a time. After all, he had spent most of the past year coughing up the concentrated bile of perceived injustices that he had accumulated over a lifetime, a year in which he had dredged up every pain he had ever suffered, every malefaction, and placed the blame, not on goats or gods as in the past, but on a single man.

He refocused his eyes and for the rest of the flight peered out into the vast blackness, sometimes seeing nothing, sometimes seeing indistinct movements only inches from his face that might have been mists or the wraiths of old grievances. And sometimes, when the plane moved through towering ranges of cumulonimbus clouds, he watched far-off threads of lightning jerking in glyphic patterns with a purpose he could only imagine. And he did imagine. His mind was fecund. That was why he had begun the journey.

He remained silent during the three-hour flight, keeping his face turned to the window, spurning a complimentary drink, declining dinner, gnawing instead upon the strong spice of a rankling obsession that he earnestly yearned to bring to resolution. For nearly a year he had thought of little else, incessantly bedeviled by a single ruling passion that gradually had turned his days and nights into distortions, that had shifted the borders of reality and had transformed his life. In the end, Saturnino did not shrink from his final conviction that at the heart of things, the life of another man had been the cause of his own puzzling misfortunes. Nor did he flinch from the severity of his final judgment: that nothing less than the other man's death would assuage the agony he had endured.

If Saturnino Barcena saw any inequity in what he was about to do, it was only that it had taken him a lifetime to discover the provenance of all his misery. And it ate at him like an acid that the discovery itself had been accidental, that the secret had been deliberately concealed from him in an inconceivable act of the worst kind of betrayal. Without the intervention of unreasoning fate, he might never have known, might never have understood the queer ways of his own heart.

Suddenly he was surprised by a shift in his equilibrium, and then

immediately he realized that the heavy body of the plane was tilting gently forward, beginning its long descent to the Houston Intercontinental Airport. The flight had seemed only a moment. Symbolically, for he was a man keenly attentive to symbols, he removed from the lapel of his suit coat the marigold he had bought from an urchin on Truentos Street and absently twirled it by its stem between his fingers. He held it to his face and let the bright yellow petals feather over the surface of his lips as he gazed out the window. He suppressed a shudder of excitement, a recognition of the stalking tension that rose inside his chest as the plane plummeted through the night sky, hurling him toward the act that would unriddle his past and rectify the ache of the mordant years. It would be a satisfaction that too long had been denied him.

## Chapter 1

Haydon stood under the Bel Air marquee wearing his raincoat and trilby as he watched Chuck Nagle splash across the street in the rain, his plastic slicker pulled up over his head. Nagle stamped his feet as he approached Haydon and reached into a hip pocket for his comb, which he quickly ran through his damp hair, feeling for the part. Nagle was a young detective, tall, husky, good-natured, and baby-faced, working with an old hand named Sid Lynch who had bad teeth and a worse disposition, and who sat across the street in the dry car, looking at them.

"She still in there?" Nagle asked, turning down the collar on his slicker. He looked down at his soaking feet. "Shit." He stamped them again.

"She's sitting in the audience now, watching the film," Haydon said. "About six rows in front of the projection booth in the center section."

"You get a look at the guy?"

"Not his face." Nagle grinned crookedly.

"He's the projectionist?"

Haydon nodded. "Apparently." He had just had the first real break in the investigation of a young widow who was the primary suspect in the murder of her middle-aged husband two weeks earlier. The case belonged to the punctilious Pete Lapierre and his partner, Robert Nunn, but three teams of detectives had been assisting them with an around-the-clock surveillance that had begun three days before. Within the last hour, just at the end of his shift, Haydon had followed the woman to the movie theater, where he had discovered her in a rainy-afternoon tryst on the floor of the projection booth with her boyfriend, whose existence they had not been able to confirm until now.

Nagle snorted. "And I was beginning to believe you guys were wrong."

"Has Dystal called Lapierre?" Haydon asked.

"Yeah. He's on his way down here."

"And Gilbert is taking Balkin's place in the cab?" Balkin was Haydon's temporary partner on the surveillance, operating out of a taxi.

"Already has. Balkin's on his way back in."

"Fine. Then I'm going to leave it with you, Chuck," Haydon said, slapping the young detective on the back as he moved away. "See you tomorrow."

He stepped out into the rain and strode across the street to his car, parked a couple of cars behind Sid Lynch's. Sid's round white face peered at him passively through the foggy car window. He nodded at Lynch as he unlocked the car, but Lynch simply looked the other way, seemingly pissed off at having to be there and at the weather in general. Haydon crawled into the car, started the motor, and flipped on the air conditioner. He laid the trilby crown down on the seat, pulled away from the curb, and drove off without looking back.

He didn't want to think about the lubricious widow anymore, and gladly put her out of his mind as he turned onto Kirby. At the Southwest Freeway he merged with the inbound traffic and settled back, determined not to fight the uneven flow of cars and vans and pickup trucks.

He listened to the rain drumming on the roof of the car. September in Houston was a frustrating season. Because of the subtropical influences of the Gulf Stream waters, extreme high or low temperatures were rare in the city. However, the effective temperature—the way the temperature feels to the body as a result of a combination of temperature, humidity, and wind—was the highest in the United States. And at no time was it worse than in September, one of the wettest months of the year as well as one of the hottest, when the oppressive swelter of July and August did not let up but hung on tenaciously, unabated by the rains and turning the month into an equatorial ordeal, one day melting into the other monotonously, endlessly.

But this year it had resembled a true monsoon. It was only two weeks into the month and they had already received more than double the monthly average precipitation, and the forecasts continued to be gloomy. The entire city was beginning to smell fusty, and the trunks of the trees were sprouting a fine, linty pelt of Kelly-green lichen. Every color exposed

to the weather was two shades darker from the incessant moisture, and the city's traffic plowed sluggishly through the glazed streets, headlights burning day and night. The bayous had risen and stayed up, and some parts of the city flooded every few days when heavy storms passed through the already darkened skies, The rain seemed interminable, and Haydon believed he was the only person in the city who really didn't mind it.

In the clean sweep of the windshield wipers he let his eyes follow the beaded file of ruby taillights as they curled gracefully into the soaring acropolis of downtown that loomed ever larger as they approached, like an immense galactic outstation hovering in a hazy alien atmosphere. Thousands of columns of lighted windows ascended into the low-hanging banks of clouds and fog, their brilliance fading as they rose into the upper reaches of the drifting rain until they were totally extinguished. Haydon always had thought of this phenomenon as a gigantic exhibition of magic—the disappearing city, a metaphor for the place where anything could happen. It was an idea in which he took little comfort.

After emerging from the interchange onto the Gulf Freeway, he was skirting the western edge of downtown, coming up on the exit to the police station, when he caught among the scratchy transmissions on his radio the West Texas drawl of Bob Dystal's baritone calling his code number. Haydon answered, and Dystal, sounding thick-chested and detached, said that he would like Haydon to stop by his office before going home. Haydon answered that he would, and the radio fell silent again. Slightly irritated, he began looking for an opening in traffic to move into the right lane. He had intended to go straight to his own car after dropping the department car off at the police garage, avoiding the main building altogether. Balkin had already agreed to handle the day's supplemental report. Now . . . well, it didn't matter. He shrugged and exited the freeway.

When Haydon walked into the squad room, he stopped at the coffee table and filled a Styrofoam cup from the fresh pot that was frequently made at the beginning of the evening shift, especially when the weather was as nasty as it had been during the last two weeks. He added a packet of artificial creamer, a dietary absurdity he no longer disdained, indignation having given way to senseless habit, and swirled the off-white powder into his coffee with a plastic stirrer. The squad room was relatively busy with

the changing shifts, but Haydon kept to himself as he walked toward the back, where for the last four months he had shared his small cubicle with Josef Balkin, who had been using what Haydon still thought of as Mooney's desk.

"Hey," Balkin said, looking up from the computer terminal where he was typing in the supplemental report. "I thought you were long gone."

Haydon threw his overcoat and trilby onto a chair between his desk and the wall and nodded as he raised the coffee to his mouth and blew at the steam. "Dystal called on the radio, wanted to see me before I left."

"Tough luck." Balkin grinned and returned to the terminal. During the fourteen months since Mooney's death a number of detectives had done stints in Haydon's office, which didn't particularly affect him one way or the other, since he had been more or less responsible for the rotation. He would have preferred to be alone, but no HPD detective had ever had that luxury, so it wasn't something Haydon even considered. Though he had easily adjusted to the changing personalities with whom he had shared the tiny office during the last year, Haydon was a man who put a high premium on privacy, and he did not, with one or two exceptions, form friendships that extended beyond the hours his job required. He did not participate in Happy Hour drinking, did not belong to a softball or bowling league, did not volunteer to work for any of the department-related charities, and did not belong to either of the unions. But those who knew him well enough liked him, and those who knew him only by reputation respected what they had heard.

Dystal was sitting behind his desk, hands clasped behind his head and a booted foot propped across an opened drawer as he talked with Walter Kramer, an evening shift lieutenant. When Kramer looked around and saw Haydon coming toward them across the squad room, he began winding down their conversation. Haydon spoke to him as they passed outside Dystal's door, and then stepped inside.

"Stu, come on in," Dystal said, bringing his hands down but not budging from the chair. His tie was undone, and his desk was littered with papers and crime scene photographs that had come from a manila file folder on the corner of his desk. "You might as well shut that thing," he said, pointing a blocky thumb toward the door.

Haydon was immediately alerted but closed the door without any reaction. He sat down in the chair in front of Dystal's desk as he had done hundreds of times before and tried to read between the lines of the lieutenant's attitude of day end fatigue. He wouldn't have to wait to learn the purpose of the summons. Their long-standing friendship meant that small talk wasn't necessary; they understood each other.

Bob Dystal had been Haydon's lieutenant for six years, but their friendship went all the way back to their rookie years when they had first worked in plainclothes on special duty assignments. A stout bull of a man, Dystal had grown up in the ranch country of West Texas and had played Southwest Conference football at Texas Tech University with enough raw grit to be placed in the front ranks of the NFL's draft choices at the end of his senior year. Characteristically, he had rejected that career possibility and used his petroleum engineering degree to obtain a position with an oil exploration company headquartered in Houston. The bearish ex-lineman who had never been farther from home than his college campus spent the next two years traveling in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. On returning to Houston he unexpectedly quit his job and incongruously entered the Houston police academy. In later years he claimed, rather unoriginally, that it had seemed like the right thing to do at the time.

Much like Haydon, Dystal was a man who liked to play his cards close to the vest, though he had the kind of inquisitive mind that invariably wanted to know about others what he was unwilling to reveal of himself. Although he had long passed that point in his life when he had lived in the city more years than he had in the country, he had never lost the basic values and mannerisms of a country boy. For the most part he was a straightforward man, unpretentious, and with a reputation for watching out for his men. He smoked generic cigarettes when he was in the office and chewed Tinsley's red tag tobacco when he was out; listened to country music on KILT; had a proclivity for chocolate-brown double-knit suits (he had three identical ones); wore handmade cowboy boots which he kept polished to a well-huffed luster and resoled again and again until the bootmaker said he had to have another pair; and drank the strongest coffee any living man could tolerate, which he brought to work in a wide-

mouth thermos jug that was so old and dented that Haydon guessed it must have been one of the first of its kind.

"So the little widow has a libido after all," Dystal said with an amused expression. "That's good. I think ol' Pete was getting a little antsy about her."

"I don't blame him," Haydon said. "I would bet she still has a few surprises in store for him."

Dystal dropped his big boot to the floor with a heavy thud, closed the drawer, and rolled his chair up to the desk. He picked up his yellowing Lucite ashtray, in the shape of Texas with rattlesnake rattles imbedded in the bottom, dumped the old butts and ashes in the trash, and set it out of his way on a stack of papers. His shirt sleeves were rolled back from his log-sized wrists. He interlocked the thick fingers of both hands and placed them in the empty space in front of him as he looked at Haydon from under his dark eyebrows.

"The captain wanted me to talk to you again," he said. "About this partner business."

"And about the lieutenant's opening," Haydon said, suddenly understanding why he was there.

Dystal grinned. "Yeah, and about that too."

"I had heard Stimson was taking early retirement."

"Yeah, he is."

"So if I go ahead and take the lieutenant's position, Mercer will solve two problems."

Dystal nodded wearily, still grinning. "Yeah."

Following Mooney's death, Haydon had asked for a special consideration, and it had been given to him. He had requested that he not be assigned a new partner right away but be allowed to work alone, as far as it was feasible, on the cases he and Mooney had been investigating. Considering the stringency of departmental regulations, that was a big request. But it was done, and he gratefully did not ask how it had been arranged. He had had several "conversations" with the departmental psychologist—as per division regulations—and was well aware that his request that the assignment of a new partner be postponed was viewed with suspicion by some members within the administration. It didn't seem

like a move toward a healthy adjustment.

On the other hand, Haydon's "floating" status was not viewed as a bad thing by everyone. Of the 105 detectives in the homicide division, he was now among the ten or twelve with the most seniority and was arguably the best detective in the division. This was a long-standing topic of informal discussion among some of the senior officers, and their criteria were stringent. Though a detective's investigative abilities might be above reproach, his performance-to-potential ratio was always suspect (though not officially) if it was known that he considered alcohol too much of a good thing or found women too much of a temptation. If he had to struggle to keep his marriage together (and the nature of the job meant that many did), it was noted. If he cut his shift short one time too many, it was noted. If he was obsessed with his work, it was noted. If the tension showed, it was noted.

For the most part, Haydon came off well under this kind of scrutiny, and was given the highest marks for investigative intelligence. But on three occasions when one of the rare vacancies for lieutenant had opened up, he had turned down the opportunity to be promoted—one of the positions ultimately had gone to Dystal. And that wasn't the sort of thing that was done without attracting attention. It was suspect behavior, and only added to the talk in some quarters that Haydon was just a little too independent for his own good.

He sipped his coffee, looked at Dystal, and put the cup on the edge of his desk.

"I'm surprised they've let me go this long," he conceded. "I hadn't thought they would."

Dystal nodded. "It's been long enough, Stu."

"I know that." Haydon stared at the edge of Dystal's desk. He could hear the faint, tinny strains of country music coming from the red plastic Hitachi radio that sat on top of Dystal's metal filing cabinet. He never turned the radio off and never turned it up, keeping the volume so low that at times you weren't sure what you were hearing. "Will I have any say about who it will be?"

"I imagine Mercer will give you a chance to put in your two bits' worth," Dystal said.

He leaned back in his chair again; its wooden frame creaked as if it were approaching its stress limits, about to explode under his weight. After his long day in harness his military haircut with its Brylcreem finish was slightly ruffled where his beefy hands had run through it in occasional moments of distraction.

He smiled reminiscently and said, "Stu, we've been working together a pretty good while now, long enough to have stored up some things to look back on. We've done each other some favors, stuck our necks out a few times, had some disagreements. But for the most part we've gotten along, and we're friends. I've learned a hell of a lot from you. You've got your peculiar ways, and I know damn well you know that yourself. You don't always look at things the way other people do, and sometimes your intuition is downright spooky." He grinned again. "Which I like."

Dystal hesitated, letting his smile subside, then went on.

"I'll tell you straight out, you're the best man I've ever seen in this business. Best by a long shot." He held up both thick hands, palms out. "Honest to God. It's a fact. And I trust you like my own bud, Stu, I really do."

Haydon was surprised to see that Dystal was looking at him with an expression of undeniable mellowness, even a sense of affection. Whether it was meant for the memories or the friendship he had no idea, but it was definitely an uncharacteristic demonstration of feeling, however restrained and subdued. That expression, as much as what Dystal was saying, sharpened Haydon's attention.

Dystal leaned forward once more in the creaking chair and put his hands on the edge of the desk to support himself as he jutted his bulky neck forward, and started slowly shaking his head as he added, "But I'll be damned, Stu, if I understand just what in the hell it is you got against being a lieutenant in this police department."

Haydon was touched by Dystal's short but uncommonly personal disquisition, and by his old friend's effort to set the stage for what was undoubtedly going to result in Dystal's delivering to Haydon a hard departmental fact.

Having said his piece, Dystal regarded Haydon silently, his brawny

shoulders hunched up on either side of his neck as his crossed forearms supported him on the desktop. The air of expectancy he had introduced would not bother him in the least; he could remain immobile and silent indefinitely, leaving Hayden the responsibility of moving the meeting forward.

However, Haydon didn't know how to respond. In the uncertain silence that followed he thought at first that Dystal was actually going to wait for a reaction from him, and then in the next instant he thought Dystal's last remark had been a rhetorical statement that required nothing from him whatsoever. But the curious part had been Dystal's obviously sincere preface.

"Have they grown a little impatient with me?" Haydon smiled, trying to give Dystal an opening to ease up.

"I guess that's about the size of it," Dystal said, sighing hugely and shrugging.

"Then what do they want?"

"You know how it works," Dystal said. "We never had this little conversation, it never happened. The fact is, you're getting a new partner. Maybe you'll have some say in it, maybe not. But what's more important, it seems to me anyway, is that they're going to come to you one more time with this lieutenant's opening that Stimson's leaving behind. If you turn it down this time, rumor is you'll never get another crack at it. All unofficial, of course," he repeated. "Nobody asked me to talk to you. Well, Mercer did say why don't you talk to Stuart, but that was all he said. But he knew I knew what he meant."

He stopped, to let that soak in, Haydon supposed, and then he said, "You gotta decide how you want to spend the rest of your career in this business, Stu. If you're ever gonna get off the streets, this is the time to do it."

Haydon took the Styrofoam cup off the edge of the desk and sipped the coffee again. It had cooled and tasted terrible. The evening shift's criteria for what made a good cup of coffee were even worse than the day shift's. He crossed his long legs, trying to formulate his thoughts. He deeply appreciated what Dystal was doing, and knew that his old friend deserved an explanation, however awkward.

"That's an interesting development," Haydon said, honestly surprised. There was a burst of laughter outside in the squad room, but neither man paid attention to it. "How did it come about?"

"Oh, come on, Stu." There was a hint of exasperation in Dystal's deep voice. "You've been so sidetracked by ol' Mooney's death . . . Maybe some of those boys up in administration are getting chapped about you throwing that promotion back at them every time they offer it to you. Ever think of that? They got people standing in line for it, but you always get first crack at it because you keep taking the damn exams and always come up with the highest scores. And then what do you do? You turn your nose up at it like it's bad tuna. Why the hell do you take the exams if you aren't going to accept the promotion? They don't have to offer it to you every time, you know, and I guess now they've decided they're not going to.

Maybe some of them are saying, hell, he don't ever want it, fine, he won't ever get it. It's not all that hard to understand, Stu. This time they want you to either piss or go blind."

Dystal could be depended upon not to dance around a subject too long before he went straight to the heart of it with a tart colloquialism, and though you might not be familiar with the idiom, you weren't likely to be in doubt about its meaning.

"And I think they've got a point," he added bluntly.

"Okay. Look," Haydon said, glancing out into the squad room and crossing his legs the other way. "You're right and they're right. I can understand how they could feel that way. But I want you to know, Bob, that there wasn't anything calculating about my turning down those opportunities."

He looked at Dystal. "The truth is, the first time I turned down the promotion it was a simple decision. I just didn't want to leave the streets right then. I was a lot younger. That was a long time ago, and I liked what I was doing. It wasn't a complicated thing at all. And I told Captain Mercer that."

He put the cold coffee on the edge of the desk again. "The second time . . . well, at that point maybe I thought there were certain principles involved. I thought what I was doing was valuable, that being a 'manager' of detectives wasn't the same thing as being a detective. I liked the

immediate payback of being actively involved. I told that to Mercer."

He paused and made a conscious decision not to get too wrapped up in his explication. "The last occasion . . . it was just bad timing. I wasn't in the proper frame of mind. I was disgruntled with some of the administration's changes about that time, and I just didn't want to get involved. I kept taking the exams . . . so I would have the option of getting off the street if I finally decided that I should. But I kept backing away from it at the last minute. Maybe I haven't been thinking it through as well as I should have."

As badly as Haydon wanted to say the right things for Dystal, to honor the confidence his friend had proclaimed in him, he couldn't bring himself to be more open than that.

"It hasn't been any great scheme," he said. "I've just let it happen each time. That's about it. It's got nothing to do with politics, with my wanting to make any kind of statement. It seems to me I've gone out of my way over the years to stay away from that kind of thing. The decisions were personal, very personal."

Dystal was nodding, listening, assenting, and when Haydon stopped, he said, "I know that, Stu, but you've got to play the game a little. You've got to give them a reason, not be too tight-lipped. You know damn well some people think you're a little . . . uppity anyway, and how you go about your business, never explaining yourself, never, you know, loosening up, doesn't help your case any at all."

"The people I respect know me better than that," Haydon said. "And the others—and I could count them on one hand—don't matter."

"Hell; that depends on what you mean by 'matter,'" Dystal retorted. "That's just what I mean, dammit. Right now it's that handful of people who're in a position to cause you some trouble. Let's be honest. You've never needed the job, so you've always had the freedom to tell those little generals to shove it. All these years you refused to play those damned little ol' games which we all hate, but most of us go along with 'em a little ways, except you. And now you're paying for all that independence in spades. They're giving you an ultimatum, Stu, and because *they've* been playing the game all these years they're now in a position to make it stick."

Dystal stopped, his eyes settled on Haydon with the steady

assurance of a man who knew what he was talking about, who understood the convolutions of a system and had long ago decided to do what he had to do to survive in it. After a pause he asked, "Well, how do you feel about it this time?"

"When are they going to announce the opening?"

"Monday. A week from today."

"I'm going to have to give it some thought."

Dystal shook his head, as if he had known that Haydon wouldn't make a simple decision, that he would have to drag it out, agonize over it. Then he began to nod. 'Yeah, you give it some thought," he said. "What're you going to tell Nina?"

"I'll tell her what's happening."

"What do you think she's going to say?"

"You know how she feels about it."

Dystal nodded again, and chewed on the inside of his jaw, regarding Haydon. "You gotta consider her this time, Stu," he said, his voice low and personal. "I mean, more than you have before."

Haydon accepted that mild admonition. It was sincerely spoken, and he knew it was more than justified.

Haydon stood in his father's library—even after all these years he still thought of it as his father's—and looked out through the small panes in the French doors. In the pale afternoon light, the pools of water on the slate terrace reflected a dull lacquered image of the house and its darkened windows, emptiness looking back at emptiness. He guessed it would be another couple of hours before Nina would be home from the studio. She had told him the night before that she had a three o'clock appointment with the Cassells, who were coming over to review her new sketches for their beach home, an ordeal which somehow always took longer than she anticipated. Gabriela had left a note on the small hail table where she always put the day's mail; it said she and Ramona had gone shopping. He was alone, which was fine with him. It suited his mood.

He looked out to the lowering September skies under which the city had been cloistered since before the beginning of the month. Haydon liked

rainy weather, and every day since this had begun he had come home from work and gone straight to the library to read, or listen to music, or simply gaze out the windows as he was doing now. At times, amid thundering, the rain would blow in sheets across the sloping lawn toward the lime trees, whipping the Flamboyán trees and scattering their frail ruby blossoms. Sometimes it would fall straight down, heavily, without respite. At other times there was only mist and fog. But always rain, unceasing. Time in legato, a seamless progression of wet days merging one into the other in a damp, unending dusk.

He looked through the mizzle to the high rock wall at the far end of the lawn where purple and red passionflowers hung from limp vines. Low on the wall he could make out the stained limestone tablet, and beneath that the small grassy berm of Cinco's grave. The old collie had not endured the long hot days of the previous summer, and Haydon was still unaccustomed to his absence. He would not have been startled to catch a glimpse of Cinco's white paws passing among the dripping hedges near the greenhouse.

His eyes moved back to the water-polished stones of the terrace, where a slight drizzle stippled the reflected sallow light, and the bright cerise fire bursts of bougainvilleas overflowed the terra-cotta urns that stood against the balustrades.

Haydon breathed deeply, smelling the books that lined the walls, the wood and leather of furniture, his breath making wavering ghosts upon the rain-cooled panes of the door. He thought of his conversation with Dystal. It didn't matter how hard he tried, it seemed impossible to remain aloof from the long tentacles of departmental politics. He thought that no one had been more determined over the years than himself to remain detached from the manipulations and power plays that were an integral part of any organization. He wasn't any good at it, never had been, and he had been willing to pay the necessary price of a stalled career to remain independent. It was a luxury he had thought he could afford.

When he had entered the police academy nearly eighteen years earlier, there were a few who had made grousing predictions that Webster Haydon's son had ambitions, that by "starting at the bottom" he was simply admitting the necessity of political cosmetics, and that one day with

the help of his father's money and influence he would try to go all the way to the top. Early on it seemed as if their predictions were on target. The political players laid their bets and watched as Haydon graduated from the academy near the top of his class and spent less than a year in uniform before he received his first plainclothes assignment. Within two years he was a detective sergeant in homicide. But there his career stopped, though it seemed to be of no comfort to his detractors, many of whom had advanced past him in the natural course of events, that his static position within the department was a direct result of his own choosing.

Turning from the French doors, he faced the library. He had not turned on the lights, and the large room was illuminated solely by the soft, silver luster of the overcast afternoon. A subtle light muted the room's colors to the fading hues of an old film and threw a dull sheen on the glossiest surfaces: thin spines of books, the crescent curve of a lamp globe, the cambered edge of a walnut chair, the rail-straight border of the mantel, the gilded motifs on the picture frame at the far end of the room.

He looked at the picture, a portrait of his father of which he could see little except a reflective smear across the varnished surface of the canvas. But he knew the image by heart. Maybe his father had been right to be disappointed in what Haydon had chosen to do with his life. Haydon had been the first son in four generations who had not become a lawyer, and though Webster Haydon himself had been something of a nonconformist, leaving the family firm in Boston and seeking a different way to put his life together outside the structure of the clan, he had been significantly disappointed in his son's departure from the profession, and from the possibility of one day joining him in the practice he had begun in the early 1940s. It had been impossible for him not to see Haydon's decision as a form of rejection, but he had not been so blind that he couldn't see the parallel to his own behavior many years earlier. The pain of Haydon's decision had healed long before the old man had died, but Haydon now wondered if his father hadn't sensed, far in advance, how unsatisfactorily it would eventually end for his son many years later.

A faint electronic clicking came from the small speaker mounted on the wall near the library door, interrupting Haydon's thoughts. The room was darker, though there was still a dull pewter light outside, and Haydon

realized he had been lost in thought for a good while, staring up at his father's obscured portrait. The clicking signaled that one of the remote controls was being used to open the front gates.

Turning away, he leaned over the long old refectory table near his desk and snapped on the green-shaded lamps. Nina always looked at him oddly when she found him sitting in the dark. Though she had gotten used to this habit over the years 18 and never said anything about it, he felt that she still considered it one of his strangest penchants. If he wasn't too far lost in thought, he sheepishly tried to avoid getting caught at it. His eyes landed on the stack of mail he had brought in from the hallway earlier and had not bothered to open. There were several letters and an envelope. Whatever they were, they could wait.

Stepping out of the library, Haydon crossed the entrance hall to the front windows and glimpsed the station wagon turning off the oval brick drive to the servants' entrance. He walked down the corridor, went into the large utility room, crossed it, and opened the outside door just as Ramona was opening the door at the rear of the car, where he saw half a dozen sacks of groceries. Gabriela was a little slower about getting out of her seat on the passenger side, clutching a shopping bag from Lord & Taylor.

"Looks like you had a good day," Haydon said to her, holding the car door as she steadied herself. The old housekeeper was pin-neat, as always, in a canary yellow dress that enriched her Latin complexion. He smelled the same inexpensive powder she had worn since he was a boy, the name of which he had never known, and caught a sweet whiff of Juicy Fruit chewing gum, which she carried in half-pieces in her purse to give to the children she met when she was shopping.

"We almos' drowned a coupla times," Gabriela said, rolling her large black eyes. "The rain, my God, the rain is not ever going to stop again." She paused, tilted her head of thick gray hair at Ramona, and grinned at Haydon. "We went to a ladies' chop. This girl, she has got some very good things ... *sostenes de encaje negro*." She drew out the words in a slow, sultry voice as she winked at Haydon and lightly fluttered her pretty tapered fingers over her heavy chest.

"Sssss, Ga-beee!" Ramona hissed, glaring at her from the back of the car.

Gabriela laughed, and the two women chatted back and forth in Spanish while they got their packages out of the car and Haydon began carrying the groceries into the kitchen. He set the sacks, which smelled strongly of damp paper, on the heavy old butcher's block in the middle of the kitchen. While Gabriela and Ramona took their packages to their rooms he rummaged around in the sacks and found a bundle of green onions. He took them to the sink and cleaned them, cut off the ends of several, and put them on a salad plate with a few slices of cheddar cheese and some olives. He poured a small bistro glass of white table wine and began to eat the snack as he leaned against the cabinets, waiting for the women to return.

He enjoyed being in the kitchen when they were working, a habit from boyhood. When his parents had died six years earlier, Gabriela had stayed in the home alone until Haydon and Nina could arrange to move in. There was never any question about whether she would remain with them, as she had with his parents. She had been in her early twenties when she moved with Webster and Cordelia from Mexico City to Houston in the early 1940s, before Haydon was born. Having grown old with the family, she watched over the household as if it were her own, with a benevolent authority that Nina, whose even-tempered nature was rarely thrown off balance, tolerated with graceful patience. So protective was Gabriela of her duties that it had only been within the last year that Nina finally had been able to persuade her to allow Ramona Solis, a Colombian student at Rice University, to assist her in running the large old house. Gabriela had quickly formed a motherly affection for the girl, who eventually moved in as the fourth person in the household.

Haydon was pouring another glass of wine when the security panel in the kitchen indicated the front gates were being opened again. He took another glass out of the cabinet and filled it too, returned the bottle to the rack, and then carried both glasses through the dining room and out into the long hallway that stretched from the terrace in back to the front entryway. He opened the front door and watched Nina's black Vanden Plas come along the glistening driveway and pull under the porte cochere. He went down the steps, balanced the two glasses in one hand, and opened the car door with the other. She swung her legs out of the car, smiled up at

him, stood, and kissed him.

"I smell onions," she said.

He smelled Je Reviens. She took a glass from him and sipped, looking at him past a wandering strand of cinnamon hair that had floated away from her temples where it was swept back in a tight chignon, the way she always wore it at the studio to keep it out of her way when she worked at the drawing tables. "You're terrific," she said, and kissed him again.

"Ramona and Gabriela just came in from 'chopping,'" he said, resting his arms on top of the opened car door. "They'd stopped by the grocery."

"And you sneaked the onions out of the grocery sack."

He nodded.

"You always do the same things," she said. A few yards away, at the end of the porte cochere, the rain was falling steadily again. "Did they have a good day?" Nina asked, taking one more sip from her glass before she turned, put it on top of the car, and bent down to get her briefcase from the front seat.

"Ramona bought some black lace bras."

Nina looked back at him from inside the car.

"Gabriela was teasing her about it," he explained.

"In front of you, of course."

"It wouldn't have been any fun otherwise."

"Here, take this," Nina said, handing him the leather briefcase as she stood again. "I've got some drawings in the backseat."

She opened the rear door and reached in to get them, the silk of her emerald dress sliding easily over her stockings, revealing the backs of her knees, and a little more. He loved the backs of her knees. No one had ever had prettier legs.

They went inside the house, and he followed her up the long curve of the marble stairs carrying her briefcase, listening to her talk about what the Cassells had thought of her drawings, and watching her hips. In the bedroom she threw the rolls of drawings on the bed, and Haydon laid her briefcase on the small sofa under the ceiling fan near the windows that overlooked the lawn. He stood behind one of the armchairs and leaned against its back sipped his wine and watched Nina undress, listening to her

describe the changes the Cassells had wanted, what they had liked, and what they were reconsidering. She stood in front of the mirror, the olive contours of her shoulders interrupted by the thin green straps of her bra and began taking the pins out of her hair. Haydon studied her, wondering how many times in their fourteen years of marriage he had watched this process. Though she was not as thin and rangy as a model, Nina was a little taller than average, and long-limbed, and she possessed a refined manner that was not practiced but entirely natural; she was one of the least pretentious persons Haydon had ever known. She was entirely accepting of herself, neither deceived in her shortcomings nor conceited in her graces. At forty-two she seemed to Haydon to be at her best, both physically and emotionally; her good common sense and uncondemning heart that had been the stabilizing forces in their marriage from the beginning were still intact, still the core of her personality.

He turned and looked outside, where night was creeping from the murky corners of the lawn, from under the lime grove, and darkening the stone wall that surrounded the grounds. A mist was hanging over the trees, settling over everything like a shroud of heavy smoke. Details became less and less distinct until he saw only a Whistler painting of dusk.

"Stuart?"

He looked around. Nina's back was still turned to him, but she had fixed her eyes on him in her mirror.

"What was I just saying?" she asked, jerking the brush through her long hair with a quick stroke.

"You were talking about the Cassells, about your drawings for them, and what..."

"I knew you were somewhere else," she said. "No, I was asking you what you were thinking about staring outside like that."

He grinned at her.

"You're out of your mind." She laughed, taking a short sleeved silk blouse off its hanger, and slipping it over her head. Then she stepped into a pair of pleated linen pants, which she buttoned at her waist as she put her feet into woven leather sandals. She shook her hair out, came over to Haydon, and sat down on the sofa opposite him. "Okay," she said. "What's bothering you?"

He nodded at the briefcase sitting beside her. "Did you bring home a lot of work tonight?"

"Nothing that can't wait." The lighthearted expression on her face was beginning to fade.

"I had an interesting discussion with Bob this afternoon," he said.

"About?"

"A couple of things. They're going to assign me a new partner." He studied his glass. "And there's going to be another lieutenant's position opening up next week."

*Copyright © 1987 by David Lindsey*