

One

On the hottest day of July, trolling in dead-calm waters near Key West, a tourist named James Mayberry reeled up a human arm. His wife flew to the bow of the boat and tossed her breakfast burritos.

“What’re you waiting for?” James Mayberry barked at the mate. “Get that thing off my line!”

The kid tugged and twisted, but the barb of the hook was imbedded in bone. Finally the captain came down from the bridge and used bent-nose pliers to free the decomposing limb, which he placed on shaved ice in a deck box.

James Mayberry said, “For Christ’s sake, now where are we supposed to put our fish?”

“We’ll figure that out when you actually catch one.”

It had been a tense outing aboard the *Misty Momma IV*. James Mayberry had blown three good strikes because he was unable to absorb instruction. Dragging baits in the ocean was different than jigging for walleyes in the lake back home.

“Don’t we need to call somebody?” he asked the captain.
“We do.”

The hairy left arm was bloated and sunburned to the hue of eggplant. A cusp of yellowed humerus protruded at the point of separation, below the shoulder. The flesh surrounding the wound looked ragged and bloodless.

“Yo, check it out!” the mate said.

“What now?” James Mayberry asked.

“His freakin’ finger, dude.”

The victim’s hand was contracted into a fist except for the middle digit, which was rigidly extended.

“How weird is *that*? He’s flippin’ us off,” the mate said.

The captain told him to re-bait the angler’s hook.

“Has this ever happened out here before?” James Mayberry said. “Tell the truth.”

“You should go see about your wife.”

“Jesus, I’ll never hear the end of it. Louisa wanted to ride the Conch Train today. She did *not* want to come fishing.”

“Well, son,” the captain said, “we’re in the memory-making business.”

He climbed back to the bridge, radioed the Coast Guard and gave the GPS coordinates of the gruesome find. He was asked to remain in the area and look for other pieces of the body.

“But I got a charter,” he said.

“You can stay at it,” the Coast Guard dispatcher advised.
“Just keep your eyes open.”

After calming herself, Louisa Mayberry informed her husband that she wished to return to Key West right away.

“Come on, sugar. It’s a beautiful morning.” James Mayberry didn’t want to go back to the dock with no fish to hang on the spikes – not after shelling out a grand to hire the boat.

“The first day of our honeymoon, and *this!* Aren’t you sketched out?”

James Mayberry peeked under the lid of the fish box. “You watch *CSI* all the time. It’s the same type of deal.”

His wife grimaced but did not turn away. She remarked that the limb didn’t look real.

“Oh, it’s real,” said James Mayberry, somewhat defensively. “Just take a whiff.” Snagging a fake arm wouldn’t make for as good a story. A real arm was pure gold, major high-fives from all his peeps back in Madison. *You caught a what? No way, bro!*

Louisa Mayberry’s gaze was fixed on the limb. “What could have happened?” she asked.

“Tiger shark,” her husband said matter-of-factly.

“Is that a wedding band on his hand? This is so sad.”

“Fish on!” the mate called. “Who’s up?”

James Mayberry steered his bride to the fighting chair and the mate fitted the rod into the gimbal. Although she was petite, Louisa Mayberry owned a strong upper body due to rigorous Bikram yoga classes that she took on Tuesday nights. Refusing assistance, she pumped in an eleven-pound blackfin tuna and whooped triumphantly as it flopped on the deck. Her husband had never seen her so excited.

“Here, take a picture!” she cried to the mate, and handed over her iPhone.

“Hold on,” James Mayberry said. “Get both of us together.”

Louisa watched him hustle to get ready. “Really, Jimmy? Really?”

Moments later the captain glanced down from the bridge and saw the mate snapping photographs of the newlyweds posed side by side at the transom. Their matching neon

blue Oakley wraparounds were propped on their matching cap visors, and their fair Wisconsin noses practically glowed with sunblock.

Louisa Mayberry was gamely hoisting by the tail her sleek silvery tuna while James Mayberry wore the mate's crusty gloves to grip his rancid catch, its middle finger aimed upward toward the puffy white clouds.

The captain dragged on a cigarette and turned back to the wheel. "Another fucking day in paradise," he said.

The phone kept ringing but Yancy didn't answer it. He was drinking rum, sitting in a plastic lawn chair. From next door came the offensive buzz of wood saws and the metallic pops of a nail gun. The absentee owner of the property was erecting an enormous spec house that had no spiritual place on Big Pine Key, and furthermore interfered with Yancy's modest view of the sunset. It was Yancy's fantasy to burn the place down as soon as the roof framing was finished.

He heard a car stop in his driveway but he didn't rise from the chair. His visitor was a fellow detective, Rogelio Burton.

"Why don't you pick up your phone?" Burton said.

"You believe that monstrosity? It's like a goddamn mausoleum."

Burton sat down beside him. "Sonny wants you to take a road trip."

"Miami?"

"That's right."

"I'll pass." Yancy glared at the construction site across the fence. "The house is forty-four feet high – I measured it myself. The county code's only thirty-five."

"It's the Keys, man. The code is for suckers."

“Deer used to come around all the time and feed on the twigs.”

Yancy offered his friend a drink. Burton declined.

He said, “Andrew, it’s not like you’ve got a choice. Do what Sonny wants.”

“But I’m suspended, remember?”

“Yeah, with pay. Is that Barbancourt?”

“My last bottle. Tell him anywhere but Miami, Rog.”

“You want me to ask if you can go to Cancún instead?”

Burton sighed. “Look, it’s a day trip, up and back.”

“They always screw me on the mileage.”

Burton knew this wasn’t true. Yancy had issues with the Miami Police Department, from which he’d been fired in a previous era of his life.

“Chill out. You’re just going to the ME’s office.”

“The morgue? Nice.”

“Come out to the car,” said Burton.

Yancy set down his drink. “This ought to be special.”

The severed arm had been bubble-wrapped and packed on dry ice in a red Igloo cooler. To make it fit, the limb had been bent at the elbow.

“That’s all they found?”

“You know how it goes,” Burton said.

“John Doe or Juan Doe?”

“Rawlings says white male, mid-forties, heavysset, black hair.”

Dr. Lee Rawlings was the pathologist who served as the chief medical examiner for Monroe County. There were relatively few murders or accidental deaths in the Florida Keys, but Rawlings never complained. He filled his free time with golf, and was rumored to have whittled his handicap down to five strokes.

Yancy knew the sheriff was sending the arm to Miami because Miami was the floating-human-body-parts capital of America. Maybe they'd luck out and find a match, although Yancy thought it was unlikely.

"Traumatic amputation," Burton said.

"Ya think?"

"Charter boat brought it in yesterday. We checked our missing persons, all three of them. Nobody fits the description."

Yancy noticed the upraised finger on the end of the arm. "A sour farewell to the mortal realm?"

"Random rigor mortis is what Rawlings says. He took a picture anyway."

"Of course he did."

"Look, I'm late for my kid's soccer game."

"Absolutely." Yancy put the lid on the cooler and carried it up to his porch.

Burton said, "Sure you want to leave it out here all night?"

"Who's gonna jack an arm?"

"It's evidence, man. I'm just sayin'."

"Okay, fine." The island was plagued by opportunistic raccoons.

Burton drove off and Yancy moved the cooler into the house. From a kitchen cupboard he retrieved the Barbancourt bottle and ambled to the deck and poured himself one more drink. Next door, the construction crew was gone. Yancy's watch said five p.m. sharp.

For the first time all day he could hear seabirds in the sky.

The new sheriff of Monroe County was a local bubba named Sonny Summers who won office because he was the

only candidate not in federal custody, the two front-runners having been locked up on unconnected racketeering charges eight days before the election. Sonny Summers's opponents were unable to post bond and therefore faced a strategic disadvantage during the campaign's final debate, which was conducted via Skype from a medium-security prison near Florida City.

During his sixteen years as a road patrol officer, Sonny Summers had received numerous commendations for not fucking up on the job. He was well-groomed, courteous and diligent about his paperwork. One year he led the whole force in DUI arrests, a highly competitive category in the Keys. His spelling on arrest forms was almost always legible, he never took any of his girlfriends on dates in his squad car and he smoked pot only on his days off.

Upon becoming sheriff, Sonny Summers arranged a series of get-acquainted luncheons with business leaders up and down the islands, from Key West to Key Largo. A recurring theme of these meetings was the fragility of tourism and the perils of negative publicity. The BP oil spill was often invoked, although not a drop of crude had ever reached South Florida beaches. Sonny Summers was sympathetic to the business owners, whose support he would need for future elections. Under no circumstances did he wish to be blamed for scaring customers away.

With that in mind, Sonny Summers ordered his public-information officer not to divulge any information about the severed arm that had been brought in aboard the *Misty Momma IV*. It was the new sheriff's worry that floating body parts would be bad for tourism, particularly the waterfront trades. This was laughably untrue, as any marina owner in Miami could have assured him. Nothing

short of a natural disaster discouraged people from going out on (or into) the water. One particular beach on the Rickenbacker Causeway got spunked regularly by raw sewage, yet squads of riot police couldn't keep the swimmers and kiteboarders away.

In any case, Sonny Summers was fighting a lost battle. A crime-scene van had been waiting for the *Misty Momma IV* when it docked, so news of the icky discovery spread quickly. Worse, the boneheaded angler who'd reeled in the dead arm was showing the pictures on his cell phone to everybody at the Chart Room. There was even a rumor that he'd posted a photo on Facebook.

"I'm counting on you," the sheriff said to Yancy, after Yancy finally answered the phone.

"How so?"

"I'm counting on you not to come back from Miami with that you-know-what."

Yancy said, "What if there are no matching limbs at the morgue up there?"

"I need some optimism from you, Detective. I need some can-do mojo."

"The Gulf Stream flows north."

"Duh," said Sonny Summers.

"Also, the prevailing breeze this time of year blows from the southeast."

"I was born here, Yancy. Get to the point."

"Factor in the wind and currents, the odds of that arm floating from Miami all the way down here are pretty damn slim – unless it was paddling itself."

The sheriff was aware of Yancy's employment history. "You don't want to drive up to the big coldhearted city, that's all."

“What if they won’t take the case?”

“See, I’m depending on you to persuade them.”

“I can’t just leave a limb at the ME’s office if they don’t want it.”

Sonny Summers said, “Tomorrow I’m announcing that the investigation has been turned over to the appropriate authorities in Miami-Dade County. That’s the game plan, okay? This is officially no longer our headache.”

“I would wait a day to be sure.”

“Know what happened this morning? Some dickhead from Channel 7 calls up and says he heard that mangled corpses are floating up in Key West harbor!”

“Did you tell him to fuck off?”

“Call back tomorrow is what I told him. Wait for the media statement.”

“Our victim’s probably a rafter,” Yancy said. “Drowned on the crossing from Havana and then got hit by a bull shark or a hammer-head.”

“There you go!” the sheriff exclaimed brightly. “Aren’t most rafters on their way to Miami to meet up with family? So that’s where the goddamn arm belongs – Miami! End of discussion.”

“It’s not really up to me, Sonny.”

“Let me put it another way: There will be no human remains on my watch. Understand? *No human remains.*”

Those close to Sonny Summers sensed that he was sometimes overwhelmed by his elevated responsibilities. The transition from writing speeding tickets to commanding a recalcitrant law enforcement bureaucracy had been bumpy. One aspect of the new job that Sonny Summers did enjoy was putting on a blazer and schmoozing with the chamber-of-commerce types.

Yancy tried to suggest that an occasional severed limb was no cause for panic.

“Really? The two-day lobster season is next week,” the sheriff said. “We’re expecting, like, thirty thousand divers.”

“A sea of reeking turds wouldn’t keep those lunatics off the water. What are you worried about?”

“We’ll speak again tomorrow,” said Sonny Summers.

Yancy said, “I’ll drive up there on one condition: You lift my suspension.”

“Not until after the trial. How many times do I have to tell you?”

“But it’s such bullshit, Sonny. I didn’t even hurt the guy.”

The sheriff said, “Talk to Bonnie. She’s the problem.”

Bonnie Witt, Yancy’s future former girlfriend, was prepared to testify that he’d assaulted her husband of fourteen years with a portable vacuum cleaner, specifically a tubular attachment designed for upholstery crevices. Clifford Witt had required some specialized medical care but he was more or less ambulatory within a week.

Sonny Summers said, “Of all the women you had to get involved with. Swear to God, Andrew. All the women on these islands.”

“Our love was like a streaking comet.” Yancy paused. “Her words, not mine.”

“Did you take a look at it? The . . . ?”

“Arm? Yes, Burton insisted.”

“Any theories?”

“No,” said Yancy. “But it makes a dandy back-scratcher.”

“Call me on your way back from Miami. I want some happy news.”

Two

A clawing heat settles over the Keys by mid-July. The game fish swim to deeper waters, the pelicans laze in the mangroves and only the hardest of tourists remain outdoors past the lunch hour. Yancy's unmarked Ford was well air-conditioned but he still brought a box of Popsicles, which he positioned beside the disjoined limb in the cooler on the passenger side.

He was a pathologically impatient driver, and sucking on iced treats seemed to settle him. Bonnie had started Yancy on the Popsicle habit because she'd found it terrifying to ride with him on Highway 1. Mango was Yancy's favorite flavor beside Bonnie herself. These were the sorts of side-car thoughts with which he tormented himself.

The drive to downtown Miami usually took ninety minutes, but Yancy had stopped along Card Sound Road to purchase blue crabs, as there was still room in the cooler.

"Is this your idea of wit?" asked the assistant medical

examiner, a serious brown-eyed woman whose name tag identified her as Dr. Rosa Campesino.

“Help yourself to a Popsicle,” Yancy told her. “However, the crabs are off-limits.”

He summarized Rawlings’s findings while Dr. Campesino removed the arm from the ice and carefully unwrapped it. She placed it on a bare autopsy table without commenting on the vertical middle digit.

“I suppose you’ve seen some winners,” Yancy said.

“And you brought this all the way from Key West because . . . ?”

“The sheriff thought it might belong to one of your victims.”

Dr. Campesino said, “You could’ve emailed some photos and saved yourself a tank of gas.”

“Want to grab lunch?”

Finally, a smile. “I’ll be back in a minute,” she said.

Yancy ate another Popsicle. Unless you happened to be deceased, there were worse places to hang out than a morgue in the summertime. The thermostat was turned down to about sixty-three degrees. Very pleasant.

Dr. Campesino returned with a printout of the county’s current inventory of body parts, listed by race, gender and approximate age – three partial torsos, two left legs, a pelvis, three ears, seven assorted toes and one bashed skull. None of the items belonged to a chunky, hirsute white male in his forties.

“I knew it,” said Yancy.

“Maybe next time.”

“Are you hungry?”

“My husband’s a sniper on the SWAT team.”

“Say no more.”

“Did you notice this?” Dr. Campesino pointed the eraser end of a pencil at a well-delineated band of pale flesh on the wrist of the darkened arm. “His watch is gone,” she said.

“It probably fell off the poor fucker while the shark was mangling him.”

Dr. Campesino gave a slight shake of her head. “Often in upper-arm amputations the victim’s wristwatch remains attached. Not so much in homicides. The bad guys either steal it to pawn, or they remove it to make the ID more difficult.”

Yancy was certain that Sheriff Sonny Summers wouldn’t want to hear the word *homicide*. “Then why wouldn’t they swipe the wedding ring, too?” he asked.

“You’re right. It looks expensive.”

“I’m betting platinum. The guy’s wife would be sure to recognize it.”

Dr. Campesino leaned closer to study the damaged stump of the limb.

“What now?” Yancy said.

“The end of the humerus is hacked up pretty bad.”

“Maybe he fell into the boat’s propeller.”

“That would be a different style of wound.”

Yancy said, “You’re killing me.”

From a tray of instruments the pathologist selected a pair of hemostats, with which she extracted a pointed tooth from one of several puncture holes in the upper biceps. She dropped the smallish gray fang into Yancy’s palm.

“I’m no shark expert,” said Dr. Campesino. “Some marine biologist could tell you what species this came from.”

Yancy pocketed the tooth. He asked how long the arm had been in the ocean.

“Five to seven days. Maybe longer.” The young pathologist took some photographs that she promised to upload in case another part of the same corpse turned up in her jurisdiction.

“Can’t you keep the damn thing here?” Yancy asked. “Honestly, it would save me all kinds of grief.”

“Sorry. Not our case.” Dr. Campesino was mindful of the blue crabs when she returned the orphaned arm to the cooler. “I’ll call you if we get something that looks like a match.”

Yancy was aware that the Miami-Dade medical examiner’s office sometimes assisted other jurisdictions in difficult cases. He was also aware that his boss hadn’t sent him to Miami to initiate a murder investigation.

“Can we call it an accident? I mean, if you had to guess.”

“Not without a more thorough exam,” said Dr. Campesino, peeling off her latex gloves, “which I’d be happy to do if we had an official request from Monroe County.”

“Which you won’t get.”

“Can I ask why?”

“I’ll tell you over a strictly platonic lunch.”

“Nope.”

“Fine,” Yancy said. “So what would you do if you were me?”

“I’d go back to Key West and advise Dr. Rawlings to pack the arm in his freezer. Then wait for someone to show up looking for a missing husband.”

“And what if nobody does? It’s a cold business when true love goes south. Take my word.”

“Can I ask you something? Did you bend his middle finger up?”

“God, no! They found it that way!” Yancy moved the arm aside as he pawed through the cooler in search of another mango Popsicle. “Dear Rosa, what kind of sick bastard do you take me for?”

The person responsible for Yancy leaving the Miami Police Department was a sergeant named Johnny Mendez, who at the time was working with the Crime Stoppers hotline. To augment his salary Mendez would recruit friends and relatives to call in with tips on crimes that had already been solved, providing detailed information that detectives already knew. Then Mendez would backdate the tip sheet and personally sign off on the reward money, half of which he took as a commission.

Yancy had discovered the scam when he’d read a *Herald* story about a bus driver who’d received forty-five hundred dollars from Crime Stoppers for providing “crucial information” leading to the arrest of a man who stuck up a pedicure salon in Little Havana. Yancy himself had busted the robber, with no guidance whatsoever from the general public. The suspect had helpfully dropped his fishing license at the crime scene, and two days later Yancy jumped him while he was waxing the hull of his Boston Whaler.

The bus driver who’d phoned in the bogus tip turned out to be a second cousin of Sergeant Mendez’s. One morning Yancy boarded the cousin’s bus and sat in the first row and opened a notebook. After thirty-three blocks the driver spilled the whole story. He said Sergeant Mendez was upset to have opened the newspaper and seen the item about the reward, and had punished him by pocketing all but a grand.

That night, after too many rum and Cokes, Yancy decided it would be fabulously clever to dial the Crime

Stoppers number and report Sergeant Mendez for grand theft and embezzlement. Mendez wasn't a big fan of irony, and in any case he'd been busy covering his tracks. Yancy was eventually accused by Internal Review of making up lies about a fellow officer and of trying to extort money from Crime Stoppers. Yancy's position was weakened by the transcript of his phone call to the tip line, in which he suggested that a reward of fifty thousand dollars would be appropriate for the "courageous and upright deed" of exposing a crooked cop.

Yancy had delivered that line in a snarky and facetious tone, but the review board never got to hear the original tape, which had been mysteriously damaged by magnets while in Johnny Mendez's possession. Suspended without pay, Yancy quickly ran out of money for his lawyer and had no choice but to resign from the department, in exchange for not being indicted. Sergeant Mendez denied all wrongdoing but was quietly reassigned to the K-9 division. Soon thereafter he was bitten in the groin by a Belgian shepherd trainee named Kong, and he required three operations, culminating in a scrotal graft from a Brahma steer.

Mendez retired from the police force on full disability at age forty-four. He lived on Venetia Avenue in Coral Gables. Parked in the driveway was a silver Lexus coupe undoubtedly purchased with Crime Stoppers proceeds. One solution to the severed-arm dilemma would be for Yancy to plant the limb in Mendez's car, perhaps strung to the rosary that hung from the rearview mirror. Yancy discarded the idea – if by some chance Mendez overcame his panic and called the police, the arm would end up at the county morgue, where it inevitably would be traced back to Yancy based on information provided by the exquisite Dr. Campesino.

Over the years Yancy had conjured many irrational revenge fantasies about Johnny Mendez. For a time he considered seducing Mendez's wife until he realized he'd be doing Mendez a huge favor. Mrs. Mendez was an unbearable harridan. Her features were a riot of futile surgeries, and she laughed like a mandrill on PCP. Yancy once bought her a margarita at the InterContinental, and for two solid weeks he'd slept with the lights on.

Now he was parked down the block from the Mendez marital nest. A fat Siamese was primping on the hood of the Lexus. Yancy assumed the animal belonged to Mendez, who seemed like a total cat person. The man's inability to control K-9 candidates was further evidence.

Before Yancy could make up his mind about snatching the Siamese, his cell rang. It was the sheriff, probably seeking confirmation that the severed-arm transfer was complete. Yancy let the call go to voicemail.

On the drive back to the Keys he phoned Burton and gave him the bad news.

"They didn't want the damn thing. Now what do I do?"

"Lose it somewhere," Burton said. "That's my advice."

"Listen to you."

"Seriously. Take 905 back through North Key Largo – there's a dirt road about halfway that leads to an old cock-fighting ring."

Yancy wasn't sold on the plan. "My luck, some birder will find it."

"Not before the ants and vultures do."

"What the hell's wrong with Sonny, anyway? This is no big deal."

Burton said the sheriff freaked when Channel 7 called.

“Anyway, he already gave a press statement saying the case had been turned over to Miami-Dade.”

“I warned him, Rog.”

“Just ditch the fucking arm and come home.”

“Let me think about this.”

“I wish you wouldn’t.”

Yancy boiled the blue crabs and served them on hearts of palm, sprinkled with lemon pepper and Tabasco. Bonnie brought a bottle of Bordeaux. The fine vintage was wasted on Yancy but the gesture seemed rich with promise. Still she said: “I shouldn’t have come.”

They ate dinner on the back deck, where a world-class sunset was being ruined by the vulgar structure arising next door, spears of light slanting harshly through a checkerboard of window spaces and door frames.

“Where’s the good doctor?” Yancy asked.

“Lauderdale. He’s got a meeting tomorrow with our bankers.”

“It must be nice to have bankers. As a couple, I mean. Here’s our Christmas tree. Here’s our minivan. And, oh, last but not least, here are our bankers.”

“Shut up, Andrew,” Bonnie said. Her frosted hair was in pigtails, and a touch of pink gloss had been applied to her lips.

“He’s sixty, you’re forty. I remain at a loss.” Yancy threw up his hands.

“Don’t try to flatter me. I’m forty-two and you know it.”

She kicked off her flip-flops and crossed her smooth tanned legs, which stirred in Yancy’s chest a longing that almost incapacitated him. He and Bonnie hadn’t slept together since the night before the vacuum-cleaner incident.

Yancy said, “The sheriff would lift my suspension if you and Cliff agreed to drop the charges.”

“So that’s why you invited me tonight.”

“I ask you over three or four times a week, but you always say no.”

“Cliff won’t budge,” Bonnie said. “He wants to see you punished.”

Yancy pointed out that a trial would be humiliating for all parties. “Especially the alleged victim.”

“Alleged? There were three hundred witnesses, including yours truly.”

The assault had occurred at high noon at Mallory Square, which was packed with cruise-ship passengers. Fourteen amateur video clips of admissible clarity were in the hands of the prosecutor.

“Nobody calls you a whore and gets away with it,” Yancy said.

“Well, I *was* cheating on him, as you’ll recall. And I believe he used the term ‘tramp,’ not ‘whore.’” Bonnie balanced a plate of crabs on her lap. With a silver fork she probed for morsels amid the ceramic debris. “These are pretty darn tasty,” she said.

“Talk to him, darling. Please. I need my badge back.”

“Why didn’t you just punch him like a normal person? Why’d you have to go and sodomize him with a Hoover?”

Yancy shrugged. “You always said he had a bee up his ass. I was only trying to help.”

“Are you seeing anybody?” Bonnie had no talent for changing the subject. “I don’t think you’re ready yet. I think you’re still recovering.”

“It’s true, I’m a portrait of frailty. Tell me again why Cliffy isn’t divorcing you.”

“He adores me, Andrew.”

“Even after catching us together.”

“Yes,” said Bonnie impatiently.

“On his own boat.”

“We’ve been over this a hundred times.”

“In the tuna tower, for Christ’s sake! His own wife and another man, lewdly entwined.” Yancy inserted a crab claw in his mouth and bit down violently. “We must’ve looked like the fucking Wallendas up there.”

The boat was a seventy-two-foot Merritt with all the bells and whistles. Dr. Clifford Witt had recently retired from the practice of medicine, having invested in a chain of lucrative storefront pain clinics that dispensed Percocets and Vicodins by the bucket to a new wave of American redneck junkies.

Bonnie said, “I wouldn’t be here tonight if I didn’t care.”

“Yet still you intend to testify against me.”

“I’ll take no joy from it, Andrew.” She looked down, tugging at a loose thread on her cutoffs. “Of course, you could cut a deal. Spare us all from the messiness of court.”

Yancy frowned. “And lose my job? That’s automatic after a felony conviction.”

“Suppose I got Cliff to go along with dropping the charge to a misdemeanor? Between you and me, Dickinson’s office would be thrilled.”

Billy Dickinson was the local state attorney, and he had no appetite for ventilating scandals.

“Sonny could still fire me,” Yancy said, “or bust me down to deputy.” Still, a misdemeanor wasn’t insurmountable, career-wise.

“What do you think of the wine?”

“Yeasty,” said Yancy, “yet playful.”

Their affair had started on a Saturday afternoon in the produce section at Fausto’s, the two of them reaching simultaneously for the last ripe avocado. From there they beelined to Bonnie’s car and sped up the highway all the way to Bahia Honda, where they spent the night, hiding from the park rangers and humping madly on the beach, carving their own private dunes. For breakfast they split the avocado.

Yancy had been aware of Bonnie’s marital status; Cliff Witt was his dermatologist at the time, always ready with a frigid zap of liquid nitrogen whenever Yancy burst into the office to present a new, ominous-looking freckle. Yancy appreciated Cliff Witt’s accessibility but knew of his reputation as a horndog perv and pill peddler.

Still, guilt fissured Yancy’s conscience when he began undressing the man’s wife. It was his first encounter with a Brazilian wax job, and rapture soon blinded him to the manifest hurdles in his path. Usually he avoided married women.

“I suppose I should go,” Bonnie said, rising. She had pale blue eyes and reddish lashes that looked gold-tipped in the light.

Yancy suggested a detour to the bedroom, and she said no. “But I’m a little drunk. Maybe a shower would wake me up.”

“There’s an idea.”

It was just like old times, Bonnie’s bare bottom slapping against the wet tile while Yancy’s heels squeaked in joyous syncopation on the rubber bath mat. Somehow they broke the soap dish off the wall and also spilled a bottle of Prell, which played havoc with Yancy’s traction. Afterward they

toweled each other dry and fell into bed, and there Bonnie made a peculiar revelation.

“I am wanted in Oklahoma,” she said.

“You’re wanted here even more.”

“I’m serious. That’s why I married Cliff. I was a fugitive. *Am* a fugitive.”

Yancy wasn’t always a good post-coital listener, but Bonnie had gotten his attention. She said, “My real name is Plover Chase.”

“Ah.”

“*The* Plover Chase?”

“Okay,” Yancy said.

“I can’t believe you don’t remember the case! Stay right here.”

Naked she bounded from the sheets, returning with a French handbag that Yancy judged to be worth more than his car. From a jeweled change purse she removed a newspaper clipping that had been folded to the size of a credit card. As Yancy skimmed the article, he recalled the crime and also the steamy tabloid uproar.

Plover Chase was a schoolteacher in Tulsa who’d been convicted of extorting sex from one of her students in exchange for giving him an A on his report card. The boy was fifteen at the time; she was twenty-seven. On the day of her sentencing she’d disappeared.

“The judge was a shriveled old prick. I was looking at ten years,” Bonnie recapped. “So instead I hopped a plane to Lauderdale. Cliff’s medical office was advertising for a receptionist, and the rest is history.”

“Does he know the truth?” Yancy asked.

“Of course.” Which explained why Bonnie had stayed with him.

Yancy eyed the headline on the article: WARRANT ISSUED FOR TEACHER CONVICTED IN SEX-FOR-GRADES SCHEME. He wasn't sure whether he should act shocked or jealous. Certainly he had nothing as sensational in his own past.

He said, "May I offer a couple of observations? One, you're even more beautiful today than you were then."

"That's a mug shot, Andrew. And, FYI, a dyke named Smitty had just given me a full-on cavity search, which is why my eyeballs are bulging in that photo."

Yancy plowed on. "Number two, 'Bonnie' is so much sexier than 'Plover.' I don't think I could ever be intimate with a Plover – it's just not a name that can be seriously howled in the heat of passion."

"Cody had no trouble," Bonnie said.

Yancy raised an eyebrow. "The teenage victim of your seduction?"

"Yeah, some victim. He knew more positions than I did."

"Actually, Cody's a good sturdy name. He would be, what, about thirty now?"

Bonnie said the young man had sat in the front row of her AP English class. "I have no defense for what happened. He flirted with me, fine, but so did lots of the boys. Our . . . whatever . . . only lasted a couple of weeks, and of course he blabbed to everybody. His mother was the one who went to the cops."

"Even after you gave him an A?"

"There was no trade! Cody was an outstanding student."

"I assume he took the stand."

"His parents threatened to sell his Jet Ski if he didn't testify. Apparently he'd kept a journal of everything we did and how many times we did it. His writing was quite jaunty and

explicit – I should never have turned him on to Philip Roth.”

“So what was the final tally? How many trysts?”

“The jury was a horrid bunch, Andrew, leering like gargoyles.”

Yancy said, “I can only imagine.”

“Anyway, I wanted you to know the full truth, now that we’re closing the book on each other’s lives.”

Like a buzzard coasting through clouds, the thought crossed Yancy’s mind that his lawyer might be interested to learn that the wife of the man Yancy was accused of assaulting – and a key witness against him – was herself a fugitive from a sordid felony rap. He let the notion glide away.

“Whatever happened to Cody?” he asked.

“How the hell would I know? He was a dumb mistake, that’s all.”

“We all make ’em.”

“I’ll talk to Cliff again tomorrow. Promise.”

Yancy said, “Thank you, Bonnie. I like being a detective.”

“In the meantime you’re still getting a paycheck, right? So go fishing or something.” She returned the newspaper article to her purse. Then she stood up and stepped into her denim cutoffs. “I need some ice in my wine. How about you?”

“I’m good.”

Yancy lay back on a pillow and watched Bonnie button her blouse. She always did it without looking down, her gaze clouded and faraway and dull. After she left the room, he shut his eyes and tried not to think about the supernatural frequency of erections enjoyed by fifteen-year-old schoolboys.

“Andrew!”

He lifted his head and through the doorway he saw Bonnie rigid in the glow of the open freezer. Her fists were pressed to the sides of her head.

“My God!” she said.

Yancy sat upright, thinking: *Oh fuck.*

“Andrew, what have you done?” she cried. “What on earth have you done?”