

Hurricane Julie

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Prologue

Heavy rain pounds the island and waves, as high as the tallest trees, crash onto the seaweed strewn beach. Wind howls bending palms to the ground, then lets up long enough for them to pop back up. The weaker trees snap from the stress. Clouds block most of the light from the full moon. Lightning illuminates the sky and thunder booms. The clouds move by quickly, taking with them the rain squalls and the lightning, only to return in several minutes' time. Crashing waves, dark clouds, torrential rain, boisterous thunder, brilliant lightning and relentless wind; it is a dark and stormy night.

In a cave, rainwater drips through cracks, and sea water sloshes at the feet of several men. Torches, held in hands and secured on tall poles stuck into the sandy, wet floor provide flickering light. Wind can be heard and felt, inside the cave, while the thunder and crashing waves can just be heard. To a normal person, the situation would have been terrifying. But these are not normal men. They are providers, warriors, defenders of a way of life that is being destroyed by external forces far greater than any of the men knew. But no force was too great to diminish their bravery. They would fight any enemy to the death as opposed to surrender. That is what has happened, and would likely

happen again. Surrender the land and leave; that was unfathomable. And yet, with their numbers severely diminished, few alternatives remain. Fight or migrate. To be decided.

But tonight is not a night of war. It is a night of celebration, a night of remembrance and of honor. The men are conducting a funeral, a death ceremony, for their revered leader.

A large sarcophagus, ornate but not made of a precious metal as any available to these Indigenous men is used as currency and not for memorial. Instead, this tomb is made mostly from limestone and hardened wood with beautiful shells arranged in decorative patterns covering it, sealed and made watertight with clay. It is strong, secure and in it rests a man of great importance. Half of the coffin is open, and the man's face shows the strength of a leader, the strain of defending his people and the pride of being a father and a husband. A lifetime etched into the curves and crevices of the face of a man no older than fifty.

Four men, led by a high priest, celebrate the life with a ceremonial dance, words of reverence and, at last, a closing of the lid of the sarcophagus. Other men are in attendance too. These men are clearly not native in dress or appearance. Their skin is lighter, though sun exposure, and a life at sea, has reddened it to a distorted version of the natives' skin coloring. Their eyes are lighter too - blue or green. Nevertheless, they also revere the leader. They are quiet, somber and

tears even streak some faces. The Indigenous men shed no tears, the lighter skin men reddened by the sun do. This is an oddity as it is clear the dead man is the leader of the Indigenous men.

After the high priest closes the lid of the sarcophagus, a final prayer is said by the tribesmen. They step back and the leader of the white men and his cohorts lift a chest, closed with contents unknown, onto the top of the sarcophagus. It covers a small length of the tomb, but has the intended effect. The weight of the chest and its contents secure the lid closed. The sarcophagus itself rests on a stone slab, buried almost to its top in the sand. It is the length of the chief's tomb, and serves to stabilize his final resting place.

As more rain starts to pour through the cracks of the cave and the seawater continues to rise, the leader of the men who are not Indigenous lays a plaque next to the chest and pounds nails into it, securing it to the sarcophagus. The nails are hammered in; the roof of the cave begins to collapse. The men leave quickly but without panic. The plaque becomes obscured, but several of the words remain exposed, at least briefly:

HERE LIES THE BODY OF...

and

A GREAT CHIEF WHO DIED PROTECTING HIS...

and finally

FIND PEACE IN THE AFTERLIFE THAT ELUDED HIM IN
THIS EARTHLY ONE

The remaining words are then covered by the collapsing cave wall. They would remain that way for more than a century.

As the group of men emerge from the cave, they are met by several villagers. Women and children embrace their partners and fathers. Even the leader of the white men, who himself has skin a darker shade than the rest, is met by a woman, with children in tow. All race toward the shelter of the remaining chickee huts, damaged in battle, that form their homes uncertain whether they will be sufficient to survive the remainder of this storm.

The weather is erupting and becoming ever more fierce. Back inside the cave, walls collapse, water fills in around the sarcophagus, and the body of Chief Allacola, and the treasure that rests upon him, appears lost to the world forever.

Part 1 - The Clue

One

Sunday Sept 3, 2000

The plane leaves Laguardia on time with Julie and her parents among the passengers. Julie sits between Ed and Emily half-way back, just behind the exit row. She is a fashionista, a throwback to the hippie days that even her parents are too young to be part of. Her jeans aren't torn, but they are faded from forever washing, and frayed at the bottom. They are bell bottoms and way too long for her so the fraying is natural. She added the iron-on flowers. To accompany the jeans, she wears a fringed leather vest over a plain tee. She has sandy blond hair, wavy and long, and looks like Robert Plant. It was a look she tried for, having recently discovered Led Zeppelin in her parents' CD collection.

Julie sits clutching a stuffed angel and holding a book, *Pirates of the Gulf Coast*. She is reading while also listening to the in-seat TV from airline-supplied headphones. She and her parents each wear their headphones, watching different shows. Julie's parents are excited to be embarking on a trip, a cruise to the Bahamas. Short and sweet but a much needed getaway. Ed is a banker in New York while Emily practices law in the suburbs, mostly doing real-estate closings and estate planning, wills and the like. It gives her the flexibility to raise a child while pursuing her profession. Ed commutes to New York by train,

works long days, but when he comes home at night he is both an attentive husband and a loving father. Overall, they are happy if not stressed by modern life, its costs, hecticness and general competitiveness. Getting away will give the couple time to reconnect.

But first, they have to drop Julie off with Emily's parents on the west coast of Florida. Then they plan to rent a car and drive across the aptly named Alligator Alley to the Port of Miami from where their ship will depart.

The handoff of Julie to Emily's parents, while short, will be the most stressful part of the trip. Emily's parents are kind enough. Her dad is laid back and simply enjoys retired life in the sunshine state. He golfs, plays cards, drinks some bourbon and smokes a cigar here and there. Mostly, he listens to Sinatra. He loves Sinatra, is obsessed and listens each day to his music. He would even watch Sinatra's movies on the VHS. And now he is getting the films delivered on the DVD via a cool new service called Netflix. As for Emily's Mom, she is also great. But I N T E N S E. She is the original type A personality. Not loud, but demanding. Not mean, but could be demeaning with just a look. Not pushy, but...oh she is pushy. As Emily liked to say, "Mom never had a meal at a restaurant she didn't return." She would even tease her mother about this but her mom would deny it strenuously yet eventually concede, "if I am paying good money for a meal, you're damn right, it better be cooked how I like it."

“Daddy, do you think pirates were good or bad?” asks Julie, seemingly out of nowhere, until he sees her book.

“Hard to say they were good when they stole people’s money.”

“And killed people,” adds Emily.

“Then why are they so famous?”

“Notorious is more like it, Julie” replies Ed.

“Hmmm” says Julie as she goes back to her book. “Maybe notorious, and still famous.”

As the plane begins its descent into Fort Myers, Julie speaks again to her mom and dad.

“I am happy you are going on a great trip. I wish I was too. Grandma can be so mean.”

Emily replies, “Julie, Grandma loves you. She just gets,” Emily hesitates as she looks for the word before settling on, “impatient. I survived it for eighteen years; you can live with it for a few days.”

“Impatient? That’s an understatement,” adds Ed. Clearly, he thinks his wife is sugar-coating his mother-in-law’s shortcomings.

“Hush.”

Julie, as many pre-teens, can be chatty and curious. Her parents, at this age, are still her primary source of knowledge and information. Her friends have not yet replaced them, though that day is coming.

“Well I hope I am rich one day so I get to go on fab vacations like you.”

“Work hard and get a good education and you’ll do very well,” says Ed.

Emily adds, “You will have a great time with Grandma and Grandpa. They love you and they will take you mini golfing and for ice cream. You can swim in the pool and even get a tan.”

“A tan? Have you heard of skin cancer? I’ll stay inside and read, thank you very much.”

“That’s absurd, you don’t go to Florida to sit inside. And Grandma hates you being sedentary all the time. Even if it is September, and hot in Florida, I’m sure you can go in the pool. Maybe there will be other kids there to play with.”

Ed reaches across Julie to place his hand on Emily’s to calm her down. Maybe it works as Emily doesn’t add anything else. Julie does wonder, however, what does “sedentary” mean.

Julie is soon distracted by the news cast on her TV screen. “Look!” she says to Mom and Dad. The screen shows a weather forecaster with a banner underneath “Possible hurricane heading toward Loveland.”

All tune in to watch and listen.

* * *

On the screen, a newscaster shows a graphic of the Gulf of Mexico with a large storm, shown as a dark red blob, appearing off of the Yucatan Peninsula and a series of lines, some showing a direct connection to Loveland, the town in Florida where Emily's parents live.

The newscaster is saying "and it may hit as far north as Tampa, but it is likely to stay south, more towards Loveland. It could be a category one hurricane by the time it hits in a few days. We take you now to Loveland, where our reporter, Jane Velazquez, is on the ground."

The camera turns to Jane, standing on a fishing pier stretching into the calm, aqua waters of the Gulf coast of Florida. She is a new breed of weather person who actually is credentialed in the field and not simply a reader of what is printed on a teleprompter. Inspired by the emergence of the Weather Channel, Jane studied and obtained a degree in Meteorology from a fine university. That degree was awarded less than four months ago. She landed this job in the second semester of her senior year, and moved to southwest Florida from her native New Mexico. She loves her new job despite what the humid weather and being in the field in south Florida during the summer does to her hair. But she is a rookie and not used to all the quirks she will sometimes encounter, including today.

“Thank you, Dan. We’ve been talking to some of the locals here in Loveland and none are too worried, yet, about this storm. With me is Lemuel Simpson. Mr Simpson, what are your thoughts on this approaching storm?”

The camera pans to a man who looks like he has spent his entire life in the sun of south Florida. His skin is craggy, bright red. He has a ruddy, weathered face. His voice matches his appearance, it is raspy and hoarse. He looks like a caricature, and sounds like one. He speaks with a thick twang, some words barely recognizable.

“I’ll tell you Sweetie. Ain’t no hercane gonna hit Loveland. Ain’t gonna happen. No siree. Hasn’t happened in my entire life and ain’t gonna now.”

“Umm, my name is Jane sir” she interjects, but Lemuel continues.

“Well sure, we get the rain, the wind, the waves, but nothing like Andrew and Hugo. You know why? I know why. You wanna know why?”

The family watches this awkward moment, as Jane is losing control of the conversation, but Lemuel is going to tell his story so she prods him on. “I don’t, can you tell me?”

“Course I can tell ya.” Lemuel then starts with, “it goes back to the Calusa Injuns. This is hallowed land, it is. Right here, this shoreline, it’s sacred land.”

“You mean the Native American Calusa tribe, of course. They were indigenous to this area.” Jane tries to steer Lemuel to using the appropriate terms, but there is no stopping him. He may use politically incorrect speech, but he speaks with reverence.

“This is hallowed ground, Loveland is. A great war was fought here between the Calusa Injuns and the settlers. Supposedly the pirate Jeremiah Love helped the settlers, that he and the great chief Allacola were bitterest of enemies. But a big storm hit, ‘bout a hundred and fifty years ago now, and Love disappeared.”

Jane, sweating and turning red with embarrassment, tries to stop him, but Lemuel marches on. His fifteen minutes of fame will not be surrendered without a fight.

“Allacola died, as did most of his brave warriors. And the settlers mostly left too.”

“Mr. Simpson, that is some story, and, please they are Indigenous people,” Jane interjects, with no success.

“That ain’t no story hon, that’s history. You should know the difference, being’ educated an’ all. Now let me tell ya,” he continues, but Jane cuts him off.

“Back to the studio...”

“Don’t be interruptin’ me none, young lady. Treat your elders with respect. Now I told ya the histry, let me get to the legend.” The director back at the studio decides to keep with the story. Jane surrenders.

“The legend is that, in Loveland, I mean, over there on that island right yonder, ya see, the one right there?” He points at a small island in the middle of the bay. “Buried right there is Allacola. His burial ground is sacred and as long as his remains are undisturbed his spirit will forever protect his beloved land from calamity and pestilence. No sirree Bob. Ain’t no hercane hitting here. Funny thing is no one ever heard from Love again either. Story is he sank at sea somewhere in the Gulf or Caribbean, treasure an’ all.”

“Thank you Mr. Simpson,” Jane was almost free and clear but Lemuel had more to say.

“One last thing to add, if you don’t mind me interjectin. Once Allacola’s remains are disturbed, then all bets are off. We’ll be movin out of here like Love and the settlers and everyone else. Because storms will be coming every year. Big ones, bad ones. Loveland will become uninhabitable.” Lemuel finishes.

Jane looks at him and hesitates before speaking. After a pause that starts to turn awkward, she accepts that her guest is finished and she wraps up. “Well thank you very much Mr. Simpson. From a sunny, calm, and,” she looks at Lemuel, “skeptical Loveland, this is Jane Velazquez reporting.”

* * *

The story is finished and Julie removes her headphones.

“Mom, Dad, this book talks about Jeremiah Love. That he was a cabin boy for Jean Lafitte. When Lafitte was forced from Galveston, that’s in Texas, he was on his own. He was 17 at the time!

Dad, dismissively, “Very good dear.”

Julie, like Lemuel, is not to be thwarted. She is excited, and continues, “He plundered the gulf coast from Texas to the Florida panhandle, whatever that is, before settling in Loveland. And then he disappeared, never to be heard from again.”

“Enough with pirates,” Emily says, “Why don’t you just watch more TV like an ordinary child?”

“Calm down dear. We will be on our way to the Bahamas soon enough. Our first vacation of the new century.” Then Ed breaks into song, asking if his wife likes pina coladas and being out in the rain.

“Ok, Stop. Goofball.”

Julie doesn't get it, but Mom and Dad are smiling. Before she returns to reading her book, Julie adds, “Maybe the treasure they are talking about is right in Loveland, maybe in Loveland Key. That would be cool. Maybe we’ll find it.”

“What?” says Emily.

“The man said Love was lost at sea and his treasure was never found!”

“Oh,” and Emily adds facetiously, “I’m sure it’s there right on the beach waiting for you to find it.”

Julie misses the sarcasm and simply says, “Yeah”.

She returns to reading her book as the plane touches down in Florida.

Two

As Julie and family deplane, they are followed by two unaccompanied siblings escorted by a disinterested flight attendant. Marshall, age 13, is dragging his small backpack on wheels, while his younger sister, Montana, has hers on her back. They are also visiting their grandmother, and for those few days the backpacks are sufficient.

“Did you hear what they were talking about?” asked Marshall.

“Who?” replies Montana.

“The people in front of us, you idiot.”

“You’re an idiot. How am I supposed to know what they were talking about? I was watching TV.”

“They said there is buried treasure in Loveland. Pretty cool right?”

“If you say so.”

Marshall just shakes his head disappointed.

At baggage claim, while waiting for the bags, into the terminal walk Grandma and Grandpa, Emily’s parents.

Emily’s dad is decked out in his best south Florida uniform - bermuda shorts, a “hawaiian shirt” and sandals with calf length black socks. He hums Sinatra before he greets his daughter and her family.

Emily's mom is dressed elegantly in a Lily Pulitzer dress, hair beautifully styled, and nails perfectly manicured. She is well put together, but wears her stress in her smile, or lack thereof. Grandpa is happy-go-lucky and Grandma carries the weight of the world.

Grandpa warmly hugs his daughter, thrilled to see her, before turning his attention to his granddaughter.

"Julie, my how big you've gotten. What a beautiful young lady you are becoming." He hands Julie a chocolate bar, "You must be hungry after the flight."

"Thank you Grandpa."

Meanwhile, Emily and her mother embrace. It's not quite as warm.

"Mom, it's so good to see you." Emily says.

"It's good to see you too. You look nice and relaxed." From the way she said it, Emily knew this meant that her mother was not relaxed. She pushed through.

"How's Dad doing?"

"Overall, he's doing quite well. Nothing bothers him. We will get the test results this week."

Emily grimaces, and whispers to her mother so that no one else will hear, something about pirates and treasure.

“As if I don’t have enough to worry about, more than you know, I don’t need her showing up with cockamamie ideas.”

“Hi Grandma,” Julie interjects.

Grandma hugs her. Julie continues, bluntly, “Are you happy to see me?”

“I’m delighted dear,” Grandma replies. It may have convinced a young girl. Mom and Dad, maybe not.

Grandpa grabs Julie’s luggage off the carousel, and the family hugs one more time before they separate. Ed and Emily head toward the rental counter while Julie, Grandma and Grandpa walk towards the exit.

They walk outside and pass Marshall and Montana. With them are two scraggly looking men. One of the men limps as he walks to a beat up sedan and opens the trunk. The other stands nervously by the driver’s door, smoking a cigarette and looking around trying to spot something unknown. They appear to be in their mid 30s, and each has little idea of what a barber or a dentist is.

As Julie walks by, she says to Grandma excitedly, “Grandma, did you know Jeremiah Love was a pirate, and he buried his treasure in Loveland?”

Grandma is taken aback by this comment, but does not reply, at least not right away.

Nearby, Marshall hears this, trips over Montana, and shouts “get out of my way dorkface.”

She replies, “Shut up Zitsky”. Sibling love at its best.

The limping man takes their backpacks, tosses them into the trunk and ushers the children into the backseat. There, they are greeted by an elderly woman, with a tall beehive of blue hair and a face covered in garish make-up. Each one kisses her on the cheek, while the two men get in the front. The driver, with cigarette still in hand, fortunately hanging out the window, peels out, burns rubbers, fishtails and speeds off. He doesn't get very far. As he passes an airport shuttle, in front of that, a motorcycle cop pulls out, blasts its siren and pulls over the un-seatbelted, nervous, cigarette-smoking, speeding driver.

Grandma and Grandpa both chuckle as they watch this. The family crosses the street to the short term parking garage where they load up for the drive to Loveland Key. They ride in luxury in Grandpa's Mercury Marquis, the stock car for state trooper vehicles and many retirees, with a huge trunk into which Julie's luggage disappears. She hops in the back seat, buckles up and away they go.

“Grandpa, I'm hungry,” says Julie from the backseat, “Can we get lunch?”

Grandma replies, “You just ate a chocolate bar dear. And didn't you eat on the plane?”

“Yeah, I guess,” she concedes.

Grandma is wound up already, and losing patience.

“Sure,” replies Grandpa.

* * *

They drive for a bit along I-75 and then exit near Loveland. They pull into a chain restaurant, the kind that litter the landscape of America. This one focuses on the beach and island vibe and offers such specialties as conch chowder, coconut shrimp and chicken tenders and chips. Got to keep the kids happy. Of course, it also offers broiled salmon, usually overcooked, and a fried grouper sandwich, usually overpriced, for adults. Rustic wood floors, calypso style music, gently humming ceiling fans and a water fountain contribute to the atmosphere designed to hide the fact the restaurant sits in a busy strip mall off a major roadway, next to a gas station. The closest thing to a body of water is the foamy puddle in the lot of the car wash attached to the gas station.

The family sits, orders sweet tea all around and looks at the menu.

When it comes time to order, Julie starts. This is an important trip for her. She wants to grow up, be mature and act sophisticated. She’s not sure how to say it but she gets it out as, “I’ll have the lobster bis-cway”. Julie had seen Beauty and the Beast and somehow she

thought the “que” at the end of bisque was pronounced in the way she said it. It was cute, but Grandma still needed to correct her.

“That’s bisk,” says Grandma. “Are you sure you like that?”

“I’ve never had it, but Mom says I like everything”.

Julie adds the chicken tenders and fries and then Grandma and Grandpa order. While waiting for their food, the blue-haired woman, the two scraggly looking men, and Marshall and Montana enter the restaurant. It’s a popular stop, apparently, as it’s shiny and new. They walk by the family and only Grandma notices them, while the blue-haired lady and Marshall notice, but do not acknowledge, Julie and family. They sit far enough away not to worry Grandma who clearly has anxiety seeing them. There is something off about the relationship; the two women seem to know each other for sure, but it is not apparent how.

Meanwhile, several minutes later, the server approaches the table, “OK, here’s the soup. And two garden salads, no croutons.”

Julie had never seen bisque before, “it’s orange, that’s gross.” She hesitates to taste it.

Grandma, on edge, replies, “That’s the bisque you ordered dear. What did you expect?”

“I don’t know, I guess something that looked like clam chowder, not vomit.”

Grandma turns her attention to her unphased husband, “I told you not to let her order that.”

And then back to Julie, trying to convince her it’s ok, “Bisque is much better than chowder. For refined tastes.” She is scrambling to deal with a child as well as her growing anxiety.

Grandpa adds, “Taste it, child. I’m sure you’ll like it.”

“Ugh, okay, I’ll try it.”

Julie picks up her soup spoon, pinches her nose with her free hand and scoops some of the creamy, orange soup onto the spoon and, hesitantly, into her mouth. Her eyes open wide. Her face wrenches in disgust. She spits the soup back into her bowl.

“Oh, this is gross. Dis! Gus! Ting!” exclaims Julie.

Grandma stares mortified, about to yell, but Grandpa takes control. Or tries to.

But Grandma just can’t hold herself back. “What is wrong with you?” she asks her young granddaughter.

Grandpa steps in, attempting to keep this visit that has barely started from going off the rails, “Was it too hot?”

“No, it’s just gross.”

“Can I try something else please?”

“Of course, what would you like?”

She looks at the menu again.

“I’ll have the escargot.”

“Oh no.” Grandma exclaims, “I draw the line there. If she doesn’t like bisque she’s going to gag on a snail.”

“I will not. Mom says I like everything. She’s amazed at what I like to eat. I even like sushi. Maybe bisque is just the one thing I don’t like.”

Grandma fights back, “You already told us what your mom, who is not here by the way, said about your culinary sophistication. Apparently it’s not true.”

But the server returns and Grandpa speaks, “Can she get something else? The bisque is a bit... foul.”

“Sure. Hon, what would you like?”

“I’d like to try the escargot please.” Grandma has lost and she is frustrated. Julie is happy to be able to try something else.

“Great,” the server says and leaves to submit the order.

Grandma and Grandpa return to their salads. Julie waits, colors in the map of the USA and Caribbean with the crayons on the table, happy the pungent, orange mush is off the table. As she looks at the map, she notes the location of Cuba and Jamaica.

“My book on pirates mentions Jamaica but not Cuba. But Cuba is right in the way so I wonder if they stopped there too.” No one replies; she is not deterred. “Doesn’t matter with the treasure being buried right here. But it is all very mysterious.”

The server returns with the escargot. “Here you go. Is everything else ok?”

Grandma is startled by the depth of knowledge Julie has on the topic and, had circumstances been different, would gladly play along with her. But with a storm approaching and other concerns, Grandma wishes to dissuade the treasure-seeker.

“Quite honestly dear, that’s a bunch of nonsense. There is rich folklore about the history of south Florida – about brave Indians fighting off the European invasion, about hearty settlers seeking a better life, about dashing pirates and beautiful damsels looking for havens in which to hide their booty. But it’s all just a bunch of tall tales that have grown over the years to be far more fiction than fact.”

Julie is mesmerized yet confused by her elder’s effort at clarification.

“Wow Grandma. That’s cool. So you believe it? You believe there were pirates here. And Native Americans. And settlers. All fighting over treasure. Wow.”

Grandma replies, “That is not exactly what I said.”

Everyone returns to eating. Julie eats all her escargot rapidly. She seems to enjoy them. In the few moments of peace, Grandma and Grandpa finish their salads.

Grandma continues, "Anyway, I was saying." Grandpa interrupts.

"Enough dear. Don't dig yourself a deeper hole." Grandma is not used to being hushed and is about to respond when Julie gasps, and takes a deep breath through her nose. Her eyes open wide. She puffs out her cheeks. She puts both hands on her stomach.

She mutters, "The escargot."

She tries mightily to hold in her food.

"Oh mother of mercy. Let's get you to the Ladies' Room. Come on. Get up." Grandma gets up to help her.

Julie puts her right hand up to stop Grandma, trying to keep her away. But Grandma moves forward, and just as she gets face to face with Julie, she lets out a loud, garlicky burp, right in her elder's face. The entire restaurant hears it. Grandma feels it, encompassed in a cloud of nauseating malodorous scent. Grandpa almost falls off his chair laughing. Gasping, Julie smiles.

"That feels better," she says.

Grandma does not smile. She is sickened by the burp and starts gagging. She runs off to the bathroom, holding one hand over her mouth and one over her stomach.

On the way to the bathroom she passes a table at which sits Marshall, Montana, and the two scraggly-looking men. Empty plates litter the table as the men attack a serving of fried calamari, their fingers dripping with the dipping sauce, some of which made it onto their shirts. There is one empty seat, and in front of it on the table sits an empty bowl, which, judging by the orange residue, started as a steaming bowl of lobster bisque.

* * *

Grandma is at the sink in the Ladies room, panting, but her nausea has passed. She splashes cold water onto her face. Julie follows her in. Grandma sees her in the mirror. She doesn't smile. She doesn't turn around. She doesn't acknowledge her. Julie is forlorn.

"Grandma, are you okay?" Grandma is about to reply, but Julie continues. "I was trying to play a trick, pretending I was sick, and then the burp just came out."

Again, Grandma is about to reply. This time, however, she is interrupted by a loud moan coming from a stall, another groan almost painful sounding. There is a brief moment of silence that is then

followed by the most disgusting sounds a body can make, and a loud splash. Finally, there is a relieved “ahhh”. Unfortunately, permeating the bathroom is now the foulest odor one can imagine, the garlicky escargot burp paling in comparison. The toilet paper dispenser spins. Another round of bodily foulness occurs. Another, more relieved, “ahhh”, and more atrocious odors come forth. More spinning of the dispenser. Surprisingly, there is no flush.

Grandma and Julie make eye contact in the mirror, hands over their noses trying to block the stench, bewildered by how to react. Then, Grandma smiles and laughs. Julie laughs hysterically and audibly.

Grandma says, “Let’s just get out of here.”

“Yes. Grandpa is getting the rest of the food to go.”

“Never coming back here, that’s for sure.”

“Me neither,” says Julie as they walk out.

Finally, there is a flush. The stall door opens and out comes the woman with a bouffant of blue hair. She stops briefly at the mirror, primps her hair, fails to wash her hands, and walks out.

Three

The day is hot, humid, very sticky and storm clouds threaten rain. It is a typical late summer day. Julie and family arrive at Loveland Key condominium, a six story building that sits at the end of a narrow barrier island. It is waterfront, well technically, gulf front, since they are on the Gulf of Mexico coast of Florida.

On the way into Loveland Key, they passed many communities, some with houses, some with two story buildings and a few with mid-rises. They passed strip malls, tennis courts and golf courses. But once they crossed onto Loveland Key island, there was one development, then a large state beach followed mostly by an unspoiled landscape of pine, cypress and palm trees inland and mangroves along the coast until they reached their condominium at the end.

“It used to be so peaceful and quiet here,” Grandma observes prior to crossing the bridge. “Now there are buildings going up everywhere.”

“Paradise has been discovered, dear,” answers Grandpa.

To Julie, it is paradise. Palms trees sway, there is bright blue water everywhere. Once inside her grandparents’ apartment, Julie is told to unpack and rest before dinner. She looks out the window of the second bedroom on the fourth floor. She notes the spectacular view of a large bay leading to the Gulf of Mexico, a sandy beach, some islands in the

bay and, beyond that, a causeway over which they traveled where the Hapicola River meets the bay. She has never seen water this color except here in Florida. It alternates between a bright blue and almost a light green. Every now and then, a cloud passes over darkening the water to a deeper blue, almost a gray. But even that gray is more brilliant than any of the waters she is used to up north.

She also notes the building and its immediate surroundings. A large rectangular pool surrounded by a deck sits just below, with a hot tub and numerous umbrellas shading the seating area. To the right sits a separate building connected by a patio and an overhang, with steps down to the beach. She later learns this is the Loveland Key clubhouse, where all the “fun” activities for the building’s occupants take place, such as bingo, which is apparently a game for “retired people”.

Near the clubhouse, Julie sees two beach chairs and a fishing pole sticking in the sand. The occupants of the chairs look elderly as all she can see is gray hair. For some reason of which she cannot be sure as they have their backs to her and are sitting, Julie believes one is a man and one is a woman. She thinks they must be happy. Sitting at the edge of the earth with a fishing pole and your friend - what could be better than that!

After a few minutes, Julie finishes unpacking and goes into the living room. The condo is neat and well-decorated. It is not overly done yet there is a curio cabinet with numerous pieces of tchotchka on its

shelves. Grandma sits at the dining room table going through mail, while Grandpa sits in a recliner, fully reclined, eyes closed, humming a Sinatra song. A “Golf Illustrated” magazine rests upon his chest. He alternates between looking at his magazine and lightly snoring. For some reason, Sinatra seems to be a consistent presence. Grandma looks up and shakes her head.

“Julie, I want you to know that when you are old enough and get married, you must remember a man can fall asleep at any time, in any place and sleep through anything.” It does not come naturally to Grandma to speak to a child as young as her granddaughter. She struggles to make conversation, understand the pre-teen point of view, and generally relate to children. This is her attempt to start a conversation.

“Ok Grandma, thanks.”

That is all Julie says. She is usually talkative, but she had no idea how to reply to that comment as her experience with men is limited to her dad. She is simply polite in her reply. Grandma, of course, is silent from then on as well, as she tried to initiate a discussion. Julie futzes around the living room for a few minutes. She had been up since early in the morning, had flown several hours to Florida, had almost lost her lunch, literally, and now is excited to be at Loveland Key.

Fortunately, the phone rings. It is Emily who is calling from her hotel. She mentions to her mother that they really didn't get a chance to speak at the airport and asks how Julie is behaving.

Grandma, to her credit, doesn't go into much detail, but Emily senses hesitation on her mother's part.

"What's bothering you Mom? I sensed at the airport you were concerned about something, and I sense it now. It can't just be taking care of Julie."

Grandma waves to Grandpa to pick up the extension. He does so while Julie sits nearby, hearing only her grandparents' side of the conversation.

"We won't be living here much longer if that developer, Dumonte Duval, has his way," Grandma starts. "And that's why I am concerned. He's buying up all the land and he wants to buy Loveland Key too. And that darn Gladys, she's backing a plan for all of us to sell to him. Below market value."

"That will never go through mom."

"I have it on good authority, he will use eminent domain to get what he wants. And what he wants is to build a golf course."

"Mom, he will never be able to use eminent domain to build a private golf course. No municipality in the world would support it and no judge would rule in his favor."

“Oh dear, for all your education and smarts, you are a naive suburbanite. I come from the big city. I know how the street works. How people who will do anything to get their way operate. Let me tell you how this will work. First, we push back and don’t accept his lowball offer. Then he goes to the authorities, not directly, but through a shell organization, a charity feigning to protect the mangroves, or the manatees, or panthers, or some other critter that needs protecting. They get everyone up in arms that our property has been endangering the species ‘of the day’ for thirty years and that the only way to remediate the issue is to take the property by eminent domain and restore the natural habitat.”

Emily replies, “Well, after all, you are directly on the beach of a barrier island. And it’s not exactly untrue that your development has spoiled that natural habitat to an extent.”

“Oh my lord. Honey, will you open your daughter’s eyes please?” She turns to Grandpa.

“Of course, dear. What Duval will do, is get our property condemned via eminent domain and handed to this charity for conservatorship. Then after a couple of years, and after his homes are built and sold just across the bay there, the charity will suddenly go bust and no longer be able to afford upkeep. Taxpayers don’t want an additional burden and here comes Dumonte Duval to the rescue. Of course, he’ll want something for it. So he will propose building a golf

course on the property, that will preserve the natural beauty and habitats, so he will claim, and further ensure that no tall buildings block the views from his development, and allow him to sell memberships to all the people who just bought his homes.”

“That will take years.”

“The craftiest people play the long game. The Duval family goes back over fifty years here. And Dudu is still upset that someone else beat him to developing Loveland Key. Getting this piece of land has been in his sight for as long as anyone can recall,” Grandma proclaims.

“DuDu?”

“Yes, that is what we call him, and that is what he is!”

Emily chuckles, “Wow, well what can be done to stop him?”

“We need the best legal team. So money would help. Most of us here can’t afford the lawyers it would take to fend off Duval’s first assault, trying to buy Loveland Key. After he breaks us with that, even if we win, the eminent domain case will ruin us. We will certainly have no funds left to defend against that, nor the moral high ground, when someone marches out a nest of baby turtles that are no longer found here because we killed them.”

“Don’t be dramatic dear.”

“Dramatic? I’ve seen this movie before and know how it ends. The little guy loses. That’s it. Done. Caput.”

“There has to be something else.”

“Well short of that, nothing I can think of. Maybe the Indigenous people of south Florida will claim this as tribal land. But, I doubt that will happen.”

The conversation tails off, they wish each other well and hang up. Julie sits there during the conversation, being as patient as a child excited by being in a fun place could be. She understands little of the half she heard, but catches “money would help” and something about “evident lo mein”.

Now that Grandma and Grandpa are off the phone, it is time for the fun to begin.

“I’m bored Grandma. Can I go outside? I bet I can find that treasure. But I need to start looking. I’m here for only a week. That’s not a lot of time to find something that’s been lost for one hundred and fifty years.”

“Oh Lord. Julie please. Go read a book,” says Grandma.

Julie pouts and turns to Grandpa, “Grandma is still mad at me for today.”

Grandpa, sitting in his recliner with eyes closed, replies, “Don’t worry about it. She’ll be fine. And so will you. Get a book and come sit with me.”

Julie rifles through romance novels on the bookshelf. She almost knocks one of the small collectibles, a ceramic figurine of a woman cuddling a baby, onto the tile floor but saves it. Grandma gasps and shakes her head. Grandpa doesn’t react.

While saving the cherished knick knack, a group of books fall over revealing one buried at the end of the shelf. It is titled “Loveland, Yesterday and Today. A History of Southwest Florida’s Most Notorious Town.”

Julie, excited by this discovery, picks it up, puts the other books back in place, and sits on Grandpa’s lap.

“Look at this Grandpa.” Grandpa doesn’t open his eyes but does hug his granddaughter.

“Very nice dear,” he mutters as he drifts into his on again, off again nap.

Julie flips through the book. She looks at the last Chapter - “Here Come the Snowbirds” which shows pictures of numerous buildings and roads being built. She jumps ahead and sees a picture of a finished Loveland Key - the condo building, the pool, the clubhouse. On the opposite page is a picture of Loveland Key in progress - the condo is a

framed shell, there's a hole for the pool, and next to the hole a large mound.

"Cooooool. Look, Grandpa, pictures of Loveland Key. Your building and the pool and the clubhouse."

"Huh?" Grandpa opens his eyes startled.

Grandma spies the books Julie is reading, "Take that book away from her. What are you doing with that young girl?"

"Doing with what? It's just a book, Grandma. Books are the keys to knowledge."

Julie hands the book to Grandpa.

"That's," she hesitates, "nonsense," Grandma replies, saying the first thing she could think of but sensing her error as soon as the words leave her lips.

"Dear!" Grandpa retorts

He puts his hand out and Julie places the book in it; he then puts the book and magazine on the coffee table, magazine on top.

"Julie, go to your room and unpack and get ready for bed." Grandpa adds in a whisper, "Grandma needs to calm down."

Even though she had already unpacked, Julie senses not to object. Instead she pouts and walks away.

“I thought you had gotten rid of that book,” Grandma says to her spouse.

“The kid just has a way of finding things I guess. Maybe she has special powers.”

“Don’t be such a wisenheimer. Let’s hope her special powers end here and now.”

* * *

A few minutes later, Julie lays in bed, donning her angel pajamas and clutching a stuffed angel. There is something unique and wonderful in childhood obsessions. Children latch onto things, ideas, toys, blankets, sports teams. They become obsessed with all aspects of that particular thing forming a lifelong bond that works in concert with the child forming an identity that carries into adulthood. Oftentimes, these obsessions are fostered by parental tastes, but just as often, children develop their own. For Julie, her obsession with angels started with a pendant Emily would wear - a golden angel on a long chain. Simple. Delicate. But it caught the eye of the young girl who asked many questions and became obsessed with a figure her mother loved, perhaps to gain her mother’s love even more. As for Julie’s other obsession, pirates, there is no known external factor to that obsession; maybe it was ‘Muppet Treasure Island,’ or perhaps she was just born with it.

Grandma comes into the room to check on her, tuck her in and wish her good night. “Did you say your prayers?”

“Yes, Grandma,” she replies.

“Good and I see you have your angel to watch over you.”

“Grandma, this is a stuffed angel. But I do have a real guardian angel who looks over me as well. Mom says so.”

There is no time for debating as it’s late and Grandma is ready for bed. “Wonderful dear. Good night.” Grandma quietly departs.

As Julie lays there, she overhears the television in the living room; her grandparents seem to keep the volume up pretty high. She realizes it must be the weatherman speaking.

“Our computer models now show that this storm is more than likely to hit Loveland than further north. Will probably come to shore as a tropical storm, but perhaps as strong as a category one hurricane. We ask our viewers to be vigilant and monitor our reports.”

Julie closes her eyes, but does not fall asleep immediately. She lays awake listening to the TV. After a few minutes, she hears it click off along with the sound of Grandpa getting up from his recliner and shuffling to bed. The light outside her room goes off and another door clicks closed. Julie lays in bed thinking. She waits. Some more time passes as peace and quiet overtake the apartment.

Julie removes her comforter and tiptoes out of the room, leaving her door ajar. In the living room, she heads to the bookshelf, a nightlight guiding her as she walks in unfamiliar surroundings. The books are arranged neatly again, as she had found them earlier in the day. She looks at the corner shelf where she had found the book on Loveland. It is not there. She hears shuffling from the other bedroom followed by Grandpa's voice.

"I saw it in the living room. I'll go get it for you."

Julie ducks behind the couch. The door opens, and Grandpa walks out, his slippers shuffling against the cool tile floor. Grandpa, even when he is sleepy, hums a tune. Julie is not familiar with it, but he alternates lyrics and humming, about flying to the moon. There are plenty of "da da das" as he either doesn't know the words, or just doesn't feel up to reciting them.

The room is illuminated by a simple night light. It is enough to allow Grandpa, familiar with the layout, to march directly to the coffee table. There he picks up the latest bestselling romance novel and returns to the bedroom. On his way back, he notices Julie's door slightly ajar. Julie watches nervously as he walks to her room, and grabs the door handle. He starts to open it.

From the bedroom, comes an impatient voice, "Well. I'm waiting. Any luck?"

Grandpa hesitates and gently pulls the door closed. He shuffles back to his bedroom. Julie sighs. And waits. She hears them speaking.

“Here you go. You should just try to sleep, you know.”

Grandma replies, “This will help.” They each chuckle and a couple of seconds later, the lamp in the bedroom goes off.

Julie waits to make sure the coast is clear. Hearing no more sounds, and seeing no light, she walks rapidly but quietly to the coffee table. Under Grandpa’s Golf Illustrated remains the book. She picks it up, hurries to her room and closes the door gently.

* * *

Back in her room and safe from being caught snooping around, Julie sits in bed and reads via a small light. The book is filled with sketches, drawings, and photos as well as numerous details of the history of Loveland and its founding father, a notorious pirate or a swashbuckling adventurer, depending on whom one believes.

She looks at a chapter titled “Jeremiah Love, The Pirate Founder”. She flips pages and sees several illustrations. The first one purports to show what Love looked like. Tall, handsome, well dressed, clean shaven but with long, woven dreadlocks. His skin color is a mystery as are many things about him. His features appear European but his skin is dark; in fact, it is not clear he is not Indigenous. Only his dress provides a clue. It is that of a well-healed aristocrat. He doesn’t look tarnished,

dirty, messy or disheveled. If anything, he looks regal. He looks more a settler, than a native; more a statesman, than a buccaneer, more landed gentry, than seafaring warrior.

The next illustration she sees appears to be more of what she would expect of Love and his companions. It is a group of pirates surrounding an overflowing chest of treasure. These men look the part, wooden legs, broken teeth, torn clothes. They celebrate their treasure with tankards of ale, devilish grins, draped golden necklaces and handfuls of coins. Love is not in this picture, or if he is, it is not clear which one he is.

She flips the pages and looks at more illustrations. One appears to be Love with several tribes-people, including a man who stands out and must be their leader. He wears an ornate headdress and holds a carved totem that has embedded shark teeth and shells in it. He stands with a young woman who is quite striking. She radiates warmth and grace and elegance. Love appears smitten in the photo. The caption reads “Love with Chief Allacola and the Princess”. No name is given for the princess and Julie flips pages ahead to see if she can find one. She cannot. The caption below the photo says “Love with Allacola and the Princess before he was betrayed by the Indian Chief.”

The final picture she sees is a sad one, a reminder of once vibrant communities shattered by the encroachment of a new world. It shows a pirate ship sailing away from the coast, and behind it a village

smoldering and torn asunder. No human is in the picture - not a villager, not a pirate, not a settler. Just the despair of a once prosperous culture no longer allowed to remain untouched by human progress.

The book's author focused on the ship and Love's departure with the caption:

After the storm there was no trace of Jeremiah Love, his crew or his treasure. His only legacy is the name he gave to the town at the mouth of the Hapicola River. Loveland.

It's ironic. The village is in ruins but it is clear to Julie that the village is now Loveland - modern, bustling and growing.

Julie flips some other pages past other pictures - more Indians, pirates, and settlers.

She comes across another chapter "Allacola's War on the Settlers". A series of drawings depicts the natives waging war on seemingly defenseless interlopers. One shows the military coming to the rescue of the settlers.

Julie takes one last look at the picture of Loveland Key, the picture she had seen earlier. She turns to the picture of Loveland Key she earlier showed Grandpa. It is the last page of the book.

As she turns that page, from inside the flap of the cover, a small piece of paper slides out. Julie pushes it back inside the cover, then reconsiders as curiosity takes hold and slides it back out. She unfolds it. The paper is old and cracked and there is writing on it that has smeared with time. It shows a severely faded, hand-drawn map. It is a very rough sketch but she can tell it is a coastline and there is water, indicated by wavy lines, and islands and peninsulas. It is faded in most parts, there are no words saying what is what. Underneath the map is written:

The first knuckle of the sixth finger

Julie stares at this for a long time. She ponders her hands and examines her fingers. She folds the piece of paper and returns it to its hiding spot. She puts the book under her bed, turns off the light, closes her eyes, smiles and goes to sleep. She sleeps fitfully as she knows it has been an exciting, prosperous day and she is anxious to get on with the task at hand. Tomorrow, her quest to find Jeremiah Love's treasure begins. She tosses, she turns and eventually she falls asleep again.

Four

That same evening, in the middle of nowhere Florida, a state police cruiser glides down the road. It's not dark yet, but no longer light. Dusk makes it hard to see as the sun fades and what lies ahead is hazy. Heading west the sun has not fully settled behind the horizon and glare reflects off the rain clouds that populate the late summer sky. It's a humid, hot evening and the mosquitoes are out in force, a seemingly endless number being squashed against the window of the cruiser. Now and again, the driver, Officer Edison Smith, must use the window washer to wipe the smudges and clear the windshield. It has minimal effect as dusk, the glare of a setting sun and mosquito remains hinder his view. He cruises onward nonetheless, swerving now and again to avoid the gators that populate the side of the road in this remote stretch of Florida wilderness on the edge of the Everglades.

The car is traveling from the outskirts of Miami to the west coast of Florida, no lights flashing as there is no emergency. Nevertheless, it is a dangerous task as Officer Smith is not alone. He is transporting a convicted felon from a maximum security facility to a minimum security one. Smith's passenger, seated in the back, handcuffed, is Fenton Jones. Fenton is large, fierce, bald and quiet. He runs about six foot two inches tall, well over two hundred pounds. He is clean shaven and has no tattoos, none that anyone can see at least. He rarely smiles,

in fact rarely shows any expression. He is neutral and hard to read. Furthermore, he is not very loquacious. He lives a life of action speaking louder than words.

Fenton wears the orange prison suit ubiquitous among jailed populations throughout the state and country. There are numbers on it but he will get a new number at the new facility. He stares ahead, blankly, however his thoughts are deep but, albeit, unknown to Officer Smith. Smith is talkative and to reduce the boredom of the long ride, would like to know what his passenger is thinking.

“Well maybe this is your chance Fenton. Good behavior and you’ll be out in a year. You’ve been a model inmate so far and being moved to minimum security, well, that’s an honor. Didn’t know you had the money to pay anyone off.”

There was no question there, at least one not worth answering. Fenton remained silent.

“Ah, the official story is overcrowding. Too many real criminals in Dade. You get a pass cause you’re just about the only one there that didn’t kill anyone.”

No reply, so Edison marches on.

“Nothing to say to that, huh? Well I know you look mean, and can act mean, and maybe lost your cool once or twice, but deep down there

ain't a mean bone in your body, is there Fenton? You're just a gentle giant, right? Maybe over-reacted one time, right?"

"True," Fenton finally mumbles a reply.

"He speaks!"

Edison is expecting more of a response. He does not get it, so he must continue talking to keep himself focused.

"And that's what you did. Reacted. I'm not sure that was the proper reaction. The judge and jury didn't think so. Better lawyer, and you might have gotten off, or at least a misdemeanor, time-served, something better."

"No money."

Edison is close to astonished as Fenton speaks multiple words.

"Yeah, that's a shame. Anyways you have yourself a chance now. Can be out in a bit. And those boys," he pauses, "one of 'em walks with a permanent limp and the other, well, he's so damn jumpy all the time looking around like he's waiting for you to sneak up on him again. They just got out of jail themselves. Don't know how they finagled that one. I bet as soon as you get back home, they'll be packing up and moving north to the Carolinas or Georgia or something. Maybe go all the way north, become Yankees. They're going to want to be far away from Fenton Jones, baddest nice guy in all of Florida."

An entire sentence from Fenton, “North would be good.”

As Edison finishes his compliment and Fenton responds, an object appears in the road, it moves, and shows huge white teeth. Dusk hides the body but Edison knows instinctively it’s an alligator, a big one. In less than a second he processes this information and swerves left to avoid the prehistoric beast. The car, going a bit too fast, swerves across the yellow line narrowly avoiding the ferocious beast and Edison overcorrects by swerving back to the right and jamming on his brakes. The car skids, and heads into a drainage ditch. He turns the steering wheel back to the left in a vain attempt to stay on the road but it’s too late and he hits the side of the ditch so hard that the car rolls over and back across it. Miraculously, the car ends up on all four wheels dangling by the ditch.

In the tumble, the driver side door flies open. Edison, not wearing his seat belt, falls out. His head bleeds and his eyes flutter. He is coming to, but not coming to. He is flirting with unconsciousness. The car idles and moves slowly forward on the side of the swampy ditch, mud slowing its progress.

Fenton’s door is open as well but he remains seated in the back, his seatbelt fastened. He rubs a lump on his head but has no other reaction and no visible wounds. He looks at Edison, and notices a gator slowly creeping towards him. Fenton undoes his seatbelt and gets out of the

car and moves to the front. With his hands cuffed, he is able to put the cruiser in park.

He remains seated in the driver seat, manipulates his binded hands adeptly and removes a letter from his pocket. He glances at the gator, at Edison, and returns to the letter. He moves slowly, as if he has all the time in the world. Edison may think otherwise, but he can neither think nor speak for himself at the moment.

Fenton opens and reads the letter.

My Dearest Fenton,

Trouble is arising. Greedy, vicious people are here. I am trying with all my might to ensure the past remains unspoiled. But I can only do so much. I wish you could be here to help but I know in my heart you did the right thing the last time. I will try to keep the sharks at bay until your return. I love you and miss you dearly.

M

Fenton returns the letter to the envelope and places it back in his pocket. He gets out of the car and walks over to the semi-conscious state trooper. He reaches into Edison's pocket and pulls out a key,

unlocks his cuffs and removes them, dropping them in the ditch. He moves slowly back to the car, a gator closing in. There are other gators around, he is sure, but Fenton seems to pay them no mind. Instead he returns to the cruiser, and pops the trunk.

Edison moans as he lays on his back. Consciousness is slowly returning, but he is not fully aware of what is happening. He notices the figure of a man at the back of the car. He can't recall who the man is, in fact, he is not sure at the moment who he is. He does however realize there is a rather large animal less than twenty feet away. And it is heading towards him. He tries to scream but does not have the strength to do so.

Fenton removes a shotgun from the trunk and checks that it is loaded. He walks up to Edison whose panic is escalating, yet remains unable to voice his concerns. Fenton aims the gun at the trooper's head. Edison finds his voice and screams. Fenton turns slightly. He pulls the trigger.

Five

Fenton drives the car for an hour or so longer. It is completely dark now, the moonlight diminished by late summer clouds and occasional storms. He parks the car in an area where it does not seem out of place, at least not for an hour or two. Nor is it so obvious as to draw immediate attention. He is several miles short of his destination, but a state trooper patrol car where he is heading would draw attention that he does not want. In the distance, he hears sirens and senses they are coming towards him. He realizes he cannot stick around for long, though part of him wants to, so he heads for the woods nearby.

He stops briefly once he is sure he cannot be seen. He pulls out the envelope, opens the letter and looks at it one more time. He notes the address:

M. Jones

Loveland Key Condominiums, Apt 512

Loveland, FL

Fenton realizes he is a multiple incident felon, having been convicted once, and now an escapee from the state penitentiary system

and more. He chooses not to dwell on this as it does him no good to foresee a future behind bars. Instead, he rubs the bump on his head, looks back towards the parked patrol car, stuffs the envelope in his shirt pocket, and heads towards what he knows can only be more trouble.

* * *

An hour or so later, several people stand near the front door of a large building, dragging luggage. A young boy hears rustling in bushes nearby. He turns and believes he sees a dark figure, lurking in the shadows moving quickly to conceal its presence. An animal? A man? A monster? The boy tugs at his father's shirt repeatedly until his father acknowledges him.

"Did you hear that?" he asks, clearly aware and afraid of something.

"It's just the wind, son. A lot of palm fronds are falling. Tonight is windy, and it's likely to get windier. Don't worry about it."

The child is not reassured.

"I'm scared Dad."

"You're scared of everything," says the dad.

"No, I really saw something."

Dad ignores him as they enter the lobby and the kid runs to the elevator and presses the button. He bites his fingernails as he awaits his ride to safety. Once it arrives, he jumps on and looks back at his father.

The father turns and looks back at the front door, now curious as to his child's concerns, trying to ignore them for his child's sake so he is not so scared, but also paying attention to whether indeed the child had heard something other than the wind. Satisfied, he turns back around and joins his son. The elevator door closes.

Shortly thereafter, Fenton emerges from the bushes. He still wears the state trooper shorts and orange prison shirt. He calmly walks to the intercom, presses the button for unit 512.

A woman's voice is heard. "Yes. Who is it?"

"Me."

The door buzzes, he pulls the handle and Fenton Jones, convicted felon and prison escapee, enters Loveland Key condominium.