



*Two families, of mixed marriages, are murdered within two weeks of each other. From a single finger print, L.A. Homicide detective Flowers, learns the identity of the perpetrator, and pursues him to Gulfport, Mississippi.*

## **EAST Toward the Tempest**

By William Neil Martin

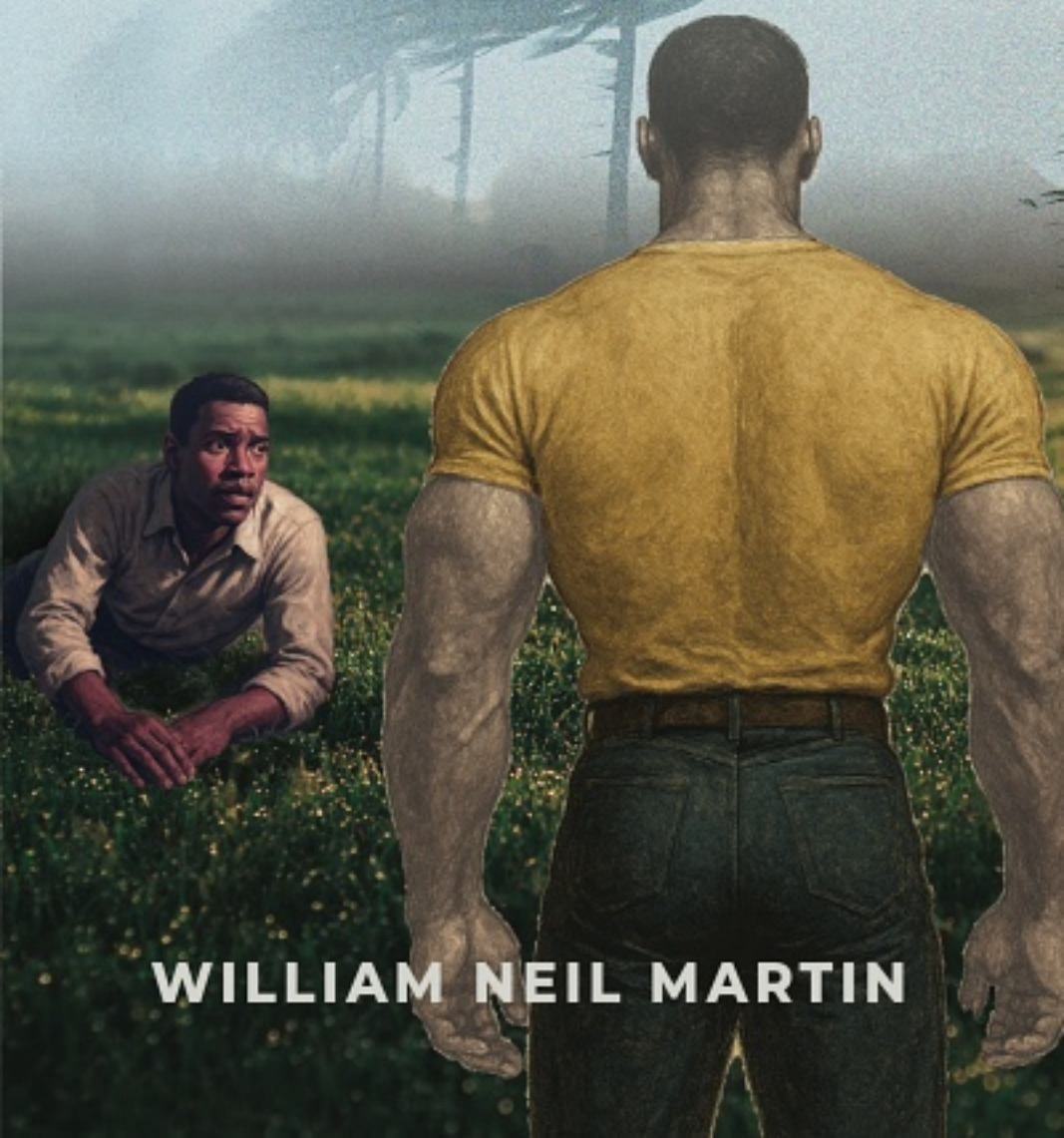
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# ***EAST***

## **TOWARD THE TEMPEST**



**WILLIAM NEIL MARTIN**

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First Edition

# ONE

Los Angeles, California (Sheriff's Jurisdiction)

Sunday

July 6, 1969

THE LOS ANGELES County deputy sheriff recognized the unmarked car when it was still a block away. So could any child over the age of seven, especially in a ghetto community adjacent to the city of Los Angeles. What was there not to recognize? A '68 Plymouth four-door sedan, pea green in color with black wall tires.

The most telling giveaway, though, were the vehicle's two male occupants, one black and one white, each wearing a white shirt and tie.

They had to be cops.

As the car approached, the deputy stepped off the curb and removed a rope from the barricade that had been set up to deny public parking access in front of the crime scene.

The Plymouth pulled to the curb and stopped. The black man emerged from the passenger side and extended his hand in greeting to the deputy.

"Hello, Jim," he said as they shook hands.

"Sergeant Flowers. It's good to see you again."

The driver had gotten out of the car and walked around to the curb, where the other two were standing.

"Jim, I'd like you to meet my partner, Sergeant Archie Penner. Arch, this is Jim Thurman. Jim and I worked together at Lennox Station."

The middle-aged redheaded sergeant and the young blond deputy shook hands, and Sergeant Flowers silently

noted how both men stood out like sore thumbs in this predominantly black neighborhood.

"Actually, Sergeant Flowers and I didn't exactly work together," Thurman said. "He was a detective sergeant, and I was a patrol deputy. Heck, I don't think I was off training more'n a few months when he transferred to Homicide."

"Who are you working with these days?" Flowers asked.

"Jerry Parker," Thurman replied. "He's guarding the entrance to the apartment."

Flowers glanced toward the building nearest them. It was a standard two-story apartment complex, the length of which ran perpendicular to the street. A sidewalk ran along the side of the structure, providing access to each of the half dozen downstairs apartments. The faded pink stucco exterior was badly in need of a fresh coat of paint. Even the late afternoon sunlight could not brighten the building's dingy appearance.

Flowers looked at Penner. "Well, I guess we better go have a look."

"It isn't pretty," Thurman said. "Triple homicide. The place looks like a cyclone went through it."

"Does it look like it might've been a residential robbery?" Penner asked.

"Not that we can tell. The TV and stereo are still there, and I saw a twenty-dollar bill on the nightstand, near the male victim." Thurman thought for a moment. "No, it looks to me like the only intention was murder."

"Upstairs or down?" Flowers asked.

"Downstairs. Apartment number two."

"Do you have everybody rolling? Crime lab? Coroner?" Flowers asked, then regretted it as soon as the words were spoken.

"Of course," Thurman replied, a little hurt that he would be questioned about such a routine matter.

"Sorry, Jim. I should have known better." Flowers didn't bother to mention how often deputies tended to forget such "routine" matters.

As Flowers and Penner walked toward the building Thurman called after them. "It's easy to find the right apartment. It'll be the one the deputy is standing in front of."

Flowers looked back and saw the grin on Thurman's face. "Thanks a lot." He returned the grin, knowing the exchange was made to show there were no hard feelings.

They walked through an open wrought iron gate adjacent to the building and along the sidewalk the short distance to apartment number two. A black uniformed deputy sheriff stood in front of the entrance. He was talking to another black man. At six feet three inches, the deputy towered over the shorter man, in spite of the huge Afro that formed a dome four inches above his scalp.

"Afternoon, Jerry," Flowers said as he and Penner approached the deputy.

"Garland!" The deputy exclaimed with a smile. At thirty-one, he and Flowers were the same age, and had been casual friends since 1958, when they both entered the academy.

Flowers introduced Penner, then Jerry Parker introduced the man with the Afro.

"This is Tyrone Adams. He's the informant."

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Adams," Flowers said. "Would you mind telling us what led you to call the Sheriff's Department?"

"Cause they's dead people in there"

Flowers suppressed a smile. Penner and Parker glanced at each other and made no attempt to suppress theirs.

"Are you the one who discovered the crime?" Flowers asked.

"Yeah."

"How did you happen to be here, and how did you get into the apartment? Are you a family member?"

"Oh, no. We ain't related. But me an' Walter, he's the dead man, we brothers."

"One of the victims is your brother? I thought you said you weren't related."

"We ain't."

"He means they're friends," Parker said. "You know, brothers of the skin, so to speak." He shook his head in feigned disappointment. "Garland, you've been downtown too long. You're out of touch with the ghetto."

"I guess I must be," Flowers said, then returned his attention to the informant. "Sorry, Mr. Adams. Let's try again. How did you happen to be here?"

"Well, me an' Walter was supposed to meet down at Leo's at noon to shoot some pool."

"Leo's is a beer bar and pool hall several blocks from here," Parker offered.

Adams continued, as if there had been no interruption in his narrative. "But he didn't show up. That ain't like Walter to be late. He usually gets to Leo's before I do. He's a great pool player. Makes a lot of money on them tables."

"Is there a chance he might have hustled the wrong person?" Penner asked.

Adams looked hurt. "Walter don't hustle. He just shoots good pool."

"No offense," Penner said. "Please continue."

"So, by one-thirty he still ain't showed. Now I'm startin' to get worried. I couldn't call cause his phone wasn't workin'. So I decided to walk over here.

"When I got here, I knocked but they weren't no answer. But he musta been home cause his car was parked out back. So, I looked in that window over there." He pointed to the

double-paned sliding glass window which set about six feet to the right of the door. "That's his and Maureen's bedroom. The shade was up a couple inches, the way it is now, and I peeked in. I couldn't see much, but what I did see was enough. A leg was hangin' over the side of the bed. It was Maureen's. I could tell on account of it was white and didn't have no hair on it."

This time Flowers, Penner and Parker each fought to suppress a smile.

"I tapped on the glass and yelled out Walter's name. Then I yelled out Maureen's. I knew she was there cause her leg was there. But she didn't budge.

"I ran to the manager's apartment. She lives right there in number one. I told her something was bad wrong over in Walter's apartment. So, she let me use her phone to call the sheriffs."

"Did you go inside at all today?" Flowers asked.

"No sir! I waited till the police got here. After they went in, Deputy Parker here, he come out and told me what all he saw." Adams paused and for a moment Flowers thought he might break down and cry. But he composed himself and added, "Walter... Maureen..." He could not hold back a sob. "And little Georgetta."

"Little Georgetta? How old is Georgetta?" Flowers asked.

Adams thought for a moment. "I think she's twelve. Ten or twelve."

For a fleeting moment Flowers thought of his own three-year-old daughter, but he forced the thought from his mind. He had learned that it was not healthy to personalize the tragedies of others.

"Why?" Adams asked. His shock was beginning to turn to grief. "Why did this have to happen?"

"I don't know," Flowers said. "But we intend to find out." Flowers and Penner then walked past Parker and entered the apartment.

THE LIVING ROOM was just as Deputy Thurman had described it. A flower vase had been thrown across the room, leaving water stains on the wall and broken glass on the soiled carpet. The cheap coffee table had also been thrown, or kicked, across the room and lay on its side in a corner. The sofa had been overturned and was lying upside down in the center of the room.

"Your friend Jim was right," Penner said. "It does look like a cyclone came through here."

"Yep," Flowers said as he gazed around the room. "The storm came in, wreaked havoc, killed some people, then left."

"You'd think that all the noise would've gotten the attention of the neighbors," Penner said.

"Not in this neighborhood," Flowers said. "Folks aren't anxious to stick their noses in things that are no concern to them. It could get them killed."

Penner sighed. "Yeah, I know."

Archie Penner was highly respected as an investigator and was aware of how things were in the street. Ten years older than Flowers, he had nine years departmental seniority on the younger man, eight years seniority as a sergeant and six years seniority in the Homicide Bureau. He had been both mentor and partner to Flowers since the younger man's transfer into the elite investigations unit.

Penner followed Flowers into the hallway, then turned right and entered the master bedroom. A king size bed occupied most of the space in the room. On the side nearest the investigators the body of a black man who appeared to be in his early thirties lay on his left side. The covers had been

kicked away from him, probably during the struggle, and he was clothed only in a pair of boxer shorts. His head, resting on a pillow, was tilted backward and slightly upward at an awkward angle. The eyes were closed but the mouth was open. It was obvious to Flowers that the man's neck was broken.

On the far side of the bed the body of a white woman, dressed in a threadbare pink negligee, lay on her back. Her left leg dangled from the side of the bed. She appeared to be in her late twenties. Her eyes were wide open, and her tongue protruded slightly from her mouth. The marks on her neck indicated that she had been strangled. Her pillow lay on the floor at the foot of the bed.

Other than the bed, two small nightstands and a large dresser were the only pieces of furniture in the room. The top of the dresser was bare, but on the floor at one end were numerous feminine items such as hairpins and various lotions, as if the items had been swept from the dresser top. There was little else in the room to ransack.

Penner went to the head of the bed on the far side and bent over the woman for a closer inspection of her neck.

"I've come across a lot a strangulation cases over the years," he said. "But I do believe these are the most severe marks I've ever seen." After a pause he added, "Whoever did this had very powerful hands."

Flowers, who had been exploring the contents of a wallet that he had picked up from the nightstand near the male victim, looked briefly at the woman's neck. He set the wallet back on the stand, then leaned over for a closer look at the man's injuries. He put a hand behind the victim's neck and rubbed, as if massaging it.

"I see what you mean," he said, shaking his head. "Despite the rigor, it feels as if everything inside this man's neck has been detached."

Now came the part that Flowers dreaded. He let Penner lead the way as they crossed the hallway and entered the smaller bedroom. This was one aspect of the job that he hated, and he knew that, as long as he lived, he would never get accustomed to viewing the remains of a murdered child.

But the scene was not what they expected. The room was neat and tidy, and nothing appeared to be out of place. The body of the child lay on her back. She was covered to the chest with a sheet and a flower-printed bedspread. Her arms were outside the covers with the hands folded, one across the other, as if in repose.

Flowers stared at the child's pretty face. Her eyes and mouth were closed. Her complexion was a light brown. Her hair was also brown, with a reddish tint to it. It was quite apparent that she was of racially mixed blood. Had she been allowed to grow up, he thought, she would have developed into a very attractive woman.

Penner lifted the covers and made a cursory examination of the body, then replaced the bedspread and sheet. "No marks or bruises. No sign of injury whatsoever."

"She was smothered to death," Flowers said as he continued to stare at the child's face.

"Smothered? You sure?"

"Well, I'm not a medical examiner, but I'm ninety percent sure an autopsy will prove she was smothered."

"How do you think he did it? Assuming it was a he. If it was the same person who killed the other two, he certainly didn't use his hands. With his brute strength, he would've left marks on her face."

"Remember the pillow that was lying on the floor in the other room?"

"Yes."

"My guess is that he took that pillow from under the woman's head, brought it in here, and I hope to God it was while the child was asleep, put it over her face and smothered her. He then returned the pillow to the other room."

"Assuming your theory is correct, why do you suppose he went to all that trouble?" Penner asked.

"Now that's a question I can't answer."

THE CRIMINALIST ARRIVED from the crime lab just as Flowers and Penner stepped from the child's bedroom. He was accompanied by the print deputy and a photographer. Flowers briefed them on the crime and walked them through the apartment. They were all experts on the collection and preservation of evidence, and Flowers knew better than to point out specific areas on which to focus. He was confident they would do a thorough job.

As soon as Penner and Flowers were called to handle this case it was agreed that Flowers would be the lead investigator. Penner was already investigating a rather complicated homicide. It, therefore, fell on Flowers to handle the details of this case.

While the crime lab was doing its job inside the apartment, the two detectives went to each apartment in the complex to get statements from the occupants. Most of them were either not at home or refused to answer the knock on the door. Those who did respond had nothing to contribute. No one heard or saw anything.

By the time Flowers and Penner were finished interviewing the tenants, the deputy coroner had arrived and was taking charge of the victims' remains.

In front of the apartment building a television news crew had set up its video equipment and was attempting to get a statement from Deputy Thurman. Flowers knew he could trust Thurman to keep them from getting past the wrought iron gate. By Los Angeles standards this was not a major news event. Ghetto murders were quite common. Whether or not it would even be broadcast depended upon the latest events related to Vietnam, civil unrest, or other acts of protest that dominated the airwaves. The activity, of course, drew a crowd of onlookers; mainly pedestrians who had been walking along the street and were attracted by the news cameras, as well as the two coroners' wagons that were double-parked in front of the apartment building.

After the bodies had been taken away and the crime lab had completed its collection of evidence, the apartment was secured. Flowers gave a brief, generic statement to the news reporter, then he and Penner departed.

When they were seated in the car and Penner was starting the engine, he asked, "Well, what do you think?"

"About what, the news interview or the crime?"

"The crime. Who cares about the news interview?"

"I don't know," Flowers said. "But I think we can rule out robbery. I checked the victim's wallet. It had several tens and twenties in it, and there was a twenty-dollar bill lying on the nightstand in plain sight."

Flowers fell silent as Penner turned the wheel of the Plymouth and merged into traffic. Then he said, "I suggest we pay a visit to Leo's. Who knows, maybe the guy ticked off some sore loser during a game of pool."

"Could be," Penner said. He thought for a moment, then added, "Have you considered the possibility that it might have been racially motivated?"

"You mean some bigot who couldn't stand the idea of a white woman shacking up with a black man?"

"Yeah, something like that."

"It crossed my mind. But if that's what it was, why the fuss over the little girl? Why would a racist be so sensitive toward a child of mixed blood? It doesn't make sense."

"Yep, It's a puzzler." Penner smiled. "I'm just glad it's *your* puzzler."

"Thanks a lot," Flowers said, then added, "There are a few things that I'm fairly certain about."

"Like what?"

"Barring any proof to the contrary, I'd say that our suspect is a male and that he acted alone. Judging from the positions of their bodies, my guess is that he killed the man and woman at virtually the same time.

"Of necessity he would've had to kill the man first, because the man would've offered the most resistance. Had the struggle been prolonged, the woman would have awakened and jumped out of bed. As it was, she barely had time to get one leg off before she was attacked... after the killer had broken the man's neck.

"Of course, the whole thing had to have happened very quickly, or it would have awakened the little girl."

"How do you know the girl wasn't awakened?" Penner asked.

Flowers sighed. "I don't know. I guess it's just wishful thinking."

"What makes you think he acted alone? Why couldn't the man and woman have been murdered simultaneously by two different people? As far as that goes, the child might have been killed by a third person."

"I don't think so. This has all the earmarks of an act of personal rage. It's hard to find conspirators in such a crime."

After a pause, Flowers added, "Of course, you might very well be right. We can't rule out any possibility. I'm going on nothing more than a hunch. I just hope we get a fingerprint, a witness, or something. I'll take any break that comes our way."

As it turned out there were no fingerprints, and an exhaustive search for witnesses proved futile. It would take two weeks and another multiple homicide before Flowers got his break.

## SEVEN

Phoenix, Arizona

Wednesday

July 23, 1969

B.C. JONES HAD never been out of the state of California. Yet here he was in a Greyhound Bus depot in Phoenix, Arizona. He was frightened, not of anything physical, but of the unknown. When he ran away after seeing the cops entering his apartment the previous day, he had given in to a basic survival instinct. He would run as far as he had to run to keep from going back to that cell at Soledad. Now he was stranded in a strange town in another state, and he did not know what his next move would be.

It had been a long night for Jones, and he was tired. After boarding the RTD bus on Century Boulevard he had ridden it as far as the Los Angeles Civic Center. He got off near the City Hall and walked a few blocks. He envisioned all the cops in L.A. searching for him, and they seemed to be on every street corner in the city, so he boarded another bus. It took him to El Monte; a suburban community located about ten miles east of downtown L.A.

Except for six years in the pen, Jones had spent his entire life in Los Angeles, yet he had never been east of Atlantic Boulevard. He had heard of El Monte in TV commercials, or at least he had heard of El Monte Legion Stadium. It was a place where teenagers went to dance and listen to live rock and roll bands. In El Monte he caught another bus that took him to West Covina. He changed buses again and ventured as far as Pomona.

It was late evening when he wandered into the Greyhound Bus terminal in Pomona. The first thing he heard upon entering was a voice over the public address system announcing the departure of a bus in fifteen minutes for Phoenix. On an impulse, as well as a need within him to put distance between him and the police in L.A., Jones decided to take that bus.

He proceeded to the ticket counter and asked how much it would cost to go to Phoenix. When the agent told him, Jones reached into his pocket, removed a wad of cash, and purchased a ticket.

B.C. Jones had no concept of banking. Checking and savings accounts were completely foreign to him. And if there was one thing he learned in prison it was that the only way to protect your money was to take it with you wherever you went. If you left it in your cell, it would be gone when you returned. For six years this was deeply ingrained in him, and after his release from prison Jones continued the practice of keeping his money with him at all times.

He lived well within his means, for he was a frugal spender. Jones himself did not know how much money was in his pocket, but it was at least a few hundred dollars.

At seven A.M. it must have been a slow part of the day in the Phoenix bus terminal, for Jones sat alone among the rows of cushioned straight-back chairs. Passengers came and went, and employees busily performed whatever tasks they were assigned, but Jones was the only one seated. He was still clutching the Safeway grocery bag. Its contents were intact, except for one of the boxes of chocolate covered cupcakes, which he had devoured somewhere between Pomona and Phoenix.

Jones was beginning to feel irritable from lack of sleep. He wished that he was in bed in his apartment. Then reality began to set in as he realized that he would probably never see his

apartment again. What would happen to his brand-new TV set? He briefly considered the possibility of his landlady, Mrs. Thomas, holding it for him, but as a clear picture of Mrs. Thomas came into focus, he knew that she would just keep it for herself. He began to feel depressed as fatigue and disappointment crept over him. But the worst part was in not knowing where to go or what to do next.

A middle-aged black woman moved in his direction from the ticket counter. She carried a small suitcase and was about to take a seat two chairs away from Jones when she glanced his way. Something about the way this strange man stared back at her caused the woman to change her mind and move to another row of seats.

Jones stared hard at the woman. She was heavy-set. Her hair was beginning to gray, giving it a naturally bluish tint. She reminded him of someone, but he couldn't place her.

There had never been many women in Jones' life. Aside from Mrs. Thomas, the only other woman he had met since getting out of prison was Mrs. Phelps, who worked in the office at Bert's Disposal. But the woman in the bus depot didn't remind him of either Mrs. Thomas or Mrs. Phelps. Then, of course, there had been his mama, but the woman definitely did not remind him of her. She was skinny and white. This woman was black and fat.

B.C. Jones frowned as the image of his mother came to mind, and the unpleasant memories associated with her. As he tried to force these thoughts out of his head a sudden recognition came to him.

*Auntie Doreen!*

The woman reminded him of his Auntie Doreen. A sense of warmth seeped through B.C. when he thought of her. He had only seen her twice in his life. The first time was when he was a small child. She had come out to L.A. to visit from some

place far away... someplace down south his mama had told him.

Auntie Doreen was his daddy's sister. Her visit was a happy memory, for she and B.C. had taken a liking to each other from the start. She played with him and took him to the movies and bought him ice cream cones at Thrifty Drugs. It was also a happy time because, when she first arrived, his daddy had been on his best behavior.

Then one day it came to an end. It was as if his daddy could not hold his meanness back any longer, and he and Auntie Doreen got into a big fight. They yelled and screamed at each other, and he threatened to beat her, but she yelled back that she would have him put in jail if he laid a hand on her. B.C.'s mama cowered in a corner, shaking and afraid to move. Fifteen minutes later Auntie Doreen was packed and walking out of the house. Before departing, she gave his mama and him a hug.

The next time B.C. saw his aunt was several years later when he was on trial for killing his daddy. Though it had been her own brother who had died, Doreen's sympathy had been with B.C., for she knew the kind of man her brother had been. B.C. had been comforted at seeing his Auntie Doreen sitting in the courtroom with his mama. She had visited him in the county jail during the court proceedings. Auntie Doreen had even given him her address and phone number and told him to call her if he ever needed anything.

A revelation struck Jones so suddenly he almost jumped. He reached into his back pocket and removed a worn leather wallet and searched the various compartments. Inside an opening between the photo folder and the currency section he found a piece of paper folded to a one-inch square. He unfolded it and saw that it was sharply creased into four squares, with a tiny hole where the creases intersected.

The words on the paper had been written in pencil and were partially smeared. It was a struggle, but Jones eventually deciphered the words and numbers. Under the name Doreen Brown was an address in Gulfport, Mississippi. Below the address was a phone number.

Jones looked all about the bus terminal until his eyes fell on that for which he was searching. Against the wall near the restrooms were two public phone booths, neither of which were in use.

He was filled with a rush of excitement, but he also experienced a sense of apprehension. These conflicting emotions caused him to hesitate. What if she doesn't remember me? He thought. What if she's mad at me now for what I did to Daddy? But as these questions occurred to him, he was also aware that there was no one else to whom he could turn. He was desperate, and the more he thought about it the more determined he became to call her. If she acted like she didn't want to see him, he would just hang up the phone.

B.C. had never made a long-distance call in his life, but he did know that if he dropped a dime in the slot and dialed "O", an operator would come on the line and help him with the call.

He shifted the grocery bag from his lap to the cradle of his left arm and slowly stood up. The apprehension grew and he felt slightly sick to his stomach as he moved with deliberate steps toward the phone booths.

## NINE

Gulfport, Mississippi

Monday

August 11, 1969

THE THUNDERSTORM THAT had passed over the Mississippi Gulf Coast the night before had done little to diminish the stifling heat, and by early afternoon the temperature had reached a very humid ninety degrees.

Doreen Brown dipped her fingers into a pan of water, then flicked them over a wrinkled blouse that lay atop an ironing board. A bead of perspiration rolled down the bridge of her nose, and her chocolate brown face glistened in the sweltering heat. The otherwise loose-fitting cotton-print dress that she wore clung to her ample body as if she had just stepped out of the bathtub and put on the dress without bothering to dry off.

After wiping her face with a damp cloth that she kept nearby for that purpose, she picked up the iron and began pressing the blouse. Doreen did not regard ironing as a chore. In fact, she found it relaxing. This was her thinking time.

The ironing board was strategically placed near the open front door. The closed screen kept most of the flies outside and allowed the air, as warm as it was, to circulate inside and lessen the heat created by the iron. To her right, facing south, an open window permitted a slight afternoon breeze to drift in from the Gulf, the shores of which were less than a mile away.

Doreen Brown had lived in the small wood-frame house since the 1930's. She and her husband had moved in shortly after they were married. They had been together two years when she became pregnant, but the child was stillborn.

Several months later her husband ran off with another woman, and Doreen was left alone. She had lost her husband, but she did not lose the house. Though it had not seen a fresh coat of paint in over thirty years it was fully paid for, and she intended to live there for the rest of her life.

She had a small circle of friends, consisting primarily of fellow members of the local Baptist Church. The various activities of the church offered variety to an otherwise uneventful life. She found pleasure in teaching Sunday school.

The house was in an all-black area east of downtown Gulfport called Soria City. It was one of several residential communities found along the coast that, until recent years, were commonly referred to as the “nigger quarters.” Since the mid-sixties, however, a more enlightened South was emerging, and such derogatory terms as “nigger quarters” were openly uttered by only the most die-hard bigots.

Soria City was an impoverished section of Gulfport. Most of the houses were poorly maintained. Some of the through streets were paved, but many of the side roads were nothing more than hard-packed dirt. Sidewalks were non-existent. Dilapidated cars parked on grassless yards were a common sight. Barefoot children played in the street, kicking up dust when the weather was dry and sloshing in the mud when it was wet. Some families kept chickens in their backyards, and it was not unusual to see an occasional goat or hog. Swatting flies and mosquitoes was a common pastime in Soria City.

Doreen glanced to her left, where her nephew sat in a large recliner watching “The Dating Game” on the T.V. She had picked up B.C. at the bus depot nine days earlier and he hardly left the house once she brought him home. Occasionally he would venture a block or so to the neighborhood grocery store on Railroad Street to purchase

chocolate cupcakes or ice cream. The rest of the time he spent sitting in front of the T.V.

She wondered at first if B.C. might be hiding something, but having nothing on which to base such a suspicion, she dismissed the thought from her mind.

Doreen experienced a feeling of sadness as she studied her nephew. God had certainly allowed nature to play a cruel joke on B.C. He was ugly and simple-minded, and almost grotesquely large. He did not fit into any group and would surely be an outcast throughout his life. He would always be a loner.

Even as a child he had known very little love and a great deal of abuse and neglect. His very name, what there was of it, reflected an indifferent attitude toward him practically from the moment of his birth.

Doreen's thoughts drifted to the past. As images of B.C.'s mama and daddy—her own brother, came into focus, the feeling of sadness that had filled her a moment earlier turned to anger. A bitter gall crept toward her throat as she was reminded of the shameful manner in which they had treated their son. At first, she resisted these thoughts, yet something tugged at her consciousness and urged the memories to flow.

DOREEN WAS BORN in Brookhaven, Mississippi, as were her older sister, Bertha and their baby brother, Lester. They were brought up in a three-room shanty on the outskirts of town. Their father, Herbert Jones, was a hard worker and a good provider, but he was also a cruel disciplinarian. He kept a razor strop handy for the sole purpose of beating his children, as well as his wife, when he felt that it was necessary, and that feeling arose often.

Soon after Bertha turned sixteen, she married, as much out of a desire to escape her father's cruelty as for love of the

groom, and they moved to her husband's home in Gulfport. Several months later Doreen went to visit her sister, and remained in Gulfport permanently. As soon as Lester was old enough, he joined the Navy and was sent to San Diego for boot camp, and he never returned to Mississippi.

What Doreen knew of her brother's life after he left Brookhaven, she learned years later from B.C.'s mother, Marlene, as well as from her personal observations when she visited them in L.A.

Following boot camp Lester Jones was stationed in Long Beach, California. He was not quite nineteen when he met a twenty-three-year-old woman in a bar and moved in with her and her four-year-old son. It wasn't long before Lester took up his father's methods of disciplining the child, especially after he had been drinking.

At first the girlfriend appreciated the heavy hand, for it appeared to give her son a father figure. But as time passed Lester became more violent. One Sunday morning he went too far and struck the child a blow severe enough to render him unconscious. The boy was rushed to the hospital. The girlfriend was so frightened and angry that she had Lester arrested. He was convicted of battery and sentenced to ninety days in county jail. He also received a bad conduct discharge from the Navy.

Following his release from jail, Lester remained in the Los Angeles area. He worked odd jobs for a year or so, then Pearl Harbor was bombed and most of the able-bodied men went off to war. His bad conduct discharge made him unfit for duty, which caused him no concern at all. In fact, it worked to his advantage, for numerous jobs were now available due to the departure of so many young men.

He soon landed a job as a steamfitter for a company located near Alameda Street in Los Angeles. It was there that he was working when he met Marlene.

Marlene Simmons was in her mid-teens when she ran away from her home in Omaha, Nebraska and made her way to Los Angeles. It was during the Depression and her departure resulted in one less mouth to feed, so a serious effort to find her was never undertaken by her family.

She had a rather plain face that was marred by acne. Her dishwater blonde hair was unkempt and stringy. Her teeth were fairly straight, but a few were blackened from decay, due to too many sweets and not enough brushing.

Soon after arriving in L.A., she got a job as a waitress in a greasy spoon restaurant near Broadway and First Street. She had been there several months when Lester Jones came in and sat down at the counter. He was fairly tall, lean and good-looking. She was attracted to him from the start. The fact that he was black and she was white, a combination that was taboo even in L.A., made the prospect of a relationship exciting.

As Lester drank his coffee, he made flirtatious comments to Marlene and she responded in kind. He returned the following day as well as the next. Eventually he asked her out and she accepted, and soon they were together constantly. She moved into his apartment and, though they never married, he referred to her as his "old lady."

On April 24, 1943, eighteen-year-old Marlene gave birth to a son at Los Angeles General Hospital. From the very first day of his life the child began paying the price for his parents' union. He was treated as something less than human by the nursing staff, black and white alike. The white nurses regarded Marlene as white trash. The black nurses looked upon Lester as having betrayed his race. Everyone ignored the baby as much as possible.

When the hospital staff began to pressure Marlene for a name to be placed on the birth certificate, she was at a loss as to what name to give her son. Lester could not have cared less about what she called him.

Marlene tended to develop a headache whenever she was pressured or became anxious. She had learned that, if she took a dose of B.C. powder and swallowed it with Coca Cola, the headache would usually go away. She had experienced some headaches during her stay at the hospital, and the flat blue packet of B.C. powder lay atop the table beside her bed.

She was beginning to feel one of her headaches coming on when a hospital staff member entered the room. She was a large woman with a stern, no-nonsense demeanor, and she demanded the paperwork on the baby. Marlene had been working on the form, and everything was filled out but the child's name. She became flustered and automatically glanced toward the packet of B.C. powders. She had been holding a fountain pen in one hand and the form in the other. She glimpsed once more at the intimidating staff member, then wrote the first thing that occurred to her. In the space calling for a first name she simply entered the letter B. For the middle name she placed a C. Having been admitted to the hospital under the name Marlene Jones, she wrote Jones in the space requesting a last name. From that moment forward the child would be known as B.C. Jones.

He grew up in a predominantly black neighborhood in south central Los Angeles. In school he was considered a slow student, and his mixed blood made him an outcast even at that early stage of his life.

At home Lester adopted the same disciplinary measures as his father. When B.C. was ten years old, Lester brought home a razor strop, just like the one his father had used on him. Most of the beatings occurred on Sunday. Lester got

drunk once a week, on Saturday night, and an ugly hangover always followed on Sunday. B.C. was usually the victim of his daddy's foul moods, and he had to be punished. If the strop was not handy, a hard blow to the child's head would sometimes satisfy Lester's need to inflict pain. The few times that Marlene tried to intervene she was severely beaten by Lester. After a while she learned to cower in the corner and pray that her son would not be killed.

B.C. grew up to be quiet and sullen. He had no place to go to escape derision and rejection, and he had no one to whom he could turn for sympathy. On his sixteenth birthday he dropped out of school. He was still in the eighth grade and was failing. His ability to think clearly was becoming increasingly difficult. No attempt was made to have him reinstated in school. He was already much larger than most of the faculty members, and there was something about him that wasn't quite right. The school administrators were glad to see him go.

B.C. got a job loading cinder blocks for a building material company. It was a job that relied on size and strength rather than intelligence, and it was not long before hard muscle began to develop on his huge bulk.

During the years that B.C. was growing up his mama became more withdrawn. The powders that had been her son's namesake no longer got rid of her headaches, so she turned to stronger painkillers. She became addicted to morphine and, eventually, heroine. Lester refused to give her money to buy narcotics, so Marlene went back to work as a waitress to support her habit.

The last time that Doreen saw her sister-in-law was the day that B.C. was sentenced to prison. She had gone to L.A. to offer Marlene and B.C. support during the court proceedings and returned to Gulfport the same day the sentence was passed. She could tell at that time that Marlene was too far

gone to be helped. But it was not until nine days ago, when B.C. arrived in Gulfport, that she learned that Marlene had died while B.C. was in prison.

DOREEN LIFTED THE freshly ironed blouse from the ironing board, placed it on a hanger, and hung it on a nearby rack. She then picked up a large cotton print dress, similar to the one she was wearing, and placed it on the ironing board. She liked the tedium of ironing, for it allowed her to lose herself in her thoughts. Usually the subjects were pleasant—her friends at church, or her Sunday school activities. But since the arrival of her nephew her thoughts tended to focus on sad memories.

She recalled the day, almost two weeks earlier, when her nephew phoned her from Phoenix. She was surprised and elated that he would remember his Auntie Doreen, and she happily agreed to have him come visit her. But he had now been a constant presence in her house for nine days. His enormous bulk seemed to remain fixed in her easy chair in front of the T.V. As much as she wanted to give him the love and support that he had been denied as a child, she realized that she also needed some time to herself. After all, she had lived alone for all these years. She was set in her ways, and any change in her daily routine would require some adjustment. She was not being selfish, she told herself. She just needed a few moments of privacy.

She dipped her fingers into the pan of water, then absently sprinkled the dress. Exhaling an audible sigh, she picked up the iron, held it for a moment, as if pondering a delicate thought, then set the instrument back on its end.

Turning toward her nephew, she said, "B.C., honey. I really do think you need to get out of this house for a while."

He made no response for several seconds, then he turned from the T.V. and looked questioningly at his aunt. "Huh?"

"I said you really do need to get out of this house for a while. You been cooped up in here for over a week now."

"But I like it here," he said. "I ain't botherin' nobody"

Emotion began to swell inside Doreen. "No, honey. You aren't bothering anyone. I just thought it might make you feel good to go outside." She paused long enough for an idea to form, then said, "There won't be anything you'd like on T.V. for a few more hours. Why don't you take a ride downtown on the bus?"

B.C. stared at his aunt but said nothing.

"Go on, now," she urged. "You can catch the bus in front of the store on Railroad Street. When you're ready to come home, just get on the same bus. It'll drop you off at the store."

He remained silent.

"I'll even give you the bus fare," she said. "Plus, a couple dollars to buy something sweet. Maybe some chocolate pie at the lunch counter in Woolworth's."

Slowly B.C. pulled himself from the chair and stood erect. Doreen had still not got accustomed to how small he made the room appear when he stood in it.

"I don't need your money," he said as he moved to the door. "I got my own."

Doreen was beginning to feel guilty. "Honey, please don't be upset with me. I just think it'll be good for you to get out for a spell."

As he opened the screen door, he turned and looked at his aunt. "I ain't upset." He then crossed the porch and descended the steps.

Doreen followed him out the door. By the time she stepped onto the porch B.C. was already two doors down the street. Children who had been playing in their yard took a break in

their game long enough to stare at the strange giant as he walked past them.

Doreen called after him. "I'll have a nice supper ready when you get back." He made no response but continued walking toward the bus stop. She was not sure if he had heard her, but she concluded that he had. The sense of guilt remained. The last thing she had wanted to do was hurt his feelings. It was quite obvious that something was troubling him, but he was not willing to share it with her. A shiver suddenly came over her and she sensed that whatever had happened in L.A. was something very serious, perhaps something very bad... bad enough to send B.C. two thousand miles to get away from it.

## EIGHTEEN

Saturday  
August 16, 1969

B.C. JONES lay on his bunk and studied, for the hundredth time, the police report that had been delivered to him on the evening following his arrest at Woolworth. He recalled that the deputy sheriff handed him the report only after he signed something they called a waiver. He had no objections to signing anything, as long as he got a copy of that arrest report.

When not studying the report, he kept it folded in his back pocket. After four days it had become creased and wrinkled, and in the early hours before dawn he found it difficult to make out the words on the first page. The cell lights were turned off every evening at ten o'clock, but there was partial illumination from a dim light in the cellblock corridor.

Jones had no interest in the narrative portion of the report. There were too many words that he could not understand. His interest was only on the few lines of the first page that provided the name and address of that poor girl at Woolworth who had the mixed blood. He vividly recalled her telling the policeman that her name was Frieda Pinchon and she lived in a place called Pineville. Once he found her name on the report he would stare at it the way one might regard the photo of a loved one. It was his only memento of her.

Since his incarceration every waking moment had, in one way or another, been devoted to thoughts of Frieda. As hours turned to days the image of her became more enhanced. Her skin assumed a darker shade, and her lips grew in fullness. The more she took on the appearance of a mulatto the more

the anger and frustration swelled within him. Jones had never known happiness. There had never been a day in his life that he ever experienced real joy. He was treated differently because of his mixed blood. Frieda had mixed blood; therefore, she would go through life suffering as he had suffered.

He could not get her out of his mind. After four days of incarceration, he had become desperate to free himself and seek her out.

He had been informed the night before that he would be leaving the jail and be driven to the airport. From there he would be flown to Los Angeles. For days he had been visited by fantasies of delivering Frieda Pinchon from the countless cruelties that awaited her. When he was given the news of his return to L.A. Jones was almost overwhelmed with worry. What if he was denied any chance of seeing her again? But before the worry had a chance to consume him, he was suddenly calmed by an inner voice. It described a plan that would set him free and allow him to satisfy the need that was surging within him.

The voice had kept him awake all night, reminding him of the sensuous gratification that had come following those two visits he had made in Los Angeles. Now he would experience it again by destroying the people who had brought Frieda into the world, and by gently sending her to a better place. She could be with that little baby and young girl who had gone before her. He even dared to hope that he might someday join all three of them.

Footsteps in the corridor caused him to sit up on his bunk. The jailer and two other men, both wearing suits, stopped in front of his cell. Jones stood up, then folded the papers and stuffed them into his back pocket.

As the jailer inserted the large key into the lock and turned it, he said, "It's time to go, Jones. Step out of the cell."

When Jones complied with the order the jailer added, "These are the deputies who'll be taking you to the airport."

The two men escorted Jones down the corridor and into a room where he was instructed to change out of the jail uniform and into his personal clothing. After doing as he was told, Jones made a point of transferring the folded police report to the back pocket of the trousers he was now wearing. The property clerk handed one of the deputies a clear plastic bag that contained Jones' wallet and a sealed envelope.

"Do I get my money and stuff?" He asked.

"No. We'll hold your personal property. It has to be turned over to the authorities you'll be traveling with."

When the deputies attempted to cuff Jones' wrists behind his back they discovered, like the officers at Woolworth had, that his arms were too massive to bring his hands close enough for the cuffs to reach from one wrist to the other. So, they cuffed him with his arms in front of him.

It was several minutes before dawn when they walked out a door at the rear of the county jail. There had been a brief thunderstorm during the early morning and the wet pavement in the parking area glistened in the darkness. Jones was led to an unmarked car. One of the deputies opened the right rear door and told Jones to get in. When he did so the deputy leaned over him and buckled the seatbelt across the prisoner's lap. The same deputy then walked around the car and climbed into the back seat opposite Jones. The other deputy got behind the wheel of the car, started the engine, and backed out of the parking space.

THEY DROVE NORTH on 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue as far as the Pass Road, then turned east. The Pass Road was a two-lane

thoroughfare that dated back to the 1800's. It had been a stagecoach route that connected the old settlements of Biloxi and Pass Christian. In those days Gulfport did not exist, and the area through which they now drove was nothing but a pine forest. But the old stage route had long since been paved, and now a continuous chain of commercial establishments occupied both sides of the road.

Ahead of them the dark sky was giving way to a gray dawn. Jones was beginning to feel anxious. Butterflies were swarming in his stomach. He had no idea where he was or how much farther they had to go before his chance of escape came to an end. Then the voice began to prod him, insisting that time was running out.

There had been no conversation since leaving the jail, then Jones broke the silence. "Are we almost there?"

The deputy who sat beside him looked at Jones and grinned. "You're not in a hurry to get back to California, are you?"

"Uh, no. It ain't that. It's just that I got to take a leak real bad."

"If you can hold it for five more minutes we'll be there."

The car slowed and turned north, onto a narrow street. They passed a few houses then entered a stretch of woods. Jones changed positions as if to ease the pressure on his bladder. As he did so he placed his cuffed hands over the seatbelt buckle and carefully lifted the release mechanism. He saw the railing of a short bridge a hundred yards ahead. At the same time a wave of adrenaline rushed through him.

Just as the car arrived at the bridge Jones lifted both arms and swung them hard to his left. It was a powerful blow that caught the deputy sitting next to him on the forehead. The edge of the handcuffs cut a deep gash just above the right eye. The deputy was out cold.

The driver glimpsed the movement through the rearview mirror, but before he could react Jones leaned over the front seat and grabbed the steering wheel. The car had passed over the bridge and, just past the railing, Jones turned the wheel sharply to the right. The driver, who was losing the battle over control of the vehicle, made no attempt to brake. The car rolled down the forty-five-degree embankment and struck the trunk of a tree before coming to an abrupt stop. The impact caused the driver to be thrown forward and his chest smashed into the steering wheel. Jones was catapulted over the front seat.

He was stunned but unharmed. The inner voice urged him to move. The vehicle had come to rest nose downward, and it was difficult for Jones to move about. He looked at the driver and noted that the deputy was not conscious. He reached over to the steering column, turned the key and pulled it from the ignition. He quickly looked over the other keys on the ring until he found the one for which he was searching. He had been cuffed too many times in his life not to be able to recognize a handcuff key.

With considerable effort he managed to turn his huge body so that his head faced the front passenger door. He reached over and lifted the handle. He gave it a slight push, then gravity took over and the door fell open. He slid over the seat on his stomach and out the door, then fell to the ground.

Jones slowly stood up on the sloping embankment. He was still shaking from the collision and his legs trembled. He leaned on the side of the car for support. The voice was becoming more persistent. *Get away from here! Leave before a car comes along!* This caused him to move.

He started up the side of the steep hill, then stopped as he remembered something. Leaning inside the car he searched around until he found the plastic bag that contained his wallet

and retrieved it from the floorboard. Placing the bag and ring of keys in his trouser pocket, he made his way up the slope.

Before stepping onto the road, he looked in both directions. It was not quite sunrise, but the light of dawn provided sufficient visibility for him to see that the road was deserted. He cautiously emerged from the embankment and ran across the road. Looking back, he saw that the car was completely hidden from view.

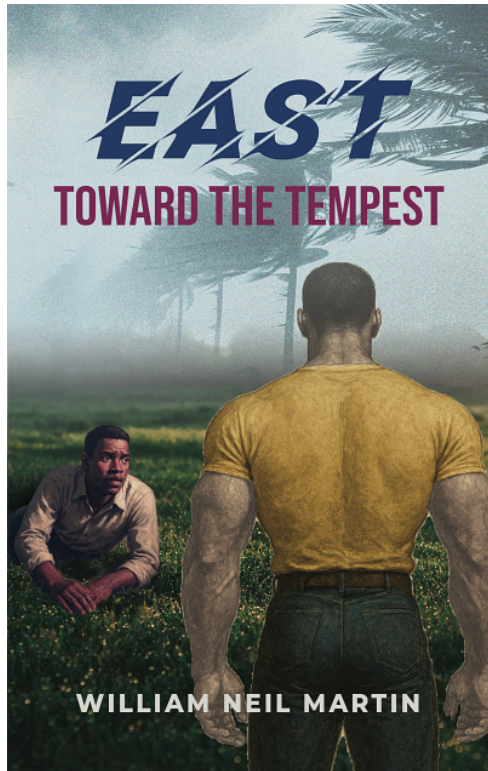
Turning his attention to his side of the road he ran beside the bridge railing until he reached the midpoint. Looking down he saw a small river. Yet it was not a river. It was a canal. The water did not flow like a river or creek. It sat motionless, a green scum covering its surface. The jungle-thick foliage on both sides of the canal covered the ground as far as the water's edge. The canal was the only opening through the woods, but Jones wanted no part of wading through the slime. What if there were snakes, or even alligators? No, he was a city boy and was not about to wade through the canal. He ran back to the end of the railing and after some hesitation, forced himself down the embankment and into the dense brush.

The progress was slow, and the limbs of small trees slapped at his face as he reached the bottom of the slope and moved deeper into the woods. Behind him the sun had come up, producing a dull glow through an overcast sky.

He had gone two hundred yards before reaching a small clearing five feet in diameter. Removing the ring of keys, he sat under a water oak and struggled to insert the key into the cuff. Once the first cuff was removed the second one was unlocked with little effort.

Jones then threw the handcuffs and the ring of keys into the canal. He rested another minute before the voice inside him urged him to stand. He was frightened and had no idea where he was. He knew only that he had to get far away from

that wrecked sheriff's car. As was his practice when he worked for Bert's Disposal back in L.A., he had to focus on the chore at hand. At this moment that chore was to keep moving. The farther he ran the safer he would be. With that thought he left the clearing and trudged slowly westward along the bank of the mucky canal.



*Two families, of mixed marriages, are murdered within two weeks of each other. From a single finger print, L.A. Homicide detective Flowers, learns the identity of the perpetrator, and pursues him to Gulfport, Mississippi.*

## **EAST Toward the Tempest**

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