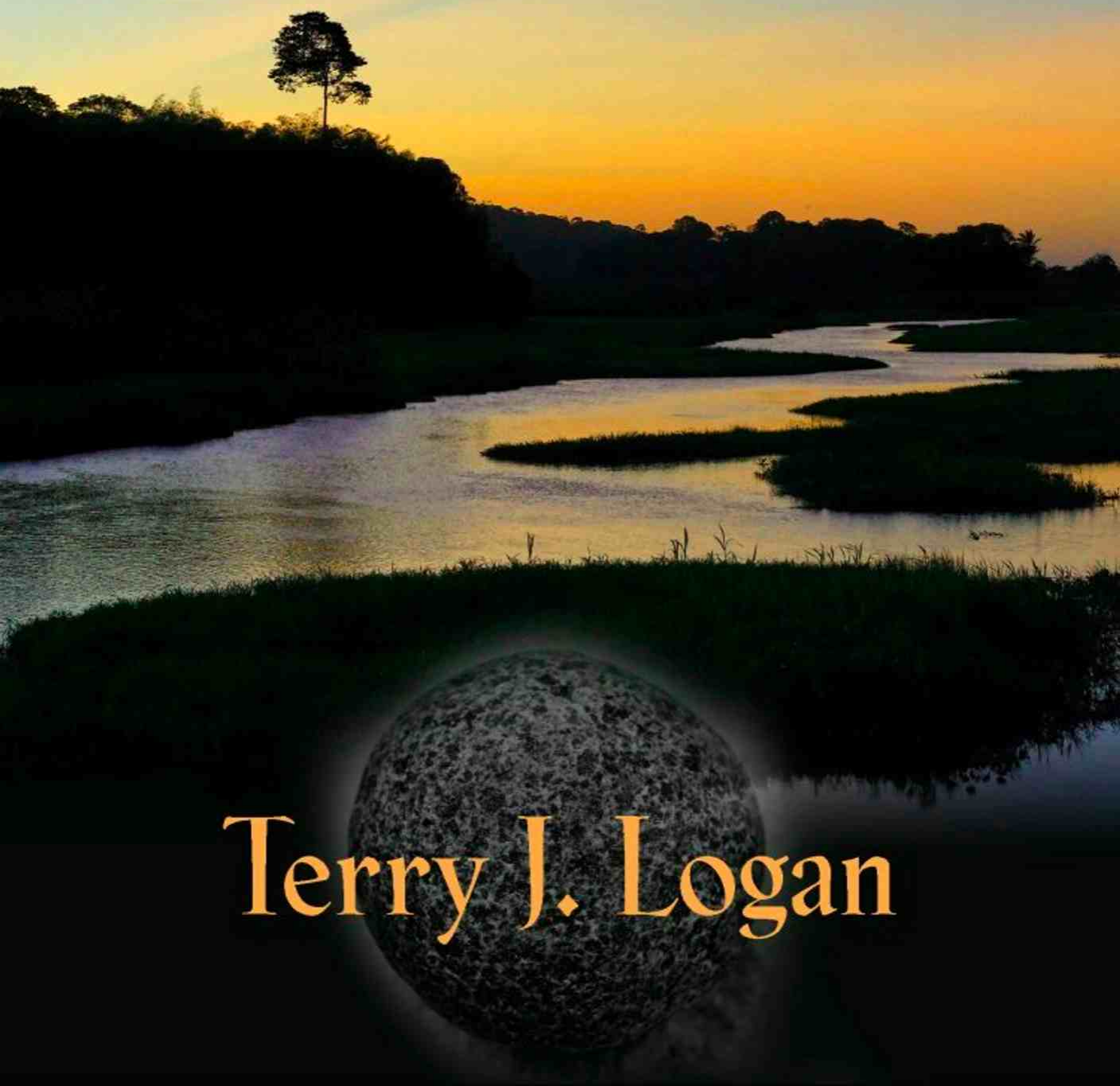
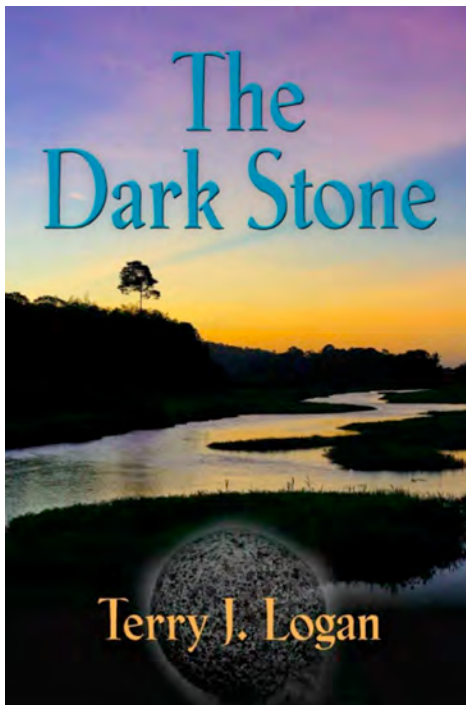


The Dark Stone



Terry J. Logan



This work of fiction follows the adventures of a young American scientist, David McLean, a geologist, in the jungles of South America. The book is set in the third-world nation of Guyana, the birthplace of the author, himself a scientist, a soil chemist. David McLean finds a mysterious specimen in a collection of rocks that he discovered in his father's belongings on his untimely death. The collection had belonged to his grandfather, a geologist in Guyana in the years after WW II. David uses his advanced analytical skills and the enormous resources of the government lab he works for to determine that the specimen, the dark stone, contains a rare element that has enormous economic value as it

is used in many of the electronics equipment we take for granted today and which is very difficult to find. David discovers from the American company his grandfather worked for the approximate location of the sample in the remote Guyana rain forest, one of the most inaccessible in the world. David goes to Guyana in search of the ore body from which the stone had been sampled and in the process meets a young and very beautiful American scientist, Sara Landes, an ethnobotanist who is one her way to find medicinal specimens in the jungle. They have a brief romantic encounter in Georgetown, the capital of Guyana, then go their separate ways. David works his way into the jungle with the help of a black man who lives in one of the many native Indian villages and prospects for gold, and a young Indian tribesman. They encounter snakes, other fauna like jaguars, and spend time in several of the Indian villages where David has fleeting sexual encounters with two women, who later on in the book, he determines has given birth to daughters by him. David finds Sara in the bush and there is an incident in which he and his two helpers have to kill two men hired by a Chinese firm looking for the same rare element he is to determine what David has found. They get rid of the bodies and he and Sara go their separate ways. David returns later on to pursue his search for the stone, which he does, meets his daughters and resolves to adopt them. He sets up residence in Georgetown and raises his children. Ultimately he is reunited with Sara and they wed. He

never pursues development of the ore he had found.

The Dark Stone

by Terry J. Logan

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The Dark Stone

Terry J. Logan

This book is dedicated to my twin brother Robin and my younger sister Suzanne whose own memories of Guyana helped bolster my own

Preface

This is a work of fiction loosely based on my experiences growing up in Guyana, then British Guyana, from 1943 to 1962 when I left to go to college in the U.S. Many of the place names are accurate but their descriptions are not since I never returned and memories are rarely sound. Kwakwani is a real place that I lived in from birth to age nine. Capturing the Guyanese accent from memory was very difficult since I have talked to few of them since I left fifty years ago. I, therefore, apologize for any mischaracterization I may have made – I love the Guyanese accent and joy in hearing it when I can.

Chapter 1

It was snowing gently when David McLean eased his 2004 VW Jetta onto the dark streets of Alexandria, Virginia. Five am and David was on his way to work in Gaithersburg, Maryland. There were few cars on the road so he took the George Washington Parkway north to pick up I-270 instead of heading over to I-95. He preferred this route with its view of the Potomac and the planes lined up at Ronald Reagan International Airport.

David worked for the National Institute of Technology and Standards (NIST), an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce. Its mission includes development of advanced analytical and imaging equipment .

David took the Gaithersburg exit off of I-270 and headed to Bureau Drive. The NIST is a compact campus of multi-storey buildings and can only be accessed through the main gate by permission or with a staff pass. He pulled up to the small security office.

“Early again, Dr. McLean; you must never sleep or you have a boring life. If I lived in Alexandria, I’d be checking out all those lonely professional DC women,” the guard said, smiling.

“It’s a little of both Danny. I like my job here and I do what I can with those DC women you talk about, but they’re a little intense for me.”

“Keep trying Doc, you’ll find a good one yet.”

David parked in one of the staff places. He used his plastic key to enter the main lab. Only the hallway lights were on - he was the first one in as usual. He proceeded to his small office off the main laboratory area.

David was thirty-five years old. He was born in Blacksburg, Virginia where his father was a mineralogy professor at Virginia Tech. Robert McLean was a native of the small English-speaking South American country of Guyana. His parents were third-generation Scots and Portuguese. His father left after high school to attend university in the U.S. and never returned. He met his future wife, Caroline, at Virginia Tech the first year he was on the faculty. She was in her senior year in dental hygiene and was from the Shenandoah Valley. David’s sister, Suzanne, was born shortly thereafter and David followed two years later. He loved his father and never tired of hearing stories of growing up in the Guyanese bush. His grandfather was a geologist in Guyana and had worked for several American mining companies, the first as a field geologist on a bauxite mine in the interior and then as a

prospector in Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. His father's stories were of the fabulous fauna and flora he witnessed first hand, his encounters with the native Indians they called Amerindians and the ex-slave bush negroes as they were called.

David developed an early love of science and when he was old enough his father let him come to the lab and he got to see how research was conducted. In the summers his parents traveled the U.S. by car and David always took the opportunity to pick up rocks he found along the way and had his dad help him identify them. He particularly liked igneous rocks and the beautiful minerals to be found in them.

David was an A student in science and math and particularly in chemistry and physics. He did his undergraduate degree at Virginia Tech then decided to follow in his grandfather's footsteps and do his graduate work in geology. He chose The Colorado School of Mines for its reputation for hard-rock mining research and ended up doing his dissertation on trace metal consortia in gabbros. This required him to use a number of sophisticated analytical instruments and he discovered that he was a whiz at fixing these complex and delicate machines when they broke down. He was always in great demand. He decided against a career in academia and an opening at NIST caught his attention. That was eight years ago.

David chose to come into the lab early so he could use some of the sophisticated equipment to analyze the many rock and mineral specimens he collected. He had developed an interest in a group of metals that are found in low concentrations in certain minerals. These were the seventeen heavy group rare earth elements (HREE). Their existence had been known for many years and a few had seen some commercial application but it was the explosive growth of semiconductors and the digital age that saw an increased demand for these materials. He was working on his own time to develop a more sensitive instrument to assay for these elements. His approach was to use tunable lasers that could produce coherent wavelengths of light that matched the emission spectra of each of the rare earth metals.

Chapter 2

David was in his second-floor apartment in Old Towne Alexandria tinkering with a piece of equipment. The gentrification of the Old Towne was not yet in full gear and his building was a block away from the ugly two-storey subsidized housing units with their crime and squalor. Needless to say, the rent was cheap and he was comfortable with the place. His apartment had two bedrooms, one of which he converted to an office and workshop. It was here that he tinkered with designs for analytical equipment. He furnished the apartment with hand-me-downs from his parents and from consignment shops. One of the reasons he had difficulty developing relationships with the young DC women he met in the Old Towne bars was the grungy appearance of his digs. They spent more on clothes in a week than he did on room and board in a month.

David was tall, six foot two, dark-haired with jet black eyes. He also had the dark complexion of his Portuguese ancestors and perhaps the Comanche blood his mother claimed to have. He was slender but muscular. He was not a gifted athlete but had tremendous stamina. He was also a romantic and adventurer at heart. He imagined himself to be a modern day Harrison Ford in Raiders of the Lost Ark looking for El Dorado in the South American jungles. He had had to settle for ecotourism trips to Costa Rica and Belize.

He was poring over an electronic circuit board when his cell phone rang. Only his parents, his sister and a few friends knew the number.

"David," a low female voice said, sobbing. "It's me, Suzanne."

"Sue," David answered, puzzled, "what's going on? Why are you crying?"

"Oh David," his sister said, trying to gain control. "It's Dad. He's dead; he was killed in a car crash coming home from Miami last night."

"My God! What about Mom?" David said in disbelief. "Is she OK?"

"She wasn't with him. He had gone alone to a scientific meeting in Miami to see some of his old buddies from Virginia Tech and was hit head-on by a drunk on Islamorada. Mom didn't find out until this morning."

"My God, Sue, we've got to get down there! She can't be alone to deal with this."

"I know. I'm flying down in a couple of hours. You need to come too."

"Of course! I'll look into flights immediately. I'm only five minutes from Reagan."

David's dad had taken early retirement from Virginia Tech and he and his mother moved to Key West. They bought a small wooden shotgun house in the old section of the island on Fleming Street and renovated it. Their father had taken to retirement well, playing tennis on the city hard courts and flats fishing. His mother, whose hobby was painting, fell in with the arty set and had shown a few paintings in a gallery on Duvall Street.

David called his sister to tell her he would arrive in Key West by early evening. She had talked to their mother and she was holding up as well as could be expected. Her neighbors had been great, bringing over food and making sure someone was always with her.

The Delta Canadair Regional jet banked over the island on its approach to the small airport giving David an excellent view of the clear blue waters of the Gulf, the naval base and the city. Two huge cruise ships were moored at the marina, dwarfing the other boats and even some of the buildings. You could never get me on one of those things, he thought. He sensed the experience would be like going to Vegas or Disneyworld. No thanks! He grabbed his duffel bag and quickly exited the small terminal to the balmy air of the tropics in late fall. The salt air was mixed with the smell of jasmine and the vibrant colors of oleander, crepe myrtle and frangipani were almost too dazzling. David waved in the direction of one of the small three-wheeled taxis and gave directions to the house.

The little house on Fleming Street was a simple, narrow but deep one-storey wooden structure capped by a tin roof. It was painted a pale yellow with white trim. A low white fence separated the sidewalk from a tiny yard choked with tropical shrubs and two palms. The front of the house had a shallow porch with just enough room for a couple of wooden rocking chairs. David knocked on the white wooden door. His sister opened it almost immediately and they embraced silently.

David did not have the best of relationships with Suzanne. She had left Blacksburg for George Washington University when he was still in high school and they only saw each other on holidays with their parents. She had studied international policy and after graduation found a job at one of the many DC think tanks. She met and married a patent attorney and he persuaded her to give up her job to stay home with their two children; they lived well in a McMansion in Chevy Chase. He was not invited very often to visit which was fine because Suzanne took every opportunity to label him a loser - living in a slum and with little future in sight. He never took the bait and spent his few visits playing with the children.

"Where's Mom?" David whispered, letting go of his sister.

"She's in her bedroom resting. I sent her friend home and urged her to take a nap. You need to go in and let her know you're here."

David walked down the narrow hallway, wondering if his father had left enough savings and insurance for his mother to keep the house. He knocked gently and opened the door. She was lying on the bed's coverlet with a pillow propping her head. She was awake and immediately started crying softly when she saw her son. He went to her and hugged her gently, burying his head in her neck and sobbing. He finally pushed himself away and wiped his tears with the back of his hand.

"I am so sorry Mom. I don't know what to say. Dad seemed to be so happy here in his new life. Now listen, Suzanne and I are here to take care of everything. We'll see about getting Dad's body home. I know he wanted to be cremated, but did he have any other requests?"

David's mom wiped her eyes with a handkerchief. "Thanks David. I feel better knowing that you and Suzanne are here. I'll be all right. It's still a shock though. Why did he have to go to Miami to see people he had gotten away from?" She shook her head, her stare a thousand miles away. "Yes, he did want to be cremated and he wanted his ashes strewn in the Gulf where he loved to fish. I think we can get one of his fishing guide buddies to help us with that."

"OK Mom. You rest. I'll talk to Suzanne about the arrangements and I'll look in on you in a while." David left, pulling the door shut behind him and went looking for his sister. She was in the living room talking to her husband.

"Yeah. David is here. We have to make the funeral arrangements and then we need to sit down with Mom to go over wills and finances - all that stuff. Dad handled all of it so we're going to have to find out where he kept everything. Give the kids a kiss when they get home from school. I'll be home in two or three days."

"OK, David," she said shutting off her cell phone. "We need to get the funeral arrangements made and then deal with the other stuff. Mom is going to be no help - she's too distraught and Dad handled all their finances and records anyway. I'll call the morgue in Islamorada and make arrangements for his body to be transferred to a local mortuary here for cremation and I'll talk to Mom to see what kind of ceremony she wants. They were never religious and I don't know how many friends they made since they moved down here. Dad's office is in the back bedroom. I saw a computer there and a filing cabinet. I know he prided himself on keeping everything on the computer so you may find most of the documents there."

David walked back to his father's office in the back bedroom. It was very difficult for him - this room contained most of what remained of his dad. There were pictures on the wall of him with colleagues and others of places he had visited. There were no framed diplomas or awards although he had many of the latter - his dad didn't believe in that stuff. There were rock specimens on one shelf, many David remembered from trips they had taken together. He attacked the filing cabinet first. Like Suzanne said, there was little there, only important stuff - a clear title to the house, which gave him a sense of relief, a life insurance policy with his mother as

sole beneficiary and their wills. He next went to his dad's old computer and booted it. The files were all arranged alphabetically. He scanned them quickly, finding only a few things of importance. In one folder labeled 'personal', he found a Word file titled 'Out of Guyana: A Family History'. His parents had never mentioned that his father was writing a family history. He scanned the file, pausing to look at old family pictures, some of which he remembered as a boy. When had his father written this, he wondered, and when was he going to show it to the family? He scrolled down to the bottom and saw that it was finished. He looked in his father's desk drawer and found a flash drive; he downloaded the file and pocketed the drive. He would read the family history in detail later. He continued looking through his father's things but found nothing of immediate importance. His mother would have to decide what to do with his stuff later. As he left the room and swung the door to close it behind him, he noticed a dusty wooden box in the corner. It was about three feet long, two feet wide and a foot deep. It had once been nailed shut but the nails on the top had been removed so he was able to remove the lid. Written on it in large ink letters was 'James McLean, 150 Lamaha Street, Georgetown, British Guiana.' David knew that Guyana was called British Guiana in colonial times and that James McLean was his grandfather. He set the lid aside and peered in. Nestled in straw were about three dozen rocks of various sizes and shapes. Each was wrapped with wire and attached to the wire was a small wooden tag on which were written a combination of numbers and letters. Some kind of identification code, David thought. He dusted each rock off in turn and inspected them. Some were common – basalts, granites and schists – while others he didn't recognize. One in particular caught his attention – an almost black, smooth and dense specimen. It looked like a meteorite, David thought, but he knew meteorites well - he had several in his personal collection. He replaced the lid and left the box in place. He would ask his mother about it later. He was sure that neither she nor his sister would want it. He would take it back home so he could analyze the rocks in his lab.

By the next day, their dad's body had been returned and was at a local mortuary. They did not have to identify the body because he had his driver's license on him and none of them wanted to see how badly he had been hurt. They wanted to remember him whole, alive and healthy. Suzanne had a name of one of their dad's fishing guide buddies and had gone down to the marina to meet him. He had immediately agreed to take the family on his boat to scatter the ashes. His father did not want a service of any kind but preferred to have all of his friends attend an old fashioned Irish-Scots wake at a local marina restaurant. Suzanne made the arrangements for the next day. She got the name and number of her dad's best friend and asked him to notify all of his other buddies about the wake.

The next day was picture perfect - sunny with scattered puffy white clouds amid blue skies, a light warm tropical breeze and the smell of salt air and tropical blossoms. The wake was held on the patio of one of the marina restaurants overlooking the water. People enjoy drinking in Key West, particularly when someone else was buying, and this crowd was no exception. People their mother didn't know came up to talk to the family – their dad's tennis and fishing friends.

Their mother's fellow artists were also there. Later, as the crowd finally drifted away, Suzanne motioned to the fishing guide who would take them out to get the boat ready. They followed him, with David carrying the urn with his father's ashes. They motored slowly out of the harbor and headed about two miles out to one of the flats areas their father often fished. David uncapped the urn and let the breeze slowly take the ashes, floating for a moment on the surface before sinking into the blue waters of the Gulf.

Suzanne left the next day after getting a promise that her mother would come up to DC shortly to visit her grandkids. David hung around the house, helping his mother box up his dad's clothes to give to Goodwill and throwing out extraneous stuff from his office. He kept a few things for himself, mostly pictures and some of the rock specimens they had collected together.

"Mom, what do you know about this box?" David asked, pointing at the corner behind the door.

"I don't know David. Your father had it for ages. He said your grandfather gave it to him one year when he visited him in Jamaica; it was a couple of years after your granddad retired and left Guyana. He died several years after that and your dad never got to discuss it further with him. He never told me what was in it and I never asked. I doubt that he knew much about it except that it contained rocks. You're a geologist, do you know what they are?"

"Just some rocks Mom. Granddad must have collected them when he was working in Guyana. I remember Dad saying he was a prospector for an American company. Do you mind if I have them? You know how much I love rocks."

"Of course, take them. I don't know why your father kept that box. Maybe he just wanted something of his own father's."

"Another thing Mom. Did you know that Dad was writing a history of the family in Guyana? I found it on his computer."

"He talked about it but I never paid much attention. He was always saying he was going to do it but he also said he was going to go back to Guyana some day - I don't think he meant it. His life was here in the U.S. but he was nostalgic about his homeland. He always said that once a Guyanese, always a Guyanese. What do you want to do with what he wrote?"

"I'd like to get it published so that everyone in the family has a copy. I don't want the Guyanese history to die - it's part of who I am, who Suzanne and her kids are."

"That would be wonderful David," his mother said, gently patting him on the cheek. "You are so much like your father. He was so proud of you."

“Too bad my sister doesn’t feel the same way. She thinks I’m a loser,” David said, holding his mother’s hand to his cheek.

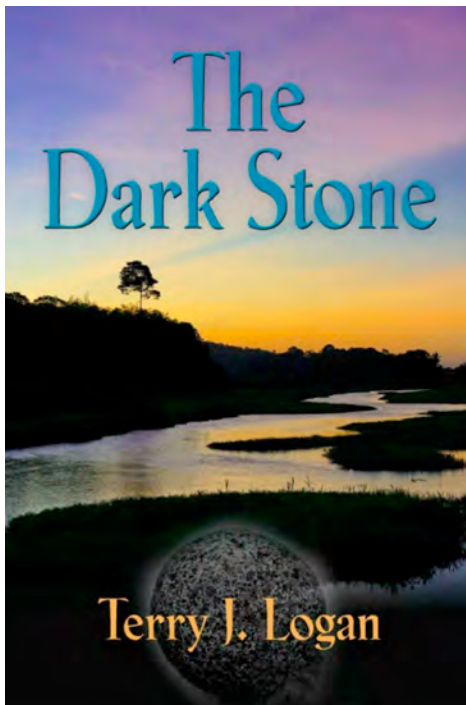
“That’s nonsense. She’s always been jealous of you but she looks up to you. Don’t let her façade fool you.”

He and his mother spent the rest of the day going through the things of the man they loved beyond bearing. They spent the evening together eating a simple meal that he helped her with, then sitting on the small porch and watching the tropical sun go down.

“Mom, what are you going to do now? This house is paid for but it’s so far away from Suzanne and me. I’ll come down as often as I can and I know Suzanne will pester you to visit the kids, but that leaves a lot of time alone.”

“Oh, David, don’t worry about me. I love it down here. I have my art friends and I also do some charity work. I’ll be fine.”

They said no more. David went to bed early – he had an early flight the next day. His mother was already awake when he got up. She made him a big breakfast and sat and watched as he ate. A car honked and he went to the door - the taxi he had reserved was idling at the curb. He had the driver help him with his luggage and the box of rocks. He hugged his mother and she held on for the longest time, both knowing that a part of their circle of life had ended and a new chapter was beginning. She was standing on the porch, her arms crossing her breasts, as they drove away.



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