

"Okay," I said, since he lived only a couple miles away.

After they left, in the gold Chev, Shelagh went on about how great those two guys were. She had no doubts about Lincoln and his story, no qualms about James, no suspicions whatsoever.

"What about those paternity suits. He sits there glaring, I mean, the guys pretty sullen, almost menacing."

"Menacing? Christ, I thought you were the sullen one. You hardly spoke ten words, and then you basically told him to shut up."

"Privacy, Shelagh. The guy's got things to hide and you were prying."

"And he sure as hell hid them. Right out in the open for you to judge."

"Oh Jesus. I was trying to sell a car."

"We did, didn't we? Almost no thanks to you."

"Thanks to you we may have got stiffed for five hundred bucks."

"He'll pay."

"How do you know?"

"I know. And you should too."

"I made a mistake with Sam, okay. I've admitted it a thousand times and every time I haul out my wallet. So I wasn't about to make another one. Until you jumped in."

"What is your problem?"

"When it comes to business and money, we're not talking soul music."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

The conversation heated up from there, with Shelagh slamming our bedroom door in my face and the two of us yelling through the wood panels. The phone rang and I picked it up to get away from her screaming at what an untrusting s.o.b. I was after I'd told her she could be damn naive and let her tastes in music muddy her judgment.

It was James Boone, calling from a restaurant phone booth near the major intersection of Jackson and 23rd. James went to stop for a redlight, and the brake pedal went to the floor without any pressure. No brakes. A brake line must've been almost rusted through. The car entered the intersection

at nearly thirty miles an hour and wouldn't you know it, some older white guy in a fairly new white Cadillac was there. James, Lincoln, and the gold Chev hit the Cadillac broadside, on the driver's door. The damage to the Chev was minor, but the Cadillac was a mess on its left side and the driver had been taken to the hospital with a broken arm.

All I could think, as James paused into the background restaurant noise on the phone, was, "Somebody take me to the hospital." I was screwed. A car with no insurance. A wealthy white guy rammed by a black man wanted in three states and an ex-gang member. I'd be paying fifty bucks for the rest of my life. We'd have to leave the state.

"I'll cover it," James was saying.

"Huh?"

"I said, I'll cover it, man. It's cool. It's my fault. I took the car."

"But it's in my name."

"Didn't you hear me, man, it's covered. I'll see you next week with the first payment."

He hung up. And I sat there stunned, disbelieving it all—how I could let the car go, the accident, James' promise—yet wanting to believe what he said, and that Shelagh was right. But unable to.

And the weirdest thing, I wanted Lincoln to call back. Lincoln with the knife scar, and tell me everything was cool. As if I could believe him.

The news ended my argument with Shelagh on the spot, and she was more shaken than I would've guessed. But not for the right reason.

"God, are the guys all right?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

"You didn't ask?"

"No. I assumed."

She let out an exasperated sigh. I started to say something, and she made a chopping motion with her hand, cutting me off. End of discussion about James, Lincoln, and the car. A while later she put on some old Aretha Franklin, but it wasn't for us, for me, and after a couple tunes I grabbed my fishing gear and took a long walk down to the lake.