

**Includes a
sneak peek
from**

RAYLAN

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

ELMORE LEONARD

FIRE

IN THE HOLE



FEATURING
RAYLAN GIVENS
FROM THE FX SERIES

JUSTIFIED

FIRE IN THE HOLE



WILLIAM MORROW

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Praise for Elmore Leonard and *Fire in the Hole*

“Let the last line of dialogue from Elmore Leonard’s new short-fiction collection sum up Mr. Leonard’s great gift: ‘He could tell a story.’ More precisely, he can invent coolheaded characters who leap off the page, equip them with pricelessly terse dialogue and dream up the kinds of plots that might have worked for O. Henry, if O. Henry had had a serious interest in lowlife, double-crossing, and crime. The short-story format brings out these strengths to a surprising degree.”

—Janet Maslin, *New York Times*

“Leonard’s prose is a delivery system honed to bring fans quick hits of pleasure. The effect of this, his thirty-ninth book, is to leave you a little high and definitely addicted to the author all over again.”

—*New York Daily News*

“Other writers have to downshift to write a short story. Leonard’s not-one-word-wasted style doesn’t have to be changed a lick. His craftsmanship is such that many readers won’t even notice it—which is the highest compliment one can pay.”

—*Philadelphia Inquirer*

“Elmore Leonard’s . . . most accomplished female characters in years.”

—*USA Today*

“Vintage Leonard. . . . We get nine stories with booze and shotguns and lowlifes in them and lots of scenes that ought to be in movies. . . . What recommends this book to Leonard fans most is that many of the characters are beloved ones from earlier novels.”

—*Detroit Free Press*

“This collection of short fiction by the top crime writer proves Leonard knows all the moves to keep readers in step with him. Enlivened with wisecracks and wry observations, Leonard’s prose will have readers shaking with chuckles, rattling with tension and rolling right along with the beat of his fabulous plotting.”

—*Boston Herald*

“[The story ‘When the Women Come Out to Dance’] is as fine a piece of writing as Leonard has ever done.”

—*Oregonian*

“The voice is there, dry and with a hint of what lordly amusement would sound like if God had worked at a Detroit ad agency. . . . In the shorter form, [Leonard is] masterly.”

—*San Jose Mercury News*

I.

They had dug coal together as young men and then lost touch over the years. Now it looked like they'd be meeting again, this time as lawman and felon, Raylan Givens and Boyd Crowder.

Boyd did six years in a federal penitentiary for refusing to pay his income tax, came out and founded religion. He received his ordination by mail order from a Bible college in South Carolina and formed a sect he called Christian Aggression. The next thing he did, Boyd formed the East Kentucky Militia with a cadre of neo-Nazi skinheads, a bunch of boys wearing Doc Martens and swastika tattoos. They were all natural-born racists and haters of authority, but still had to be taught what Boyd called "the laws of White Supremacy as laid down by the Lord," which he took from Christian Identity doctrines. Next thing, he trained these boys in the use of explosives and automatic weapons. He told them they were now members of Crowder's Commandos, sworn to take up the fight for freedom against the coming Mongrel World Order and the government's illegal tax laws.

Boyd said he would kill the next man tried to make him pay income tax.

The skinheads accepted Boyd as the real thing, his having seen combat. Boyd had caught the tail end of Vietnam, came back with three pairs of Charlie's ears on silver chains and an Air CAV insignia on his arm, the tat faded from having been there now some twenty-five years.

Raylan Givens, a few years younger than Boyd, was now a deputy United States marshal. Raylan was known as the one who'd shot it out with a Miami gangster named Tommy Bucks—also known as the Zip—both men seated at the same table in the dining area of the Cardozo Hotel, South Beach, when they drew their pistols. Raylan had told the Zip he had twenty-four hours to get out of Dade County or he would shoot him on sight. When the Zip failed to comply, Raylan kept his word, shot him through china and glassware from no more than six feet away.

The day the Marshals Service assigned Raylan to a Special Operations Group and transferred him from Florida to Harlan County, Kentucky, Boyd Crowder was on his way to Cincinnati to blow up the IRS office in the federal building.

II.

Boyd was making the run in a new Chevy Blazer, all mud from wheels to roof after coming out of the hollows and forks of East Kentucky. The Blazer belonged to his skin-head driver, a new boy named Jared who'd just finished his sixty-day basic training and indoctrination, a skinhead from Oklahoma. Boyd said to him, "You see where out'n Oregon a militia group threw a stink bomb in the IRS office?"

"A *stink* bomb," Jared said, his eyes holding on the road, the view all trees, sky and semis. He said "Shit, throw a pipe bomb in there, a grenade, you want to get their attention."

It sounded good, but did he mean it? Boyd had his doubts about this Jared from Oklahoma.

They had come out of deep woods five hours ago and were now following 75 on its approach to

Covington and the Ohio River. Riding with them in back, covered in plastic wrap, were a pair of Chinese AKs, ammo and an RPG-7 antitank grenade launcher, another Chink weapon Boyd had used in the Nam, a little honey that fired a 40-millimeter hollow-charge rocket grenade.

He said to Jared, "I want you to tell me if there's something you don't understand about what you been learning."

Jared moved his shoulders in kind of a shrug, eyes straight ahead as they came up on a line of big diesel haulers. He had that lazy manner skinheads put on to show they were cool. He said, "Well, a couple of things. I don't understand all that Christian Identity stuff, their calling Jews the progeny of Satan and niggers subhuman."

Boyd said, "Hell, it's right in the Bible, I'll show it to you we get back. Okay, what're the Jews behind?"

"They control the Federal Reserve."

"What else?"

Jared said, "ZOG?" not sounding too sure.

"You betcha ZOG, the Zionist Occupational Government," Boyd said, "the ones set to rule us we let the gover-mint take away our guns. You see Chuck Heston on TV? Chuck said they'd have to take him out of his cold dead hand."

"Yeah, I saw him," Jared said, not sounding moved or inspired. Then saying, "There's Cincinnati ahead. You see it before you get to the bridge."

This Jared had come recommended from an Oklahoma group, the Aryan Knights of Freedom, Jared saying he heard of Crowder's Commandos he couldn't wait to drive his new SUV over to Kentucky and join up. Saying he was anxious to get into high explosives 'stead of chasing niggers down alleys and spray-painting synagogues; shit. He said he was in Oklahoma City for the Murrah Federal Building, got there just a few minutes after she blew. He said it had inspired him to get in the fight. Sometimes talking about the Murrah Building it would sound like he had taken part in that mission with Tim and Terry.

No, Boyd and others weren't all that sold on this Jared from Oklahoma. How come he didn't have any Aryan tattoos? How come he was always touching his head? Like wondering if his hair would even grow in again. Boyd didn't personally care for that bare-skull look, but allowed it since it was what they were known as. He preferred an inch on top and shaved sidewalls like his own regulation grunt cut, now mostly gray at fifty, steel bristles crowning his lean leathery face.

They were coming on to Cincy now, its downtown standing over there against a sky losing its light. A few minutes later they were on the northbound span of the Ohio River bridge. Boyd said, "Get off on Fifth Street."

"Another thing I don't understand," Jared said, "there's all these white power outfits around but nothing holding 'em together, no kind of plan I ever heard of."

"Except purpose," Boyd said. "Militias, the Klan, your pissed-off Libertarians and tax protesters, your various Aryan brotherhoods, we're all part of the same patriot movement."

They were on Fifth now passing hotels and that big fountain there.

"Also you have your millions who don't even realize yet they're part of the revolution. I'm talking about all the people caught up in white flight. You know what that is?"

"Yes sir, people moving out of town."

“White people moving to the suburbs. You think it’s ’cause they’re dying to cut grass and have barbecues in the backyard? Shit no, it’s to get away from the niggers and greasers. And Asiatics, Christ, we got ’em all. Anybody wants in, sure, come on. Look at all the fuckin’ Mexicans . . .”

He paused to give directions, but Jared was already turning left onto Main—without being told where they were going, now or anytime before.

Boyd gave him a look, but then had to hunch down as they passed the John Weld Peck Federal Building, Boyd trying to see up to the seventh floor of the nine-story building, where the IRS office was located. All he saw was a wall of tall rectangular windows up no more than a few floors. Sitting up again Boyd said, “Take a left on Sixth and come around the block.”

They passed the Subway sandwich shop on Sixth his recon man Devil Ellis had told him about. Boyd didn’t mention it or say a word the rest of the way around the block, not until they were coming up on the federal building again.

“Lemme off on the corner over there and make your circle. I’ll be waiting.”

Jared turned left, pulled up in front of the yellow Subway awning, and Boyd got out. He went inside the shop—no one here but the woman behind the counter—and stood at the plate-glass window smelling onions. The view showed most of the John Weld Peck Building diagonally across the way. From here, Devil Ellis said, he’d have a clear shot at the corner windows up there. Which was how much Devil—what they called him—knew about firing a grenade rocket at a target this close and high up. It was the kind of stunt Devil would try, stoned or just crazy, stand here chewing on a roast beef sub dripping onions and decide, yeah, shoot through this big window.

Devil was the one drove down to the Tennessee line one night and set off a charge in the Jellico post office, and all the pissed-off retirees had to wait and wait to get their social security checks, which didn’t help the cause. Got the post office bombing listed with the abortion clinic Boyd was supposed to have blown up—the dumbest thing he ever heard of. What did you gain by it? Rob a bank and spray-paint *White Power* on the wall, you make your point and get away with a bag or two of cash.

It was Devil told him to keep an eye on Jared—both Devil and Boyd’s baby brother, Bowman, suspecting Jared had been planted among them by the FBI, the Federal Bureau of Imperialism, or was an agent himself, although pretty dumb.

Boyd walked out to the corner and stood watching for unmarked cars creeping around, vans parked where they shouldn’t be, spotters inside. It was getting dark already. The muddy Blazer rolled up. Boyd got in and Jared said, “Which way?”

“Straight ahead.”

Boyd sat there and didn’t speak again until they were up Main Street a ways, crossing East Central Parkway now, and Boyd said, “We coming to it, Niggaville,” Boyd looking at dingy old buildings, run-down storefronts, people he saw as winos on the street. Another couple of blocks and he spotted the place Devil told him to look for. Sure enough, up on the right. “There it is,” Boyd said. “Go past slow.” He could read the sign now sticking out from the front of the building:

TEMPLE OF THE COOL AND BEAUTIFUL J.C.

A thin coat of whitewash covered the front, the place a dump, the sign blasphemous, calling Jesus cool and beautiful, for Christ sake.

“Turn left that next street and stop. I believe I can take ’er from over there.” Boyd stuck his butt in Jared’s face pushing his way between the seats to get in the back. Jared raising his voice now:—

“You gonna blow up that church?” Sounding surprised, then in kind of a panic. “Boyd, we’re in the middle of fucking Cincinnati.”

Now Boyd, in the back end of the Blazer, getting his Chinese grenade launcher unwrapped, raised his own voice to tell Jared, “You always have a secondary target, just in case.” He looked out the rear as Jared came to a stop. “This is good, I’m gonna have a clear shot.”

“Boyd, there’s people on the street.”

“I don’t see none. Just some niggers.”

“They gonna see us. I.D. my car.”

Boyd loved times like these he could show how cool he was under fire, so to speak. “You worried about your car, huh?”

“They’s people right up the block, watching. Boyd, you see ’em? They watching us.”

Even if this Jared wasn’t a snitch, which could be, he sure as hell wasn’t commando material. “Fuck ’em,” Boyd said. “We’re about to raise a whole lot of hell.”

He had the RPG just about put together. He’d screwed the propellant cylinder to the back of the missile grenade and slipped it into the tube, sticking out now like a fat spear. Next, he removed the nose cap from it. Shit, he could do this in the dark drinking from a jar of shine. He pulled out the pin, the safety, and called to Jared to get ready.

Now Boyd dropped the tailgate and slipped out to the street with his rocket gun, hefted it to his shoulder, flipped the sight up and took aim. He called out to no one in particular, “Fire in the hole!” Squeezed the trigger and that Temple of the Cool and Beautiful J.C. blew up before his eyes.

III.

Boyd got rid of the RPG crossing the Ohio River south, stuck his head and shoulders out the back end of the vehicle and flung the weapon out into the night. He told Jared to look for 275. That took them over to the airport, where he got Jared to follow the signs to long-term parking and find a spot a good ways from the terminal. “Over there toward the fence,” Boyd said, still crouched down in the back end.

Once they were parked, Jared said, “Now what?” sounding like all his energy had drained out of him.

Boyd didn’t answer. He had one of the Chink AK-47s unwrapped and armed with a magazine. He heard in his mind the familiar words *lock and load* and was ready for business.

Jared said to the rearview mirror, “What’re you doing?”

Boyd could see just the top of his head above the cushion on the front seat.

“How’d you know where we was going?”

“What?”

“You heard me.” It was quiet in here, neither of them moving.

“How’d you know we’s going to the federal building?”

Now Jared's voice in the dark said, "Was your brother told me. Him and Devil."

"You mean you heard 'em talking?"

"Uh-unh, Bowman told me and then Devil goes, 'But don't let on you know.' "

"I think you spied on 'em."

"No sir—you can ask 'em."

"I think you listen in on things you shouldn't, and then report it to who you work for. Is that what you are, a snitch for the feds?"

Jared had his head raised to the rearview mirror.

"Boyd, you got no reason to say that, none."

"I saw how you acted, I'm setting up to blow out that nigger church. You didn't want no parts of it"

"They was *people* around, watching us."

Sounding like he was starting to panic again. Boyd asked himself, You want to argue with him or get 'er done?

He laid the barrel of the assault rifle on the backrest of the seat close in front of him and *bam*, shot Jared through the headrest of the driver's seat—the round going through the fat cushion, through Jared, through the windshield, through the rear window of the car in front of the Blazer and through its windshield—Boyd discovering this once he was outside and took a look.

From the terminal he called Devil Ellis at the Sukey Ridge church to tell him he'd arrive at the London-Corbin airport on the late shuttle. Devil was full of questions on the phone, but Boyd managed to satisfy him with, "Yeah, I had to let Jared go. I'll tell you about it when you get me."

Now in Devil's pickup, trailing its headlights along pitch-dark roads toward Sukey Ridge, Boyd filled him in: how he'd knocked out the nigger church—Devil letting out a Rebel yell—and then how, not taking any chances, he shot Jared, wiped down the Blazer pretty good where he'd sat, and stashed the rifles and extra RPG loads and parts along that cyclone fence there separating the lot from the airfield? They'd send one of the skins, see if he could pick 'em up.

Boyd sipped from a jar Devil kept in his truck, then looked over at him with his dark beard and black cowpuncher hat Boyd allowed, the look being the man's style, Devil's devilish, go-to-hell image.

"Jared said you told him where we's going."

"Yeah, me and Bowman."

Boyd took another sip of the shine. "Even thinking he was a snitch?"

"Bowman figured Jared'd fuck up and you'd see he knew more'n he was supposed to and you'd get on him about it."

Boyd said, "Yeah ...?"

"Jared'd say it was us told him and you wouldn't believe it."

Boyd said, "Then what?"

"We figured you'd work on him in your way and get him to confess."

Boyd said, "That he's a traitorous snitch."

“Yeah, in the pay of the government.”

“But he didn’t tell me nothing like that.”

“You work on him?”

“I started in but, hell, I knew he’d lie to me.”

“I know what you mean—those people. So you put him down. I’d have done the same.”

Boyd didn’t say anything to that. They drove through the dark in silence till Devil said, “You know how he was always talking about the Murrah Building, saying he was there like a minute after she blew? Me and Bowman don’t believe he was anywheres near it. Saw it on TV like everybody else.”

Boyd said, “Was it you didn’t trust him or you just didn’t like him much?”

Devil said after a moment, “I guess both.”

They were coming to the church now, way up there where that speck of electric light showed on the ridge. Across the front of the property, coming down to the dirt road they followed, was a pasture, a good five acres of cleared land and no road leading up. It was around the next bend where the pickup slowed to turn into the trees past the sign that said PRIVATE PROPERTY—TRESPASSERS WILL BE SHOT.

Boyd said, “You watching for claymores?”

“You think you’re funny,” Ellis said. “If I believed you planted any I’d move clear to Tennessee.”

They followed switchbacks up through the trees finally to top a rise and coast into the barnlot back of the old church, not used for services since Ike was President. Boyd had bought it cheap, had it painted and turned into a dormitory for when his skinheads were here. Anybody complained it looked like a prison dorm, Boyd would tell ’em to go sleep in the barn—with a mean rat-eating owl lived there. He got out of the truck stiff, tired from riding.

Three skins watched him from the back porch where a kerosene lamp sat on top the fridge. The two fat boys were locals Boyd called the Pork brothers. The one without a shirt this cool evening, his dye blond hair spiked, was a boy named Dewey Crowe from Lake Okeechobee in Florida. He wore a necklace of alligator teeth along with the word HEIL tattooed on one tit and hitler on the other, part of the Führer’s name in the boy’s armpit.

Walking toward them Boyd said, “What’s going on?”

It was Dewey Crowe who spoke up. “Your brother got shot.”

The words came at Boyd cold, without any note of sympathy, so he took it to mean Bowman wasn’t shot any place’d kill him.

But then Dewey said, “He’s dead,” in that same flat tone of voice.

And it hit Boyd like a shock of electricity. Wait a minute—in his mind seeing his brother alive and in his prime, grown even bigger’n Boyd. How could he be dead?

“Was his wife shot him,” Dewey said, “with his deer rifle. They say Ava done it while Bowman was having his supper.”

IV.

It was Art Mullen, marshal in charge of this East Kentucky Special Op Group, who had requested

Raylan Givens, now seated in Art's temporary office in the Harlan County courthouse. It was an overcast morning in October, the two sipping coffee, getting acquainted again.

"I remember you were from around here."

"A long time ago."

"You still look the same as you did at Glynco," Art said, meaning the time they were both firearms instructors at the academy. "Still wearing the dark suit and wing-tip cowboy boots."

"The boots're fairly new."

"Don't tell me that hat is." The kind Art Mullen thought of as a businessman's Stetson, except no businessman'd wear this one with its creases and just slightly curled brim cocked toward one eye, the hat part of Raylan's lawman personality. He said no, it was old.

"What do you pack these days?"

"This trip my old Smith forty-five Target." He saw Art grin.

"You and your big six-shooter—born a hundred years too late. You ever get married again?"

"No, but I wouldn't mind some homelife. I can't say Winona ruined it for me. I stopped to see my two boys on the way up. They come down to Florida every summer and I get 'em jobs."

There was a lull. Raylan looked toward the gray sky in the window, trees starting to change color. Art Mullen, a big, comfortable man with a quiet way of speaking, said, "Tell me what you remember of Boyd Crowder."

Raylan, nodding his head a couple of times, went back to that time in his mind. "Well, we dug coal side by side for Eastover Mining, near Brookside. Boyd was a few years older and had become a powderman. He'd crawl down a hole with his case of Emulex five-twenty and come out stringing wire. You'd hear him call out 'Fire in the hole,' to clear the shaft. She'd blow and we'd go back in to dig out the pieces. We weren't what you'd call buddies, but you work a deep mine with a man you look out for each other."

Art Mullen said, "Fire in the hole, uh?" in a thoughtful kind of way.

"I hate to say he was good at it," Raylan said, and sipped his coffee, still back all those years in his mind. "I remember when we struck Eastover and Duke Power brought in scabs and gun thugs? Their cars'd drive in, Boyd'd be waiting to swing at 'em with a wrecking bar. He was put in jail twice. Then when he shot one of the scabs, almost killed him, Boyd took off and I heard he joined the army. Came out and what happened, he went to prison?"

"Came out pissing and moaning," Art said, "'cause we quit in Vietnam 'stead of getting it done. He bought a truck and went to work hauling timber for the mines. Ten years never paid his income tax, refused to, claiming he was a sovereign citizen. The U.S. attorney sent him to Alderson. That's where he got into what they call the patriot movement. You read his sheet?"

"I've only had time to skim it so far," Raylan said. "He's been busy, huh? Has his own army now, bunch of serious morons sieg-heilin' each other?"

"More serious'n you think," Art said. "Boyd's got 'em making horseshit bombs, fertilizer and fuel oil. They drive to a town like Somerset, blow up somebody's car to get the police busy and go rob a bank."

Raylan was nodding. "I saw it in a Steve McQueen movie."

"Well, these people aren't movie actors." Art leaned forward, resting his arms on the desk. "Lemme

tell you about this guy they found at the Cincinnati airport, sitting in his new Chevy Blazer shot through the back of the head. This is Jared, on file with the Bureau as some kind of Aryan knight. Oklahoma driver's license and registration."

"You put him with Boyd?"

"Lemme get to it," Art said. "This is good. Just the night before, a black church in Cincinnati—the one called it a street mission in the paper—was blown up."

Raylan was frowning. "It was a church? I caught only part of it on the news."

Art held up one hand. "Listen to me. Four witnesses say a guy got out of the Blazer with what looked like a bazooka and fired it into the church. But right before, you know what he said, yelled it out? 'Fire in the hole.' "

Raylan straightened. He said, "Come on . . ." his interest picking up.

"All four witnesses heard it. So now evidence techs go through the Blazer. They find this little cardboard cylinder you hook onto the back of an RPG rocket. It holds the juice, the propellant. One hell of a must've missed."

"So you got the dead guy with Boyd."

"It would seem, huh? But first," Art said, "we want to put Boyd and the dead guy at the church. What's interesting, it's only kind of a church. The pastor, it turns out, Israel Fandi, is one of the witnesses. Only at first he won't admit who he is till people start pointing at him. Israel wears an African outfit, a dashiki and a little pillbox hat and talks like he's Rastafarian. You know what I mean?"

"Ethiopian," Raylan said. "By way of Jamaica. I remember now on the news they said it was believed the people smoked ganja as part of the service."

"They smoked it, they sold it—the place was a dope store passing as a church. It blew," Art said, "there was free grass all over the block. This was three days ago. Since then we got the Cincinnati police to loan us Israel Fandi. He's in a holding cell downstairs, but claims he didn't see the man's face had the bazooka. I said to him, 'Israel, you see him in a lineup, the man we *know* blew up your church, you might change your mind.' "

"The power of suggestion," Raylan said.

"Without holding the marijuana over his head. We'll save it. Next thing is to pick up Boyd, if he's still around."

"What've you got on him otherwise?"

"The U.S. attorney wants to collect indictments under a charge of sedition. That he did willfully and knowingly et cetera conspire to overthrow, put down and destroy by force the government of the United States."

"But what've you got you can take to court?"

"Only bits and pieces of evidence."

"Then he's most likely still around," Raylan said.

"Well, he's got sympathizers. Half the people living up in the hollers around here," Art said, "are on welfare but still don't trust the government, won't talk to census takers. Boyd's mother and his ex-wife are in Evarts. His skinheads train at a place up on Sukey Ridge, what he calls his Christian Aggression Church. Signs on the trees say you approach at your own risk, as the road's been mined."

“You let him get away with that?”

“ATF swept it. There aren’t any mines. Another house, one he used to own up on Black Mountain? It’s been under fore-closure since he went to prison. We want to sell it to cover his back taxes, but Boyd’s put the word out, anybody buys the house, he’ll blow it up.”

“I remember,” Raylan said, “they used to raise marijuana crops up there, acres of plants all the way down across the Virginia line.”

“They’re still growing it, but that’s not our business, busting dopers.”

“No, but what I was thinking,” Raylan said, “Israel being into weed, what if you sold the house to him? Say for a hundred bucks or so.” He had Art starting to grin. “And you let Boyd know a black guy’s living in his house.”

Not a bad idea, Art saying yeah, that could bring him out. Saying then, “There’s another situation could do it. You know Bowman, Boyd’s brother?”

Raylan saw him in a football uniform. “Sorta. He was a star running back in high school—this was after I got out. Boyd was always talking about him, how Bowman had the goods and would go on to play college ball and become a pro. I was never that sure.”

Art said, “You remember the girl he married, Ava?”

Raylan’s tone came alive as he said, “Ava, yeah, she lived down the street from us.” He remembered her eyes. “She’s married to Bowman?”

“Was,” Art said. “She ended the union the other day with a thirty-ought-six, plugged him through the heart.”

It stopped Raylan. He remembered a cute little dark-haired girl about sixteen and how she tried to act older, flirting, working her brown eyes on him. He remembered her sassy cheerleader moves on the field Friday nights, the girls in blue and gold doing their routines, and his eyes would be on Ava the whole time. Too young or he would’ve gone after her.

He said to Art, “You talk to her?”

“She admits shooting him. Ava said she got tired of him getting drunk and beating her up. She was arraigned this morning. Her lawyer had her plead not guilty to first and second degree and she was released on her own recognizance. Unusual, but the prosecutor, knowing Bowman, would just as soon not bring her up. They’ll work out a plea deal.”

“Where is she now?”

“Went home. I told her, you know Boyd’s gonna come looking for you. She said it’s none of our business. I told her it is if he shoots you. You want to talk to her?”

“I wouldn’t mind,” Raylan said.

V.

She’d be fixing her face to go to work at Betty’s Hair Salon, and Bowman would say, “Who you think you are, Ava Gardner? You don’t look nothing like her.”

Ava had quit trying to get it through his head no one ever said she did. The day she was born her daddy named her Ava on account of Ava Gardner saying she was a country girl at heart with a countr

girl's values. He had read it somewhere and believed it and would remind her as she was growing up, "See, even a good-looking woman don't have to put on airs."

She married Bowman a year out of high school because he was cute, because he was sure of himself and told her he'd never work in a goddamn coal mine. He'd wear the blue and white of the University of Kentucky and after that get drafted by a pro team; he wouldn't mind the Cowboys. But colleges either wouldn't accept his grades or didn't think he was good enough. He blamed her for their getting married and taking his mind off staying in shape so he could try out at some school as a walk-on. She said, "Honey, if your grade-point average sucks . . ." Uh-unh, that had nothing to do with it, it was her fault. Everything was. It was her fault he had to dig coal. Her own fault he hit her. If she didn't nag at him he wouldn't have to. Unless he slapped her for the way she was looking at him. He'd start drinking Jim Beam and Diet Coke—ate like a hog and drank diet soda—and she'd see it coming as his disposition turned from stupid to ugly and pretty soon he'd be slapping her, hard. She ran way to Corbin and got a job at the Holiday Inn waiting tables. Bowman found her and brought her back saying he missed her and would try to tolerate her acting up. It was her fault she miscarried after he'd beat her with his belt. Her fault he didn't have a son he could take hunting with him and his creepy brother. She told Bowman there were times he wasn't home Boyd would stop by wanting a drink, and if she gave him one he'd start getting funny, "your own brother." Bowman whipped her for telling him, kept after her with his belt till she fell and hit her head on the stove.

This was the other night. She got up from the floor knowing he would never hit her again.

The next day, Saturday, he walked in smelling of beer and gunfire, like nothing had happened the night before. She had his supper on the table, ham and yams, cream-style corn and leftover okra fixed with tomatoes, because she wanted him sitting down. Once he'd poured his Jim Beam and Diet Coke and took his place at the table, Ava went in the kitchen closet and came out with Bowman's Winchester. He looked up and said with his mouth full of sweet potato what sounded like "The hell you doing with that?"

Ava said, "I'm gonna shoot you, you dummy," and she did, blew him out of the chair.

When the prosecutor asked if she had loaded the rifle before firing it, she paused no more than a second before telling him Bowman always kept it loaded.

Raylan was told Bowman himself couldn't find his house when he was drunk. Go on up along the Clover Fork, or take the Gas Road out to the diversion tunnels and turn right down to a road bears east where a sign says JESUS SAVES, and it ain't far; start looking for a red Dodge pickup in the yard.

It was one-story with aluminum awnings set high among pines. Raylan got out of the Lincoln Town Car—one Art had taken off some convicted felon and given to Raylan to use—and crossed the yard past the Dodge pickup to the front door.

It opened and he was looking at a woman in a soiled T-shirt worn over an old housedress that hung on her, her dark hair a mess. Ava was forty now, but he knew those eyes staring at him and she knew him, saying, "Oh my God—Raylan," in kind of a prayerful tone.

He stepped into a room with bare walls, worn carpeting, a sofa. "You remember me, huh?"

Ava pushed the door closed. She said, "I never forgot you," and went into his arms as he offered them, a girl he used to like now a woman who'd shot and killed her husband and wanted to be held. He could tell, he could feel her hands holding on to him. She raised her face to say, "I can't believe you"

here.” He kissed her on the cheek. She kept staring at him with those eyes and he kissed her on the mouth. Now they kept looking at each other until Raylan took off his hat and sailed it over to the sofa. He saw her eyes close, her hands slipping around his neck, and this time it became a serious kiss, the mouths finding the right fit and holding till finally they had to breathe. Now he didn’t know what to say. He didn’t know why he kissed her other than he wanted to. He could remember wanting to even when she was a teen.

“I had a crush on you,” Ava said, “from the time I was twelve years old. I knew you liked me, but you didn’t want to show it.”

“You were too young.”

“I was sixteen when you left. I heard you got married. Are you still?”

Raylan shook his head. “Turned out to be a mistake.”

“You want to talk about mistakes ...I told Bowman I wanted a divorce? He goes, ‘You file, you’ll never be seen again.’ Said I’d disappear from the face of the earth.”

“I hear he used to beat you up.”

“That last time—I’ve still got a knot where I fell and hit my head on the stove. You want to feel it?” She was touching her scalp, fingers probing into her wild-looking hair, and her expression changed. She said, “Oh my God, don’t look at me,” pulling the T-shirt over her head, the hem of the housedress rising to show her legs hurrying away from him. “Close your eyes, I don’t want you to see me like this.” But then she stopped before going in the bedroom and looked back at him.

“Raylan, the minute you walked in I knew everything would be all right.”

The bedroom door closed and he wanted to go knock on it before she started assuming too much. Show her he was a federal marshal and tell her why he was here. But then had to ask himself, Why are you? Art had said she didn’t want protection. He’d offer it anyway. No, he was here to get a lead on Boyd. Kissing her had confused his purpose there for a minute.

Raylan walked over to the table where they said Bowman was sitting. He looked in the kitchen at a pile of dishes in the sink—Ava letting her housework go, letting herself go, not knowing what was to become of her. But she had all of a sudden pulled herself together, ashamed of the way she looked, and it sounded like she was expecting him to see her through this. And if she was, what was he supposed to do? For one thing they’d better quit kissing.

It wasn’t a minute later the front door banged open and a guy wearing alligator teeth walked in the house.

Gator teeth, spiked hair dyed blond and a tattoo on his chest, part of it showing the way his shirt hung open. He stood there looking Raylan over before saying, “Who in the hell are you, the undertaker?”

Raylan got his hat from the sofa and set it on his head the way he wore it. He said, “I might be undertaking a situation here. Lemme see what you have on your chest,” wanting this skinhead with hair to open his shirt.

He did, held it apart to show Raylan his HEIL HITLER tattoo, no weapon stuck in his belt. Raylan decided not to mess with Adolf Hitler, saying now, “You buy that necklace or poach the gator and yank her teeth out?”

It got the skin to squint at him but still wanting to tell, because he said, "I shot her and ate her tail."

Now Raylan squinted to show he was thinking. "That would put you in Florida, around Lake Okeechobee."

It got the skin to tell him, "Belle Glade."

"Is that right?" Raylan reached into his inside pocket for his ID case. "I sent a boy to Starke was from Belle Glade, fella name Dale Crowe Junior." He flipped open the case to show his star. "I'm Raylan Givens, deputy United States marshal." He flipped the case closed. "You mind telling me who you are?"

The skin was staring now like he did mind and had to decide whether or not to tell. Raylan said, "You know your name, don't you?"

"It's Dewey Crowe," the skin said, putting some defiance into the sound of it. "Dale Junior's my kin."

Raylan said, "Man, that's some family you belong to. I know of four Crowes either shot dead or sent to prison. Tell me what you're doing here."

Dewey said, "I come to take Ava someplace," and started toward the bedroom.

Raylan held up his hand and it stopped him.

"Lemme tell you something, Mr. Crowe. You don't walk in a person's house 'less you're invited. What you better do, go on outside and knock on the door. If Ava wants to see you I'll let you in. She doesn't, you can be on your way."

Raylan watched him, curious as to how this boy wearing alligator teeth would take it—big, ugly teeth but no apparent weapon on him.

What he said was, "All right." Keeping it simple to show he was cool. He said, "I'm gonna go out." Paused to set up the rest of it and said, "Then I'm coming back in." He turned and went out the door, leaving it open.

Raylan came over to stand in the doorway. He watched young Mr. Crowe hurrying toward his car standing in the road, an old rusting-out Cadillac, and watched him raise the trunk lid.

Raylan took off his suitcoat and hooked it on the door-knob. He wore a blue shirt with a mostly dark-blue striped tie. He reset his hat on his head. Now his hand went to the grip of the revolver on his right hip, the .45-caliber Smith & Wesson, but did not clear it from the worn leather holster.

He watched Dewey Crowe bring a pump shotgun out of the trunk and start back this way, all business now, his mind made up, his dumb pride taking him to a place it would be hard to back out of.

Though he hadn't racked the pump to put a shell in the breech.

Still hadn't as he slowed up seeing Raylan in his shirt-sleeves, Dewey Crowe taking careful steps now, holding the shotgun out in front of him.

Raylan said, "Mr. Crowe? Listen, you better hold on there while I tell you something."

It stopped him about fifty feet away, his shoulders hunched.

"I want you to understand," Raylan said, "I don't pull my sidearm 'less I'm gonna shoot to kill. That's its purpose, huh, to kill. So it's how I use it."

Speaking hard words in a quiet tone of voice.

"I want you to think about what I'm saying before you act and it's too late."

“Jesus Christ,” Dewey said. “I got a fuckin’ scatter gun pointed right at you.”

“But can you rack in a load,” Raylan said, “before I put a hole through you?”

Raylan stepped out to the yard. He said, “Come on,” pushing the barrel of the shotgun aside to take Dewey by the arm and walk him out to the car, a piece of junk but still a Cadillac.

“Where’d you want to take Ava?”

Dewey said, “Man, I don’t understand you.”

“Boyd want to see her?”

“It’s none of your business.”

“You know Boyd and I were buddies? We dug coal and drank beer together.” Raylan opened the car door. “You see him, tell him I’m in Harlan.”

Dewey didn’t say anything getting in the car. He had to turn the key a few times before it caught. Raylan reached through the open window and put his hand on his shoulder. “I was you, boy, I’d drop this Nazi bullshit and get back to poaching gators, it’s safer.”

Dewey looked up at him. As he said, “The next time I see you . . .” only got that far before Raylan took a handful of his spiked hair and brought his head down hard on the windowsill. Raylan hunched over now to look into the face tightened with pain.

“Listen to me. Tell Boyd his old buddy wants to see him, Raylan Givens.”

VI.

He went back in the house to find Ava in the kitchen pouring Jim Beam, Ava in a tank top and shorts, her hair wrapped in a towel that was like a white turban around her head. She said, “Who was that?” not sounding too interested. He told her and she said, “Oh, the one with Heil Hitler on his chest, he was one of Bowman’s buddies.”

“He came to take you someplace.”

“Most likely to see Boyd. You want something with yours? I’ve got Diet Co’Cola, RC Cola, Dr Pepper . . .”

“Just ice, if you have some.”

“I ever forget to fill the trays Bowman’d start slapping me. ‘What’s wrong with you? Don’t you know how to keep house?’ ”

The towel covering her hair made the rest of her seem more exposed, white and kind of puffy, more to her, like she had gained a good twenty pounds since taking off the housedress that hung on her. He saw now it was that wild hair that had made her face appear drawn. He noticed bruises on her pale skin, on her arms and legs, that made her appear soiled, and, oh man, her behind filled out those shorts—Raylan watching her carrying their drinks to the table where she had shot her husband.

“I cleaned it up good. Had to scrub the wall there with Lysol to get, you know, the stains off it. I think Lysol’s the best cleaning product you can buy.”

Raylan sat down at the table with her. “You haven’t seen Boyd, have you? I mean since?”

“No, but he’ll be after me, I know. He’s *been* after me.”

“That’s why we want to keep an eye on you,” Raylan said. “You know I’m with the Marshals Service.”

“I believe was your mother told me, before she passed.” Ava lit a cigarette from a pack lying on the table and blew a stream of smoke by him. “I made the mistake of telling Bowman about his brother coming around and he whipped me with his belt. Didn’t want to believe it.” She drew on the cigarette again. Smoke came out as she said, “Here’s a man was so jealous he’d stop by Betty’s to check on me.”

“Betty’s?”

“Hair Salon, where I work, or did. I trained under Betty washing hair, giving perms. I do hair now for special occasions, weddings, graduations I do a bunch of the girls. Yeah, Bowman’d stop by and look in. ...He’d get on me for the least thing. Like if he found a hair in his baked possum? Or I didn’t get out all the scent glands? He’d have a fit, throw his supper at me, the plate, the whole mess.”

Raylan listened, sipping his drink, wanting to get back to Boyd.

“I wish I could move, go someplace and open my own hair salon. Where do you live?”

“West Palm Beach.”

“Is it nice?”

“Palm trees and traffic, if you’re going anywhere.”

Ava drew on her cigarette and started to grin. She turned it off exhaling the smoke and said, “I think Bowman’s problem, besides being stupid, he wasn’t raised properly. He had the worst table manners. Like he’d be sitting here, he’d lean over to one side and get a look like he was concentrating on some deep thought? Furrow his brow and let a fart. It didn’t matter he was having his supper. But the worst oh my Lord, were the beer farts, the next morning when he was hungover? I’d have to leave the house.”

Raylan managed to smile, nodding his head.

“That’s the way he always was, either drunk or hungover, or gone. Off playing soldier with his brother.”

“You have any idea where he is?”

Ava looked at him funny. “I imagine he’s in Hell. Where else would he be?”

“I mean Boyd.”

“Boyd’s on his way there. You gonna arrest him?”

“We have to catch him in the act first. Robbing a bank, blowing up a church . . . making an attempt on your life . . .”

“*Mine?*”

“You said yourself he’ll be coming after you.”

“ ’Cause he likes me. Boyd don’t want to shoot me, Raylan, he wants to”—she shrugged in a cute way—“go to bed with me.” Ava stubbed out her cigarette, her eyes warm as she looked at him and put her hand on his. “You want me to help you catch him?”

Raylan sipped his drink. “How about if you get him to talk to me?”

“I could do that.”

Ava got up and Raylan’s gaze followed her into the kitchen. He said, “I hear he has a place up by

Sukey Ridge.” Then had to wait for Ava to come back to the table with the Jim Beam and a bowl of ice.

“It’s his church,” Ava said, freshening their drinks. “He’s only there when he gets his skinheads together. There’s a fun bunch. They sit around drinking beer and listening to black-hater bands, different ones like the Midtown Boot Boys, Dying Breed, all bopping their bald heads. They are so creepy.”

“Boyd doesn’t stay there?”

“Bowman said he has places around nobody knows about, not even all the skins.” Ava took a drink and said, “’Cept I know of one,” giving Raylan a sly look with those brown eyes he remembered. “Was Boyd, not Bowman, told me where he stays most of the time.”

Raylan took a drink. “You want to tell me where it is?” Ava said, “What do I get if I do?”

VII.

It was Devil Ellis saw the car headlights out the window, moving up the grade, and told Boyd somebody was coming. Boyd folded the map full of arrows and circles they were looking at and shoved it into the table drawer.

Devil, at the window now, peering out from under his black hat, said, “Who do you know drives a Town Car?”

Walking to the door Boyd said, “Why don’t we find out,” each being cool in front of the other.

Devil said, “Ain’t anyone I’ve seen before.”

Boyd opened the door and watched the man in the cocked Stetson approach out of the dark. Boyd, grinning now because he was glad to see him, said, “It’s my old buddy, Raylan Givens.”

Raylan had to smile seeing the way Boyd was waiting for him, holding out his arms now, Boyd saying, “God *damn*, look at you, a suit and necktie, all dressed up to look like a lawman.” He gave Raylan a hug, patting his back, Raylan letting him for old times’ sake. As they stepped apart Boyd looked over at Devil. “Here’s how you wear a hat, casual, not down on your goddamn ears.”

Raylan looked him over, recalling a Devil Ellis on Art Mullen’s skinhead list. This one was giving Raylan a dead-eyed look, showing he wasn’t impressed, as Boyd was saying, “I hear you called on Ava. Boy name Dewey Crowe said he ran you off.”

“You believe that?”

“Not if you say it ain’t so. Ava’s the one told you I was here?”

“I talked her into it. Told her I wouldn’t tell anybody.”

“How do you know she didn’t send you to me?” Boyd winked. “So I could decide what to do with you.”

“I’ll take care of him,” Devil said, wanting in on what was going on.

Raylan didn’t bother with him. He said to Boyd, “I doubt she even knows this is the house was foreclosed on. Pretty slick, move back in figuring nobody would look for you here.” Raylan saying it as he began to look around at the front room of this farmhouse that was spare of furnishing—a table and a few straight chairs on the linoleum floor—but looked like a gallery with all the white suprema

symbols framed on the wall. There were emblems representing the KKK, Aryan Nations, the Hammerskins, SS thunderbolts, RAHOWA with a death's head that stood for Racial Holy War, swastika on an Iron Cross, over an eagle, Nazi Party flag with swastika . . . Raylan said, "You all sure like swastikas," and looked over at Boyd. "What's the spiderweb?"

"You get it tattooed on your elbow if you done time or killed some minority, Jew or a jigaboo."

"Boyd, you know any Jews?"

"A few. I also know they run the economy, control the Federal Reserve and the IRS. I recruit skins don't know any more'n you, have to show 'em why we have a moral obligation to get rid of minorities. Read your Bible."

"It's in there?"

"Part of Creation. Back at the beginning of time you got your mud people, referred to as beasts 'cause they don't have souls. Okay, Adam jumped Eve and she begat Abel, the beginning of the white race as God intended. But then Satan in the form of a snake jumped Eve. She begat Cain and things got out of hand. Cain began fucking mud people, the women, and out of these fornications came the Edomites. And you know who the Edomites are?"

"Tell me."

"The Jews."

"You're serious."

"Read your Bible as interpreted by experts."

"Are you born again?"

"Again and again."

"I think you're putting me on," Raylan said, noticing silver chains now hanging from deer antlers, on the wall with photos taken of Boyd in Vietnam. Raylan walked over and Boyd followed him.

"They look like dog turds now, but they's ears I took off a dead gook I killed. After I got back I used to offer a pair to different women I was seeing."

"No takers, huh?"

"It was like a test. A woman that won't accept a pair and wear 'em proudly ain't the one I'm looking for. We invite these little Nazigirls up to the church? Chelsea girls they're called—shitkickers, hair under their armpits—any one of 'em would wear a pair of the ears, fight over 'em, but they're not my type. I like a woman ain't afraid of nothing but more feminine in her ways, more womanly."

"Like Ava," Raylan said.

"Listen, I called her up—" Boyd stopped and looked over at Devil. "Go on get us a jar and a couple glasses." He raised his voice, "Clean ones," as Devil went out to the kitchen. Boyd turned to Raylan. "He just got his release, so he's looking for action."

"I can tell," Raylan said.

"Was down three years on a marijuana conviction—you know it's grown all around here. Devil couldn't convince the court what he had was for personal use. Four hundred pounds in two refrigerators."

Raylan sensed a connection between Devil and the marijuana church in Cincinnati and said, "We were thinking to sell this house to a black man, see if it might bring you out in the open."

Boyd said, "Your nigger would never've known what hit him."

Devil came with a jar of shine no meaner-looking than water, a few specks of charcoal in it, his fingers in the three glasses he placed on the table.

Boyd shoved one of the glasses back to him. "This is me and Raylan's party. You aren't invited." Devil seemed to want to argue, give a reason to stay. Boyd told him go on, get outta here.

Now he poured their drinks, a few inches of pure corn into each glass. "I don't like him hearing things he's liable to take the wrong way."

Raylan said, "How you feel about Ava?" He took a sip. It was smooth, but caused saliva to rise in his mouth and made him swallow a couple of times.

"I called her up," Boyd said. "I told her the only reason I didn't take her out and shoot her, I saw she had no choice in what she done. I told her she showed spunk for a woman, not knowing what I'd do about it. I told her another reason was the Bible saying a man should see to the needs of his brother's widow, and that I intended to take care of her."

"Bless your heart," Raylan said.

"Don't get smart with me. I meant it."

"Boyd, you use the Bible to get what you want, same as you use all this white supremacy bullshit to rob banks and raise hell, blow up a church in Cincinnati for the fun of it. See, I'm giving you the benefit you aren't mental. I know you aren't stupid enough to believe that mud people story."

They stood facing each other across the table, the quart mason jar of moonshine between them, Boyd showing his size in a khaki shirt pulled taut across his chest. He appeared calm, his eyes showing interest.

He said, "Raylan, the whole world's gonna become mulatta we don't separate the races quick. I believe that much and it's enough."

Raylan only shrugged. "Then you'll die for it or go to prison."

Boyd looked at him now like he was trying to decide something in his mind.

"You'd shoot me, you get the chance?"

"You make me pull," Raylan said, "I'll put you down."

Devil had the map spread open on the table again, the one with the circles and arrows. He said to Boyd coming back in the house, "You kiss him goodbye?"

Boyd said, "You want your jaw broke?"

"I'm kidding with you," Devil said, waited for Boyd to sit down and hunched over next to him to point out on the map. "Here, we take 421 down across the Virginia line. East on 606 and we come to Nina, not an hour from here."

"How many people?"

"Less'n four hundred. Nearest deputies are at Big Stone Gap. Hit the town, the bank, the stores, bang bang bang, any place there's a cash register. Run up the flag... Which one?"

"Rebel battle flag."

"That'd be my choice. We show how a town can be taken over and secured with fifteen militia. How, the time comes, it can be done all over the Jewnited States."

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