GUIDE ME HOME

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First published in Great Britain in 2024 by Viper,
an imprint of Profile Books Ltd
29 Cloth Fair
London
EC1A 7JQ

www.profilebooks.com

First published in the United States in 2024 by Mulholland Books,
an imprint of Little, Brown and Company,
a division of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Hardback ISBN 978 1 78816 396 5
Trade paperback ISBN 978 1 78816 397 2
eISBN 978 1 78283 639 1

For every mother whose child knows only half the story

I know *I was done wrong*
I've got to keep on singing my song . . .

. . . Lord, I know *I done wrong*
I want you to guide me home.

— *Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton*

Nacogdoches County

THE TRACKS were long gone.

But if you knew where to look, how to set your foot just so, you could feel history beneath your feet. The ghost of an old railroad tie, the slim rise of land where the earth had grown over an abandoned tramline. Evidence of a logging camp that had thrived in these woods over a century ago. Rey toed the rubber nose of his Airwalk sneakers into the damp carpet of sweetgum and tupelo leaves at his feet, overlaid with fallen pine needles, slick and rust red beneath a braided canopy of tree branches. Lingering drops from a light morning shower fell from the leaves, landing, crystalline and cool, in the black curls at the base of Rey's skull, dampening the collar of the company-issued pullover he'd borrowed from his dad when he left home.

Home.

The word had started to bite since he'd made his decision.

He hadn't told his parents. Maybe he wouldn't. Maybe it was better to just leave. Be a memory by the time his mother flipped on the light switch tomorrow morning in the room he shared with his little brother. He hadn't told anyone but Sera that he was thinking of just taking off.

And he wasn't sure she'd believed him. She certainly hadn't bothered to reach out to say goodbye. They hadn't spoken in days, in fact.

It had been warm when he started his walk (*hike* always sounded so white; *¿Qué* hike*?* his stepfather had said the first time Rey had ventured from their new town, back when he'd thought it fate that the family had landed near a national forest), but he'd brought an extra layer today anyway. There were pockets of the woods that were so tucked away, so walled off by trees as to be crypt-like. Quiet. And oddly cold.

This state could be weird like that. Contrary.

Of all the places they'd lived, he found this one to be the most frustrating to his sense of order in the natural world. It was achingly beautiful — slate-blue sky in the fall, a gem-like sapphire in the spring and summer, set above land so fecund and verdant as to nearly embarrass itself with its showy beauty, every turn scented by pine and the sweet smokiness of red cedar — but the air itself, no matter the season, was often thick and muggy as a wet cotton ball, and you couldn't go ten feet without being met by a pushy mosquito or a gang of gnats or both. Roaches flew here. There were scorpions *and* swamp rats. Going outside required a level of fortitude just barely commensurate with any pastoral pleasure that awaited you. To see its grace, Texas was going to make you put in the work. As Rey got closer to the cave-like atmosphere surrounding the ruins of the old sawmill, he slipped on the pullover. He felt immediately cushioned and comforted by the peace he always felt this deep in pure woodlands. He took in mouthfuls of the air, so clean here it was almost sweet, trying to taste it on his tongue, to swallow and savor this place. If he kept to his plan, today would be his goodbye.

He'd discovered the remains of the ancient mill about a month after his family moved to Thornhill. Though other people had known about

it, as evidenced by the graffiti on the two surviving walls, the tops broken and crumbling at an angle. Some of the writing here went back far enough to reference bands from the '70s Rey had never heard of. The first day he discovered the old sawmill, he ran his fingers along the fading words on the crumbling walls. *Trisha Was Here. Lumberjacks, Class of '87.* And *Pink Floyd, The Wall (on a wall, man!).* Then he googled everything the second he was back home with decent Wi-Fi. Free, quality internet service was one of the amenities that came with living and working in Thornhill. Or was it *at* Thornhill? Or *for*? None of it felt right. Did they live where his parents worked? Or did his parents work where they all lived?

He got the Pink Floyd joke after googling it, though it was hardly worth the effort of the search. He did download a few of their songs. "Wish You Were Here" became a favorite of his. For the rest of his life, it would make him think of Sera. He'd looked up anything he could find about what he'd just seen. What were the remains of a stone and brick building doing in the middle of the Angelina National Forest? He soon learned that logging had been huge in this part of the state at the turn of the last century, had made some men very rich and left others dead from the dangerous work of cutting trees taller than most buildings at that time. Moving them from virgin earth to a mill that could turn wood into timber for construction. At one point, there had been hundreds of lumber mills (and their outgrowth, mill towns) in these dense woods. Loblolly and longleaf pine were East Texas gold, harvested for decades until there was nothing left, whole swaths of the state pillaged, left treeless and bald. By the 1910s, the entire industry had shrunk in on itself like a snail slinking back into its shell in shame. Dozens of companies folded, the remaining ones consolidating into a few industry giants.

The ruins of the Hill Mill, as Rey learned it had once been called, got left behind along the way, abandoned because of a new rail line closer to New Orleans or maybe because a bigger mill was built nearby. His research — all done on the company-issued cell phone that he shared with his kid brother — got fuzzy at a certain point. He'd thought it might make a good thesis project for an environmental science major. But that was before his family had been told that, unlike Sera, there would be no paid college for him. When Sera got into Stephen F. Austin the previous year, Rey had brought her to this place in the woods, talking her ear off the whole way from the trailhead to the secret turnoff deep in the thicket about logging routes and timber yields. Though she appreciated the haunting beauty in all that decay, she didn't see in the place a cautionary tale or a shrine to fallen industry as Rey did. A relic of the folly of men. For him, history was a missing tooth his tongue never lost a taste for, especially when it came to the natural world. He was curious about all of it. But because Sera loved the mill site too, saw something fantastical in its existence, it became a special place between them, their pied-à-terre in the woods. Hansel and Gretel's little getaway from the narrow confines of Thornhill.

They brought books there, sometimes music, trading off who got to set a playlist, exchanging stories of where they'd come from, how they found themselves in this little slice of East Texas: Sera by way of Houston and a once perma-existence at the medical center there; Rey by way of South Carolina, which was by way of Iowa and then Florida and Alabama. They brought lunch sometimes — charro beans with pork smoked over maple and mesquite, which Sera would scoop up with homemade white bread drizzled with honey; or a basket of her mother's cornmeal-crusted catfish, of which they could hardly resist pinching off piping hot morsels on their walk to the woods, bottles of homemade hot sauce sticking out of the back pockets of their jeans.

They would make seats of loose bricks and stare up at the pines, the tips of which seemed as impossible to reach as the sky, as Rey's dreams for his future. The more he talked about the "mill project," as he called his research, and the more he prodded Sera with ideas about areas of study, which classes she could take to advance a thesis topic, the more awkward things grew between them, both because Sera asked him to stop — she'd had enough of being told what to do in college, what to study and where to live, from her parents, her father especially — and because Rey became aware of an invisible but real crossroads that had sprung up between them. Sera would go one way, and Rey would, well . . . well, Rey decided he didn't want to talk about it with her anymore. Instead, he often took on the role of elder statesman of Thornhill — his family had lived there for years before hers had moved in; his had been one of the original families when the town was founded — hoping to make himself indispensable by affecting an expertise about the town's secrets and social mores. Like which laundry machines worked without tokens, the unspoiled food routinely tossed in the trash bins behind the commissary, and the Wednesday-night services at the Baptist church that should be avoided at all costs because prayer requests there too often became fodder for town gossip.

The truth was, besides his kid brother, Sera was his only friend. Which embarrassed him a little . . . or *a lot,* depending on his mood. On which side of leaving or staying his heart fell on that day. Though Thornhill brass would likely never admit it, the makeup of the town made clear they favored families with younger children. Rey and Sera were two of the only older young people there; most of the "founding" families his had come in with were now long gone. It bonded them by circumstance, the hovering and increasingly pressing question of what came after Thornhill for kids like them. They were both nineteen. She

got college. And he got . . . told there was no work for him. His family had recently received the paperwork they'd been dreading, the notice that since Rey was without proper documentation, his time as a Thornhill resident had to come to an end. He was actually supposed to have vacated the town weeks ago.

But he was scared to go out into the world all alone.

As he came upon the old sawmill now, taking in the fern grass and vines of wild honeysuckle that grew along the structure's remaining walls, blood orange blossoms poking through holes where weary bricks had flown the white flag of time, crumbling to the forest floor, he chewed on a soothing thought. *Maybe she's just busy with school*. Why else had she stopped texting and calling? He stepped over the chunk of fallen stone Sera had considered her forest throne, the seat, furry with moss, from which she'd introduced him to J. California Cooper, a story she read from *Some Love, Some Pain, Sometime.* He pictured her bright, round eyes and the dimple of her right cheek, the red tone beneath her brown skin, which reminded this earth-loving boy of rich clay soil that he wanted to run his fingers through. It was possible he didn't realize until this exact moment that he was half in love with her. He felt a sudden exhilaration at the release of what had been at the edge of his waking thoughts for months now, as if a bell had rung in a still room. The clarity was achingly clean and clear: He loved Sera. He felt giddy for half a second. Which was why when he saw — a few feet ahead of him — a snatch of blue the same color as the Thornhill pullover he was wearing, he thought he was seeing *her,* sitting on a low and loose branch, waiting for him. As if his affection had summoned her, as if she had somehow known to meet him here for a clandestine goodbye, had intuited his feelings and had maybe come to say the same. Maybe Sera loved him too. But a second glance revealed

he was just looking at a shirt. Thornhill blue, a brilliant azure, with yellow-gold writing. Near the log on which the shirt lay, there were beer bottles and a few cans. Lone Star and Shiner Bock, plus an empty bottle of green-apple schnapps. These were new. As was the shirt. Sera's, he knew at once.

She often turned the company-issued long-sleeved T-shirts into V-necks or modified the fit to follow some fashion idea she'd read online. This one's sleeves had been carefully excised, leaving not even a stray thread. He recognized the altered garment but not its lifelessness. He couldn't understand what it was doing here without its owner. Was she changing somewhere nearby? There was no watering hole in the part of the national forest that sat on this side of Highway 59. It was a trek of several miles to find a pond you could swim in. He called her name, and in the silence that followed, he felt the coolness in the air ice into a creeping sensation of dread. His breath felt sharp; the air stung as he inhaled. He walked even closer and saw how haphazardly the shirt had been left lying on the log.

Discarded came to mind.

Rey stared at it for a while, running time backward in his head, not just back through the thick woods of the national park or all the way back to Highway 59. He tried to go all the way to the last time they were out here together. It was Labor Day weekend. They'd previously discussed camping here for a few days, but she'd told him a party had come up and her plans had suddenly changed. Plans that had included Rey and then didn't.

A red-tailed hawk flew over the treetops, as near as a bird that size had ever gotten to the old mill site. It dusted pine tops, the crowns of oaks, then circled back, hovering long enough for Rey to wonder if it was actually a buzzard. *El zopilote.* He was so far from the culture of his

birth country that he didn't even know if this was a good or bad sign, and he was often too ashamed to ask these things of his dad—who was really his stepdad and born here. But still more Mexican than Rey might ever be.

The hawk or vulture spooked him.

He picked up the shirt, gripped it while playing a scene in his mind of returning it to her. He was pleased by the idea of having an excuse to see her again, until he was suddenly seized by a sour feeling in his gut. A terrible thought yanked him up short. Had Sera been out here without him? Had she brought someone else to their special place? *His* special place? Try as he might, he could not make his mind come up with an innocent explanation for finding Sera's shirt in the woods, not one that wouldn't break his heart.

Why were there beer bottles out here?

Cigarette butts in the grass, he now saw.

Was it evidence of a clandestine assignation? Had she taken off her shirt for someone else when she and Rey hadn't so much as held hands, when he hadn't yet worked up the nerve to ask if he could kiss her? He realized he was still holding the shirt, turning it over, wanting to convince himself that it wasn't really hers.

And that's when he saw the rusty streaks of blood on the back of it.

A wide swatch of it along the neckline.

Part of the shirt was lightly damp, but because of the way it had lain on the log, the blood remained stiff and dry. Matte and dulled to a russet brown. Still, Rey had touched it, had stained himself by proximity. He let out a yip of terror, an animal panic.

He stumbled away from the walls of the mill, nearly tripping over a drift of wood. He didn't know what the blood meant, but it told a story that scared him. Seriously, where *was* Sera? How long *had* it been since she'd returned a text? He froze momentarily beneath the weight of not

knowing what he should do. It felt wrong, dangerous even, to leave the shirt in the woods. He'd touched it, after all. He knew it would be bad to have any of this on his hands, a boy like him without a real home in a land he'd come to love. Unsure and afraid, he clutched the bloody shirt to his chest as gingerly as he might have held Sera if she'd let him, if he'd been brave enough to ask.

Part One

1.

Texas, 2019

Darren was just passing through New Caney when he realized he'd forgotten the honey yogurt she liked. He considered Kingwood the last outpost of city life before Highway 59 takes you deep into the piney woods of East Texas. He had just cruised into one of his favorite parts of this drive, where the pine trees crowded the highway into a corridor lined with dark green on both sides, so you could hardly believe there was a world beyond these trees. It called to mind one of the monikers for this part of the state: Darren was behind the Pine Curtain now. It felt late to double back, especially when he should have already been in Camilla. He didn't want to miss her arrival. He wanted to stock the fridge, run a vacuum over the rugs in the living room, and set up the guest room just so. There was laundry still to do, field peas to prep for dinner. He hadn't expected to spend last night in Houston. But the news from his attorneys yesterday had caught him off guard and sunk him deeper into the funk he'd been in for the past three years. He holed up in a hotel and drank past his limit, a line of such incredible elasticity as to deserve a place of study in the physics department at

Rice or UT. He had woken this morning, cotton-mouthed but clear of mind, ready to tell his lieutenant what he could not put off for another day, knowing it was well past time.

That detour was now making him late getting back home.

He was planning to do up the whippoorwill peas with sautéed onions and garlic and stew them with tomatoes, also from his garden, from heirloom seeds that had belonged to his grandmother and her grandmother before her. There would be chicken or maybe grilled salmon, he hadn't decided. Because it didn't matter. She didn't eat much meat, and the real show was always what he could coax out of East Texas dirt, what the land of his birth would provide. There would be collards, or chard if he didn't have enough time, and a dill and mint cucumber salad, followed by baked peaches coated in butter and ground nutmeg and enough brown sugar to blacken a tooth. It was her first trip to the farmhouse in Camilla in a month, and he was determined to roll out the red-dirt carpet for her, was hoping, in fact, to entice her to stay longer this time. Their goodbyes stung, the more years they were together without putting a name on it. He wanted something real with her now, had his heart set on something permanent.

He'd have to stop for the yogurt somewhere on the way.

There was a Walmart in Cleveland, but it was as likely to have the imported foods she favored as the Brookshire Brothers in Coldspring, and if he had to choose between walking into the red-hat circus of a Walmart or the relative calm of a tiny grocery store in a town smaller than half the high schools in Houston, he would take the latter any day. San Jacinto County had a similarly hued belief system, but Darren found that the smaller the town, the fewer the folks to peacock to, the lesser the need for showing out. It made for, at a minimum, a less anxiety-producing trip to the grocery store. And managing his sense of doom was nearly a full-time job for Darren these days.

It was the reason he'd given Wilson when he turned in his badge this morning.

His lieutenant had looked terrible, sallow under fluorescent lights. He was sitting at his desk beneath a framed map of Texas in 1835, the year the Rangers were founded as a law enforcement agency in the state. He was eating a turkey and jalapeño sandwich, his ulcer be damned. "Is this about the Malvo deal?" Wilson asked when Darren made plain his desire to quit. "'Cause they don't have enough to indict you."

"And yet they keep trying."

Frank Vaughn, the district attorney of San Jacinto County, had tried to charge Darren in 2017 and again in 2018 with obstruction of justice and failed to get an indictment for a wholly circumstantial case — one that would require reopening the Ronnie "Redrum" Malvo homicide investigation. But yesterday his lawyers were frank about a harsh new reality: They were up against more than facts now. Vaughn was on the ballot for a congressional seat in 2020 and had hitched his campaign rhetoric to the winds of MAGA terror over antifa and the BLM movement, somehow tying Darren to both, openly painting him as a radical who had infiltrated Texas law enforcement and taken the law into his own hands by interfering in a homicide investigation, tipping the scales in the direction he wanted them to go. Vaughn had been dropping hints about bringing the case back to a grand jury in his campaign speeches, promising to take down an alt-left interloper inside the Texas Rangers. It was all theater, of course. But it was hard these days to know where make-believe ended and the truth held firm. Facts no longer seemed to matter all that much. It had been a maddening, dizzying three years since the election, a kaleidoscope of confusion and chaos — from the first strident insistence that we had not seen what we all most certainly *had* seen at the inauguration to Sharpiegate just a couple of weeks ago, a grown man drawing on his

homework to prove he'd actually gotten the answers right. It would be laughable, would seem we were all watching a well-crafted farce, if Darren didn't feel in his bones that we were all going to die before the curtains closed; he couldn't shake this feeling that something truly awful was coming our way. He was deeply rattled, drinking more than ever, and therefore not entirely lying when he'd told Wilson he wasn't well. Jim Beam had been his best companion of the past few years, something to hold on to as he floated through the aimless void his life became when the multiagency Aryan Brotherhood of Texas task force was disbanded without a single indictment in 2017 — the second the new administration was in charge. He held to drink like a blind man to his cane, a way, in this strange new land, to tap a path through each day, sip by sip. He told none of this to Lieutenant Wilson. Instead, he said something vague about his doctor saying he needed a break — throwing out words about his heart, using poetry to mislead his boss into thinking there was something medically fragile about Darren's cardiovascular system when really he was just profoundly, unimaginably sad in this new world. The fever dream that had been the years since Donald Trump was elected.

Years that had laid bare the fragility of democracy.

Turned out the Founding Fathers were just men who liked to talk big all night after tying on a few, scribbling down laws and ideals that contradicted themselves every third paragraph, dreaming up an institution of freedom on a foundation built by slaves. It was all a house of cards. Smoke and mirrors. Just marks on parchment. With holes you could drive a truck through. And a talented huckster got behind the wheel of one and drove it all the way to the White House. It was reported that he had told over ten thousand lies since taking the oath of office, had broken umpteen laws. Darren would have said *allegedly,*

but the president had either committed or admitted to many of these on live television. And no one seemed to care. Not really. People went to work, fed their kids, tucked them in at night, stayed up with the bills, then got up and did it all over again the next day. Because to slow down and really consider what was happening, to fully take in the ways reality itself no longer felt *real,* that it seemed everyone was lying, even if just to themselves about what a precarious situation we were all in, was to wake each night with a bone-rattling terror. The ground had gone out beneath us. We were floating through a mad world without guardrails. Darren was baffled and quietly terrified. And now he was again facing an indictment. According to his lawyers, shit was different this time. The run-up to the 2020 election was frying everyone's brain, making rabid animals out of neighbors and fellow citizens, the people you ran into at the post office. Everyone was mad and confused and sure somebody somehow was cheating them. In this environment, folks looking to park their anger and indignation somewhere might actually indict a black Texas Ranger, might even enjoy it.

The lawyers were clear: This time, Darren could go to prison.

Or be killed.

They said Darren's name and likeness were circulating on right-wing threads on Reddit, Discord, and Facebook pages. All it took was one idiot with a gun to recognize Darren and think he should settle it judge-jury-and-executioner-style, within his rights to take the law in his own hands. The very thing DA Vaughn was accusing Darren of doing.

Seated before Wilson's desk this morning, Darren had to press his fist to his right knee to stop it shaking, and when that failed, he covered his knee with his Stetson.

"They don't know where that gun came from," Wilson said.

"Neither do I," Darren lied.

He pictured the day years ago when he'd walked into Wilson's office to see DA Frank Vaughn sitting before a snub-nosed .38 in a plastic evidence bag on top of Wilson's desk, remembered knowing instantly that his mother, who'd been holding on to the gun as a tool of blackmail, was responsible for getting it into the hands of the district attorney. And he remembered the private tears he'd shed over her betrayal.

"Ballistics tell us that *was* the gun that killed Ronnie Malvo, but it was wiped clean of prints when it was mysteriously delivered to Vaughn. There's no clear chain of custody, no way to prove that gun was in your friend Mack's possession or that you did anything to hide it or try to protect him." Wilson wiped grease from the corners of his mouth with a napkin Darren was fairly certain was on its second or third round of use.

"I'm aware, sir."

The whole thing was a mess, an irony as bitter as chicory root.

When Darren believed that Rutherford "Mack" McMillan had killed Ronnie Malvo, an active member of the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas, and hid the murder weapon on the grounds of Darren's house in Camilla, where Mack had done odd jobs for the Mathews family for decades, Darren *had* looked the other way, tacitly hiding evidence. He didn't want an elderly black man going to death row for ridding Texas of a known racist and a murderer, a man missed by exactly no one, maybe not even his own mama. But it turned out Mack hadn't killed Ronnie Malvo; Mack's nineteen-year-old granddaughter, Breanna, had — over a base entanglement between her and Malvo that involved both drugs and sex. A fact that Darren now realized was a precursor to his current feeling that the world as he knew it made no sense anymore, a first clue that America was a snake eating its own tail. Breanna was sleeping with a white supremacist; a white supremacist

was sleeping with a black girl. But by the time he discovered this, the murder weapon had gotten into the wrong hands: his mother's.

Darren eventually coerced a murder confession out of Bill "Big Kill" King, another member of the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas, to close the Ronnie Malvo case—keeping suspicion away from Mack. And Darren himself. He had lied and manipulated evidence, had done a wrong thing for a right reason, sure. But, bottom line, he had lied.

He wasn't entirely sure he didn't deserve to be indicted.

Wasn't sure either that he didn't deserve a medal.

He could keep going like this, vigilante cop settling scores in his own way, meting out his own home-brewed justice, but there would always be a faint whiff of rot coming from inside him, seeping out of his pores. *Because you will never beat them at their own game,* his uncle Clayton was fond of saying. The man in the White House was also making up his own rules and look where that had gotten all of us. The debate over purity in battle versus rolling in mud had worn Darren down, had burned out the light in his heart. What he thought: He wasn't sure if he was a good or bad cop, or even what that meant for a black Ranger, but he still believed he had a shot at being a decent man.

What he'd told the lieutenant: *I'm tired.*

Darren watched as Wilson grunted from the effort of sitting up from a reclining position in his office chair to grab the badge that rested between them on his desk. In one fluid motion, he slid the five-point star across the desktop, dropping it into the drawer, Darren hearing the metal lightly clink against something inside. Wilson looked not just disappointed; he looked like a man who was being abandoned, a wounded soldier left on the field. "Your uncle William would have thought this was the exact time the country couldn't afford to lose a man like you," Wilson said. He had served with Darren's uncle, the first black Ranger sworn into the department, in the 1980s.

"All due respect, sir," Darren said, "my uncle couldn't imagine the times we're living in."

"No worse than what he and your family saw during the sixties, I bet."

Wilson must have caught the fleeting look of annoyance on Darren's face: *And you would know this how?* He closed the desk drawer that now held Darren's badge. "This too shall pass, Mathews," Wilson said, although he looked exhausted by the prospect of waiting out whatever *this* was that they were living through. He rubbed at the bags, both puffy and dark, under his eyes. "This country's been through worse."

"I'm not sure it matters, sir. We are where we are."

"Could use you out there, all I'm saying. Now more than ever," Wilson said.

Darren swallowed his guilt, then rooted around for his anger at being put in this position, at Wilson for invoking his uncle William's name and legacy. Sure, it was a sentiment among black cops these days that "Black Lives Matter" meant a gun and the law had their purpose — safeguarding black folks in every corner of American life. But Darren felt resentful of the idea that black cops somehow bore the sole responsibility for this. Surely it was someone else's turn to do the work of righting the country's racial wrongs, case by trauma-inducing case. He'd devoted his entire career to ridding the state of Texas and the country of racists like the Brotherhood, had compromised his honor to do so, and now they were in every branch of government, sitting pretty.

Wilson gently cleared his throat as Darren rose to leave. "You don't think this makes you look guilty, son, tucking tail and running?"

He *was* guilty. Of a lot of things.

He didn't see it as running so much as saving his soul.

"No," he said.

Wilson glanced back at the desk drawer that held Darren's badge. He fingered the handle, flicking the drawer open an inch, then looking up with something like hope. "Give it some time, Mathews. Huh? Just asking you to think about it, son."

Darren slid his Stetson on his head. "I did," he said. "And I'm done."

2.

THE MATHEWS farmhouse sat at the end of a clay dirt road.

Years before Darren was born, his grandfather had lined the private drive with crape myrtles of a coral color that made Darren think of peaches some days, unripe plums on others. They were planted as a gift to Darren's grandmother. The Mathews family had been on this land for over a hundred years. Darren's identical-twin uncles—William, the Texas Ranger, and Clayton, a former defense attorney turned law professor—had been born in this house. Darren's father had also come into the world through these doors. Darren "Duke" Mathews, the first, was something of a closed book to his only son. When Darren was a boy, the uncles who had raised him were his whole world, the moon and sun, each a source of light, if one was cool and the other fiery. By the time he thought enough to ask after an essential missing element in his life—what was his father like; what sort of man had he come from—William had been killed in the line of duty, and Clayton was even *less* inclined to talk about his baby brother, Duke. Grief bit his tongue. To raise the issue with even the simplest questions—what kind of beer did he drink; was he funny—was to see a pall come over