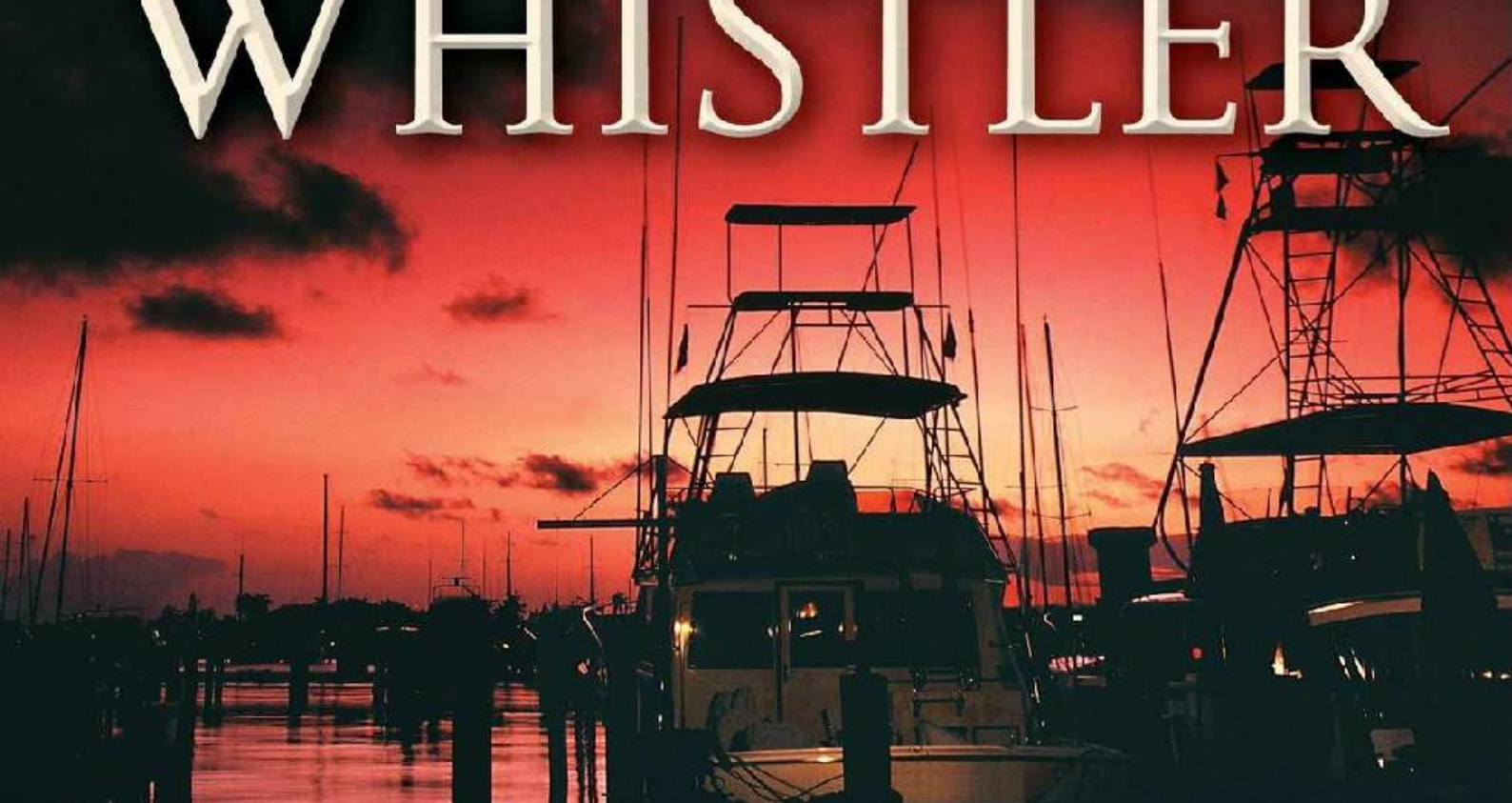


JOHN
GRISHAM

— | A NOVEL | —

THE
WHISTLER



ALSO BY JOHN GRISHAM

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JOHN
GRISHAM



THE
WHISTLER



DOUBLEDAY

New York London Toronto Sydney Auckland

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The satellite radio was playing soft jazz, a compromise. Lacy, the owner of the Prius and thus the radio, loathed rap almost as much as Hugo, her passenger, loathed contemporary country. They had failed to agree on sports talk, public radio, golden oldies, adult comedy, and the BBC, without getting near bluegrass, CNN, opera, or a hundred other stations. Out of frustration on her part and fatigue on his, they both threw in the towel early and settled on soft jazz. Soft, so Hugo's deep and lengthy nap would not be disturbed. Soft, because Lacy didn't care much for jazz either. It was another give-and-take of sorts, one of many that had sustained their teamwork over the years. He slept and she drove and both were content.

Before the Great Recession, the Board on Judicial Conduct had access to a small pool of state-owned Hondas, all with four doors and white paint and low mileage. With budget cuts, though, those disappeared. Lacy, Hugo, and countless other public employees in Florida were now expected to use their own vehicles for the state's work, reimbursed at fifty cents a mile. Hugo, with four kids and a hefty mortgage, drove an ancient Bronco that could barely make it to the office, let alone a road trip. And so he slept.

Lacy enjoyed the quiet. She handled most of her cases alone, as did her colleagues. Deeper cuts had decimated the office, and the BJC was down to its last six investigators. Seven, in a state of twenty million people, with a thousand judges sitting in six hundred courtrooms and processing a half a million cases a year. Lacy was forever grateful that almost all judges were honest, hardworking people committed to justice and equality. Otherwise, she would have left long ago. The small number of bad apples kept her busy fifty hours a week.

She gently touched the signal switch and slowed on the exit ramp. When the car rolled to a stop, Hugo lurched forward as if wide awake and ready for the day. "Where are we?" he asked.

"Almost there. Twenty minutes. Time for you to roll to your right and snore at the window."

"Sorry. Was I snoring?"

“You always snore, at least according to your wife.”

“Well, in my defense, I was walking the floor at three this morning with her latest child. I think it’s a girl. What’s her name?”

“Wife or daughter?”

“Ha-ha.”

The lovely and ever-pregnant Verna kept few secrets when it came to her husband. It was her calling to keep his ego in check and it was no small task. In another life, Hugo had been a football star in high school, then the top-rated signee in his class at Florida State, and the first freshman to crack the starting lineup. He’d been a tailback, both bruising and dazzling, for three and a half games anyway, until they carried him off on a stretcher with a jammed vertebra in his upper spine. He vowed to make a comeback. His mother said no. He graduated with honors and went to law school. His glory days were fading fast, but he would always carry some of the swagger possessed by all-Americans. He couldn’t help it.

“Twenty minutes, huh?” he grunted.

“Sure, or not. If you like, I’ll just leave you in the car with the motor running and you can sleep all day.”

He rolled to his right, closed his eyes, and said, “I want a new partner.”

“That’s an idea, but the problem is nobody else will have you.”

“And one with a bigger car.”

“It gets fifty miles a gallon.”

He grunted again, grew still, then twitched, jerked, mumbled, and sat straight up. He rubbed his eyes and said, “What are we listening to?”

“We had this conversation a long time ago, when we left Tallahassee, just as you were beginning to hibernate.”

“I offered to drive, as I recall.”

“Yes, with one eye open. It meant so much. How’s Pippin?”

“She cries a lot. Usually, and I say this from vast experience, when a newborn cries it’s for a reason. Food, water, diaper, momma—whatever. Not this one. She squawks for the hell of it. You don’t know what you’re missing.”

“If you’ll recall, I’ve actually walked the floors with Pippin on two occasions.”

“Yes, and God bless you. Can you come over tonight?”

“Anytime. She’s number four. You guys thought about birth control?”

“We are beginning to have that conversation. And now that we’re on the subject, how’s *your* sex life?”

“Sorry. My mistake.” At thirty-six Lacy was single and attractive, and her sex life was a rich source of whispered curiosity around the office.

They were going east toward the Atlantic Ocean. St. Augustine was eight miles ahead. Lacy finally turned off the radio when Hugo asked, “And you’ve been here before?”

“Yes, a few years back. Then boyfriend and I spent a week on the beach in a friend’s condo.”

“A lot of sex?”

“Here we go again. Is your mind always in the gutter?”

“Well, come to think of it, the answer has to be yes. Plus, you need to understand that Pippin is now a month old, which means that Verna and I have not had normal relations in at least three months. I still maintain, at least to myself, that she cut me off three weeks too early, but it’s sort of a moot point. Can’t really go back and catch up, you know? So things are fairly ramped up in my corner; not sure she feels the same way. Three rug rats and a newborn do serious damage to that intimacy thing.”

“I’ll never know.”

He tried to focus on the highway for a mile or two, then his eyelids grew heavy and he began to nod. She glanced at him and smiled. In her nine years with the Board, she and Hugo had worked a dozen cases together. They made a nice team and trusted each other, and both knew that any bad behavior by him, and there had been none to date, would immediately be reported to Verna. Lacy worked with Hugo, but she gossiped and shopped with Verna.

St. Augustine was billed as the oldest city in America, the very spot where Ponce de León landed and began exploring. Long on history and heavy on tourism, it was a lovely town with historic buildings and thick Spanish moss dripping from ancient oaks. As they entered its outskirts, the traffic slowed and tour buses stopped. To the right and in the distance, an old cathedral towered above the town. Lacy remembered it all very well. The week with the old boyfriend had been a disaster, but she had fond memories of St. Augustine.

One of many disasters.

“And who is this mysterious deep throat we are supposed to meet?” Hugo asked, rubbing his eyes once again, now determined to stay awake.

“Don’t know yet, but his code name is Randy.”

“Okay, and please remind me why we are tag teaming a secret meeting with a man using an alias who has yet to file a formal complaint against one of our esteemed judges.”

“I can’t explain. But I’ve talked to him three times on the phone and he sounds, uh, rather earnest.”

“Great. When was the last time you talked to a complaining party who didn’t sound, uh, rather earnest?”

“Stick with me, okay? Michael said go, and we’re here.” Michael was the director, their boss.

“Of course. No clue as to the alleged unethical conduct?”

“Oh yes. Randy said it was big.”

“Gee, never heard that before.”

They turned onto King Street and poked along with the downtown traffic. It was mid-July, still the high season in north Florida, and tourists in shorts and sandals drifted along the sidewalks, apparently going nowhere. Lacy parked on a side street and they joined the tourists. They found a coffee shop and killed half an hour flipping through glossy real estate brochures. At noon, as instructed, they walked into Luca’s Grill and got a table for three. They ordered iced tea and waited. Thirty minutes passed with no sign of Randy, so they ordered sandwiches. Fries on the side for Hugo, fruit for Lacy. Eating as slowly as possible, they kept an eye on the door and waited.

As lawyers, they valued their time. As investigators, they had learned patience. The two roles were often in conflict.

At 2:00 p.m., they gave up and returned to the car, as smothering as a sauna. As Lacy turned the key, her cell phone rattled. Caller unknown. She grabbed it and said, “Yes.”

A male voice said, “I asked you to come alone.” It was Randy.

“I suppose you have the right to ask. We were supposed to meet at noon, for lunch.”

A pause, then, “I’m at the Municipal Marina, at the end of King Street, three blocks away. Tell your buddy to get lost and we’ll talk.”

“Look, Randy, I’m not a cop and I don’t do cloak-and-dagger very well. I’ll meet you, say hello and all that, but if I don’t have your real name within sixty seconds then I’m leaving.”

“Fair enough.”

She canceled the call and mumbled, “Fair enough.”

The marina was busy with pleasure craft and a few fishing boats coming and going. A long pontoon was unloading a gaggle of noisy tourists. A restaurant with a patio at the water's edge was still doing a brisk business. Crews on charter boats were spraying decks and sprucing things up for tomorrow's charters.

Lacy walked along the central pier, looking for the face of a man she'd never met. Ahead, standing next to a fuel pump, an aging beach bum gave a slight, awkward wave and nodded. She returned the nod and kept walking. He was about sixty, with too much gray hair flowing from under a Panama hat. Shorts, sandals, a gaudy floral-print shirt, the typical bronze, leathery skin of someone who spent far too much time in the sun. His eyes were covered by aviator shades. With a smile he stepped forward and said, "You must be Lacy Stoltz."

She took his hand and said, "Yes, and you are?"

"Name's Ramsey Mix. A pleasure to meet you."

"A pleasure. We were supposed to meet at noon."

"My apologies. Had a bit of boat trouble." He nodded down the pier to a large powerboat moored at the end of the dock. It wasn't the longest boat in the harbor at that moment, but it was close. "Can we talk there?" he asked.

"On the boat?"

"Sure. It's much more private."

Crawling onto a boat with a complete stranger struck her as a bad idea and she hesitated. Before she could answer, Mix asked, "Who's the black guy?" He was looking in the direction of King Street. Lacy turned and saw Hugo casually following a pack of tourists nearing the marina.

"He's my colleague," she said.

"Sort of a bodyguard?"

"I don't need a bodyguard, Mr. Mix. We're not armed, but my friend there could pitch you into the water in about two seconds."

"Let's hope that won't be necessary. I come in peace."

"That's good to hear. I'll get on the boat only if it stays where it is. If the engines start, then our meeting is over."

"Fair enough."

She followed him along the pier, past a row of sailboats that looked as though they had not seen the open sea in months, and to his boat, cleverly

named *Conspirator*. He stepped on board and offered a hand to help her. On the deck, under a canvas awning, there was a small wooden table with four folding chairs. He waved at it and said, "Welcome aboard. Have a seat."

Lacy took quick stock of her surroundings. Without sitting, she said, "Are we alone?"

"Well, not entirely. I have a friend who enjoys boating with me. Name is Carlita. Would you like to meet her?"

"Only if she's important to your story."

"She is not." Mix was looking at the marina, where Hugo was leaning on a rail. Hugo waved, as if to say, "I'm watching everything." Mix waved back and said, "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure," Lacy said.

"Is it safe to assume that whatever I'm about to tell you will be rehashed with Mr. Hatch in short order?"

"He's my colleague. We work together on some cases, maybe this one. How do you know his name?"

"I happen to own a computer. Checked out the website. BJC really should update it."

"I know. Budget cuts."

"His name vaguely rings a bell."

"He had a brief career as a football player at Florida State."

"Maybe that's it. I'm a Gator fan myself."

Lacy refused to respond to this. It was so typical of the South, where folks attached themselves to college football teams with a fanaticism she'd always found irksome.

Mix said, "So he'll know everything?"

"Yes."

"Call him over. I'll get us something to drink."

Carlita served drinks from a wooden tray—diet sodas for Lacy and Hugo, a bottle of beer for Mix. She was a pretty Hispanic lady, at least twenty years his junior, and she seemed pleased to have guests, especially another woman.

Lacy made a note on her legal pad and said, “A quick question. The phone you used fifteen minutes ago had a different number than the phone you used last week.”

“Is that a question?” Mix replied.

“It’s close enough.”

“Okay. I use a lot of prepaid phones. And I move around all the time. I’m assuming the number I have for you is a cell phone issued by your employer, correct?”

“That’s right. We don’t use personal phones for state business, so my number is not likely to change.”

“That’ll make it simpler, I guess. My phones change by the month, sometimes by the week.”

So far, in their first five minutes together, everything Mix said had only opened the door for more questions. Lacy was still miffed at being stood up for lunch, and she didn’t like the first impression he made. She said, “Okay, Mr. Mix, at this point Hugo and I go silent. You start talking. Tell us your story, and if it has huge gaps that require us to fish around and stumble in the dark, then we’ll get bored and go home. You were coy enough on the phone to lure me here. Start talking.”

Mix looked at Hugo with a smile and asked, “She always this blunt?”

Hugo, unsmiling, nodded yes. He folded his hands on the table and waited. Lacy put down her pen.

Mix swallowed a mouthful of beer and began: “I practiced law for thirty years in Pensacola. Small firm—we usually had five or six lawyers. Back in the day we did well and life was good. One of my early clients was a developer, a real high roller who built condos, subdivisions, hotels, strip malls, the typical Florida stuff that goes up overnight. I never trusted the guy but he was making so much money I finally took the bait. He got

me in some deals, small slices here and there, and for a while it all worked. I started dreaming of getting rich, which, in Florida anyway, can lead to serious trouble. My friend was cooking the books and taking on way too much debt, stuff I didn't know about. Turns out there were some bogus loans, bogus everything, really, and the FBI came in with one of its patented RICO cluster bombs and indicted half of Pensacola, me included. A lot of folks got burned—developers, bankers, realtors, lawyers, and other shysters. You probably didn't hear about it because you investigate judges, not lawyers. Anyway, I flipped, sang like a choirboy, got a deal, pled to one count of mail fraud, and spent sixteen months in a federal camp. Lost my license and made a lot of enemies. Now I lie low. I applied for reinstatement and got my license back. I have one client these days, and he's the guy we'll talk about from now on. Questions?" From the empty chair, he retrieved an unmarked file and handed it to Lacy. "Here's the scoop on me. Newspaper articles, my plea agreement, all the stuff you might need. I'm legit, or as legit an any ex-con can be, and every word I'm saying is true."

"What's your address now?" Hugo asked.

"I have a brother up in Myrtle Beach and I use his address for legal purposes. Carlita has a place in Tampa and I get some mail there. Basically, though, I live on this boat. I have phones, fax, Wi-Fi, a small shower, cold beer, and a nice lady. I'm a happy guy. We bounce around Florida, the Keys, the Bahamas. Not a bad retirement, thanks to Uncle Sam."

"Why do you have a client?" Lacy asked, ignoring the file.

"He's the friend of an old friend who knows my shady past and figures I'll roll the dice for a fat fee. He's right. My friend looked me up, then convinced me to take his case. Don't ask for the client's name, because I don't have it. My friend is the intermediary."

"You don't know the name of your client?" Lacy asked.

"No, nor do I want to."

"Are we supposed to ask why or just accept this?" Hugo asked.

"Gap number one, Mr. Mix," Lacy said. "And we don't do gaps. You tell us everything or we'll leave and take nothing with us."

"Just relax, okay?" Mix said as he chugged some beer. "This is a long story that will take some time to unfold. It involves a ton of money, corruption that is astonishing, and some really nasty guys who wouldn't think twice about putting a bullet or two between my eyes, yours, my client's, anyone who asks too many questions."

There was a long pause as Lacy and Hugo allowed this to sink in. Finally, she asked, "Then why are you in the game?"

"Money. My client wants to pursue a claim under the Florida Whistleblower Statute. He dreams of collecting millions. Me, I'll take a nice cut, and if all goes well, I'll never need clients."

"Then he must be a state employee," Lacy said.

"I know the law, Ms. Stoltz. You have a demanding job, I don't. I have plenty of time to pore over the code sections and case law. Yes, my client is employed by the State of Florida. No, his identity cannot be revealed; not now, anyway. Perhaps, way down the road, if money is on the table, then maybe we can convince a judge to maintain a closed file. But, to kick things off, my client is far too frightened to sign a formal complaint with Judicial Conduct."

"We cannot proceed without a signed, formal complaint," Lacy said. "The statute, as you know, is very clear."

"Indeed I do. I'll sign the complaint."

"Under oath?" Hugo asked.

"Yes, as required. I believe my client is telling the truth and I'm willing to sign my name."

"And you're not afraid?"

"I've lived with fear for a long time. I guess I'm accustomed to it, though things could get worse." Mix reached for another file and withdrew some papers, which he placed on the table. He continued, "Six months ago, I went to court up in Myrtle Beach and changed my name. I'm now Greg Myers, the name I'll use on the complaint."

Lacy read the court order from South Carolina and, for the first time, doubted the wisdom of traveling to St. Augustine to meet this guy. A state employee too frightened to come forward. A reformed lawyer so spooked that he went to court in another state and changed his name. An ex-con with no real address.

Hugo read the court order and, for the first time in years, wished he could carry a gun. He asked, "Do you consider yourself to be in hiding at this moment?"

"Let's say I'm just real cautious, Mr. Hatch. I'm an experienced boat captain who knows the water, the seas, the currents and cays and keys and remote beaches and hideaways far better than anyone looking for me, if, in fact, anyone is back there."

Lacy said, "Well, it certainly sounds like you're hiding."

Myers just nodded as though he agreed. All three took a sip. A breeze finally arrived and broke some of the humidity. Lacy flipped through the thin file and said, "A question. Were your legal troubles in any way connected to the judicial misconduct you want to discuss?"

The nodding stopped as he weighed the question. "No."

Hugo said, "Back to this mysterious client. Do you have any direct contact with him?"

"None whatsoever. He refuses to use e-mail, snail mail, fax, or any type of traceable phone. He talks to the intermediary, the intermediary either visits me face-to-face or calls me on a burner, one of those disposable phones. It's awkward and time-consuming, but quite safe. No trail, no records, nothing left behind."

"And if you needed him right now, how would you find him?"

"That's never happened. I suppose I would call the middleman and wait an hour or so."

"Where does this client live?"

"I'm not sure. Somewhere along the Florida Panhandle."

Lacy took a deep breath and exchanged glances with Hugo. She said, "Okay, what's the story?"

Myers gazed into the distance, across the water, beyond the boats. A drawbridge was opening and he seemed mesmerized by it. Finally, he said, "There are many chapters to the story, some still being written. The purpose of this little meeting is to tell you enough to make you curious, but also to frighten you enough to back off if you want. That's the real question right now: Do you want to get involved?"

"Is there judicial misconduct?" Lacy asked.

"The word 'misconduct' would be a massive understatement. What I know involves corruption at a level never before known in this country. You see, Ms. Stoltz and Mr. Hatch, my sixteen months in prison were not completely wasted. They put me in charge of the law library and I kept my nose in the books. I've studied every single case of judicial corruption that's ever been prosecuted, in all fifty states. I have the research, the files, notes, everything. I'm quite the resource, just in case you ever need a know-it-all. And the story I can tell you involves more dirty cash than all the others combined. It also involves bribery, extortion, intimidation, rigged trials, at least two murders, and one wrongful conviction. There's a man rotting away on death row an hour from here who was framed. The man responsible for the crime is probably sitting on his boat right now, a boat much nicer than mine."

He paused, took a drink from his bottle, and gave them a smug look, satisfied that he had their complete attention. “The question is, do you want to get involved? It could be dangerous.”

“Why call us?” Hugo asked. “Why not go to the FBI?”

“I’ve dealt with the FBI, Mr. Hatch, and things went badly. I don’t trust them or anyone with a badge, especially in this state.”

Lacy said, “Again, Mr. Myers, we are not armed. We’re not criminal investigators. It sounds like you need several branches of the federal government.”

“But you have subpoena power,” Myers said. “You have statutes that give you the right to obtain subpoenas. You can require any judge in this state to produce every record maintained in his or her office. You have considerable power, Ms. Stoltz. So in many ways you do investigate criminal activity.”

Hugo said, “True, but we’re not equipped to deal with gangsters. If your story is true, it sounds like the bad guys are well organized.”

“Ever hear of the Catfish Mafia?” Myers asked after another long pull on the bottle.

“No,” Hugo replied. Lacy shook her head.

“Well, it’s another long story. Yes, Mr. Hatch, it’s a gang that’s well organized. They have a long history of committing crimes that are none of your concern because they do not involve members of the judiciary. But, there is one enterprise in which they’ve purchased a judge. And that does concern you.”

The *Conspirator* rocked in the wake of an old shrimp boat and for a moment all three were quiet. Lacy asked, “What if we decline to get involved? What happens to your story?”

“If I file a formal complaint, aren’t you required to get involved?”

“In theory, yes. As I’m sure you know, we have forty-five days to do an assessment to determine if the complaint has some merit. We then notify the target, the judge, and ruin his day. But we can also be very adept at ignoring complaints.”

Hugo said with a smile, “Oh yes. We’re bureaucrats. We can duck and delay with the best of them.”

“You can’t duck this one,” Myers said. “It’s too big.”

“If it’s so big, why hasn’t it been discovered before now?” Lacy asked.

“Because it’s still unfolding. Because the time hasn’t been right.

Because of a lot of reasons, Ms. Stoltz, the most important being the fact that no one with the knowledge has been willing to step forward until now. I'm stepping forward. The question is simply this: Does the Board on Judicial Conduct want to investigate the most corrupt judge in the history of American jurisprudence?"

"One of our very own?" Lacy asked.

"You got it."

"When do we get his name?" Hugo asked.

"You're assuming it's a male."

"We're not assuming anything."

"That's a good way to start."

—

The tepid breeze finally gave up, and the oscillating fan rattling above them did little more than shove around the sticky air. Myers seemed to be the last of the three to realize their shirts were sticking to their skin and, as host of the little gathering, finally made a move. "Let's take a stroll over to the restaurant there and have a drink," he said. "They have a bar inside with plenty of AC." He clutched an olive-colored leather courier bag, well used and seemingly attached to his body. Lacy wondered what was inside. A small pistol? Cash, a fake passport? Perhaps another file?

As they walked along the pier, Lacy asked, "Is this one of your hangouts?"

"Why would I answer that?" Myers retorted, and Lacy wished she'd said nothing. She was dealing with an invisible man, one who lived as if his neck was always near the block, and not some casual sailor who bounced from port to port. Hugo shook his head. Lacy kicked herself in the rump.

The restaurant was empty now, and they took a table inside, overlooking the harbor. After roasting in the heat for the past hour, they found the air almost too frigid. Iced tea for the investigators, coffee for Mr. Myers. They were alone; no one could possibly hear them.

"What if we're not too enthused about this case?" Hugo asked.

"Then I suppose I'll eventually go to Plan B, but I don't really want to. Plan B involves the press, a couple of reporters I know, neither of whom is completely reliable. One is in Mobile, the other in Miami. Frankly, I think they'll spook easily."

"What makes you so sure we won't spook easily, Mr. Myers?" Lacy

asked. "As we've said, we're not accustomed to dealing with gangsters. We have a full caseload anyway."

"I'm sure you do. No shortage of bad judges."

"Actually, there aren't many. Just a few bad apples, but there are enough disgruntled litigants to keep us busy. Lots of complaints, most of which have little merit."

"Right." Myers slowly removed his aviator shades and placed them on the table. His eyes were puffy and red, like a drinker's, and they were encircled by pale skin, a contrast that gave him the resemblance to an inverted raccoon. It was obvious he rarely took the glasses off. He glanced around once more, as if to make sure those after him were not in the restaurant, and he seemed to relax.

Hugo said, "About this Catfish Mafia."

Myers grunted with a smile, as if he couldn't wait to spin a yarn. "You want the story, huh?"

"You brought it up."

"I did." The waitress placed their drinks on the table and disappeared. Myers took a sip and began: "It goes back fifty years or so. Kind of a loose gang of bad boys who misbehaved in various parts of Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, anywhere they could bribe a sheriff. Mainly bootleg booze, prostitution, gambling, sort of the old-fashioned sins, I guess, but with a lot of muscle and no shortage of dead bodies. They would pick a wet county near a Baptist desert, preferably on a state line, and set up their operations. Invariably, the locals would get fed up, elect a new sheriff, and the thugs would leave town. Over time, they settled along the Mississippi coast, around Biloxi and Gulfport. The ones who didn't get shot were indicted and sent to prison. Almost all of the original gangsters were gone by the early 1980s, but there were a few leftovers from a younger generation. When gambling was legalized in Biloxi, it really knocked a hole in their business. They moved to Florida and discovered the allure of bogus land deals, along with the astonishing margins in cocaine trafficking. They made a lot of money, reorganized, and morphed into an outfit known as the Coast Mafia."

Hugo was shaking his head. "I grew up in north Florida, went to college here, and law school, lived here my whole life, and for the past ten years I've investigated judicial corruption, and I've never heard of the Coast Mafia."

"They don't advertise, and their names are never in the papers. I doubt if a member has been arrested in the past ten years. It's a small

network, very tight and disciplined. I suspect most members are blood kin. It probably would have been infiltrated, busted, and everyone sent to prison but for the rise of a guy I'll call Omar for the moment. A bad dude but a very smart man. In the mid-1980s, Omar led the gang to south Florida, which at the time was ground zero for cocaine trafficking. They had a few good years, then things went to hell when they crossed up some Colombians. Omar got shot. His brother got shot too, except he didn't survive and his body was never found. They fled Miami but not Florida. Omar has a brilliant criminal mind, and about twenty years ago he became infatuated with the idea of casinos on Indian land."

"Why am I not surprised?" Lacy mumbled.

"You got it. As you probably know, there are now nine Indian casinos in Florida, seven of which are owned by the Seminoles, which is by far the largest tribe, and one of only three recognized by the federal government. As a whole, the Seminole casinos are grossing four billion a year. Omar and his boys found the opportunity irresistible."

Lacy said, "So, your story involves organized criminals, Indians who own casinos, and a crooked judge, all in bed together?"

"That's a fair summary."

"But the FBI has jurisdiction over Indian matters," Hugo said.

"Yes, and the FBI has never shown much enthusiasm for going after Indians for any type of wrongdoing. Plus, Mr. Hatch, and please listen as I repeat myself, I'm not dealing with the FBI. They don't have the facts. I do, and I'm talking to you."

"When do we get the whole story?" Lacy asked.

"As soon as your boss, Mr. Geismar, gives the green light. You talk to him, relay what I've said, make sure he understands the dangers involved, and when he tells me, on the phone, that the Board on Judicial Conduct will take my formal complaint seriously and investigate it fully, then I'll fill in as many blanks as possible."

Hugo tapped his knuckles on the table and thought about his family. Lacy watched another shrimp boat inch through the harbor and wondered how Geismar would react. Myers watched them and almost felt sorry for them.