



SUMMARY: Beware Jerusalem

440 pages

setting: rural St. Louis County; on a cliff high above the banks of the Mississippi R.
time frame: a two week period between Thanksgiving and December 13, 1969.

For more than 100 years, since the early days of the American Civil War, a supernatural force has held sway over the Hoehn Mansion destroying the flower of four generations of Hoehns. Into this maelstrom comes Mathew Hoehn, 25 years old, an invalided Vietnam War veteran and last surviving member of the Hoehn family. He has been willed the house and estate grounds by his great aunt Louisa. With his new life and possessions comes a warning: "Beware Jerusalem!".

The mystery begins at the end of chapter one after Matt arrives at the estate to find bars on all the windows, second story as well, and wonders why aunt Louisa would be "so worried about security way out here". The beginning of the second chapter introduces the supernatural entity:

"That night a small bluish light would watch the house. No one remembered when the light first appeared; all anyone knew was that a cloud would descend, vague at first, but more palpable with time. At first the light would shine as a small twinkle, but with each passing day grow larger and brighter--imperceptible maybe, but grow nonetheless. And as it grew, would journey closer and closer toward the house, inexorably drawn during its nightly wanderings. Eventually it would come right up to the white stone walls and heavily-barred windows. As the light grew and ventured close to the house, the cry of a cat, seemingly half mad with pain and anguish, would be heard."

Other characters: Dan Anderson, the estate's caretaker and handy-man, is the only employee of Matt's late Aunt Louisa; he is responsible for the day-to-day care and functioning of the house and grounds; he is too spooked by the occurrences at the estate to live on the premises. The Hardemores, father and son, are the lawyers for Aunt Louisa and the estate; the former is an old friend of the family, while the latter is interested in gaining whatever he can of the estate's wealth by legal or extralegal means. Frank Cippolino is a St. Louis County Policeman; he grew up with Dan and his family and has known the Hardemores and Matt's aunt for years; it's not known whether he can be trusted or is in league with the younger Hardemore. Melanie and Deeann are PhD students at a local university; they become involved with Matt through their interest in folk history and the history of Missouri. Father William is a Jesuit priest affiliated with the Old Cathedral in St. Louis; he becomes involved, through his own curiosity, after an unintended visit by Matt and Dan in which the subject of the spirit world is broached by Matt. Mrs. Pearl Hensley is a descendant of the slaves that were at one time owned by Matt's ancestor, the original owner of the estate, Edward

Bartholomew Hoehn; she ultimately holds the key to what the blue light is.

Day 1. Sunday, November 30, 1969 (Chapters 1-2): Matt, and his German shephard, Hendrix, arrive by train from his mother's home on the Gulf Coast. The younger Hardemore meets him at the local train station and drives him to the estate. It is when he arrives that he wonders why his Aunt Louisa has seen fit to install iron bars on all the windows, even those on the second floor; he dismisses her paranoia as the silliness of an old lady. (It's only later, after events unfold, that he realizes the bars are to keep unwanted spiritual intruders from entering the house.)

Day 2. Monday, December 1, 1969 (Ch.2-3): Matt meets Dan, the caretaker for the estate; Dan is cooking breakfast before Matt rises. The two form an immediate bond: both Dan and Matt were U.S. Marines; both lost an important family member during that war; Dan lost his brother and Matt lost his father. (Throughout the novel, Matt's father is a recurrent and important character.)

Matt visits the graves of his ancestors located on estate property.

Near dusk Matt is walking his property when he hears unmistakable voices. Upon investigation he sees a old white-haired black man and a young black woman, both dressed in period costumes, circa the American Civil War. They disappear when Matt calls out. The question becomes: are they friendly or not?

A short time later, after dark and unbeknownst to Matt, he is seen by a supernatural entity, which presents itself as a pulsing blue light (the main antagonist in the novel). The light, filled with a murderous rage, is set to attack Matt. Without realizing the danger he is in (and will be in throughout the novel), Matt escapes by simply walking into the house through the front door. The blue light cannot enter the house. Matt does not even realize that something deadly is out to destroy him.

[Unknown to Matt the blue light (who, in reality, is the Jerusalem in the title) begins stalking him relentlessly every night after the sun goes down.]

Day 3. Tuesday, Dec. 2 (Ch. 4-11): Matt questions Dan (about the two spirits seen the preceding night) who confesses to seeing spirits and strange lights (this is the reason he will not live on the premises). These incidents prompt Matt's interest in Hoehn Family history, of which he knows nothing. Matt searches the family archives in the basement of the estate house; he realizes that his ancestors were an important slave-holding family in the state.

Matt also finds a welcoming letter from his late aunt Louisa. (Later it's determined that the letter is bogus, written by someone else.)

Matt meets Frankie, the St. Louis County police officer who lives only a few minutes from the estate.

Later that day Matt, on a trip to see the sights of St. Louis, meets Father William. In a cryptic aside he invites the priest to visit him to see for himself that such things as spirits do, in fact, exist. (Later, the priest takes Matt up on the offer to visit the estate.

He sees the two spirits: the old man and the young woman.)

On the same trip, after visiting the St. Louis Historical Museum, seeking information on the history of his family, meets Lainie, the PhD student, who agrees to help him uncover information about his family.

Near dusk, Matt and Dan search the grounds, near where Dan said some old outbuildings once existed, for a slave cemetery. No sign of cemetery graves seems to exist.

That night, as Matt lies in bed, the young, black, female spirit visits him. She stands on the balcony, outside Matt's bedroom. Matt touches his fingers to the glass of the bedroom windows, the opposite side of which are the fingers of the young spirit. As they make contact Matt feels an unremitting sadness, a feeling of uncontrollable loss; he recoils from her touch and she disappears.

Day 4. Wednesday, Dec. 3 (Ch. 11-18): Early in the morning, Lainie, along with another PhD student, Deann, arrive at the estate. They plan to help Matt delve into the geneology of his family. Later, the Priest also joins the group at the estate.

Aunt Louisa kept important family artifacts and papers secreted behind a locked door of a cellar room. Dan knows where the key is and also knows the combination of the lock for a safe in the room (the safe won't open; a locksmith arrives the next day, but the safe is empty.) While trying the combination they notice strange marks on the concrete floor near the safe. Upon closer examination they find that the safe swings outward from the wall exposing a tunnel leading to a cave. The cave is on two levels, the lower one leading directly to what was at one time a large opening at the same level as the Mississippi River (this entrance was blocked by fill when the railroad tracks were built.) During Prohibition the cave served as a drop location for smuggled alcohol to be distributed in and around St. Louis. (This is how the Hoehn's made a sizeable fortune well after the plantation, post Civil War, began a slow economic decline. Much of the plantation/estate land was sold piecemeal after the Civil War, not only to pay taxes, but to allow the family to maintain their lifestyle. The wealth also serves as a source of rumors of hidden or buried treasure on the estate grounds.)

During the afternoon Hendrix shows up carrying a piece of calico which Matt recognizes as the same material as belonging to the dress of the young, black slave girl. Hendrix lead them to a small stand of trees (near where Dan and Matt searched the previous day and found nothing) and a series of sunken slave graves. Carefully, they begin removing the overlying dirt.

During the early evening hours both Lainie and Dee see the spirits and become committed to understanding their reasons for being on the estate grounds. They, along with the priest, decide to wait though the night for another visitation.

Well after midnight, two thugs in the employment of the younger Hardemore, not realizing that there are a group of people at the estate, attempt to enter through the cellar door. (They have a key provided by the younger Hardemore.) Before they can enter they are attacked by the blue light which is out hunting. All the noise arouses the group and Matt, along with Hendrix, chase after the men. Along this stretch of the

Mississippi River are railroad tracks. Matt and Hendrix surprise the duo at the level of the tracks. One of two men hits Hendrix with a thrown stone. When Matt calls out to them. The same man takes aim at Matt and hits him in the head with another stone. Matt collapses and the men escape. Soon, hovering over the unconscious Matt is the blue light, pulsing with anger and hatred. The young, female ghost appears and tells the light: "The time is not yet right. You can wait." Together, they disappear. Matt is taken to a local hospital's emergency room for treatment of a mild concussion, and is released later that night.

Day 5. Thursday, Dec. 4 (Ch. 18-20): The group continues to reasearch the Hoehn family, either from family papers in the cellar or in county records. They find a photo of the old, black, male slave and one of an old, black female with an extremely hateful visage (referred to as the old crone.)

Also, after further excavation of the slave cemetery, they find an empty grave and one that contains a woman and child. They contact a friend of Lainie's, a professor whose area of expertise is physical anthropology; he agrees to come to the estate in a day or so and have a look at the skeletons.

Finally, they find the letter of warning Aunt Louisa wrote to Matt and hid from prying eyes. They realize that someone--they think the younger Hardemore--purposefully substituted the fake letter Matt originally read as a warm letter of welcome.

Day 6. Friday, Dec. 5 (Ch. 21-27): Following research of county records a few telephone calls, Lainie, with Matt, visit a Mrs. Pearl Hensley of Perryville, MO. It turns out that Mrs. Hensley is a direct descendant of some of the slaves owned by one of the Hoehn's original to the area. Later, Matt and Lainie visit Charleston, MO, county seat of Mississippi County. The Hoehns also owned property (land, buildings, and slaves) in this area. They find that one of the Hoehns gave away--to a descendant of one of his slaves--a parcel of land and cabin; but no reason is given for this beneficence.

Meanwhile, back at the estate, Dee and Father William continue to explore the cave, finding the lower cavern. Dee finds a sizeable treasure--gold coins (up to \$50.00 pieces) and federal government bearer bonds. (They later hide their find at the bottom of a pool of water in the cave.) They also realize that the cave mouth can, without too much effort, be found from outside. In fact, it is Dan who finds the cave mouth outside. To prevent unwanted visitors finding the mouth they make the effort to effectively conceal it from prying eyes. They also realize that the two men are watching them.

While in the upper cavern Father William experiences a close call with the blue light (the light floats near the priest but does not see him). The priest's experience of a feeling of dread brings on a heart episode which is mediated by small white pills (triglyceride for a heart condition of which none of the group is aware).

Later that night Dee has a very close experience of her own with the blue light. The light exhibits a feeling of warmth and Dee feels a certain understanding of the feelings behind the hateful visage of the light.

Earlier in the day a relatively large snowfall blankets the area. On their return from

southern Missouri, Matt and Lainie become stranded (stuck in the snow) less than a half-mile from the estate mansion. Unable to move the car Matt treks to Dan's house, only a short walk away. Dan agrees to help and Matt, on his way back to the house, is attacked by the blue light. Matt slips and fall from the cliff along the side of the estate mansion and reinjures his recently concussed head. (While the cliffs directly behind the house are two hundred feet in height, those bordering a valley leading up to the grounds are considerably lower; it is from these lower cliffs that Matt falls.) Matt is again taken to the emergency room; however, this time he stays in the hospital for two days for purposes of observation. While in the hospital he becomes morose and fatalistic that his end is near.

Day 7. Saturday, Dec. 6 (Ch. 27-28): Father William stays at the hospital with Matt who refuses to communicate with him (or with the nurses or doctors) about anything, even when asked direct questions.

The policeman Frankie drops by the estate and begins asking questions, fishing for information (especially about a possible cave on the premises). Dee begins to suspect that Frankie can't be trusted.

Day 8. Sunday, Dec. 7 (Ch. 28): Early this day Matt is brought home from the hospital. He secludes himself (and Hendrix) in his bedroom, refusing to talk or eat.

Day 9. Monday, Dec. 8 (Ch. 28-29): Matt decides to throw everyone out of the house (except Dan) and prepares to die; he feels that fulfillment of the curse is now unavoidable.

Day 10. Tuesday, Dec. 9 (Ch. 29-30): Early in the morning Laine and Dee to drive to Perryville to confront Mrs. Hensley; they think she knows more about the history of the estate (and the spirits) than she let on at their first meeting. She does and supplies information on the cruel nature and horrible rumors (of witchcraft and sorcery) of the old crone in the photo.

Also that morning, Dan finds Matt at the family cemetery where is talking about meeting them (his dead ancestors) in the near future.

Day 11. Wednesday, Dec. 10 (CH. 30-31): Laine and Dee visit Dan who gives them a key to the cellar door. The two women plan to surreptitiously enter the house after dark and keep watch just in case they may be needed.

Well after dark Matt waits for the apparance of the blue light. (It has appeared regularly since Matt's fall.) On his lap is his Marine-issue automatic. Matt places the barrel of the gun against his temple. He hears (then sees) the young, female spirit extolling him not to end his life. When the blue appears on the balcony, opposite the bedroom windows, Matt, in a final effort to break the spell, fires three shots at the light.

Not knowing this the two women rush upstairs, fully expecting to find Matt a victim of suicide.

The two thugs are also on the prowl. Dan sees them pass near his house and sets out to warn Dee and Lainie. He climbs the steep valley adjacent to the estate. He takes a circuitous route which leads him to the rear yard (ending in the 200 foot cliffs). Unseen, the blue light focuses on Dan, after Matt's shots, as the object of its hatred, and attacks. The attack propels Dan off the cliff.

Day 12, Thursday, Dec. 11 (Ch. 31-32): Early in the morning Frankie visits the estate to inquire about Matt's well-being. The two men talk and Matt learns more about Dan (for instance, his having won a Silver Star in Korea at Chosin Reservoir.)

Lainie and Dee visit Dr. Bassoon at the Missouri Historical Museum (where Matt had visited earlier; she gave Matt information on Lainie's interest in Missouri lore). Dr. Bassoon arrives at an erroneous conclusion about the old crone and the blue light that will later put the group in mortal danger.

After realizing that Dan, who's not at his house, never showed up for work that morning, the group becomes worried and begins searching the grounds. Frankie, Dee, and Lainie find Dan's crumpled body on the railroad tracks at the bottom of the cliffs behind the mansion. On the corpse Dee recognizes the markings on Dan's neck as being identical with ones Matt had after he was attacked by the blue light.

Meanwhile, Father William accidentally discovers Aunt Louisa's journal. It is the journal that expands upon what Louisa knew of the family mystery.

When told of Dan's death Matt vows: "It ends here. This is my house and I'm staying".

Day 13, Friday, Dec. 12 (Ch. 32-35): Matt realizes that the two thugs are keeping watch from the caretaker's cottage across the front yard of the estate. He decides to not do anything, just wait.

Lainie finally contacts the physical anthropologist (she had misplaced the telephone message asking her to call, and then forgot about it) who tells her that the child's bones found occupying the common grave with a female skeleton is probably from an unborn boy; when the mother died, she was pregnant.

After discussion of what they've found out about the family, from Mrs. Hensley and from Aunt Louisa's journal, they surmise that the blue light is Jerusalem. And Jerusalem is the product of an illicit love affair between the son of the Civil War owner of the estate and a female slave. (Unbeknownst to them, from their own reasoning and the erroneous conclusion drawn by Dr. Bassoon, it is the old crone that controls Jerusalem and it is her hatred and desire for vengeance that animates the blue light.)

They decide to try to unite Jerusalem with his mother (the young female slave) by calling her to appear at the same time the light attacks Matt. Matt becomes the bait in what plays out this night after dark.

Everything goes according to plan: Jerusalem and his mother are physically reunited and the group--with the exception of Matt--feels that the mystery has been resolved and the estate will be peaceful from here on out.

Day 14, Saturday, Dec. 13 (Ch. 35-40): While the others feel the curse to be broken, Matt has his doubts. He and Hendrix surreptitiously visit the caretakers house and find the two men gone. (Their mutilated bodies will be found after the Spring thaw.)

The group, minus Father William, decides to celebrate in town that night; they don't return until near midnight on December 13, the day that Aunt Louisa said must be feared. At midnight on this date Jerusalem always disappears, only to return the next year, or years or decades later.

After nightfall the old crone appears to utter an incantation designed to restore Jerusalem to her control.

While Matt, Dee, and Laine are gone the priest realizes from rereading parts of Aunt Louisa's journal, that they were wrong on their assumption; he now realizes that Jerusalem will make one final assault on Matt before midnight. He also realizes that, with the safe never having been pushed back into place, sealing off the upper entrance to the cave, Jerusalem can no longer be prevented from gaining access to inside the mansion. (He is the only one to know that Jerusalem was in the cave when he had his heart episode.) He decides to replace the safe by himself.

Arriving to the mansion and finding no Father William, but a warning note he wrote in haste, Lainie, Dee, and Matt begin a frantic search. In the cellar, propped against the wall, they find the priest, unconscious, the vial of heart pills spilled across the floor.

An ambulance is called and Father William, who has had a minor heart attack, is taken to the hospital. Matt, Dee, and Lainie decide to visit the next day.

Shortly thereafter when Matt takes his leave for the night, the two women are surprised by the blue light in the great room of the mansion. Jerusalem rapidly ascends the stairs, races down the hall, and into Matt's bedroom for one final assault. This initial attack surprises Matt, who fights off the blue light. As Jerusalem hurls himself toward Matt a second time, midnight chimes and Jerusalem abruptly vanishes.

As the novel ends, Matt, staring into the darkness outside, vows to remain in the house when the light again sees fit to reappear.

“Beware Jerusalem”

(subtitled: “The Sins of the Fathers”)

By

R. R. Smith

Dedication

To Gary Cheshire, a boyhood friend who lost his life in Vietnam, Fall, 1969. And to all the others who left a life unfulfilled. And to those who survived them.

Chapter 1

The quiet countryside seemed so far removed from the war in Vietnam that Mathew Hoehn could hardly believe it. Six months before he had been a marine, a sergeant in South Vietnam, slogging his way up a heavily-defended hill. Now he was on a train to St. Louis for the simple reason that he couldn't think of anything else that would do better. He had no job--and no prospects, either--and was nursing a bitter leg wound that was frightfully painful at times. The pain would go away with time, the VA doctors had said, but he wasn't so sure, not when the pain was at its most severe. At least he still had two *whole* legs, which was more than some of his buddies had. He often wondered whether life would be worth living from a wheelchair; but he always left the question unanswered.

He gazed out the window at the empty fields. He could see the ghosts of rows furrowed by recent harvesting. Here and there were remnants of once high corn plants, now fodder for pigs, their stalks dead and drying in the late autumn sun. In some strange sense the fields reminded him of the rice paddies of Vietnam. Their serenity belied the ravages of war. *People just trying to survive*, he thought. *Life goes on, even in war.*

Convalescing in hospital had given him more than enough time for thought. He decided he was simply burned out, that he had forgotten what it was he was fighting for. Vietnam had taken its toll emotionally and physically. Two tours of war were enough. He had grown tired of being scared, tired of not knowing friend from enemy,

tired of watching buddies die. He had seen his lieutenant disappear in one blinding flash during a rocket attack. Mostly he just wanted to be human again. The last few months had been the most difficult. He had decided not to make friends of any new men transferring in. He didn't want to know where they were from, what their families were like, or what they thought. He just wanted to have his orders obeyed. It was just too painful when he lost one of them to the enemy. He wouldn't even re-up at the end of his current enlistment. He just wanted a life as far from the pain of war as possible. That's if the Corps even needed or wanted a cripple in it's ranks. Rather, he'd go home to visit his mother and then decide what he'd do with his life as it was. He'd been a marine for six years, since he was seventeen, and didn't know much else. The Corps had been his home. The Corps had taken him off the streets when he was digging himself into an ever-deepening problem with the authorities and had given him direction--the Corps had "made a man of him" as the judge said it would. The judge hadn't given him much of a choice, though--either jail or enlistment--and had suggested the Marines as the best there were. So he enlisted. He finished high school and even had some college. He remembered himself as a seventeen year old with the smartass attitude of a young punk out to prove himself, and smiled slightly. Not that enough people hadn't tried to convince him to grow up before he landed in serious trouble, but there was only so much someone else could do. The Corps had made him take a long, hard look at himself. It was a slow, sometimes painful process, but he felt they had succeeded, even though there were still rough edges. Or rather, the Corp had helped

him succeed, and that gave him a certain sense of accomplishment. He thought of how proud his father would be had he still been alive. The thought brought back the pain of separation; he missed his father even though he remembered very little of him. He had been killed-in-action in Korea, April 27, 1952, ambushed while on patrol. Not having a father was a burden he didn't carry lightly.

He remembered the only photo he had of his father. The photo, now old and worn from handling, and carefully packed, was of a happy, wide-eyed four year old holding his father's hand. The boy was looking up at this father and the father was looking down at his son. Each was smiling, pride and affection radiating from their faces in profile to the camera. He had carried the photo with him in Vietnam; he felt it brought him luck--a guardian angel to watch over him. The photo was in his breast pocket the night he was wounded and he had it with him in the hospital.

Too often were the times when he resented--sometimes even hated--his father for having left him and his mother--for not being there when he really needed him. Much of what he did and felt the past sixteen years--much more than he realized--had been determined by his feelings toward his dead father, especially the relationship with his mother. When he was younger, before the Marine Corps, he had a wild nature. Like his father's, she'd say. Her despair at his behavior bred resentment in him, a resentment in her lack of strength, a strength he knew his father had. From the time he joined the Corps, he purposely chose to stay out of her life. He came to realize how much grief he had caused and had decided not to open old wounds in either of them.

Besides, on the few brief visits he'd made on leave, he realized he didn't fit in very well with her new life. She had remarried a few years after he'd enlisted and had inherited the three small children of her widowed husband. He found he honestly liked his step-father, sisters, and brother well enough, but he didn't feel part of the family, regardless of how much they tried to welcome him and make him feel a part of their lives. This was another reason why he came to St. Louis.

The flat, farm land rolling by gave way to densely-covered hills. The occasional farm house disappeared, replaced by ranch-style country homes. Matt glanced at his wristwatch. Within the hour he should be in St. Louis. He wondered how he'd like his new home. He had never had a permanent home of *his own*, and didn't know whether he'd like it. He knew next to nothing about the area, had never even been to St. Louis, even though his only surviving relative on his father's side, his great aunt Louisa, had lived there her entire life. He had only met her once, when he was a small boy, before his father shipped to Korea. From family photographs he knew what she looked like but that was about all. His mother had mentioned her on occasion, but never with much detail. The old woman was rather reclusive and more than slightly eccentric. She lived alone on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River south of St. Louis. The house and its furnishings, as well as the grounds, were his father's family's legacy--to him, as fate decided, as the only surviving family heir.

Matt tried not to doze even though the train ride was senselessly boring. He focused, instead, on the changing landscape. Even though he had left Vietnam behind physically six months ago, in his mind, at times, he was still there, fighting the war against phantoms. In the hospital he had developed an unconscious tick. During times of stress or when his mind was focused on the war, his left hand would begin shaking. He would be forced to clench his fist, and sometimes his entire forearm, as if trying to keep control of his emotions. The doctors had noticed it first. Stress related, they had said. It would also disappear with time.

Night was the most difficult. Sleep would come fitfully, if at all. Many times at night he would wake thinking he was still in the jungle, fighting an elusive enemy who sought to kill him and the men in his platoon. Even a nap might result in a frightening dream. In the worst of those he would be ceaselessly chased by an unseen and unknown antagonist. The location might change--the jungle, rice paddies, the city, a tiny hamlet--but the course was always the same: fleeing for his life, but never escaping. He would awake both mentally and physically drained. Sometimes he just feared going to sleep. Even the commonplace experience, taken for granted by those not subjected to war's horrors, might trigger anxiety. A car's backfire, mistaken for gunfire, might find him in a pool of sweat, on his belly, or cause him to find shelter behind a parked car. And he'd be back in Vietnam again, fearful for his life. An exaggerated reaction brought on by the stresses of combat, was the hospital psychiatrist's explanation. 'Shell shock', 'battle fatigue'--labels that didn't quite seem to fit. The symptoms would lessen with

time, they said, just like the pain in his leg would. Hopefully, his move to St. Louis would give his sanity time and peace to heal. He realized he desperately needed to heal.

The train rolled to a stop in station. Matt slowly lifted himself from the seat. Extended periods of inactivity bothered his leg more than actually walking on it did. After a few minutes spent exercising the stiffness, he lifted his duffel bag and made his way toward the front of the car and the platform. He was to be met by a Mr. Hardemore, aunt Louisa's lawyer. Matt had no idea what Hardemore looked like. They had only talked briefly on the telephone when Matt was staying at his mother's. "Don't worry, I'll find you," Hardemore had said.

Once on the platform, Matt began walking to the rear of the train, toward the baggage car, when a voice behind him asked: "Mr. Hoehn?" Matt stopped and turned. A slight man of medium height, about 30 years of age, with a sullen, nervous demeanor, was approaching. "I'm Hardemore," he said. He did not offer his hand to Matt to shake. "Welcome to St. Louis."

In the Corps Matt had gotten pretty good at taking the measure of a person at first introduction and he doubted that Hardemore meant what he said. "It's nice to be here," he said, only half meaning it himself.

"I have a car waiting outside. If you'll follow me, I'll take you to the estate."

"Sure. But I need to find Hendrix, first." Matt turned and began to walk down the platform. Hardemore followed.

Further along the train's length porters were unloading passenger's luggage. Matt stopped and allowed the duffelbag to slide from his shoulder onto the platform. He waited until one of the porters noticed him.

"May I help you?" the porter asked.

"I've come for my dog; the German Shepard"

"Yes, sir." The porter disappeared into the car.

A few minutes later he reappeared leading Hendrix, who arched his back and stretched. Matt thanked him, handed him a tip, and took the leash. The shepard licked his hand, then nuzzled the pocket of the coat Matt wore. Matt removed a treat and offered it to Hendrix.

"Here you go, big fella. This is for you."

As Hendrix crunched the buscuit, Matt scratched behind the dog's ears, then between his shoulder blades.

"Yea, I know. It's been a long trip for me, too.

"Nice dog," Hardemore said flatly.

"We sort of adopted each other in Nam," Matt said without being asked. "He's about the only friend I have right now." Matt continued stroking Hendrix.

"Your aunt asked me to extend you every courtesy. Whatever you need, just ask." Hardemore's politeness seemed forced.

Matt straightened from petting Hendrix. "Thank you, Mr. Hardemore, I will. But I was expecting someone older."

"That was my father you talked with on the phone. He couldn't come today. He's not feeling well. He asked me to meet you, instead."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Matt said in reply.

"Just a touch under the weather. Nothing serious. Now if you and your dog are ready, my car's just outside."

"Then let's go," replied Matt. He retrieved his duffel bag and slung it over his shoulder.

The station was rather empty. Hardemore led the way. Matt walked slowly with a noticeable limp. Shrapnel had torn through his right thigh, lateral aspect, midway between knee and hip. It had missed bone and major blood vessels but shredded good-sized chunks of muscle. He had refused to use crutches. He wasn't a cripple, he'd say, just an invalid. He would heal.

Hendrix also walked with a limp. If Hardemore noticed, he didn't comment.

A slight frost hung in the air as they left the station. The sky was overcast. A light breeze blew across Matt's face and disarranged his hair. He had let his hair grow longish while in the hospital in an effort to blend in with the civilian population.

Hardemore's car was parked around the corner at a meter. The ride to the estate took 45 minutes, but seemed to drag on forever. Matt tried to make small talk, but Hardemore wasn't interested and said nothing more than he had to. When Matt asked for details about his aunt and uncle, Hardemore only said, "You'll need to ask Father,"

and left it at that. Matt knew he didn't like Hardemore, and probably never would. He did find out that the young Hardemore also was a lawyer, like his father. What kind, wasn't said.

Matt spent most of the ride gazing out the car window. Hendrix lay on the back seat. The city and suburbs disappeared, replaced by countryside--a few small, empty farming plots, *Probably produce farmers*, Matt thought--but mostly woods. The woods, with a dense understory of tangled vines and overwinter bushes, extended on either side of the two-lane county road. An occasional side road appeared, only to disappear among the trees. They passed a large, ground-level water storage tank and turned left, off the main road. Along the right of this road was a large, flat expanse of cultivated bottom land; to the left, the wooded hills.

Hardemore broke the silence. "At the end of this road is a small country club. It borders the estate's lands. Beyond that is a power company."

Matt could see high tension electrical towers and dense, coal-smoke billowing upward.

"You'll just need to learn to live with the pollution," commented Hardemore.

Hardemore turned left onto a single-lane gravel road which led into the woods. At the fork, a few hundred yards into the woods, they turned to the right.

"What's in that direction?" Matt asked, pointing across the dashboard at the left fork.

"That road takes you down to the river." Hardemore paused. "But I'd stay away

from there, if I were you. There's been at least a couple bodies found down there in the last couple-of-three years." Then, for emphasis, added, "Most likely murder victims." Another pause. "The fact is one guy was found shot in his car. And the car'd been run off the road, into a gully. It was hidden pretty well. Must've been there four or five months, maybe more, before they found him. Stunk like hell. The car had to be sold for scrap; they couldn't get the smell out. A brand new Corvette, it was. Never found who did it! Or never wanted to!"

Hardemore seemed to take real pleasure in this discussion. *Too much so*, Matt thought. It was the most he'd talked since they'd met.

Hardemore continued. "At the river the road flattens out into a gravel area. The local high school kids use it for *parking*." Hardemore took his eyes from the road and looked at Matt. "You know! The guys cop feelies. Maybe a hand job. Maybe a little nooky if they're lucky." Hardemore turned his attention back to the road. "Well, anyway, about a year ago, a couple were *getting-it-on* late at night...a couple of teenagers. They were both dragged from the car. She was raped. And he was beaten senseless...put in the hospital. It made all the news channels."

"This must be the estate," Matt said, glad to end Hardemore's monologue. The gravel road exited the woods onto a manicured lawn dotted with large trees and shrubs. The road continued for about fifty yards, to end at an imposing stone house. Off to the right of the road, tucked into the woods, they passed an outbuilding of sorts. It consisted of a barn attached to what appeared to Matt to be a small cottage. Both were

built of wood and freshly painted.

The gravel road approached the main house at an angle, affording Matt an excellent view, and ended in a circular drive before the main entrance. He was amazed at the extent of the lawn--*Must be at least four or five acres*, he thought--and at the size of the house. The front facade of white, irregularly-shaped stones lifted upward two stories to pointed gables. Above the gables the roof sloped precipitously upward another story in height. Tudor-style, wooden-framed windows, the frames painted brown, dotted the flat stone surface. At either end were open-air balconies outlined with massive darkwood beams supporting pointed roofs. Matt wondered why there were bars on the lower story windows.

Hardemore stopped the car near the front entrance and without saying a word exited toward the house.

Matt continued to marvel at the estate and at his good fortune. For a few minutes he sat and looked out over the lawn. "Well, it looks like we're at our new home," he finally said to Hendrix. "Let's see what the inside looks like."

Hardemore had already unlocked the front door when Matt opened the rear car door for the shepard. He grabbed his bag from the floorboard and together they followed Hardemore through the open door. He dropped his bag just inside.

A small foyer led into the main living space which extended upward two-and-a-half stories through the center of the house. Through the massive rear windows--a wall of glass panes two stories tall--opposite the foyer where he stood, Matt could see over the

waters of the Mississippi, to the bottomland of western Illinois. To the right, at the far side of the great room, was the study. To the left was a hallway leading to the kitchen. From both the kitchen and study were doors leading to the outside.

Adjacent to the foyer a circular staircase led upstairs to a narrow, railed hallway which, in turn, led to two bedrooms, one on either end of the house. It was the balcony from one of the bedrooms that Matt saw from the gravel drive on their approach.

Matt walked across the great room to the rear windows, near where Hardemore stood, and looked out. The sun had already set and dusk was giving way to night. Matt noticed bars on these windows as well. *Aunt Louisa must have been terribly eccentric to worry this much about security, way out here,* he thought.

The house had been built on a slight rise. The ground in front sloped up gently to the house. The rear had a much more pronounced gradient which continued for seventy feet or so, to more woods, then fell precipitously from a cliff to the river.

"The fall is about two-hundred feet...almost straight down," Hardemore said.

"There's railroad tracks down below."

"How far do the cliffs go?" Matt asked.

"To the right, down the river, to where the Meramec empties into the Mississippi...maybe a half-mile, maybe less. There's a small valley in the other direction, a few hundred yards. You can walk up to the estate from there."

Hardemore had already turned and started for the open front door before he finished the sentence. "Well, I must be going," he said. "It's getting dark, and I have

another appointment. The door keys are on the table by the front door. So's the letter from your aunt--written before she died--that my father mentioned on the phone. There's probably some food in the refrigerator. The beds are made. Your aunt's car is in the barn; the keys are on a hook by the kitchen door. If you have any questions you can ask Dan in the morning...if he's here for work, that is. He's not too bright! And he's a drunk. Rather useless, if you ask me."

Matt turned to follow Hardemore. "Who's Dan?" he asked.

"He worked for your aunt. Does odd jobs and such."

Hardemore was already through the door and nearly at his car when Matt walked outside.

"And one more thing," Hardemore said before he climbed into his car to leave. "I'd make sure all the doors were locked at nightfall, if I were you. And be sure there are plenty of lights turned on in the house all night. And keep the outside lights on, too. You'll probably need them."

Matt wasn't sure but he thought he saw a slight, twisted smirk on Hardemore's face as he said this.

Chapter 2

That night a small bluish light would watch the house. No one remembered when the light first appeared; all anyone knew was that a cloud would descend, vague at first, but more palpable with time.

At first the light would shine as a small twinkle, but with each passing day grow larger and brighter--imperceptibly maybe, but grow nonetheless. And as it grew, would journey closer and closer toward the house, inexorably drawn during its nightly wanderings. Eventually it would come right up to the white stone walls and heavily-barred windows.

As the light grew and ventured closer to the house, the cry of a cat, seemingly half mad with pain and anguish, would be heard.

Matt watched Hardemore drive down the gravel road into the deepening darkness. He had left in a hurry, before Matt could ask any questions. Matt released a sigh. *The air's grown chillier*, he thought. He walked back inside and saw Hendrix lying on a large rug spread before the fireplace. A fire had been laid but not lit. On the mantel were long-stemmed matches in a small crystal vase.

"Feels like we may need a fire tonight," Matt said to Hendrix.

Matt's mood had improved greatly since the trainride. Anxiety about the future had changed to satisfaction. He thought how nice it would have been to have grown up here. There was plenty of room to play; more than enough wide open spaces to

explore. In the days to come he would imagine both his mother and father in the house, and himself outside playing.

"I guess we'll just show ourselves around," he said aloud, as much to himself as to Hendrix. "And then get some sleep."

The study, off the great room, contained scores of books, many of which appeared to be quite old. The door from the study exited onto a tile patio, bounded by a waist high stone wall on two sides which together formed a right angle farthest from the house. In the center of the patio was a reflecting pool. Matt could barely see what appeared to be ten or twelve good-sized goldfish swimming in the pool. Hendrix took a drink and the goldfish scattered anxiously away.

"Hendrix!" Matt snapped. "Don't drink that! It's probably dirty." He paused, then continued, "C'mon, let's go inside. I'll find you some fresh water."

The kitchen was at the opposite end of the house. Matt searched cabinets for the right-sized bowl for Hendrix and filled one with tap water.

"We'll find something to eat after we see the upstairs," he said.

By now a half-moon had appeared in the night sky. A cold wind was blowing through the woods and around the house.

The kitchen exited through a covered porch on the side of the house. Stone steps led around to a rear patio artificially raised above the otherwise steep gradient. A rear entry led from the patio into the basement, below the great room.

Matt lifted his duffel bag and together, he and Hendrix climbed the staircase to the

bedrooms. From the walkway Matt could look down onto the great room. The view gave him an odd sensation of command; from where he was he could control the room and anyone below, and they would literally look up to him. He smiled at the thought.

The bedrooms were almost identical in size. Both had open-air balconies supporting a pointed roof with massive wooden timbers. Only the balcony of the bedroom above the kitchen had a staircase which followed the contour of the house to the rear patio.

Hendrix tried the comfort level of each bed in both bedrooms, and eventually followed Matt down the stairs to the kitchen. Freshly prepared food to make sandwiches was in the refrigerator. Matt also found an unopen bag of dog food for Hendrix in the pantry. Together, they settled down to enjoy an impromptu dinner.

Matt decided the perfect way to end the first day in the new house was with a lit fire. Since the fire was already laid and matches were nearby he saw no reason not to. With the remainder of the dinner back in the refrigerator and a couple of bottles of cold beer in hand, he settled onto the sofa. He remembered his aunt's letter on the table by the front door. After retrieving the letter, he resettled himself on the sofa.

My Dear Matthew, the letter began. The handwriting was well-formed and easy to read. It's so nice to pass along the estate to my last surviving relative, the grandson of my beloved brother, Martin. It's a lovely place. Your uncle and I have had many happy years here. I think you also will. If there's anything you need please don't hesitate to contact the Hardemores--they take care of all estate business. Since they've been such great friends of mine over the years, I'm sure they'll be great friends of yours. There's nothing

for you to worry about. Just relax and enjoy the estate. Use the time to heal your war injuries. Your loving aunt, Louisa.

Matt turned the page over, looking for more. "She could've written more than this," he said aloud to Hendrix. "She could've given me some idea how the estate is run, how to pay bills...which end is up." He shrugged. "I guess I can talk to Hardemore if I need to."

From the effects of the painkiller taken following dinner and the beers Matt drifted into an unsettled sleep. Hendrix lay by the great room's windows.

Matt awoke with a start, wondering what all the commotion was. Hendrix, hair bristling, was barking furiously out the back windows at something in the night. Matt went to the windows and looked out into the darkness, but saw nothing.

"Let's go up to bed," he said to Hendrix. He climbed the stairs to the bedroom, but Hendrix remained by the windows until morning.

Matt's dreams that night didn't become too real. His sleep was quiet if not totally peaceful. He awoke occasionally to Hendrix' barking, but no nightmares of Nam, and no night sweats.

The gloomy, overcast weather had disappeared. The morning was bright. Shafts of sunlight streamed in through the bedroom curtains.

Matt awoke to noises in the kitchen below. He wondered what Hendrix was up to. He hurriedly dressed and went downstairs. Hendrix was in the kitchen, alright, but so was a stranger, sitting at the table. Breakfast was cooking on the stove. The stranger saw Matt as soon as he entered and was the first to speak.

"Oh! Misser Hoehn!" he said as he stood and crossed the floor with his hand extended toward Matt. "Ah'm Dan. Is nice ta fine'ly make yer acquaint'ance." His speech was slow and deliberate, his pronunciations somewhat slurred.

"Just call me Matt", Matt replied and took his hand.

"Ah hope ah did'n dis'urb ya. Ah lef' mahsef in...ah have a key. Ah'm makin' some breakfas'." Dan pointed repeatedly over his shoulder with his right thumb, then crossed to the stove to check its preparation. "Ah hope ya hungry." He stirred the eggs in the skillet. "Ah hope ya like scrambl' eggs 'n ham. Dere's some rolls...ah made 'em mahsef."

Dan was of medium height with a thin frame and a long, open, friendly face. His hair was brown and bushy and as yet untouched by grey. Matt guessed that he was probably near 50 years of age.

"How long have you been here?" Matt asked.

"Since near seven dis mornin'."

Matt looked at his wristwatch: *Oh-nine-ten.*

"And where was Hendrix?"

Dan didn't reply at first, thinking through the question. "Oh....Oh, OK! Ya mean

mah frien', here! He's in da kichen when ah opened da door. He's fine...did'n bark 'r nuttin'. Ah lef' him outtadoors dis mornin'. Ah also give him some'n ta eat. He's real frien'ly!"

"Yea. And a great watchdog," Matt said sarcastically in Hendrix's direction. Hendrix ignored him, instead concentrating on the food on the counter, a bit of drool hanging from his jowel.

Dan opened the oven door and removed the biscuits which he then placed on a hot-pad on the table. Matt had walked to the kitchen door and was looking out.

"Breakfas's ready. Have a chair," Dan said, returning to the stove. "Ah did'n know if ya liked milk 'r o.j., so ah poured ya milk 'n o.j."

"Either one would have been fine...or both," Matt replied and sat down on the side of the table nearest the kitchen door.

Dan placed a full plate before Matt. "Dere's plen'y more," he said.

"Thanks," Matt said. "Looks good."

Dan was filling a plate for himself. He sat in the chair opposite Matt. "Shud be," he said. "Ah bin doin' dis fer Louisa, God res' her soul, since June a' fitty-nine. Ah's her driver 'n handyman. Ah keep da grounds. Wha'ever needed ta be done, ah did fer her. As well as chief-cook-'n-boddle-washer," he said with a crooked grin showing gaps where teeth had been.

Matt was eating in silence.

"How's da food?" Dan asked with his mouth full.

"Good! Very good," Matt replied.

"Ah's a cook fer a coupla' years 'fore ah begun ta work fer Louisa. Learned mah job perdy good if ya as' me. Like ta cook...jus' doan like bein' one. Louisa give me da op'tuniddy ta bedder mahsef."

Matt continued eating in silence, occasionally giving Hendrix a scrap.

"Ol' man Hardemore hired me fer Louisa. Been here ever since."

"I met his son," said Matt. "He met me at the train station."

"He did, huh? Wha's yer feeling a' him?"

"Not much. Kind of an odd duck. Didn't say a word all the way here. Then started talking a blue streak about rapes and murders down by the river."

"Yea. Das 'im, a'right. He's a li'l shit. Ah doan trus' him as far as ah can pitch him, which ain' far."

Matt smiled at this. "Tell me about the father. I originally talked to him on the phone. He called my mother's and told me aunt Louisa had died. He said he'd meet me. But his son showed, instead."

"Ol' man's OK. He bin real nice ta me over da years. Real good ta Louisa. Wud drop by da house a' times. Has'n been by since Louisa passed. Only da li'l shit has. He likes givin' orders. His opinion a' himsef is dat he's hot shit on da en' a' a short pole. Swore ta fire me, bud never did. Ah figger he doan wanna keep up da groun's by hissef."

"You live in the house by the barn?" Matt asked.

"No way! Doan like da place afta dark. Spent coupla nights when ah's firs' hired. Did'n sleep a wink. Ah clear out near dark. Ah live up the tracks by the flats."

"The flats?"

"Yea. Nex' t' da Missipp River. Years ago boads'd pull in 'n unload cargo. Only place up 'r down da river fer a ways dat ain' hilly. I's where da rape 'n murder was."

"Right," said Matt, realizing he knew about the location.

"Ah was da one dat foun' da body a' da dead guy in his car. Out huntin' one day...squirrels...when ah foun' him. Decomposed! Worse'n mos' stuff ah ever seen in Korea."

Korea surprised Matt. "You fought in Korea? he asked.

"Yea. Da firs' Marine Division. Took some shrapnel in da head a' Chosin. Frac'ured mah skull. Dey give me dis plate." Dan tapped the back of his head with his index finger. "Metal! Have'n bin da same since. Dat's why ah'm workin' here...does'n use much brain power. Ah doan talk ta good, anymores--brain's damaged. 'N mah mem'ry kin be hell a' times. But ah r'member Korea as if i's jus' yesserdy."

"My father was a Marine," Matt said with regret in his voice. "KIA in Korea."

"Ah los' a brudder...Joseph Marvin Annerson...older'n me...April 17, 1953...Pork Chop Hill. He was Army." Dan said this matter-of-factly, as if he'd been through this explanation many times before.

Matt liked Dan's honesty. Most people would have tried to hide their incapacity or

at least make excuses for it. While Dan didn't wear it as a badge of honor hanging from his shirt sleeve, he didn't try to hide it, either.

"I heard Pork Chop Hill was a hell of a battle," Matt said.

"Yea," said Dan. "Same wit me."

Matt grew to like Dan during their conversation at breakfast. He realized that to a certain extent they were kindred spirits. Both had fought overseas and came away with lasting wounds. Both had suffered scarring experiences in the cauldron of war--the defining experiences of their young lives. Both claimed the Corps as their home. As the saying went, "Once a Marine, always a Marine. *Semper fi*. The brotherhood of the Corps.

Dan seemed uncomfortable with the topic of his dead brother. Too painful, Matt realized. As painful as Vietnam was for him. He changed the topic.

"Tell me about my aunt?" Matt asked. "I've only met her once...a long time ago."

"She's a real nice lady. Real kind ta me. Mos' a' da years ah worked fer her, she kep' ta hersef. Seldom wen' anywheres, jus' stayed on da groun's. Did'n have many real close frien's as near as ah cud tell. Somedimes people wud visit her, but not ta offen. Toward da en', she did'n even go out da house. Jus' sat in her room lookin' out da winda.

"Ah doan know what she 'as like when she's younger. Sometimes when ol' man Hard'more'd come over, he'd ged real sad afta talkin' ta her. He'd dell me 'bout some a' da good times he had wit Louisa 'n yer uncle, Louis. Yer uncle died 'fore ah begin'

here. Hard'more said when yer uncle died da life seemed ta leave her. Dat's prob'ly why she did'n go nowheres."

Dan thought for a moment. "Be back in a secon'" he said and left the kitchen. A few minutes later he returned carrying a large photographic album and handed it to Matt.

"Louisa kep' dis in da sec'try. Ah'd brin' it up ta her 'n she'd look a' dese pictures fer hours when she was in da mood.

Dan cleared away Matt's empty breakfast plate to create room for the album. Louisa'd act like dis was gold," he said.

The album contained a photgraphic history of the Hoehn family, from faded and cracked pre-Civil War daguerrotypes to much more recent photographs. Each was carefully labeled as to individual and location, and dated.

"I know some a' da people," said Dan. "Louisa'd describe 'em ta me, a'times."

Matt opened the album and carefully turned to the first portrait, a daguerrotype, dated 1844. Matt read the name, "Edward Bartholomew Hoehn." The name meant nothing to him.

"Be back 'n a secon'", Dan said and again exited the kitchen. In a few minutes he returned, this time with a large leather book.

"Ah almos' fergot dis. Louisa's Bible. She'd all the fam'ly written down inside."

Dan handed the book to Matt and then cleared more of the table. "The fam'ly lis's in da front," he said.

Matt carefully opened the cover and began turning pages until he found the geneology tables. Dan was leaning on the table looking over his shoulder.

Dan pointed to the top entry. "Dis's one a' yer grandfadders," he said. "He's da one dat come ta Missoura."

Matt read the name aloud. "Edward Bartholomew Hoehn. Born, February 19, 1810. Died, July 3, 1871." Matt looked again at the daguerrotype.

Dan pointed to the adjacent entry. "Dis's his wife," he said.

Again Matt read the name aloud. "Fanny Monroe Covert Hoehn. Born, May 19, 1821. Died December 10, 1896."

Matt pointed to the entries below Edward and Fanny. "These are there children?" he asked.

"Yea. Dere's eight a 'em."

Matt began to read the names and dates silently to himself.

Stanley Morgan Hoehn. Born, September 9, 1837. Died, June 2, 1895.

Everett Edward Hoehn. Born, June 19, 1840. Died, July 3, 1863.

James Pauling Hoehn. Born. February 17, 1843. Died, July 3, 1863.

"These two, Everett and James, died on the same day," Matt said.

"Yea. Durin' da War Between da States. One was fer da Nort, the udder fer da rebs. I forgit where dey was killed."

Matt thought for a time. "Gettysburg," he finally said. "In the Corp I read some on Civil War battles." He thought some more. "Imagine, two of my ancestors fighting

one another at Gettysburg. Both killed on the third day of the battle. And this must be Everett's wife." He pointed to the adjacent entry. "Jonna Katherine Beauford Hoehn. Born, February 19, 1843. But there's no date of death."

"Mebbe she moved," Dan offered.

"Or remarried," said Matt.

Matt read the next two names silently. "These next two died young," he said.

"Franklin Hart Hoehn. Born, June 16, 1845. Died, September 29, 1849. He was only four years old. And Louisa Mae Hoehn. Born, December 6, 1847. Died, May 8, 1850. She was only about two-and-a-half."

"Ah tink Louisa's named fer her," Dan said.

"That makes sense," replied Matt. "The next entry reads Theodore Mathew Hoehn. Born July 16, 1850. Died, July 1, 1948." Matt thought for a moment, then finally said with some amazement in his voice. "I'll be! He must've been my great grandfather...Theodore Mathew Hoehn. He died after I was born." Matt thought aloud. "I was born in February of '45 and he died on July of '48. I was about three-and-a-half, I guess. I never heard of him before."

Matt read the entry of his great grandmother. "Wilhelmina Eustace Lardeker Hoehn. Born, September 18, 1860. Died, August 18, 1894." Matt began to realize that he actually had a concrete history. These were flesh-and-blood people, and he had never heard of any of them. Matt read the next name. "Elizabeth Albany Hoehn. Born December 13, 1851. Died, December 13, 1871."

"You know something," he said to Dan. "She was born and died on my birthday. That's a hell of a coincidence."

Matt read the last entry on the page. "Pauline Dreiser Hoehn. Born, June 17, 1855. Died, August 6, 1860. She died young, too--only five."

"Dere's more on da nex' page," Dan said.

Matt turned the page. At the top was the entry of his great grandparents, Theodore and Wilhelmina Hoehn, and their children. His great aunt was the oldest. Matt read the entry. Louisa Mae Hoehn Beeker. Born, January 7, 1879. Died, November 12, 1969."

"Dis was yer uncle," Dan said, pointing to the adjacent entry.

"Louis Robert Beeker. Born, March 3, 1871. Died, July 9, 1949."

Matt quickly scanned the remainder of the page until he came to his grandparents. He read their entries. "Martin Thomas Hoehn. Born, February 19, 1891. Died, September 16, 1960. Emily Watson Hoehn. Born, November 13, 1894. Died, September 20, 1959." Matt thought for a few minutes. "I do remember my grandparents," he finally said. They lived in Philadelphia, where I'm originally from. Very kind people. After we moved they always remembered my birthday. Sent me presents. Grandma loved to cook. She always mailed me cookies. Once, when I was about seven or eight, when I visited them, I was outside playing with a little parachute toy...in a tube. I shot it into a tree. Grandpa climbed a ladder and got it out. He was a nice guy."

Matt momentarily lost himself in thought.

Dan pointed to the last entry on the page. "He 'as a Marine," he said.

Matt didn't hear what was said at first. "What?" he asked.

Dan tapped the entry. "He 'as a Marine, like us," he repeated.

Matt read the entry. "William Everett Hoehn. Born, August 17, 1894. Died, June, 1918."

"He was MIA," Dan explained. "France."

"World War I, huh?"

"Yea."

"Do you know where?"

"Nope. Louisa said. Bud ah doan 'member."

"What happened in June of 1918?" Matt wondered aloud. He thought back to a book of Marine history he had read. "The Marines distinguished themselves at Chateau-Thierry and Belleau Wood about that time. I wonder if Theodore Hoehn died there."

Matt thought for a few minutes. Finally, he said, "MIA. I wonder what happened. In Nam we'd have Marines catch a shell from an RPG, a rocket propelled grenade, and they'd just disintegrate. That's what happened to my lieutenant."

"Yea," Dan said flatly. "We had dat happen in Korea."

"Horrible sight."

"Yea." Dan was staring out the window, not really hearing all of what Matt was

saying.

"I wonder if he was blown to pieces by some sort of large-bore Howitzer."

Dan left the answer to that unsaid. As if to change the subject, Dan pointed to the adjacent page, and said, "Yer over here."

Matt followed Dan's finger to the entries of his grandparents, Martin and Emily Hoehn. The entry below was for his father, which he read. "Francis Edward Hoehn, Frank for short. Born, December 13, 1923."

Dan shuddered slightly with a sense of foreboding when the date was read.

"Died, April 27, 1952. He was KIA on patrol," Matt said. "This is my mother, Gail Ann Gregg Hoehn. And this is me." Matt pointed to the last entry. "Dad and I share a birthday, December 13."

When the date was again read Dan shuddered a second time. He went slightly pale.

Matt had looked at Dan as he said the date and saw Dan's reaction. "What's wrong?" he asked.

At first Dan didn't respond. Finally, he said hesitantly, "Dat's a bad day."

"What do you mean?"

"Ah doan know 'xac'ly. Ah doan tink Louisa ever tol' me. But ah know i's a day dat scared her. Sometin' bad happened dat day."

"Had happened or would happen?"

"Ah doan know."

"Is that why you won't stay in the house?"

"I's not jus' da house. I's da whole place. Da few nights ah was here ah saw weird stuff. Strange colors aglo' in da dark. 'N..." Dan paused. "'N ghosts."

"Ghosts?"

"Yea. Ah tink so. Scared hell outta me! Da day's OK. Bud nod afta dark. I's freaky here a'night."

"Then why stay? You could find a job somewhere else."

"Ah ain' got no place else ta go. Dis is home." Dan paused. "Lissen, Matt. Ah know what yer tinkin'. Bud ah ain' nuts. Dere's jus' sometin' weird 'bout da grounds...somethin' afta dark."

Dan excused himself. "I got some work ta do. Ah shud be busy" Dan headed for the door. "If ya need anytin', jus' yell. Ah doan go ta far."

"OK," said Matt. "Will do."

After Dan had left the kitchen, Matt voiced his thoughts aloud to Hendrix. "Now, how in the hell could a Marine be scared of ghost stories?" He stroked the shephard, who was laying beside his master's chair. "Even you don't believe in ghosts, do you big fella?" he asked.

Hendrix rolled onto his back and lifted his paw, the signal to have his belly rubbed.

"I didn't think so," Matt said, and obliged the request.

Chapter 3

Matt sat at the kitchen table and rubbed his eyes. Hendrix was still at the side of his master's chair. "Wanna go out, boy?" he asked. Hendrix cocked his head slightly and straightened his ears.

"I guess that means yeh, huh? Well, let's go!" Matt eased himself from the chair, exercised his leg, and headed toward the kitchen door. Hendrix followed.

"I need the exercise, too," he said as he opened the door. He followed Hendrix outside.

The weather had cleared since the previous day. It was warmer and the sun shone brightly. The chill was gone from the air. A few, wispy clouds gathered overhead. Matt stood outside the door breathing deeply. "Today's is much better weather," he said to himself. "Might as well explore some."

Hendrix had disappeared down the stairs to the rear of the house. Matt followed. He wanted to see the cliffs overlooking the river. At the far end of the patio were stairs leading to the yard. The slope of the the ground made the going difficult with a bad leg, but Matt moved slowly. After about twenty feet the lawn ended in woods and the slope increased. Hendrix was ahead of him. To keep his balance Matt moved cautiously using the trees as a break from falling. At one point he lost his footing and fell to the ground, sliding a few feet. He then slid himself the last short distance to a rocky outcropping. Below him was an almost vertical drop. He estimated the distance at one-hundred-fifty-plus feet. He could see most of the river but not the railroad

tracks at the base of the cliff.

Good Lord! he thought. *That's one hell of a drop.* The bare trees of Fall afforded a panoramic view of the countryside. A tugboat was slowly making its way upriver, pushing a line of coal barges. Matt looked upriver toward St. Louis, then river, following the contour of the cliff. Upriver he saw the cliff disappear from view as it sloped away from him. He saw a small portion of the railroad tracks in the distance before they disappeared around a bend. Downriver the cliffs simply disappeared into the distance. Crowning a point in the distance was a single high tension electrical tower with wires leading across the river to another tower opposite.

Matt laid back and looked at the sky. His thoughts drifted to his mother and how she would enjoy the estate. He'd invite her and his stepfamily for a visit as soon as he settled in. That's if she would come. "I wouldn't bother with the house," she had said. "I'd sell it as soon as possible and use the money for something else: finish college, travel. You can always move here. You might buy a house. Something constructive. I think your inheritance means nothing but trouble. You don't know your relatives; I do. Your dad's family were none too honest. Some of them had a knack for being really strange...all of them except your father and grandfather. Your grandpa left home as soon as he could and never went back." Matt had just laughed. "I'll be fine," he had assured her. "You'll see; everything will turn out for the best. I promise." The move had been pleasant. The house and grounds were much more than he had expected.

Dad's family must have done well financially, he thought, *to have built an estate this*

grand. A flock of Canada geese flew overhead, honking and heading south. "Yea!" he said aloud. "This definately was the right decision."

Matt lay on the outcropping the better part of an hour before deciding to return to the house. The climb up the slope was more teacherous than the one down. Matt lost his footing repeatedly on the loose, rocky ground covered with leaf litter and twigs. Finally, he reached a more level portion of the yard, then climbed the stairs to the patio. His leg ached from the exertion.

"Remind me never to come down here at night," he said to Hendrix.

Matt noticed that the door to the cellar was slightly ajar. From somewhere within a small light shone. Together, he and Hendrix entered and walked through the shadows toward the dim light. A musty smell hung in the damp air. The cellar's walls were a continuation of the irregular-shaped stones of the upper stories and divided the area into rooms which served mostly for storage space. Furniture, lockers, trunks, and cabinets were arranged away from the centers of the rooms, some stacked to the ceiling. The room with the light was to the right, below the kitchen. A series of solid wood cabinets were located along the far wall. All were shut tight except one. This one drew Matt's attention. The doors had been opened and bundles of papers removed and placed on a nearby table. Some of the bundles had been untied and loose sheets were scattered without organization across the table top as if someone had been looking for a particular item. Many of the loose sheets were old, nineteenth century: dark ink written on veiny and mottled paper. In the light the sheets had the appearance of blotchy, age-spotted

white skin. Even in the poor light Matt could read enough of the script to realize what he had found: the original records of the Hoehn estate. Among the contents were letters, ledgers, bills of sale, receipts, account books, documents, correspondence, journals. Within the open cabinet, bound together and folded, was the original land deed to the estate, dated March 10, 1831, in the name Edward Bartholomew Hoehn, and the original survey of the grounds.

Matt laid the large sheets on the table. A thin transparent sheet overlay the survey with outlines of what were fields. Each field was marked as to dimensions, area, and expected crop yield. The survey had been updated over the last one-hundred-thirty-eight years as more land was acquired and new buildings constructed. Changes were carefully noted and dated. Matt removed the overlay and oriented the north end of the plat toward the opposite end of the table. He found the various landmarks. The Mississippi and Meramec Rivers formed the east and south boundaries, respectively, of the original estate.

"This should be the house," he said, tapping his finger on the spot. He noticed that the barn and shed were not on the plat but there were other buildings marked which he did not see on the drive in. They were drawn in ink original to the survey. *Must've rotted away by now*, he thought. He also noticed that two small plots, one about one-hundred feet downriver from the house, the other about five-hundred feet due west of the house, were outlined on the plat and marked with a C.

The afternoon passed as Matt became immersed in Hoehn Family history. Most of

the items were carefully labelled and organized chronologically. The Hoehn's, it seemed, were prolific compilers of their own history. The earliest were ledgers dating to the 1830s, outlining the day-to-day finances of the estate. Matt found Edward Bartholomew Hoehn's will bequeathing the immediate house and grounds to his eldest son, Stanley Morgan Hoehn, which then passed to a younger brother, Theodore Thomas Hoehn and his descendents upon Stanley's death in 1905. There was business correspondence, correspondence with various government officials, and letters between family members.

One ledger in particular, a listing of Latin and biblical names with dates of births and deaths, caught Matt's interest: James, Isaac, Scipio, Cyrus, Caesar, Magdalena, Mary, Ruth. Next to each name was a series of entries, dollar amounts for purchase and yearly expenses...and sale prices. "Damn!" Matt said aloud. "These are slave names. My family owned slaves! That's how they made their fortune." The thought made him uneasy. Growing up in Philadelphia, after his father was killed, he had black friends and mingled easily with black soldiers in Vietnam. He couldn't fathom owning another human being...much less being owned.

Matt's thoughts were interrupted by someone calling his name from outside. He walked to the backdoor and saw Dan.

"I'm in here," he said. "I've found the estate's records and I've been reading them.

"Louisa sure managed ta collec' stuff, did'n she?" Dan asked, not really expecting an answer. "She never trew nuttin' away."

"I found the original deed and there are two small plots marked with a C, one down river and one opposite the house, away from the river. Do you know what they are?"

"Yea. I's prob'ly da cem'try." Dan pointed downriver. "Down dere. Ah take care a' it. Louisa's buried dere."

"Really?" Matt was surprised. "I thought she'd have been buried in a regular cemetery."

"Nope. She wanned ta be on da lan'. Mos' a' da res' of yer fam'ly is dere. Uncle Lewis. Da whole bunch a' 'em."

"What's the other cemetery for?" Matt asked.

"Ah doan know. Ah did'n know dere was a secon' one."

"It's in that direction. Matt pointed over the house. "On the other side of the house, somewhere. A few hundred feet, I think."

"Nope. Doan 'member ever seein' one. Who's buried dere?"

"Maybe slaves."

"Slaves?"

"Yea. You didn't know that the family owned black slaves before the Civil War?"

"Nope. Louisa did'n say."

"Well, I think we did. My guess is they're buried on the land. I think I'll take a look for it. You want to join me?"

"Nope. I's afta four. Ah thin' ah'll be headin' home."

"Fine. I'll see you tomorrow, Dan."

"Ya need anythin' 'fore ah leave?"

"No. I'll be fine."

"OK. Den ah'll see ya in da mornin'," Dan turned to leave.

"Oh! By the way," Matt said. "I found the basement door open. And one of the lights was on."

Dan looked puzzled. "Ah doan know how dat happen'd," he said. "Ah make sure ah lock up when ah leave. Ah'm pos'tive on dat. Da basemen's was Louisa's. Ah us'ly did'n go dere. Only when she ask'd me ta fin' her somethin'. Maybe when one a' da Hard'mores was in da house. Soon's Louisa died dey was over offen. But ah'll double check da doors from now on."

Matt let the question drop. "Have you seen Hendrix?" he asked.

"Yea. 'He wen' up 'round da house. He came outta da cellar when ah called ya. Yer wan' me ta fetch him?"

"No. I'll find him. But thanks."

"See ya in da mornin'," Dan said.

"Yea." Matt closed the door and it locked. He followed Dan up the stairs around the house. Dan headed down the gravel road and disappeared down a path into the woods.

"Hendrix!" Matt called. "C'mere boy!" Hendrix came running up the gravel road, limping as he did. He stopping to acknowledge Dan along the way."

"Let's go look for the cemetery while there's still enough day," Matt said as he

headed across the lawn keeping track of the number of steps as he went. The fields, once planted and harvested by slave hands, had long since been left to grow wild. Most had become overgrown by grasses, bushes, and woods. Matt walked toward what he thought from the plat was the area where the cemetery should be. He continued past where the front lawn ended in knee high grass and bushes. About one-hundred-fifty feet in was a small stand of trees. Matt headed for them, scanning the grass as he walked. *This could be like looking for a needle in a haystack*, he thought. *The stand of trees is about where the cemetery should be.*

The sky was beginning to darken quickly. After thirty minutes spent searching through the grass, Matt decided to quit until the next day. He began the walk back to the house.

"C'mon, Hendrix," he called. "Let's go back to the house. It's time to eat." The shephard came running from across the field.

A chill wind was developing, blowing across the lawn. As Matt approached the house along the last stretch of gravel road leading to the main entrance, he noticed movement across the balcony from his bedroom. He opened the door for Hendrix, but rather than follow him inside, he hesitated, then closed the dooor and walked back along the gravel road to gain a better view. As far as he could see the balcony was empty. *Must be my eyes playing tricks with the shadows*, he thought. Before he could turn to walk back the door, he thought he heard someone call out a greeting from somewhere to the side of the house. He walked slowly toward the sound, beneath the

balcony and turned the corner to the steps leading to the rear of the house. Matt carefully descended the stairs. In the darkness he stumbled, producing a sharp pain in his leg, but managed to keep from falling. He reached the bottom of the stairs to the patio. At the far end, at the top of the stairs leading to the rear yard and the cliffs, were two figures. They were conversing in tones too quiet for Matt to understand. Their presence took Matt by surprise. He stood quietly watching them for a few minutes.

"Hello!" he finally called in a voice of sufficient force to gain their attention.

Neither had seen Matt until then. They turned their heads toward him. In the moonlight he could distinguish their general features. Both were black adults, one an older male with a snowwhite beard and hair, wearing work clothes. The other, a young woman, was wearing a bonnet and an apron over a calico dress that nearly reached the ground.

From the great room's windows Hendrix had also noticed them. At the instant he began barking the man and woman disappeared, evaporating into the darkness. Matt blinked his eyes and continued to peer into the emptiness.

The venomous blue light, its pulsations casting a hideous glow in the moonlight, appeared at the base of the cliff below the house. A thin, eerie cry escaped its parted lips as it slowly began to ascend.

Good God in Heaven! Matt thought. *Am I losing it? Or was Dan right?* The thought sent a chill up his arms and across the skin on the back of his neck. The feeling had instant appeal. It was the same sensation of adrenaline he had first experienced in battle in Vietnam. *His house did have spirits!*

Matt walked across the patio to the steps, the spot where he had last seen the apparitions. He peered into the shadows formed by the woods near the cliff's edge but there was no sign of movement.

The blue light continued its upward ascent, lighting the cliff face as it rose. It seethed with a vengeance born of murder.

Matt had heard Hendrix barking and had already turned to walk across the patio, to the steps leading around the side of the house. *I wonder if the spirits are friendly?* he thought.

The blue light stopped, floating a few feet out from the cliff's edge. Its cold eyes scanned the woods and the rear of the house. They focused on Matt as he disappeared up the side stairs.

Matt climbed the stairs slowly, his leg still aching from his earlier stumble. He gained the front yard without incident and walked toward the front door.

Up the stairs and across the patio the light rushed, it's pulsations quickening into a frenzy. Hendrix, still at the great room's windows, barked furiously. The light disappeared around the side of the house.

Matt was reaching for the latch of the main door as the blue light rounded the front corner of the house. The fear of lost opportunity, of lost prey, quickened the light's pace into a headlong murderous rush.

As Matt closed the front door the light reached the threshold. A shrill wail, drowned by Hendrix's continued barking, escaped from it's parted lips. The time was not yet here. It had waited a hundred years for final restitution. It could wait a short while longer!

The light receded along the same path it had come and disappeared over the edge of the cliff. It would not appear again that night.