
CHAPTER

14

WHEN I GOT UP LATER THAT MORNING MY FATHER HAD already gone to work. I went down to The Joint and saw a crowd gathered in front of the building. I tried to figure out what was happening from the faces in the crowd, but I couldn't. All I could see was Tina standing on the top step and screeching her head off.

"He's going to kill us all!" she was shouting. "We all going to be dead any minute now!"

"Who's down there?" I asked, not wanting to really know. I was hoping she didn't say Bubba's body or something like that.

"That Petey, that's who!" Tina said. "He's got a still down there, and he's going to blow us all sky-high one of these

days. I called the police and they're going to be here any minute!"

"You oughta mind your business, you old four-eyed witch!" a woman called out from the sidewalk.

I didn't understand what was going on, and I asked Tina to run the whole thing by me one more time.

"Petey got a still in the basement," she said, out of breath for some reason. "And them things blow in a minute! We could all be killed!"

I went down to the basement, and the door was locked. I banged on it and called Mr. Darden. He came to the door after a while and asked who it was, and I told him it was me. He let me in and I asked him what was going on.

"That skinny little wench done gone and called the police because I'm mixing up a little brew here in the basement," he said.

"She said you got a still," I said.

"Ain't nothing but a little brew," Mr. Darden said.

"Can it blow up?"

"If it does it'll be her fault," he said. "I'm supposed to be supplying the brew for this party down the street, and I had to turn the fire up full blast just to get it out so I can get things cleaned up before the police get here."

"Mr. Darden," I said, remembering that he had brought some kind of liquor to the rent party we gave, "are you kidding me?"

"No," he answered. "I ain't kidding and there's not one little thing to worry about except what the police gonna say when they get here and find there ain't nothing here. Because as soon as this mess is finished cooking, I'm gonna tear

the whole thing down and put it away so fast you won't even know it was here."

The next thing I knew Bubba was coming down the stairs asking how come there were police cars stopping in front of the place. I didn't know what to say, but I ran upstairs anyway and saw that there were two cars stopped outside of the place. One of the cars was across the street and the other right in front. The crowd was moving around in front of The Joint, and Tina was still standing outside of the door on the stoop. Right then I had a bright idea.

"Tina," I called to her, "quick, go up to your apartment so the cops will find you home!"

She looked at me kind of funny and took one little step back.

"Go ahead," I said, motioning with my hands, "quick."

Tina gave me another look, like she was puzzled, and took another backward step. I motioned with my hands again and she went inside. She didn't know what I was up to, but she was just going along. By then two of the cops had come up and I was just about to tell them that Tina was upstairs, which I thought would give me more time to convince Mr. Darden to take the still down, when—*WHOOOSH!*—a big sound came from the basement.

Everybody that was in front of the building started running this way and that, and the cops backed off in a hurry. I heard one of them yell for somebody to call the bomb squad. I ran into the building and down the back stairs toward the other entrance to the basement. I opened the door, and there was the worst smell I had ever smelled in my life. Mr. Darden opened the door to where the boiler room was,

and the floor was covered with slime and mess. There was a small fire, and Mrs. Darden was trying to stamp it out with her foot, only she was slipping around in the mess from the still so much she couldn't get it out. There was a bucket of sand standing near the wall, and Mr. Darden came and got that and threw it on the fire and put it out.

"Don't you worry none," he said, snatching down some of the pipes, which must have been really hot because he would snatch at one and then jerk his hand back. "I'm going to have this whole thing cleared up in two shakes. Just you wait and see."

I waited and what I saw was Mr. and Mrs. Darden trying to sweep up the mess. It smelled awful, and it was slippery, and I just hoped it wouldn't catch on fire again.

When I got upstairs, the police had cleared the street, and a truck marked 532nd Bomb Disposal Squadron was there. Two guys came out and were talking to the cops. They had a loudspeaker and were trying to get the building evacuated.

"I think everything's cleared up now," I said to one of the cops.

"Who lives down there?" he asked. "Arabs?"

"Yeah," I said, knowing that Mr. Darden was from Georgia, and that seemed to do him a lot of good.

You know who got in trouble after all that? Not Mr. Darden, because he said he didn't have a still in the basement. He said he was sleeping and he heard a loud noise. Me. I got a summons for having a building violation. I didn't even believe it. But that's what happened. The cops and the bomb squad left, and people started gathering around and asking Mr. Darden if he really had a still in the basement, and he

just looked like he was being too modest to say anything about it. A couple of people said that if he ever got it going again they would order from him.

Tina came down to the office and told me that either Petey Darden had to go or she would go.

"Tina," I said, "I don't really care. If you go, then we'll have an empty apartment on one floor. If Mr. Darden goes we'll have an empty apartment on another floor. What can I tell you?"

"Well," she said, putting her hand on her hip, "I can tell you one thing. I'm not going!"

Gloria came over and I told her the whole story. We were sitting around talking about it and just sort of goofing around in general when Mrs. Brown came down and said that, in all the excitement, Jack Johnson had had a heart attack and died. She was crying so badly that we thought about calling the doctor. She said that she couldn't go up to the apartment alone, and Gloria said that she understood, that she would go with her.

I sent Jackie, a little girl that hung around the office sometimes, out for two containers of coffee. I had begun to drink a lot of coffee, and I was beginning to feel old. I looked at the calendar. There were still five weeks before school started.

Gloria stayed with Mrs. Brown almost two hours. Dean came by and we talked about nothing in particular. When Gloria came down, I asked her how Mrs. Brown was doing, and she said okay, that she would go and check on her after a while.

"You know, I really think you're okay," I said to Gloria.
"I really mean it."

"Really mean that I'm okay?" Gloria asked.

"I guess so," I said, chickening out. I wanted to say something else to her, but I lost the nerve, or maybe the right words, somewhere along the way.

"If you mean that I care for people, you're right," Gloria said. "Is that what you mean?"

"I guess so," I said.

"We still going to work on finding out who stole the stuff from Mr. Reynolds' store?" she asked.

I nodded.

"Is that really what you meant?" Gloria asked. "About me being okay? Just that I care for people?"

I was embarrassed and I smiled, and she smiled, too, and I felt about ten feet high. Gloria had a way of doing that to me.

CHAPTER 15

WE WERE IN THE JOINT WHEN A FRIEND OF GLORIA'S CAME in and said that her mother had said that we were in the newspaper. So we went out and got a *Daily News* and a *Times* and the *Amsterdam News*, but we couldn't find a word. Gloria called her mother, but her mother didn't know what paper we were in either. It seems a friend of Gloria's from school had called her house and said that she had read something about us in the paper. Gloria's mother had told a friend, who came and told us. So we called the girl who had called her mother, and she wasn't home. We were about to forget about it when the girl—her name was Karen—showed up.

“Gloria!”

"Hey, what are you doing over here?" Gloria gave Karen five and they went through their little number about giving each other five and bumping hips and what have you. They looked cute doing it, too. Only, by this time, I have to admit, Gloria was getting cuter every day and whatever she did I liked. She had my nose open, so to speak.

"Is this the place you're messing with?" Karen asked.

"Yeah," Gloria said. "Look, everybody, this is my friend Karen, and these are my friends Paul, Dean, and Bubba."

Karen smiled at everybody, and everybody sort of nodded at her.

"Who's Paul Williams?" Karen asked, checking the paper she was carrying for the name.

"I am," I said.

"You look like a slumlord," she said.

Well, the whole bit was this. *The Village Voice* was doing an article on slumlords in the city, and they had my name listed as the owner of The Joint. Really. I looked at the paper, and there, big as day, was my name. Not only that, but next to my name it said, "Possible mob connections."

Gloria tried to explain to Karen how I really wasn't a slumlord, but she didn't sound too convincing.

I was getting a little uptight about the whole thing, too. Nobody seemed to want to know about the problems with the building, but everybody wanted a little piece of the criticism. From wanting to make a go of The Joint, I had come around to just wanting to get people off my back. I wondered if Harley saw the article. He was probably laughing his head off if he did.

We decided to send a letter to *The Voice*. At first we were

going to make it a real angry letter, saying how we were being picked on and everything. But then we figured that they probably wouldn't believe us anyway. Dean said that even if they did believe us, they couldn't print our letter because it would make them look bad. He had a point. So we decided on a letter that said how much we were going to improve the building. Which was a little bit of a joke because we didn't have any money.

"If we did take the money that Chris's father's boss put up for a reward," Gloria said, "we could do something. At least we'd have a few dollars."

It was a short-term solution, and it didn't look like it would make much difference in the long run, but it was all we had. We agreed to do it. We didn't have any idea if we could actually help out in the case or not, but it was worth a try. We decided to try to follow A. B. Tucker. That way we could find out where the warehouse was. The tail was a toss-up between Dean and Bubba, because A. B. had gone with me and Gloria to the warehouse. If he saw Dean or Bubba, maybe he wouldn't figure them to be tailing him. Anyway, we had Bubba and Dean draw straws. Bubba was elected to tail A. B. Tucker, but then it was decided that Dean should do the tailing because he had a bike and A. B. didn't know him as well as he did the rest of us.

We also knew that we were going to have to get a list of the stolen stuff from Mr. Reynolds, and Bubba was sent to do that. Finally, our money crisis was getting worse. The rent party had been a disaster, and the idea of having another one, as suggested by Mr. Pender, didn't hit anyone right. We had only five tenants who were paying their rent

on a regular basis. Mr. Lowe and Mrs. Brown on the top floor paid each month on time. He worked in the post office and she collected Social Security and a small pension. Tina and Johnnie Mae Robinson paid. They were the only ones on the second floor. Mr. Hyatt usually paid okay when he wasn't in the hospital, but he was in there now. Ella Fox had always had trouble paying. On the first floor the Gilfonds paid, and so did Mrs. Jones. She worked in the St. James Hotel on 45th Street as a chambermaid. Mr. Darden and his wife lived in the basement and did the cleaning and odd jobs instead of paying rent. Of the nonpayers, the worst was Askia Ben Kenobi on the third floor. I didn't know how *The Voice* expected me not to be a slumlord if some people didn't pay their rent.

Mr. Pender said that we had enough money to last for three more weeks before we went bust. That's with all the payers paying. He showed me his figures, and they looked reasonable. One thing I noticed was that there was no mention of his salary. He hadn't collected a penny for keeping the books, and even though he was just doing it part time, I felt bad.

The thing was, really, that I had given up. If someone had come along and said, "Hey, here's a good excuse," I'd have grabbed it so fast it would have made your head spin. Gloria wanted to keep on going, but I didn't. Bubba wasn't really that interested, and Dean was just beginning to pick up a little in his interest. It seemed that everything that happened had the effect of stopping the rent. The Gilfonds, for example, broke up for about two days, and the rent was a week late because he went out and lost the money somewhere. He

came back two days after he had left, but he didn't have the money to pay the rent. When Mr. Pender asked him about it he jumped bad with Pender.

"You have to understand hostility," Pender said. "When people feel that their weaknesses are showing, their lack of education or finances or position, they become defensive. Somehow they think that if they're hostile enough you won't notice whatever it is they're lacking."

"What did you say to Gilfond?" I asked.

"I said peerio," Mr. Pender said brightly. "Chip, chip, peerio!"

"Oh."

The street fair idea was, more or less, our last hope of getting enough money to get through the following month. I told my father about it, and he came up with something I didn't know about. You could rent booths from the city for a nominal fee if you had an affair that promoted the city. So the street fair was named the I Love New York Street Fair. It was really encouraging to find out about the booths, because at least it seemed as if we were really going to be doing something for a change. We were going to have drawings, and people were going to sell food. Everyone that had something to sell or do could get a booth, and they, in turn, would give us some money to participate in the fair. Altogether thirty people, mostly people who had small stores, but some who didn't, wanted to participate. We decided to charge everyone twenty dollars, and nobody objected.

Mr. Pender had another idea. He said we should rent out the office. That way it would contribute another one hundred dollars a month to the income of The Joint. It was a

good idea and one that we had to go along with, but we had gotten used to hanging out in the renting office and didn't really want to give it up. But we told Pender that we would get the furniture out of the office and rent it out right after the street fair.

Mr. Reynolds refused to give the list of stolen stuff to Bubba. He said that we shouldn't be fooling around in police business. We got a list of stuff from Chris, but he didn't know the serial numbers. Then someone—I think it was Gloria—got the idea of getting the numbers from the Police Department. As it turned out we didn't have to because Chris got the numbers from his attorney, the woman from Legal Aid. That made us feel good, because at least Chris seemed to be getting interested in the case. After all, it was his neck we were trying to save.

Dean had been trying to follow A. B. Tucker around for almost a week without results.

"Usually he gets into his car and takes off, and by the time I get my bicycle ready, he's gone," Dean said. "And when he's walking he just hangs around the same old places."

As luck would have it, though, it was me who found out where the warehouse was. I was going to a friend's house on La Salle Street, and who do I see but A. B. Tucker and this girl walking along Broadway. He was talking to her as if he was explaining something, and I watched him for a while from across the street. I was standing at the doughnut shop on 125th, and he was walking uptown on the other side. Now, the el train runs along Broadway, and I thought I'd heard a train the last time I went to the warehouse. I walked across the street from A. B. Tucker and the girl, staying as

close as I could to the buildings so he wouldn't see me. I followed them for a while, and then I saw A. B. stop and go into a garage. At least it had "Garage" on the outside. He just opened the door and walked in. I could see that there was someone at the door when he walked in, but I couldn't see who it was. The girl didn't go in with him. She waited outside, and after a while A. B. came out. He had a box with him, and he and the girl hailed a cab. I was standing there watching him get into the cab, and then when the cab turned and went past me I looked the other way. I was sure he didn't see me, and I was pretty sure that the building he went in had to be the warehouse.

I was pretty excited by the time I got back to The Joint. I told Gloria, Bubba, and Dean what I had seen. They weren't exactly enthusiastic.

"So?" That was Dean.

"So?" I said, a little ticked that they didn't show more interest. "So now we know where the stolen stuff is!"

"No, we don't," Bubba said. "What we know is that there's some stuff in there that might be stolen. We don't know if the stuff from Mr. Reynolds' store is in there, and we don't know that the stuff that is in there is really even stolen."

"Not only that," Gloria said, "but I remember this picture where the hero found this warehouse where they were putting dope in cars to ship around the world, and he told the F.B.I. By the time the F.B.I. got to the warehouse it was empty."

"Hey, look, I don't get it," I said. "We've been planning to follow A. B. Tucker to find out where the warehouse is,

and now we've done it and you guys don't even give a darn."

Gloria looked at Bubba and then at Dean.

"Me and Dean was over near the park," Bubba said, "and we saw Mr. Reynolds and we started talking to him, and then Dean said—"

"I said?" Dean jumped up. "You were the one that started talking about us having a clue!"

"Well, one of us said something about having a clue," Bubba said, giving Dean a dirty look.

"You tell him what the clue was?" I asked.

"We just said that the stuff might be in a warehouse someplace," Bubba said.

"And what did he say?"

"He just said that we should be careful," Dean said. "And then he said that sometimes guys get hurt when they try to handle things themselves, like in the newspaper this morning."

"What was in the newspaper this morning?" I asked.

Gloria had the morning paper and pushed it toward me. There was a story about a gang that had killed a witness out on Long Island.

"You guys aren't witnesses," I said.

"No, but we will be if we find out that the stuff is in the warehouse!" Bubba said.

"Well, I'm going to check it out," I said. "Maybe I'll go by there tonight."

No one else said anything. Gloria looked down at her hands. Bubba stuffed a cupcake into his mouth, and Dean looked at the ceiling. It wasn't what you would call a show

of strength. We talked around a bit more without really saying anything, and then we split up. I kept trying to think about The Joint and the reward money.

My mother had stewed chicken that night. If there's anything I hate in the world, it's stewed chicken. My father asked me why I wasn't eating the chicken, and I told him I didn't like stewed chicken. I expected to hear his mouth—you know, the lecture about the starving children in India or China or wherever. Instead he came up with one of his little jokes. He's got these strange little jokes that he makes up and gets a big kick out of.

"You think you hate eating stewed chicken?" he said. "Well, just imagine how the chicken feels about it!"

Then he laughed. I didn't like that joke at all. In the first place, I don't like to think about animals being able to think. If you think that the animal can think, you have to come up with a long story to justify you eating the animal. So when my father makes a joke like that I don't think it's funny. He laughed, though. A little chuckle to himself.

"I think we got a new lead on Chris's case," I said.

"What does that mean?" he mumbled through a mouthful of rice and gravy.

"Maybe we can find the stuff that's stolen," I said.

"Suppose you find out that he's guilty," my father said. "Suppose you get a lead and check it out and find out that Chris stole the stuff. You going to turn your evidence over to the police?"

"He's not guilty!" I said.

"But if he is . . ."

"If he is, I'll turn it over to the police," I said.

"Well, that's good," he said.

He didn't say anything for a while, and I figured he was thinking about the case.

"You really want Chris to be guilty, don't you?" I asked.

"I don't want anyone to be guilty," he said. "But the truth of it is that somebody is."

What I had really wanted to get into was that I was a little scared about checking out the warehouse. I wanted to say something to him so he would be a little scared for me, or tell me that it was too dangerous, or something. But it didn't work out like that.

I fooled around with a crossword puzzle after supper. I say fooled around because I've never finished a crossword puzzle in my entire life. I was waiting until it got dark before I went to check out the warehouse. At least that's what I told myself. When it began to get dark, I wished I had gone when it was still light out.

I was just about to leave when the phone rang. My mother answered and it was Dean.

"Hello?"

"Hi, it's me," Dean said. "You still going to check out the warehouse?"

"Yeah."

"Darn it!"

"Does that mean you're going, too?"

"I guess so," Dean said, "but believe me, it's against my advice to myself!"

CHAPTER

16

WE WENT BY THE JOINT TO PICK UP A FLASHLIGHT. GLORIA was there, and she said she would go with us. I told her that it might be better if she didn't, but when she said she wanted to, I was glad.

By the time we got to the place I thought was the warehouse, it was dark. Now, it gets dark everywhere at night. But this whole neighborhood gets darker than any place in the world. Really. It was so dark you couldn't even see the doors of the place. I remembered the guy that I saw standing near the door when A. B. Tucker went in. I told Gloria to go across the street and watch when Dean and me went in. I told her that if she heard any screaming to go get the cops on the double.

"And if you don't hear nothing, go get the cops on the double because they got us," Dean said.

"No, that means we're okay," I said. "But we'll be out in thirty minutes or less. After that, we're in trouble."

We left Gloria across the street and crossed under the el toward the warehouse. Dean asked me if I thought he was gay. It was a funny thing to ask at the time. I said no, and then he asked me if I minded holding his hand when we got inside. That was kind of funny. Later, I told myself, I would laugh.

We got to the door and walked right up to it and tried it. I figured that if there was somebody inside I could tell them some story about how I had gone to the wrong place or something. The door opened. We couldn't see a thing inside. I shined the flashlight inside the place. Nothing, but I thought it could be the place that A. B. Tucker took us to. So in we went. We closed the door and started toward where I thought the stairs were. They were there. We turned out the flashlight and went slowly up the stairs. Dean had his hand on my arm. I was never so glad to be touching anybody in my life as I was just then. We went up two flight of stairs and came to a door. I opened it slowly.

"Who's there!" A voice came from the darkness.

What we heard next sounded like either someone throwing a piece of rock or metal against the door or someone shooting at it. We started downstairs in the darkness. I dropped the flashlight and ran into Dean and we tumbled down the first flight, grabbing the best we could at the metal banister, until we hit the bottom.

"Who's there!" The voice from the top of the stairs.

"Shoot him!" That was Dean, and we heard a scuffling at the top of the steps as whoever it was was getting under cover.

We got up and got down the rest of the stairs as quickly as we could. By the time we hit the first floor we heard some barking behind us and we knew there were dogs in the place. Never mind. The barking was behind us, the front door was in front of us, and fear was in our feet. I got to the far wall first and couldn't find the door.

"You got a match?" I tried to whisper in the darkness.

"Who? Me?" Dean asked.

What a question! Who else? I groped around for the door. The dogs were coming closer, and I could see a light from the staircase we had just come down. A moment later I saw a flashlight.

"Shoot to kill!" Dean again.

The light disappeared. But I thought I saw the door. I went over to where I thought I saw it. Bingo.

"I got it!" I whispered as loudly as I could.

I heard Dean's footsteps coming toward me as I opened the door. I jumped out and Dean came right behind me. There was a loud bang and an echo. Someone had shot at us again. I ran across the street in a crouch, and I saw Dean doing the same thing.

"What's up?" Gloria saw us coming.

"Run!" I said. And the three of us ran down Broadway. I never knew Gloria could run that fast. Dean and me were probably tired from running down the stairs.

We got back to The Joint and we were so out of breath we couldn't even talk. Dean announced that he would see

us in the morning and started for the door.

"Thanks for coming along," I said, "and thanks for thinking so fast when we were in there."

"Yeah," he said, "right. Look, if you want to check out anything else, let me know, so I can get out of town for the day."

Dean was okay. He was scared, the same as me, but he had gone, and he had thought fast when we were in the warehouse.

"What happened?" Gloria asked.

"We got shot at," I said.

"By who?" she asked, her breathing calming down a little.

"I don't know," I said, "but it sure was close."

We sat there for a while until our breathing was back to normal, and then we closed up the office.

Maybe it was the excitement—I don't know. It had to be something different. But when Gloria was standing there locking up the office and I was standing there next to her, it just came out. It was almost as if somebody else besides me said it.

"Gloria?"

"What?"

"I love you."

She started laughing.

I turned and walked out of the hallway. Behind me I could hear her calling me and still laughing. I turned around and she was leaning against the door, still laughing. I felt like change for two cents. I went on home. I washed up a little and went to bed. It was the first time in my life I had said that to a girl. It would also be the last. I couldn't fall

asleep right away—in fact, I stayed up most of the night, just staring into the darkness.

I had a dream, not a real dream, but the kind of thing you have when you're half awake and half asleep. I was back in the warehouse, and the guy was coming down the stairs. I told Dean to head for the door as I distracted the guy with the gun. I had the flashlight and I went to one side and turned it on. I could see, out of the corner of my eye, Dean open and shut the door as the bullets slammed into the wall next to my head. I turned out the flashlight and moved into the middle of the floor and backed slowly toward the door. The guy didn't have a flashlight. I was safe. He fired a few more shots off in the darkness. How many had he fired? Five? Six? I reached behind me and found the doorknob and turned it slowly. I threw the flashlight across the darkened floor. He fired at the light as I opened the door. But somehow he spotted me silhouetted against the streetlight and fired once in my direction. I felt the bullet go into my chest and felt a burning sensation. I closed the door behind me and staggered across the street. Down the street, about a block away, I saw Dean running, passing the liquor store. Gloria was there. I reached out to her but fell before I could touch her hand. I looked up at her one last time before I died. She was sobbing. There, now she would be sorry.

Then I fell asleep.

When I woke the next morning the phone was ringing. I stumbled out into the kitchen and saw that my mother was out. What day was it? I looked at the calendar and saw that Wednesday hadn't been crossed out. Wednesday was my favorite day. I answered the phone and it was Gloria. I hung

up. A moment later it started to ring again, but I ignored it and went to the bathroom.

I wandered down to The Joint and found Bubba sitting on the stoop. He was trying to balance two slices of pizza, one on each knee, and drink a Coke at the same time.

"You got some people in the office," he said, a big grin on his face.

"What kind of people?" I asked, trying to read something into his expression.

"Just the usual astral types," he said.

Okay. I went into the office and there, sitting cross-legged on the floor, was Askia Ben Kenobi and some girl. Now, Askia Ben Kenobi normally looks as weird as you want or need on a regular day. But the girl looked like something else. She had silver paint on her face, little stars on both cheeks and one on her chin. There was an eye painted right in the middle of her forehead, too.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Kenobi?" I asked, trying to get enough sarcasm into my voice to let him know that I was being sarcastic but not so much that he would get really ticked off.

"I am here to inform you that my queen has arrived," he said.

I figured out right away that he was talking about the weirdo sitting next to him.

"She can't move in with you unless you're married," I said, lying through my teeth. "It says so on the lease."

He started chanting. She started chanting, too. Being chanted at is kind of a different experience. I mean, you don't get chanted at every day. I remember whole months

that have gone by and I wasn't even hummed at. Anyway, they started their chanting, him first and then her. That's the way they stopped, too. He stopped and then she stopped.

"Do you mind if we pray?" he asked.

"Go ahead," I said.

So they started praying. But the praying sounded a lot like the chanting. He was still cross-legged, only now he leaned all the way forward until his head touched the floor in front of him and he was kind of muttering and kind of humming. There weren't any words that I could just come out and call words that I knew. Maybe he was doing it in another language.

Anyway, they were doing it in front of the desk, and I was sitting at the desk, so it looked a little as if they were praying to me. That's what Mrs. Brown saw when she walked in.

"What are you people doing?" she said in a loud, high voice.

They didn't say anything, just kept on praying, or whatever it was they were doing.

"You must be disciples of the Devil!" Mrs. Brown's face looked furious. "Disciples of the Devil!"

When Askia and his lady had finished praying, he introduced her to me as Selassie Tafari and said she was from his people.

"I will," he said, "not need this!"

He handed me a paper. I looked at it and saw that it was an eviction notice. It must have been Pender's work. I looked up at Askia Ben Kenobi and saw that he had narrowed his eyes down to little slits.

I smiled a dumb little smile and sat down. Mrs. Brown

spit on the floor right in front of him, and he gave her a look, but she just gave him one right back and he left. The lady, Silver Face, put her hands in front of her chest and walked out as if she were stiff.

"I just came down to tell you that Mr. Johnson is very pleased with the way you are running the establishment," Mrs. Brown said. "You know, when a champion trains for a fight he must be able to relax in the evening and this place is quite quiet after supper."

"I'm glad he's pleased," I said.

When Mrs. Brown left, I sat at the desk and thought about what Gloria had said before we went to the warehouse. I called Chris. He wasn't home, but his mother answered and said that she would have him call me back.

I closed up the office and went out. The day was really warm. I just hadn't walked around for so long I forgot what it was like. Bubba's cousin was in the street with his crazy dog. The dog was trying to attack the street light.

I wandered over to the park and saw some kids playing basketball and I got into a game with them. They were a lot younger than me, and they kind of thought I would be a star because I was older than they were. I'm not bad, really, but I'm not a star. I played with them until it started getting dark. I thought some more about Gloria, how bad I felt that she had laughed at me.

When I got home, everybody was excited. My mother was crying and my father was all agitated.

"What happened at the warehouse yesterday?" he asked.

"The warehouse?"

"Dean told his parents that you and he and Gloria went

over to some warehouse and someone took a shot at you."

I told the whole story the best I could, and we had to go down to the precinct house. When we got there, Dean was already there. They had been over to the warehouse and found the guard that shot at us.

"Guard?"

"He claims that you and your friend were trying to steal from the warehouse," the policeman said.

"How about the stolen stuff on the third floor?" I asked.

"That's a legitimate warehouse," the policeman said. "As far as I know the only thing that happened is that you kids let your imaginations get the best of you. You almost got yourself killed in the process. The best thing I can say is that we can probably get the people who own the warehouse not to press charges, since you came in with your story."

I looked at Dean and he looked at me. We had to give the police a lot of information about what schools we went to and things like that. My mother was still crying.

"What I would suggest"—a heavyset detective named Jenkins was chewing on a cigar as he talked. Every time he said anything the cigar would bob up and down—"is that you kids go back to being what you can be—that is, a bunch of kids. Go on and have yourself some fun and stay out of places where you don't have any business being. If I hear anything more about either of you getting into trouble, I'm gonna make life rough on you. And don't expect your parents to get you out of trouble the next time. I don't care who comes down here crying and who don't. Now get out of here!"

I didn't know what had happened at the warehouse. I was

sure it was the one that Gloria and me had been to. Even in the dark it looked like the one.

When I got home my father started off with a lecture. I deserved it, every bit of it. And everything he said was true.

"You know, I came from a big family," he said. "You saw the place I lived in. It wasn't any better when I lived in it. My father couldn't any more support all of us than walk on water. So I say I'm just going to have one kid and take care of it. And now what? Now you go out and try to get yourself killed because some other kid gets himself in trouble. How come you didn't call Chris and tell him to go get his head shot off? I don't understand that!"

He went on asking me the same questions over and over. How was I going to tell him that I was beginning to think that maybe Chris did do it? Or that we needed the reward money to keep The Joint from going under?

He kept it up even after it didn't make any more sense to me any more. I could tell he was trying to get through to me, and I told him that I was sorry that I did it.

"Sorry?" His voice went up as if it was just changing or something. "Is that all you can say—that you're sorry?"

I sat quietly for a while, and so did he. He started to say something and then stopped. I realized that he didn't know what to say to me. He made a gesture with his hand, and that stopped as well. He didn't have any more answers to what I should have done or shouldn't have done than me. I don't know why, but when that thought came to me I felt really scared for a minute. It only lasted for a short time, but it was a different feeling. I felt very close to him after I stopped being scared. I knew I was sharing something with

him. There were other things that I would have rather shared with him, but this was a very real thing. He seemed not to be as hard or as stiff as he usually seemed to me. He was okay, not as much as I thought, or as strong, but okay.

The next day I stayed around the house all day. Dean called and said he was sorry if I got into trouble because of him, but I said it was cool. I felt better that our parents knew about it. He asked me if I thought I could have made a mistake about the warehouse. I said yes, but I didn't really think so.

CHAPTER

17

I DON'T KNOW WHAT SHOOK ME UP THE MOST. WHAT HAPPENED in the warehouse was bad, but what happened later, going to the police station and everything, was nearly as bad. I got up early the next day and went to the library, just to be away from things for a while, and then I went to the movies. Gloria called that evening, but I told my mother I wasn't feeling well when she told me who it was, and that I would call her later. I didn't, of course.

The street fair was coming up, and I wanted to go to see what was going on at The Joint, but I didn't. I stayed in the house the next day, too. It rained most of the day, and I just hung around and watched some of the silly daytime quiz shows on television. When the doorbell rang, I thought it

might be my mother. She was working that day, and I thought maybe she was home early. She hadn't been feeling too well lately, and sometimes she would come home in the middle of the day. It wasn't my mother. It was Gloria.

"Hi." She was standing there in the doorway with this big grin on her face.

"Hi," I answered.

"Can I come in?"

I moved away from the door and she came in. I went over and sat at the kitchen table. She came over to the sink and leaned against it.

"You know"—she had her head down and had stopped grinning—"I'm really sorry about the other night."

"Forget it," I said. "I did."

"I don't want to forget it," she said. She looked up at me and smiled again. Not smiled, but grinned.

"I don't see what's so funny," I said.

"That's just it," she said. "Nothing's funny. You said . . . you know . . . what you said, and I just got kind of embarrassed and I laughed. Even now, when I talk about it, I really feel embarrassed."

"So don't talk about it."

"I want to talk about it."

"Why, if you find it so embarrassing?" I pushed the salt shaker behind the sugar bowl with one finger and then brought it around the other side.

"I was embarrassed because of the way I felt when you said it, I guess," she said. "That and because I felt so good inside and so silly at the same time. I didn't know what to say or what to do. When you left I cried. I really did. I didn't

even want to think about how I felt about you before. And then you said what you said . . . that you loved me . . . and it all came out, or up, or someplace. I don't know, I was just so glad that you said it. What I wanted to say to you then—or after you had left, really—was that I felt the same way about you. You know what I mean? I love you, too.”

Now it was my time to feel stupid. I didn't say anything at all. Instead I pushed the salt shaker back around the sugar bowl. Only this time I pushed it the other way. I looked at Gloria and she was still standing there, leaning against the sink, fooling around with her fingers. I had the feeling she was waiting for me to say something cool. I remembered in a movie once when this girl was walking with a guy on a beach and she turned to him and said something like, “David, I love you very much.” And there was this music playing in the background and he took her in his arms and said something about her meaning the whole world to him, and then they kissed and the movie ended as they walked along the beach. There wasn't any music playing, but I had to say something.

“Thanks, I needed that.”

Gloria smiled again, and we didn't say anything for a while, and then she asked me if I wanted to go over to The Joint to see what was going on. It seemed like a good idea and I said okay.

“Before we go over,” she said, “you want to kiss or anything?”

So I kissed Gloria Wiggins. I haven't kissed many girls, but I have to admit kissing Gloria wasn't the worst way to spend a little time.

When we got back to The Joint we found out that Mr. Hyatt was out of the hospital. He had lost a lot of weight and didn't look good at all. We all went up and said hello to him, and he said he appreciated us keeping his place for him and he'd have the rent straightened out as soon as he could. Then we had a meeting, and we decided at the meeting that we weren't going to get involved with the Chris caper any more. It was just too dangerous. We didn't know anything more than we had at first, and we—at least Dean and me—almost got ourselves shot. Bad news. We didn't even feel bad about it at this point. I said that I would tell Chris and that he would probably understand. We all vowed to still be his friend, though. We'd have to manage without the reward money.

It's funny about our block. Everybody does their own thing, so to speak, and leaves everybody else alone. But once when we had a street clean-up campaign everybody came and pitched in. Now when we were going to have the street fair everybody wanted to help. Some people volunteered to make free food, some helped with the decorations, some wanted to play instruments. I got the feeling after a while that there was going to be so much free stuff going on that we would end up not making any more money than we did at the rent party.

Bubba had one of his rare good ideas. He said that we should have our own little things. He got a scale and said that he would guess people's weight, and Gloria and her mother made chocolate candy which they wrapped up in tin foil to make them look like chocolate kisses. Tina and Johnnie Mae got some of their friends to hook up a loudspeaker

and brought all of their records. There was some argument over whether we would have Puerto Rican records, West Indian records, disco, or just plain soul records. A Polish lady—the only white woman living on the block—wanted at least one polka and brought her own record. She said it came from the old country, but it had a Sears label on it. Somebody pointed that out to her, and she said that she had bought it in Union City, New Jersey. I guess that was as close to the old country as she had ever been.

I got my father involved in the street fair. No lie. I just asked him if he would give us a hand. At first he didn't say anything, and then he said okay, he would. And what he did was to go around and keep people moving. I didn't think that was very important at first, but I saw after a while that it was.

The most popular thing at first was Bubba's weight-guessing thing. He had a jar, one of those big jars, and you put a dime in the jar and he would guess your weight. If he didn't guess your weight to within five pounds he would give you your dime back. Now that sounded pretty silly, and it would have been except for the fact that all the guys were trying to get the girls to step on the scale and they didn't want to. Then some of the guys started betting among themselves who was the heaviest and things like that and they were all putting dimes into Bubba's jar and weighing themselves and trying to get the women to get on the scales. It was pretty funny, really.

When Tina and Johnnie Mae got the music going, the whole block was jumping. People were dancing in the street, on the sidewalk, everywhere. There were a lot of people

from other blocks, but it didn't make any difference. Everyone was having a good time. Mr. Pender came with Mrs. Pender. I didn't even know there *was* a Mrs. Pender. She was in a wheelchair. He told Gloria that she had cerebral palsy, and that he spent as much time with her as possible. She had been all right until she reached forty, he said, and then they had been in an auto accident and she had gotten cerebral palsy as a result.

My mother had helped one of the ladies bake some cakes, and they were selling cakes and little tarts. Askia Ben Kenobi's lady, Miss Selassie, as he called her, was telling people's fortunes by writing their names on a piece of paper, burning the paper, and reading the ashes. She was as spooky as he was.

Things were working out just fine until Gloria got into a fight. There was a guy on the block named Luke who everybody used to call Homeboy. Wherever you said you were from, Homeboy would say that he used to live there. He was married to a girl who wasn't too pretty. In fact, Bubba said she looked like she had plastic surgery on her face and the surgeon didn't have anything but used parts when he did the job.

So Homeboy came up and asked Gloria how much her kisses went for, and she said fifty-five cents apiece, two for a dollar.

"They're really good," Gloria said. And she held one out for him. Homeboy took a look at the candy kisses and said that he didn't mean anything wrapped up in silver paper. He wanted a real kiss.

Now Gloria had been going through this all the time, and

she didn't really mind because after people finished kidding around they usually bought one of her candy kisses.

"Now what am I going to do with these things?" Homeboy said. "What I need is the real thing."

"Well, what you need is one thing and what you can buy here is another thing."

Homeboy walked off in a huff, and Gloria started talking to Jeannie about this and that. The whole thing might have ended right there if it hadn't been for Homeboy running into Mr. Darden. Darden had started his still back up and was running what he called an upside-down beauty parlor.

"You goes to the regular beauty parlor," he said with a big smile on his face, "to get your hair curled. You come here to get your toes curled."

Homeboy bought some of Petey Darden's basement booze, mixed it with some Coca-Cola, and carried it around in a brown paper bag as he nipped on it. After he had nipped his way through most of the bag, he stumbled back over to where Gloria was trying to sell the last couple of kisses. Not only was he half bombed, but the booze had messed up his throat so bad he could hardly talk. He was just wheezing his words out. Gloria couldn't hear him when he asked her a question and kind of leaned over, and she turned her cheek.

Homeboy wasn't having any cheek turning. He turned Gloria's face back around and gave her a kiss. It must have been kind of a powerful kiss, or perhaps the booze on his breath put her under for a while because she didn't move. She just looked at him.

"Knew that would get you," Homeboy said. Then he

grabbed her and half pulled her out of the booth, kissing her like they used to in the movies back when kissing was a big thing. Gloria tried to get loose and the more she tried the harder Homeboy was holding her. A few people saw the whole thing—the kissing part at least—but they weren't sure what was going on. They could have been fooling around—it would have been some heavy fooling around, but it could have been. Finally Gloria got one hand free and punched Homeboy just above his left ear. Homeboy staggered back and then he started circling Gloria as if he was going to fight her. Some of the other guys started to go in and break it up, but it was too late. Gloria hit Homeboy on the jaw and knocked him down. Homeboy got up again and Gloria knocked him down again. He got up again and she hit him and he fell against a wall.

It was funny at first, the way Gloria had hit Homeboy and knocked him down. But then everybody saw that it wasn't just because Homeboy had been drinking. Gloria could just fight better than Homeboy! Homeboy got serious, but that didn't help anything. Gloria went upside his head so many times he must have thought her fists were part of a permanent hangover he had grown in his ear—a noisy part that hurt a lot.

We got the fight broken up and some guys helped Homeboy down the street toward where he lived. He was saying that if he ever caught Gloria alone he would punch her out.

"If you ever catch her alone you'd better look cross-eyed and hope she don't recognize your ugly butt!" Tina yelled at Homeboy. Then there was another fight up the street when two older guys had a foot race and one slipped and fell in

some dog leavings. The guy who fell was mad, of course, and the other guy was just laughing. The streets were clean, but some dogs had wandered into the street fair and did their thing.

With the second fight people started drifting away. But then Tina got the microphone and called everybody back to the street.

"Everybody come over here for just one more minute!" Her voice echoed off the buildings as she talked through the loudspeaker. "Come on, you've had a nice time today, you can spare a minute!"

So everybody started gathering around the stoop she was standing on. And when they did, she called me, Gloria, Bubba, Dean, Omar, and anybody else she saw under nineteen and said we were the organizers of the party and to give us a big hand.

"Now we got these booths and things from the city and they're going to come by and pick them up," she said. "But they're not going to clean up the mess we made. We got two ways of doing that. Everybody can just clean in front of your own place, or we can all pitch in a dollar or fifty cents, whatever you got, and give it to these young people and they will do the cleaning!"

That really sounded like a good idea. And most people didn't want to clean the streets so they took up a big collection and five of us got brooms and stuff to start cleaning the street. We made extra money, so that was a good idea, right? Wrong!

Cleaning a street after a block party is about the hardest thing in the world. We started at one corner and started

sweeping everything into the street. We figured we could sweep everything into the street and then the sidewalks would be clean and we could just go down the street and pick up the garbage. Good idea, right? Wrong again! Since the party was over, the police took down the barricades and started letting traffic through again, so when we had a big pile of garbage in the middle of the street a few cars spread half of it back across the width of the street. We started picking up a lot of the stuff and putting it into garbage cans and plastic bags. Hours. That's what it took. We didn't have the really big brooms that the sanitation department did or those garbage cans on wheels. Just bending down picking up everything was brutal.

We started off, me, Dean, Bubba, and Omar, laughing and joking and working as fast as we could. We lost Gloria right away because Mr. Pender came and took her away so they could figure out the money.

"How much you figure we made?" Bubba asked.

"About three hundred dollars," I said, really thinking it was a lot more than that.

"I bet it was a lot more than that," Bubba said.

"How we gonna split the money?" Omar asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, Tina said that all the kids in the block were responsible for the party, so I figure everybody should get a share," Omar said.

"Only the sponsors of the street party get the money," I said. "Why should you get anything? You didn't help do anything."

"I'm helping clean up," Omar said.

"Then you get part of the clean-up money they collected," Bubba said.

Omar said if that was all he was going to get, then we could forget it, and he dropped his broom and went home. He wasn't that anxious about working anyway. Neither were we, but we were stuck.

The street fair had started at five and ended at eight. We began cleaning about nine o'clock, and at eleven-thirty we were just getting finished. Two and a half hours of back-breaking work. When we got the last little bit cleaned up, a car came through and a girl who was riding in the back of it threw out some wrappers from Kentucky Fried Chicken and some chicken bones as the car sped past. One of the funniest things I ever saw in my life, and then it wasn't funny until the next day, was Dean standing in the middle of the street trying to hit a car a block and a half down the street with a chicken bone. You don't know what it means to have somebody dump garbage on your street until you're the one who has to clean it up.

"And you know what else makes me mad?" Bubba said. "Everybody is going to come out tomorrow and not even notice that the street is clean."

"Right," I said, "but they would notice if it was dirty."

We put all the cleaning stuff in the office at The Joint, and Bubba left. Me and Dean started to leave and made it to the stoop before we had to sit down again, we were just that tired. Dean was so tired he was getting whiny, like a little kid.

"Hey, bloods, what's happening?" It was Kelly Smith, Pat's older brother. They were a cousin to someone in Earth,

Wind & Fire, and Kelly had tried out with the Cleveland Cavaliers. He was about six six and had a way of leaning over you when he talked. Which wouldn't have been so bad if he had heard of Scope.

"Hey, Kelly, how's it going?"

"All right, all right," he said. "I got the weight and I'm definitely carrying the freight."

He put his hand up and we stuck out our palms and he gave us five. That was another thing about Kelly. He was always giving somebody five. By the time you finished talking to him, your fingers were swollen.

"Were you at the party?"

"I don't miss nothing dynamite," Kelly said, "and this was dynamite and out of sight! It helped my day and made the night!"

Slap. Slap.

"It was a lot of work," Dean said.

"I think you cats should give a party like this every week," Kelly said. "Check it out! This could be the party capital of the world. You get all the downtown freaks coming up here to disco to the outdoor sound, and boogying with the people."

Slap. Slap.

"Too much work," Dean said, trying to rub some life back into his legs. "It took us almost three hours to get the street clean."

"Yeah, and then some woman threw a box of Kentucky Fried Chicken and some chicken bones out the window of her car."

"You can run the money end, see," Kelly said, "and have

your old lady run the social part, dig it? You got an old lady?"

"Yeah," I said.

"What's her name?"

"Gloria." I held my breath when I said that. I was glad nobody else was around, especially Gloria, when I said that she was my old lady.

"No lie? You really got an old lady named Gloria?"

"Uh-huh."

"I used to have an old lady named Gloria," Kelly said.
Slap. Slap.

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah, everybody thought she was ugly, but she wasn't. She was handicapped. I could see people thinking she was ugly because the first time I seen her I thought she was ugly, too. But she was just handicapped. She was born with her lips on wrong. The top lip was where the bottom lip was supposed to be and the bottom lip was stuck up on top. That made her look funny."

"I can understand it," I said.

"She talked funny, too," Kelly said.

"I can understand that, too," I said.

"But you could tell she wasn't ugly or nothing," Kelly went on, "because she had a little mustache and that was in the right place, and if you could kinda imagine her bottom lip up on top she was kinda cute."

"Sometimes you have to use your imagination a little," I said.

"Right on."

Slap. Slap.

"I wish I could have used my imagination to get the street clean," I said. "We worked like dogs getting all that paper and stuff up."

"Hey, look." Kelly was hovering over us and it was pretty rough. It was like something had died in his mouth. "You can hire some flunkies to do that kind of work, and you and your man here can be the man-o, man-o-gerial staff. Can you dig it?"

Slap. Slap.

"Then after a while you become famous and everybody will flock to the place. When it rains you hold it indoors, see?"

"We don't have a place to hold it indoors," Dean said. "And the booths and loudspeaker and stuff don't belong to us either. We got the booths and the loudspeaker from the park people."

"The Department of Parks," I said.

"Don't be mean, baby," Kelly said, exhaling. "You can hold the thing in your place. It'll be like a ongoing rent party. A different kind of music in every pad. I can get you some boss stereo equipment at half price, and I know a cat who can get a lot of downtown chicks to come. That's all you really need, man, the chicks. If you get some foxes all you got to do is stand around and hum, the foxes will take care of everything else!"

Slap. Slap.

"Well, we'll think about it," I said. My mind was jumping around to so many places I couldn't even think straight. I wondered if Dean had picked up on the bit about the stereo stuff.

"You know what we should do," Dean said, "check out the prices of everything we would need. We'd have to paint all the places—that would cost money—probably do some decorating, figure out how much the stereo stuff would cost, and figure out how we could get cheap food—"

"Man, the idea can't lose!" Kelly interrupted. "Paint don't cost nothing much, and you don't need to decorate the place all up. You just got to give it a cool name. I used to know a place that some cats bought to make into a bar. This cat's aunt went to the hospital, and everybody thought she was going to die and leave this dude a piece of change. So they went out and bought a place that wasn't much more than a cellar. They figured as soon as the cat's aunt kicked off they'd get the money and decorate the place up. But she was one of them mean old West Indian chicks what refused to kick off. So they opened the place and called it The Cellar and it made a fortune. You can call this place something cool and you won't have no decorating to do, man."

"Stratford Arms Disco."

"Right on! If they can have a singer called Meat Loaf, you can have a disco called Stratford Arms!" Kelly said. "And I can take you over to a cat got a stereo store near La Marqueta, and he'll give you stereo stuff at a boss price."

We told him we would think about it, and Dean said we could go look at the stuff Saturday, and Kelly said okay. Then he went on talking about how much money we could make and stuff like that until I couldn't keep my eyes open any more. The thing was that a lot of the stuff he was saying seemed to make sense. But the thing that was on my mind most was the stereo stuff.

"What do you think?" I asked Dean when Kelly left.

"I think we should forget about this whole thing," Dean said.

"I guess so," I answered. "What do you think?"

"You already asked me that."

"Oh."

"Probably wouldn't do any harm just looking, though," he said.

"I guess not," I answered.

I said good-bye to Dean at his place and started across to my place when I heard him call to me. I turned and he was just crossing the street.

"Look," he said, "if you can convince yourself that this is really stupid and that we shouldn't do it, call me right away and work on me, okay?"

CHAPTER

18

MY FATHER SAYS I SLEEP THE SLEEP OF THE DEAD. NOTHING wakes me. Once my parents had gone out and I had put the chain on the door and fell asleep, and they banged on the door, called on the telephone, and even went to Mrs. Lucas's house next door and banged on the wall—nothing. Finally my father had to come in through the fire-escape window. My mother thought I had either been drugged or had died in my sleep. They woke me up finally after shaking me for a minute. What can I tell you?—that's the way I sleep. After I got home from cleaning up the street and the party and so forth, I said good night to my parents and went in to bed. Then I had this weird dream.

I dreamed that I was playing third base for Cincinnati.

They had hired me to replace some star that had gone to another team. I was hitting about .400 and hadn't made an error. The season was almost over and two of our pitchers had been hurt in an auto accident. We just managed to win the pennant and then the league playoffs, mostly due to my hitting, and now we were in the series. Another of our pitchers was hurt—he pulled a tendon in his right leg and couldn't throw. The two pitchers we had had pitched all the games. They were exhausted. There was no way they could pitch the last game of the series. This was it—do or die. The manager came to me.

“Paul,” he said, “you know what you have to do.”

I knew. He handed me the ball and I took the mound. I pitched the first four innings without giving up a hit. In the top of the fifth I shook off one sign from the catcher and then another. He came out to the mound and started in this long argument about he knew what pitching was all about, that I was just a third baseman and I'd better wake up to that fact.

“Wake up, kid,” he said. He was shaking me by the shoulder.

“No, I don't want to wake up,” I said, “I can pitch as well as anybody in this league!”

“Wake up, Paul, wake up!”

I opened my eyes, and it was my father. I looked around for the rest of the team and they weren't there.

“Paul, are you awake?”

“Yeah,” I answered through the fog, “I guess so.”

“There's a phone call for you,” he said. “That Mrs. Brown from the building.”

"What time is it?"

"Two-thirty."

"In the morning?"

"In dreams begin responsibilities."

I stumbled through the dining room to where the phone sat on the hutch. I answered it and listened while Mrs. Brown told me, in tears, that Jack Johnson had just died. She asked me would I come over to help her with the arrangements. I asked could it wait until morning, and she said she thought I had better come right over.

"Is anything wrong?" My mother was tying the belt of her housecoat. **"It's so early in the morning. . . ."**

"Jack Johnson just died again," I said.

"Again?" My mother looked at my father.

"There's this woman, Mrs. Brown," I said. **"She thinks she lives with Jack Johnson, and about once a month she tells us that he died. But after a while he comes back to life again, or she forgets that he was supposed to have died, or something."**

"What are you going to do?" my mother asked. **"You can't have her calling you at all hours in the morning."**

What I wanted to do was to go back to bed. But Mrs. Brown had been crying. I decided that Jack Johnson would probably be alive in the morning, though, and went back to bed. Then I thought about Mrs. Brown waiting for me or someone to come over, and I got up again. I told my parents that I would go over and talk to her and would probably be right back.

I had only been in Mrs. Brown's apartment once or twice. It was full of smells. She had alcohol and this mentholated

cream that she used to put on herself to "ward away colds and fevers" and cocoa butter which she put on her face. When I got there she was still crying a little and said that Mr. Johnson was in the next room.

That was a little scary. Suppose there *was* somebody in the next room? Dead. I went to the door holding my breath and looked in. There was a big brass bed in the middle of the floor. The whole room looked like something from the olden days. There were pictures of Jack Johnson around the room. Some of them were in his boxing trunks and some in street clothes. What I didn't see, thank goodness, was any real people laying around dead.

I sat with Mrs. Brown for the rest of the night. She fell asleep, and I did, too. I woke first and she was sitting in the chair near the window. It was just daylight. I could hear the sound of a radio coming from one of the floors below us. Then I heard a swishing noise and the sound of a window opening slowly.

"I hear that window going up!" Mr. Darden. "I'm watching, too!"

Mr. Darden used to sweep the alleyway between The Joint and the next building. And every time he would sweep someone would throw down a bag of water or an empty milk container at him. So what he would do would be to stand against the side of the building and make sweeping noises with the broom and watch to see what window opened. I guess he figured if he could see who was doing it they wouldn't have the nerve to do it. Anyway, he started making more sweeping noises and kept that up until he figured he was safe. Then he started sweeping. I heard the bag

of water hit, and I heard Mr. Darden start swearing. He knew some swear words I had never even heard before.

It was kind of funny, really—Mr. Darden yelling up at whoever it was that threw the bag of water at him. It also woke up Mrs. Brown. She was a little startled to see me there, and said how nice it was of me to visit.

“Mr. Johnson is sleeping late today,” she said. “But if you come a little later, after he’s done his roadwork, we can all have breakfast together.”

I told her I’d like that and left. I wondered what the world looked like from her eyes, and what part of it she was living now and what part of it she was just living in memory.

I went home and told my parents what had happened, and they said how sorry they felt for Mrs. Brown, which was more or less what I expected them to say. I tried to get some sleep but I couldn’t so I went over to The Joint again.

Now, Gloria was there and I had already told Gloria how I felt about her and everything. So there we were in the office at The Joint, talking about the party and the fight and everything, except I was thinking about how I had kissed her. The thing was, when I was outside with Gloria I didn’t particularly want anybody to know how I felt about her, but when I was alone with her it was different. Not that I wanted anybody else to know how I felt, but I liked saying that I cared for her, even though it was a little embarrassing. Also, I liked kissing her. I wanted to get the conversation around to that before Mr. Pender came over. He was supposed to come over and tell us how we did from the party. Gloria said that they had done some figuring and it looked really good.

"I think we made enough money to keep us going until after school starts," Gloria said.

"Hey, look," I said—my usual cool beginning—"you want to go out or anything?"

"Go out where?" she said. "Mr. Pender's going to be here any minute."

"I mean on a date or something?"

"With you?"

There she went smiling again. That really ticked me off, because her smile (and I had really thought about this) was just about a laugh for most people. And as soon as I saw her smile I didn't want to talk about it any more. She got up from the desk where she always sat when we were in the office and came up to where I was standing next to the linen closet. Then she gave me a little kiss just as the door opened. It was Tina Robinson.

"You people at it again?" she said. "At least you got yourselves out of the bathroom."

That was the end of that. But that was good, because I really had to take Gloria in small doses. Not that I didn't like her or anything, because I was crazy about her, but I felt so different when I was around her I was almost a different person. Even more so when we were alone.

When Tina left (she just dropped in to say hello) I told Gloria about what had happened with Kelly and how me and Dean were thinking about going over to the place he said there were stereos. She was about to say something when Mr. Pender came in.

According to Mr. Pender, we had done well with the street fair but not as well as Bubba and me had thought.

After we had paid all our bills we had made a net profit of four hundred and two dollars. Then Mr. Pender said we should keep one hundred and fifty dollars aside in case we come up with some bills from the fair that we didn't know about

"And our bills only come up to two hundred and eight dollars," Mr. Pender said. "That includes payment to the accountant of some fifty dollars . . ."

He hesitated and looked at Gloria and me.

"Good!" I said, and Gloria echoed my feelings. I was glad that Mr. Pender was finally getting paid something, at least.

We talked some more about the party and about the house, and then we got around to talking to Mr. Pender about the Chris caper again. We told him what had happened with the warehouse bit and then again with Kelly Smith. I also told him what had happened with my father, about how upset he had been.

"Well, I can see that," Mr. Pender said. "Sometimes you want to avoid any kind of risks. But there has to be a balance somewhere. An Englishman—I believe his name was Housman—once wrote a poem that went something like this:

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard a wise man say,
'Give crowns and pounds and guineas
But not your heart away;'

"It was probably the worst advice I had ever heard in my entire life," Pender went on. "I don't mean that you should do anything that's just out-and-out foolish, but there are

certain little chances that one confronts in life that seem to give meaning to the whole. Do you know what I mean?"

"No."

That seemed to disappoint Mr. Pender a bit—that we didn't know what he was talking about. But he did seem to be in favor of checking out our new lead.

"Although it probably won't work," he said. "The stolen items, to the best of my knowledge, were all fairly standard equipment. We'd have to go around checking identification numbers of the stuff, which might very well be in a back room or somehow inaccessible unless we were willing to actually buy it. And that, of course, seeing how limited our funds already are, would hardly be worth the risk."

"That's for sure," Gloria agreed.

We talked for a while longer, but my mind was already racing ahead. I could hardly wait for Mr. Pender to finish telling us about our new financial status, which was predictably gloomy, and leave. I told Gloria that I had to see Dean about a basketball tournament we were thinking of entering. She said okay, but I felt she was a little disappointed that I didn't get back to talking about taking her out. There would be time for that later, I thought.

When I got to Dean's house, I found him sitting in the bathroom, sorting out his dirty socks, looking for a pair that wasn't too dirty to wear. I told him about my idea.

"You got to be crazy, man," he said, sniffing a pair of tubes. "You can't use the money we got from the street fair to buy the stuff. Suppose it's not the stuff?"

"I know it's the stuff," I said. "I just know it. I can feel it in my bones."

"What did Gloria say?"

"I didn't tell her."

"'Cause you know she wouldn't go for it," he said. "We go over and buy that stuff and it's not the right stuff we're just going to be out the money and right back where we started from."

"What's the matter?" I asked. "You afraid?"

"What's today?"

"What's today?" I repeated his question. "Friday. Why?"

"Because Friday isn't one of my stupid days," he said. "But check me out on Wednesday or Saturday—those are my stupid days."

"Look, I know it's going to work. It's a bold move, I know, but we're bold dudes!"

"And you're going to take all the heat if we just blow the money?"

"All the heat," I said.

"And tell Gloria that it was all your idea?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

"You *guess* so?"

"I'll tell her it was all my idea."

"You got a plan?" he asked, pulling on a pair of slightly stiff socks.

"I got a plan."

CHAPTER

19

IT WAS EASIER GETTING BUBBA INVOLVED THAN IT WAS Dean. Bubba was basically a more straightforward person than Dean was. With Dean you had to cajole and badger and argue with him until two things happened—one, he was convinced, and, secondly, he was convinced more than he was scared. With Bubba you could take a more direct approach, usually a bribe. We offered Bubba a pizza if he would go along without telling Gloria until it was over. We had to involve Bubba because Kelly didn't know him. He knew Dean.

We got the money from the office where we had it locked in a drawer. Dean was to stay in the office and tell Gloria or Mr. Pender that I had taken the money home for safekeep-

ing, if they asked. He was also there to act as our backup man. If I called and asked to speak to Charlie, he would know we were in trouble.

Bubba was dressed in his Sunday suit and was wearing shades. That was my idea so that he looked a little like an underworld guy. It was his idea to carry a handkerchief and keep wiping his neck with it. He had seen that on the Late Show. I think he looked okay, but Kelly didn't take to him at all.

"Who is this cat?" he asked.

"He's the bag man," I said, trying to act cool.

"The *what*?" Kelly asked.

"Our bag man," I said, wondering if the people working on the SALT talks knew about Kelly's breath. "He carries anything that's a little . . . you know . . ."

"What you mean, man?" Kelly looked Bubba over.

"I mean"—I lowered my voice to a whisper and looked around—"that when we do anything a little . . . you know . . ."

"No lie?" Kelly looked at me.

"No lie," I answered.

"He don't look the type to me," Kelly said.

"Now you know why we use him."

"Hey, I can dig it," he said, nodding. "All riiight!"

We went over to where Bubba was standing with his briefcase in his hand. Bubba didn't say anything to Kelly when Kelly spoke to him, just grunted a little and wiped his neck with his handkerchief. We got the crosstown bus and then walked half a block until we reached the small store. It was crowded with furniture and signs. Sometimes you

couldn't even see the furniture for the signs. The signs read "3 rooms of furniture, \$295"—or "No money down, 2 years to pay"—things like that. A short stocky guy wearing a suit and a small cap came up to us.

"Hey, Kelly, what's happening," he said, shaking Kelly's hand but looking right at me and Bubba. "How's it going, man?"

"It's going okay, Tony," Kelly said. "Look, my friends here are interested in getting a good price on some stereo equipment. I told them you could give them a special price."

"Yeah, yeah." Tony looked me and Bubba over. "What kinds of things you looking for?"

"Some stereo equipment," I said, feeling kind of confident.

"Well, we got some nice stuff," he said. "About how much you want to spend?"

"It depends," Bubba said, "on how much we can get for our money."

"Well, why don't you take a look at this set?" Tony took us over to a stereo set that was made into a combination bar and fake fireplace. There was a price on the set. It was three hundred and sixty-seven dollars. There was another price, five hundred and ninety-nine dollars, that had a line through it, as if it had just been reduced. "This is a nice set, a lot of people are buying it."

"What's the price?" Bubba asked, looking at the price sign.

"It's right there," Tony said. "But you can pay on time if you don't have the money."

"We have the money," Bubba said, taking out a roll of

bills, "but the price isn't what we're looking for. We might have to buy two or three systems . . ."

"Well, you can buy as many systems as you want on credit," Tony said.

Kelly had walked away and was talking to one of the salesgirls. I didn't know what to say next. Bubba reached into the bar and turned on the set. It sounded pretty good. Then he turned it off and walked over to an amplifier. He turned that on and listened for a while.

"How many things can you plug into this?" he asked.

"What you got?" Tony asked. "This set can take a tape deck, a phonograph. How many things can you use at one time?"

Bubba grunted and wiped at his neck with the handkerchief. Then he started this little twitch with his mouth, as if something was jerking at his bottom lip. He was getting carried away with the whole bit.

"Look, you guys see anything you want, you let me know, okay?" Tony turned and walked over to where Kelly was standing looking at a turntable. He started talking to Kelly, but we could tell he was talking about us because he kept looking over his shoulder at us.

"Hey, Bubba, don't go overboard," I whispered.

Bubba grunted and wiped his neck with the handkerchief.

He turned on a few more sets, pretended like he was listening to them and then turned them off. Tony came back over and asked us if we saw anything we liked. He couldn't keep his eyes off Bubba, and Bubba was wiping faster and faster.

"I don't think we can"—Bubba wiped three times,

twitched his mouth twice, and then wiped again—"because your price isn't what we're looking for."

"That's the way it goes, my friends," Tony said, rubbing at his chin.

"Yeah," Bubba said, "and, like, later."

We started toward the door. Kelly caught up with us just before we got outside, and he pulled me aside.

"Look, man," Kelly said, "Tony thinks your friend is a dope fiend. He figures he just wants to case the place and come back and rip him off."

Kelly motioned for Tony to come over.

"Look, you want to do business with me it's okay," Tony said. "But I ain't looking for no trouble."

"He ain't no dope fiend," Kelly said, "he's just their bag man."

"What kind of bag he in?" Tony asked.

"I don't know," Kelly said. "Tell him, Paul."

"He's the *bag* man, dig it?" I whispered to Tony. "He carries the stuff when it's a little . . . you know . . ."

"Oh," Tony said, looking over at Bubba, who was still wiping and twitching, "he do?"

"Say, Mr. B.!" I called to Bubba, and he came over.

"You call him Mr. B.?" Tony asked.

"Never call him by his right name," I said under my breath as Bubba came over.

"What's up?" Bubba said, only now his voice was changing, too.

"Show him the bread," I said.

Bubba opened the briefcase where we had put the money. It looked like more than it was when you looked down at it.

Anyway, Bubba just gave Tony a quick look and then shut the bag again.

"Ain't no junkie got that kind of bread, baby," Kelly said, obviously impressed.

Tony was impressed, too. A moment later we were in the back room looking at boxes of stereo equipment. Tony said we could have anything we wanted at fifty dollars a box. In another minute we had selected six boxes.

"Get us a cab, man," Bubba said. He was beginning to sound a little like Marlon Brando in *The Godfather*.

I got the cab and we loaded all the boxes in the trunk and some in the front seat with the driver while me, Bubba, and Kelly sat in the back. Kelly whispered something into Bubba's ear, and Bubba opened the briefcase and took out a twenty-dollar bill and gave it to him. We dropped Kelly off near Morningside Avenue. It took us exactly forever to get back to The Joint and to unload the stuff in the cab. We took it all in the office and closed the door.

"You see how that cab driver looked at us?" Bubba said. "That guy was scared stiff!"

"You got all the stuff from that store?" Dean asked. "How much did you spend?"

Bubba opened the briefcase. We had twenty-three dollars left. I got this sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. Dean held the money that was left in his hand, and it didn't look like very much. The original money that we had had from the street fair hadn't been much, but at least it was something.

"Let's get at those numbers," I said.

We dug out the list of serial numbers that Chris had given

us and began to check them against the numbers on the boxes. They didn't match. Not one number came even close to any of the boxes.

Checkout time. The sky had fallen. We just sat in the office without saying anything. Dean looked at the list again. He looked at the numbers on the boxes. He dropped the list on the desk.

When we heard Gloria's voice, talking to one of the Robinson sisters, we felt sick. She tried to get in and the door was locked and she knocked. I opened the door.

"Who died?" she asked.

"We thought—" I took a deep breath and started again. "I thought I had a good idea, but it didn't work out."

"What was the idea?" she asked, looking first at one face and then the other.

"I thought that if we bought the stuff from the store that Kelly said he had seen it in . . ."

"You mean what we were talking about before?" Gloria asked.

"Yeah."

She looked at the boxes and at the list of numbers on the table.

"How much is left?" she asked.

Dean pointed to the twenty-three dollars on the desk. Gloria looked at me and then counted the money. Then, as if she couldn't believe it, she counted it again. She didn't say anything else, just stood up and left the office.

CHAPTER 20

WHEN I GOT HOME, MY FATHER WAS MAKING HAMBURGERS. My mother had gone somewhere shopping. He was in a good mood. He liked to cook. Even though he wasn't the best cook around, it always seemed to cheer him up when he made supper.

"How's it going?" he asked.

"Okay," I said, going past him to my room.

I fell across the bed and just lay there for a while. I tried to think of something, but I couldn't. I thought of taking back the stuff we had bought, but I knew it wouldn't work. I felt as if I were at the bottom of a deep pit that was getting deeper by the minute.

"Paul?" My father stood at the door.

"Yeah?"

"You want to talk about whatever's bothering you?"

"No." It came automatically, and he turned and left the room. I thought about it for a minute and then went into the kitchen where he was just turning off the burners.

"I assume you're not hungry," he said.

"Can I tell you about what happened?" I asked.

"Sure," he said, sitting down.

I told him the whole dismal story. He knew most of it, about how we had been trying to raise the money and everything, and about the reward. I just added the part about me still being involved in trying to find out who stole the stuff and how I blew the money. I halfway expected him to blow up, but he didn't. He didn't say anything, even after I had finished. When he didn't, I went back to my room. At least he didn't blow up.

My mother got home, and I listened to see if he would tell her, but he didn't. She knew something was up, but as usual she didn't push it. Later, when she was in the tub, he came into my room again.

"What do you mean, the numbers weren't even close?" he asked.

"What do *you* mean?" I asked.

"Were the first numbers different? Were there the same amount of numbers? What?" he asked.

"There were like five numbers on the list for each piece," I said, still not knowing what he was driving at, "and the boxes had about seven numbers and a few letters."

"Did you check the sets themselves," he asked, "or just the boxes?"

"You mean they might have changed the numbers on the boxes?"

"No, you might have checked the wrong numbers," he said. "You want to take another walk down to the office with me?"

Anything was better than just sitting there. He grabbed a few tools and we told my mother we'd be right back.

We got to the office and he looked at the list of numbers that Chris had given us and checked them against the boxes. Then we opened one of the boxes and we looked on the back of the set. The number wasn't the same as on the list but it was the same kind of number. That is, it had five digits and no letters, just the way the numbers on the list had. We started checking the other boxes. On the fifth one we struck gold. The numbers matched. The sixth one did, too. We had been right after all!

The night couldn't go fast enough. I called Gloria, Dean, and Bubba and told them what had happened. We agreed to meet at The Joint the first thing in the morning. Naturally, my father was there, too.

We were all really up, and when Tina and Johnnie Mae came in, it was my father who explained how we had found the stolen stuff. We were happy for about two or three minutes, until we called in a cop that was walking by.

"If it ain't happening right now, it's not in my jurisdiction," the heavy, puffy-faced policeman said. "What you got to do is to call the precinct."

A moment later my father was calling the precinct and was being told that we had already been warned about getting ourselves involved in police business.

"And how about this stolen merchandise?" asked my father.

He was told that a detective would be around in a day or two to question us about it. In a day or two the stuff could be gone, as it had been in the warehouse, we said. It was no use—in a day or two was the best he could do, he said.

"You want some action right now?" Tina asked. "Because if you do I can get this whole thing cleared up right away."

That we did.

"But let's not get into any danger," my father said.

"I got somebody that's going to keep us out of danger and get the police to moving their butts!"

Tina went upstairs, and we busied ourselves telling Dean and Bubba what had happened when they showed up. The next thing we heard was Tina coming down the stairs yelling at somebody.

"You better come on, turkey!" She was yelling at Askia Ben Kenobi! "You owe these kids something. You don't pay your rent, you done messed up their rent party—now you come on with us."

So the group of us locked up the office and marched over to the store that we had bought the equipment from. I was pretty nervous about the whole thing, but Tina wasn't. She told us all to stand outside and then she told Askia Ben Kenobi to stand in the doorway and not to let anybody in or out until she told him to. Then she stood in front of the door, cleared her throat, and started screaming!

"HELLLP! PO-O-O-O-O-LEEEEEESE! HELLLLLLP! PO-O-O-O-O-LEEEEEESE!"

Nobody could figure out what was going on. Tony came

out to see what was wrong, and Askia Ben Kenobi, robes flying, started jumping around in his karate poses. Tony backed off. Meanwhile Tina just kept screaming.

"HELLLLLP! PO-O-O-O-O-O-LEEEEEESE!"

A crowd started gathering around.

"That Arab just stole her pocketbook!" one guy said, making up an instant story.

"I think the guy inside is trying to get his money from her and that A-rab is her boyfriend," another guy said.

By this time Tony, who thought the whole thing was pretty funny at first, had looked out and saw Bubba and me. He knew something was up. He grabbed a club that he kept behind the door and went after Ben Kenobi. No good. Ben knocked the club out of his hand with a flying kick. Then he started breaking up stuff in the store. He was going berserk. A squad car pulled up and two policemen got out. A second later another car came up and in minutes the street was filled with cops. Tina ran in and got Askia Ben Kenobi calmed down, and we went in and told the police the whole story. The police made Tony open the back room and they found all the stolen stuff.

"The detective told us that Tony didn't steal the stuff, after all," Mr. Pender told us at The Joint.

"I don't believe it!" my father said. "We found the equipment in his place."

"That's right," Chris said. "But he didn't steal it. Mr. Reynolds arranged for Willie Bobo to take part of the stuff over to Tony's place and keep part of it. He sold it to Tony for a cheap price and claimed all of it on his insurance. But

when Willie got caught with his share there was a problem."

"Then when they arrested Chris, Willie was happy. He figured that since Chris was innocent they would both get off," Mr. Pender continued. "He wanted to drop charges, but the insurance company didn't let him. He felt bad about Chris getting arrested, but he knew the only way he could really clear Chris was to admit his own guilt. And Willie Bobo knew that as long as Chris was involved the chances of his going to jail were reduced. Except that Chris couldn't prove he was innocent."

"And everybody—well, a lot of us just assumed that he was guilty because he was involved," my father said.

"Exactly," continued Mr. Pender. "Except for Paul and his friends. Their concern, along with a little savvy from Paul's father, broke the case."

We were all happy for a while, but things didn't work out exactly the way we thought they would. Tony, the guy that bought the stuff from Mr. Reynolds, got a six months' suspended sentence. Willie Bobo and Mr. Reynolds we thought would go to jail for sure. It didn't turn out that way. What happened was that Willie Bobo stuck to the story that Chris was in on it even though everybody knew he wasn't. But Willie Bobo said that Mr. Reynolds had given Chris part of the money they had made from selling the stuff. It turned out that the money that Mr. Reynolds had given Chris wasn't really vacation money and, even worse, Chris knew it. It wasn't that Chris had stolen anything, but after Mr. Reynolds started giving him money, he had figured out that his boss was involved somehow. And he had taken the money. So in order not to get Chris involved they made a

deal with Willie Bobo and Mr. Reynolds to accept suspended sentences.

When we found out about how Chris was involved, we didn't feel right taking the reward money, so we didn't. We thought we would just try to do more of the work ourselves and to get by the best we could. We thought we were having troubles with The Joint during the summer, but it was much worse in the winter. The fuel bills seemed to eat up every penny we earned and then some. Mr. Harley, the guy who had sold us the building in the first place, came around, and when he saw that we were keeping the building going, he got a friend of his to offer us another building on the same block for a few hundred dollars. We didn't have the money for it, but the Captain did, and he bought it and hired us to run it for him. That made things a little easier because the people in the other building paid their rents fairly regularly, and having two buildings actually helped because we began to get discounts on some things because we bought a lot. Mr. Pender says that we'll have The Joint making a profit, if everything works out and we have just a little luck, in about two years.

Petey Darden and his wife moved out, and Askia Ben Kenobi moved down into the basement. Now he takes care of the maintenance and things, and he gives karate lessons down there, too. You get used to the karate yells and things after a while, and even the people who hate the noise say that they haven't been bothered much by burglaries lately. One of the things that got Askia Ben Kenobi quieted down was that he got a little sweet on Tina Robinson. She even got him to wearing regular clothes most of the time. Every now

and then he greases himself up, though, and runs around in one of his costumes.

When our first winter was almost over and I had just managed to pay what I hoped to be the last big fuel bill for the year, my father asked me if I had the chance to buy the building again, knowing what it would mean, if I still would. I said I didn't know, but I would think about it and let him know. We talk a lot more now, me and my father. He's still my father, but I think I'm coming from a slightly different place than I was before I got involved with The Joint.

I had wanted the fun of owning a place, but I hadn't wanted the responsibility. But even that wasn't as important as having the responsibility and being faced with the idea of wanting to give it up. I learned a lot from The Joint about people, how they lived and all, which was basically cool. I learned to accept the idea that answers were a lot easier to come by when you stood across the street from the problem. What was a lot harder to accept was that there weren't good answers to every problem, and when there weren't good answers you had to make do the best you could. That was hard sometimes, really hard, to accept.

Mostly the whole experience was an up kind of thing, though. Because we had made it work, even though it wasn't always rewarding. And then we had gotten close to a lot of people in the bargain. And it was still a lot of fun sometimes.

Me and Gloria were talking about it the other day in the office, and she felt pretty much the same way. We must have talked longer than we thought and it was almost midnight when Tina Robinson knocked on the door to the office.

"What are you people doing in here this time of night?"

Tina asked. She had her hands on her hips and a big smile on her face.

"Tina, we weren't doing anything," Gloria said.

"Confess, Paul!" Tina put her nose right up to mine and I had to smile.

"Tina—" I started, but she was already laughing and backing out the door.

"Love'll make you do some strange things," she said. "Some *strange* things."

I guess it will. She was heading toward the basement and Askia Ben Kenobi.

I walked Gloria home and then went home myself. When I got home, there was a note in my room that someone had called and said that they had dropped their keys down the drain in the kitchen sink. I didn't even wonder how anybody could do something like that any more. I just picked up a pencil and put "Bubba's turn" down on the bottom.