

BLOOD OF THE DRAGONFLY

by Hawk MacKinney

Excerpt

Spinner and Craige dodged the potholes and bayou-puddled sorrowful drive that was already weeded-up with pieces of blackened 2x4s and tumbled rubble. Nestled among old cypress and giant hardwoods, the scorched ruins of a once-elegant time and place cast a brooding haunted ambiance. A lonesome tangle of police tape fluttered around one blackened trunk, while wads and scraps of yellow plastic flurried here and there among the blossom of mushrooms and cinders snagging on bushes and heat-brittle weeds among the char and ash clinging to seared limbs of dead shrubs. Except for half of one lonesome brick chimney, come next season, the surrounding marshes and scrubby undergrowth and vines would reclaim the scarred skeleton that once was Corpsewood and leave a burial mound of vines and voracious pitcher plants.

Spinner said, “I want to check that shallow ravine that follows along the north side of the drive. Looks like an overgrown gulley draining toward the river. Be an easy approach to the house without being seen.”

Craige said, “Dogs would've spotted them unless they'd been baited or poisoned.”

“Bogs won't hold many tracks.” As the green underbrush swallowed Spinner, he called over his shoulder, “If they came in by river, I might get lucky in the mud along the riverbank for any trace of a boat being pulled up and beached.”

“Watch out for moccasins on those overhangs,” Craige called back to him. “If you come up on a weedy dry knoll of brush, sticks, and leaves above the water, leave it be. You don't want to rile a mama gator guarding her nest. A twenty-footer may look cumbersome, but those big ones can move fast.” Craige stepped over chunks of tumbled cement and distorted rebar where a foundation had been an outside kitchen wall. One windowpane hung lopsided but intact in its section of wall that had collapsed outward into the soft dirt of what had been a flower garden. Sunshine peaked through to splash a glass pane angled among the ruins.

Beyond the foundation was a rose garden, trampled blossoms crinkled with burnt petals, broken stems buried amid tumbled bricks, crumbled mortar, and stinking charred timbers. Craige picked his

way around the corner of the kitchen. He stopped at the front of the garage with its oily smudges, where the two autos had once parked. A few sooty cement blocks had tumbled from the corner of the garage. The wall had obviously been added as an afterthought. None of the square hollowed-out cement grabbed his attention until he noticed the broken end on one wasn't smoked-seared or stained. The fire hadn't touched it. The end had been broken off after the fire, but it wasn't the inside hollow that grabbed him. It was the small wrapped yellowish-brown brick protruding from inside. CTU R&S ops had come across too many caches of potent hash oil and loose dry kief for him not to recognize it. He leaned down, touched nothing, saw the wrappings had been torn. The heady smell wrinkled his nose. Along one side of the package, he noticed a smattering of scattered pallid crystals. Neither the powder nor the brick with any ash or cinders; what he was seeing came after the fire. The brick looked as though it had been hurriedly pried open, an empty space inside where something had been removed. Someone had known where to look for whatever it was that was taken—someone not interested in the stash.