

THE STICKING PLACE

A Luke Jones novel

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THE STICKING PLACE

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*For Ben Limoli, the teacher that mattered and,
as with all things, for Miranda, my bridge to forever...*

"But screw your courage to the sticking-place, and we'll not fail."

— Lady Macbeth exhorting her husband to murder the King of Scotland
Macbeth, Act I, scene vii

1

San Diego
Summer 1978

PHILLIP MCGRATH WAS ON HIS WAY TO KILL SOMEBODY.

He turned toward a home at the end of a quiet cul-de-sac where rusted children's toys lay scattered in a puddle of oil in the driveway. A dusty motor home rested near the stained stucco of the house and a basketball hoop drooped over the crumbling asphalt.

The Toyota truck rolled to a stop beneath a tangle of power lines.

Sweat dripped down McGrath's neck, under his armpits and along the sides of his protruding belly as he hobbled toward the door. He slid the key from under the welcome mat and eased his way inside. A huge German shepherd stood in the entryway, his tail thumping against the door frame.

McGrath patted the shepherd's head and ran his fingers along its muscular back as it panted along beside him. Dropping to his knees at the open door to the study, McGrath muttered words of affection to his only friend as he scratched the dog's massive chest and pulled gently on his ears.

Struggling to his feet a moment later, McGrath blocked Max with

2 *The Sticking Place*

his knee and locked the door behind him to ensure privacy in case someone came home. He limped to the stereo, pulled a record from its jacket and set the needle into the groove. Walking behind a large oak desk, he opened a closet door, lifted an afghan and clutched the Winchester rifle beneath it. Sinking backward into a heavy chair, he pushed against the floor with his feet and scooted toward the middle of the room.

Nothing could stop him now.

He swiveled to face the door and listened to the strains of Keith Jarrett's Köln Concert. As he closed his eyes, he envisioned the pianist's movements as Jarrett's chin slumped toward his heaving chest and his nimble fingers played a run of notes that peaked and waned in a series of mini-crescendos.

Where was the passion that used to drive McGrath's life? As he relived Jarrett's sweetly tormenting performance for the last time, a run of ecstatic moans escaped the pianist's lips and floated up to dangle in congress with the music.

As Jarrett's music filled the room, McGrath spread his legs, propped the rifle between them, swallowed the barrel and pulled the trigger. With no regard for who would deal with the mess.

2

TWENTY-THREE-YEAR-OLD POLICE TRAINEE Luke Jones, was one person who would deal with the mess.

None of his academy instructors had figured out what to make of him before graduation. His physical presence both impressed and confused them, but that was only part of it. His chin was as squared as pushed together bookends and his prominent brow made him a Dick Tracy look-alike. His chest looked like two anvils held together by builders' rebar that bent downward to join with an old fashioned washboard. He stood half a hand more than six-feet tall, could obviously bench press a bull elephant, and had barged into the academy classroom like his instructors owed him an accounting for all the world's injustices.

His hair covered half of his ears and touched his collar, stretching the limits of department regulations. So did his turned-down mustache since it crept past the edges of his mouth and sneaked onto his lower face. But the Shakespeare thing made him really stand out in the police crowd. He could quote the Bard faster than they could read a suspect his Miranda rights. He knew the sonnets better than they knew the California Penal Code and loved skewering them with an on-the-nose quote from *Hamlet* or an obscure tidbit from *Coriolanus* or *Titus Andronicus*.

The academy was as much a ghost as Hamlet's father now, though, and Luke had to impress his training officer to keep his job. The pair were talking in a police car in the parking lot of Jack Murphy Stadium when their call sign rang out over the radio.

T.D. Hartson interrupted his opening day spiel, acknowledged the call and stomped on the gas pedal.

Santa Ana winds bullied brittle blades of straw-colored grass on the surrounding hills and muscled their way into the cab that had no air conditioning. As Hartson sped toward the crest of the ravine, the engine pushed invisible plumes of heat through the open vents and whipped the officers' cheeks.

Hartson pulled to the curb and stepped into the gutter next to a row of dilapidated trash cans.

Luke waited for a break in radio traffic before announcing their arrival to dispatch and joined Hartson in the street.

A pale woman approached, the sharp wrinkles at the corners of her eyes deepening with the effort it took to smile. On the far side of seventy, she twirled fingertips through a mat of gray hair that stood out from her head in a spray of snarls. Trembling hands lowered to pick at a small patch of lint on the faded legs of her polyester pants.

"I got home and found the den door's locked," she said. "I think my husband's in there, but he won't come out, and he won't answer when I knock." Her volume trailed off. "Ever since he retired, he just sits in there and broods. But he never locks the door. You don't think he could've hurt himself?"

Hartson stepped onto the curb and supported the woman by her elbow. "What's your name?" he asked as he led her toward the house.

As they walked through the door, Luke heard her answer. "Martha McGrath," she said. Then she commanded Max to his blanket.

It surprised Luke that Hartson stood only a few inches taller than the squat woman walking beside him. Hartson's orientation speech in the stadium's parking lot had communicated a no-nonsense training officer who would demand his trainee's best efforts. The confident performance had made Hartson seem bigger. His full head of wavy white hair, moving in unison with Martha McGrath's gray mane, could have been the opening of a vaudeville act. His pudgy body dominated his skinny legs, but his self-confidence drew attention away from the avun-

cular physical attributes. Luke had to get down to business before Hartson mistook him for a typical first phase trainee.

He pushed through a swinging wooden gate to the backyard to look for a way to see inside the den. Sun glared off the glass as he leaned toward the window. An orange tree pushed pointed shards of shadow into the room, obliterating some of the room's contents. Luke made out the back of a chair and a pair of trousers stretching from the seat onto a circular rug in front of a large desk. Squinting allowed him to see the butt of a rifle before his gaze moved upwards. Shadows obliterated everything above the seat of the chair.

Luke had seen enough to know this encounter with Martha McGrath wouldn't have a happy ending. "I think we need to kick the door in," he said as he walked into the house. "Can I have your permission to do that?"

Martha McGrath processed Luke's request, appearing to come to grips with its meaning. She closed her eyes and nodded, the muscles in her neck twitching noticeably.

Luke's boot splintered the door and exposed a super-heated den packed with the surreal sight of a partially headless man and the sickening stench of heat and gore. Darts of pain pricked the base of his skull and settled behind his right ear. Shooting sensations turned into an iron fist that squeezed and twisted in his neck. He kneaded a growing knot with his fingers.

Hartson brushed past him looking every bit like a man on a rescue mission.

Luke couldn't let Hartson think of him as some punk trainee who needed coddling. A muscle jerked in his jaw. He fought the urge to bolt from the room as chunks of vomit spewed into his mouth. He swallowed hard.

Hartson pulled on Martha's elbow to turn and ease her from the room. "Is there somebody you'd like to call?" he asked.

Martha turned to Luke instead. "When I got home, his dog was

standing right there, chewing on a piece of bone.” She pointed toward the floor in the hall a little past where the shattered door used to stand.

Luke fought against his gagging reflex and reached for his radio. “It’s an 11-44, self-inflicted,” he said. “Notify the coroner and make sure they have the phone number.”

The fist of pain at the back of Luke’s head twisted and squeezed. As he headed toward the outside door to get the camera, he heard Martha’s thready voice and turned to see her speaking into the telephone. “Son, your daddy’s killed himself.” Her legs gave way as she said it and she plopped in a heap to her knees, the telephone slipping from her hand.

Hartson lunged too late to stop her. He squatted close, rested his palm on her shuddering shoulder, lifted the phone and told her son to come home. “We’ll take care of your mother until you get here,” he said.

Martha kept talking; apparently unaware she’d already dropped the phone. “He’s in the den and, oh, it’s such a mess.”

Luke stepped onto the welcome mat, sucked in a breath and looked up to the clouds punctuating the blank blue expanse of the sky. Then he remembered the box of cigars in his equipment bag. He needed one now. It couldn’t smoke out the stink of the situation, but his roommate—a Viet Nam vet—had told him smoking cigars helped a little against the stench of heat and death.

Luke stepped over the forlorn dog stretched across the threshold as he reentered the house. Hartson kept Martha busy making coffee as Luke lit his White Owl and steeled his resolve to go back into the den for the photographs.

With the cigar smoke almost making him gag, Luke did what he always did in stressful moments. He searched his memory for something he’d read to reflect against his real life experiences.

Shakespeare’s description of Macbeth’s “weird sisters” stirring a pot in a dank cave matched the madness in McGrath’s den. Luke puffed insistently on the cigar as he circled the chair, snapping photographs, his thoughts swirling in unison with his body’s movements. The stench clung to his uniform and crawled up his nostrils. He remembered the witches’ chanting as they circled round the spewing cauldron:

*Round about the cauldron go;
In the poisn'd entrails throw . . .
Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the caldron boil and bake;*

Without realizing it, he started muttering the words out loud.

*For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble...*

A noise behind Luke jerked him back to reality.

"Martha's son's here and wants to see his dad," Hartson told him. "I need you in the living room to keep him busy until the coroner gets here." Hartson shook his head. "And for Christ's sake, don't say any of your weird shit to him."

Luke crossed the hallway, wiping the rolling sweat from his mustache, his shoulders brushing the sides of the doorframe as he stepped into the living room. He awkwardly stretched his hand out for the introduction before sitting on a flower-printed sofa that rested beneath a faded Hudson Valley print.

"I should've known he'd do this," Phillip McGrath Jr. told Luke. "We actually didn't fight when he called me at work today."

Luke slid his department-issue notebook from his hip pocket, pulled a pen from his shirt and doodled, trying to find the words to engage the dead man's son while Hartson sat with the widow in the kitchen.

"Tell me about your father," he said. "What did he do for a living?"

A pause followed. "He was an engineer."

"What kind of engineer?"

"He worked at General Dynamics designing jet propulsion systems. He was a genius," McGrath said.

"How so?" Luke asked, hoping the topic would give McGrath a pleasant moment.

"He had seven patents to his credit," McGrath said, a tremor infus-

ing his words. “But the company threatened to fire him if he insisted on keeping the profits. He hated himself for letting them get away with it. They kept all the money that should’ve made him rich in exchange for guaranteeing his job.”

“Was he angry about not getting what he deserved?”

McGrath slumped into the couch. “It destroyed him. He wanted to buy a big house in La Jolla. Instead . . .”

“Instead of what?” Luke prompted.

“Instead of this.” McGrath waved his arm to encompass the room and its contents. “He put all four of us kids through college and two of us through graduate school.” McGrath’s head and neck trembled.

“But our going to the best schools wasn’t enough for him. He drove all of us until we hated him. Then he started in on his grandkids. That’s when we stopped coming around to see Mom.”

“Why do you suppose he did that?” Luke asked.

“He gave away his greatness thinking it guaranteed our success. And he hated himself for it. He retired last week and couldn’t talk about anything but his worthless life.”

Luke wanted to comfort this man whose father was doing the ugly imitation of the Headless Horseman in the other room and wondered what Hartson would advise. The answer came in an instant. Just do your job, he would say, and stay out of the way.

The sound of his call sign on the portable radio came as a relief, but its message did not. The coroner would be delayed.

Luke scoured the room, looking for some relief. The youthful face on the portrait of Phillip McGrath Senior looked identical to the sorrowful face of his son on the couch.

The hot room magnified the pain twisting at the base of Luke’s skull and the intensity pushed his chin to his chest. He tried focusing his gaze on the throw rug under the coffee table. It matched the one in the den.

Luke wanted to scream, get me out of here!

He doodled in his notebook. He wanted to drive the freeway with

the windows open, to snort fresh air into his lungs. The next radio call had to be better than this one, but he found himself stuck in this suffocating house waiting for the coroner who wouldn't show for more than an hour.

His doodles turned into words as he wrote a note and put quotation marks around it.

"What's done cannot be undone."

Lady Macbeth was right about that.

3

TOM PLANTMAN SETTLED INTO THE RED LEATHER BOOTH at Bully's Steak House. He sucked his gut in, gazed at the velvet portraits of naked women above the heads of the two men across the booth, lit a match, and sucked hard against the end of his Macanudo cigar. He jabbed the ashes forward, each movement punctuating his point as he pushed the burning cigar tip closer to the chest of the man sitting opposite him.

Charles Henreid lifted his elbows from the table and pulled back into the booth. His crew cut carried the colors of coarse ground pepper. The gray flecks at his temples gave the illusion of wisdom, but the pronounced cheekbones that started where his sideburns ended and narrowed into a thin chin, created the noticeable contradiction of projected strength and weakness at the same time. It was the eyes that broke the tie and gave away Henreid's vulnerability.

"I'm not a guy who sells generic information," Plantman said. "Larry there'll tell you, that's not who I am." He nodded toward the beaver-toothed man who'd set up the meeting. "I'm a silent partner in a few racehorses who's just trying to take care of his family." Plantman settled back into the booth. "We've got a horse going today that can make us some serious money."

White wisps of smoke formed into exclamation points above Plantman's fingers as he poked the cigar forward. "We both win in this situation. You pay me the five hundred and bet as much cash as you can get your hands on." He took a puff and mirrored Henreid's posture.

He thought his injured horse would hold up for one race, but Henreid's five hundred, combined with the fifteen hundred he got from the three other guys would cover his own action. "Look. It's up to you. I'll only say this once. You can ignore the posted workouts and today's field is as weak as they come. Our horse'll go gate to wire at a good price."

"I don't have that kind of cash handy," Henreid said. "Why can't your share come out of my winnings?"

"Larry here says you could use a break, which is why I had him call you." Plantman pushed his glasses over the bridge of his nose. "I believe him when he says to trust you, but I got to look out for myself too. I'll end up with nothing to show for the work we've put into the horse if something happens. Besides, you know as well as me, whatever money you put down lowers my odds."

Henreid leaned forward.

Plantman dragged on the cigar, blowing a cloud into the cleavage of the waitress who leaned across the booth and poured another frosted Michelob into a sweaty mug. He found a direct view into Henreid's eyes.

Henreid would be back with the money.

4

HENREID TOSSED HIS NAVY BLAZER ONTO A NOTEBOOK with material about how to get rich on the real estate boom and pushed them across the bench seat of his half-ton pickup. There was an hour until the race, just enough time to withdraw the money for Plantman, get the name of the winning horse and make the bet that would give him his life back. But what if the horse lost? Losing that kind of money would destroy him.

He made up his mind. He wouldn't do it.

Still, what could it hurt to have the cash handy just in case?

No, placing the bet would turn him into a gambler again. How could he justify that? The solution turned out to be simple. He quit trying. This was an insider business decision. It was investing, not gambling.

Henreid parked beneath a towering palm. The pungent scent of ocean breezes hung strong in the air as he pulled open the glass door of the San Diego Trust and Savings Bank.

A series of bounced checks had prompted the bank to close his accounts, but he had a plan to come up with the cash. He handed over his MasterCard and asked for an advance.

"I'm sorry." The teller shifted nervously on spiked heels behind the counter. "It looks like you're at your limit." She fumbled with a pen and looked at the clock on the wall.

Henreid pulled his VISA Gold Card from his lizard-skin wallet

and flipped it onto the counter. "There should be a couple grand available on this," he said as he twisted his wallet against the parquet counter. "Let's try for twenty-five hundred."

The teller disappeared into an inner office.

Henreid leaned against the counter with an unperturbed expression on his face and a pounding in his temples.

The teller reappeared a few minutes later and reached for the drawer. The smile playing across her lips relieved the tension for both of them. "Would you like large bills for this?"

"Large bills would be great." Henreid put the money in his pants pocket and pivoted on his heel.

He looked at his cowboy boots and pulled in a relieved breath as he stepped into the sunshine. His final credit card was now maxed out and he was on the verge of losing his business, but everything would be different after he put the two thousand down on a sure thing. The winnings would make everything wrong in his life right again.

He pulled the Chevy pickup into the valet parking area at the race-track and handed his keys to the attendant with a five-dollar bill for parking. The crashing of the waves a couple furlongs to the west would've been audible on a quieter afternoon, but this was the middle of a seven-week meet at the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club, the place "Where the Turf Meets the Surf."

It was "Heaven by the Pacific" and had been since Bing Crosby and Pat O'Brien had founded it in 1937. According to legend, Bing and Bob Hope had come up with the road picture idea while clowning in the paddock between races.

Now, it was the place where Henreid would put his life back together.

The announcer introduced the horses with information about the owners, trainers and jockeys as mini-skirted women with manicured hands clutched shiny purses and ogled the thoroughbreds coming out for the post parade. The crowd of impeccably dressed socialites who needed to be seen, serious horse players, and the let's-go-to-the-races-

one-day-a-year variety, had one thing in common. They all took the time to gaze at the photographs of Dorothy Lamour, W.C. Fields, Paulette Goddard, Edgar Bergen, Ann Miller and Don Ameche. The movie stars were denizens of the past and harbingers of the future.

The loud speaker boomed Bing Crosby's version of the Del Mar anthem as Henreid pushed his way toward the turf club.

He handed Plantman the five hundred dollars, learned that his horse's name was Wage Earner and muscled his way through the throng. He stepped up to the cashier at the large transaction window, heard the loudspeaker announce, "The horses are approaching the starting gate," and handed the cashier the last of his money. "Give me two-thousand to win on the eight-horse," he said.

The tote board flashed seven-to-one odds on Plantman's sure thing as the gates opened. The two horses vying for the lead with Wage Earner clipped heels rounding the first turn, giving the eight-horse an uncontested advantage as the rest of the field ducked in toward the rail or veered wide to avoid the trouble.

Perched on the concrete brim running along the base of the rail a few feet from the track, Henreid could feel the surging power of the speeding eight-horse as it ran by, its chest heaving and its hooves thundering into the dirt, each stride accompanied by a magnificent grunt. His chest pulsed with a thunderous pounding of its own as Wage Earner widened her lead to six lengths as she ran past.

The hot wash of the sweltering Santa Ana winds seemed to whip through the billowing manes of the other horses as they desperately tried running down the horse that would make Henreid's life right again. He tasted the salt in the air and could almost feel the pockets of his Van Heusens swell, momentarily forgetting that the \$16,000 represented a pittance compared to what he'd already lost. He'd split the payoff between his late mortgage payments and his maxed out credit cards.

His reverie shattered as the crowd gasped.

"No!" Henreid shouted.

The right foreleg of the eight-horse had collapsed, sending her tumbling and rolling over the thrown jockey who lay in a heap on the track. Wage Earner was in a tangle, her leg splayed in the air like a turkey wishbone on a Thanksgiving platter.

“No!” The cry imploded in an internalized scream this time, a wail against the lost money and against being sucked into gambling again. The blood rushing to his head deafened him. He shredded his tickets and tossed them into the wind, his chance to start over as dead as Wage Earner would be when the vet administered the lethal injection. Adrenaline pounded his system and blood rushed through his brain, making his eyesight a red haze of confusion as he stumbled through the turnstile.

“You are such an asshole,” he said to himself, more worried for the moment about the five-dollars he’d blown on the valet service than about the cash advance he couldn’t repay.

Tipsters waved multi-colored selection sheets that promised future winners as Bing Crosby’s voice crooned the Del Mar Anthem’s lyrics over the loud speaker again. Henreid spit on the ground. “Fuck you Bing,” he mumbled and climbed behind the wheel. The truck’s tires pushed out a billowing cloud of dust and gravel in their wake.

Henreid pushed through the door of a liquor store on Camino Del Mar a few minutes later and snatched a pint bottle from the shelf. While the clerk busied herself with customers, Henreid stuffed the bottle under his jacket and walked out the door. It was the first time he’d ever stolen anything, but he had no money and he needed a drink.

He twisted the top off, tipped the Jack Daniels to his lips and stomped on the accelerator. The front bumper scraped pavement as he pulled into the street and lowered the electric windows.

For a fleeting instant he understood that nobody else carried the blame for destroying his life and swore to work hard and quit betting forever. Rational thoughts quickly got swallowed up by his growing hatred for Tom Plantman though, the man who’d seduced him into gambling again and taken his money from his pockets. “Damn, damn,

damn.” The obsessive damns turned into a resounding mantra as Henreid sped south on Interstate 5 toward downtown San Diego.

He turned on the radio.

Rod Stewart’s “Maggie May” faded away on station KCBQ as the talent’s mellifluous voice launched into a familiar sign-off. “Rod Paige here, glad to have spent this time with you right here in beautiful San Diego, our very own Camelot by the Sea, old friend.” The “old friend” dragged out in a long drawl that intermixed with Bing’s crooning and Henreid’s obsessive round robin of thoughts. *Get your hands on some cash, you can win tomorrow, you can win tomorrow and everything will be all right where the turf meets the surf in Camelot by the Sea, old friend.*

Flashing blue and red lights in his rear-view mirror interrupted Henreid’s mantra. He pulled to the freeway shoulder a few hundred yards from the exit that led to the heart of downtown San Diego and squeezed the wheel as one police officer eased his way toward the driver’s window and another took up position outside the front passenger door.

“May I see your driver’s license and registration, sir?” the officer asked.

Henreid fumbled in his wallet for the license before plunging his fist into the glove compartment for the expired registration. A few months before, he’d stopped at the track on his way to mail a check to the DMV and threw it in the trash can along with the three losing tickets.

“Sir, are you aware that this registration has expired?”

Of course Henreid was aware, and wasn’t that a stupid fucking question anyway? Yes, he knew it was expired and this arrogant bastard knew that he knew it. “Really? I didn’t get any notice in the mail,” Henreid said.

“Would you step out of the truck please, Mr. Henreid? Walk over there.” The officer nodded toward the bank of ice plant near where the other officer stood. “Away from traffic please.”

“Mr. Henreid, we intend to put you through a series of field sobriety tests. If you fail the tests, we’ll place you under arrest. Please pay close

attention to everything I say because part of what we're evaluating is your ability to comprehend and follow instructions. Do you understand?"

Henreid understood, or at least he thought he did. The instructions were simple enough, even if they were delivered by this highfalutin' son of a bitch who stood like he had a stick shoved up his ass.

"Mr. Henreid, I need you to count from seventy-five to fifty-five backwards. Begin now, please."

"Seventy-five, seventy-four, seventy-three, seventy, sixty-nine, sixty-eight," Henreid continued counting with no more mistakes. This was easy. "Fifty-five, fifty-four, fifth-three, fifty-two . . . how far did you say to count?" Henreid asked.

Luke Jones flipped a page in his notebook and started writing. He kept up the tests until Henreid stumbled against the police car while trying to balance on one leg. "Mr. Henreid, that's enough. Please put your hands behind your back with your palms together. You're under arrest for section 23102(a) of the California Vehicle Code, driving on a public highway while under the influence of an alcoholic beverage."

Hartson told Luke to handcuff their prisoner and escort him to the back seat of the police car.

Henreid watched from behind the cage as Hartson directed Luke to search the truck. Luke snatched the passenger door open, leaned across the length of the bench seat, put a knee on the floorboard and looked under the driver's area. That was where he found the mostly empty bottle of Jack Daniels.

Then Hartson directed Luke to call for a tow rig, to start filling out the tow report and to give the plate information to dispatch to check for wants and warrants.

The dispatcher's response resonated throughout the car a little later. Eight hundred dollars worth of warrants for failure to pay parking tickets waited at the Marshal's Office.

Luke handed the truck driver the tow slip just before the two officers piled into the car.

After they picked up the warrants Hartson eased the patrol car into the front lot of the police station as Henreid made up his mind. And this time he meant it. He'd go back to Gamon for sure and put his life back together, just like he'd done it before. He knew his screwed up life was entirely his fault.

Then he examined the real reasons for his predicament. First there was Plantman and then these two cops who thought they had the right to poke around in his truck and throw him in jail. They were why his life was all fucked up. No—not really—it was his fault.

He remembered the first time he'd stood in front of a group at a GA meeting, clutching the back of a hand-carved pew, forcing a smile. "My name's Charles Henreid and I'm a compulsive gambler."

A chorus rang out around him, "Hello Charles."

"This is my first time admitting I have a problem."

A new chorus of the voices of informed understanding sounded exactly like the holy-roller congregation of his childhood church, the ones that shouted Amen to the preacher's hell-fire and brimstone sermons.

"Sometimes it feels like killing myself is the only way to get control of my life back."

He was struck by how much this crowd understood and accepted his helplessness. They actually cared about him and listened to what he had to say.

Henreid was jerked back to the present when Luke started asking him the personal questions for the report top sheets while Hartson disappeared into an office near the front of the car. But Henreid had a few questions of his own. "What'll happen to my truck?" he asked.

"It'll be impounded," Luke said.

"How can I get it back?"

"I don't think you can get it out until you pay the parking fines and there'll be impound and storage fees tacked on," Luke said.

"I can't afford to pay. You're taking my livelihood away?"

"I don't know what to tell you," Luke said. "I don't have any choice."

“Mr. Henreid,” Hartson said as he eased back on to the driver’s seat. “You need to submit to a chemical test. The test can be of your blood, breath or urine. You have the right to choose which test, but not to refuse to take a test. If you do refuse, you’ll go to jail and your driver’s license will be suspended. Which test would you like to take?”

“Whatever. What difference does it make?” Henreid asked in disgust.

“Obviously, you have to pee in a bottle for a urine test and someone will stick a needle in your arm for the blood test,” Hartson said. “Either test would have to be analyzed by the lab in the next day or two. The breath test isn’t intrusive and you get the results right away.”

“Can I think about it for a while,” Henreid asked.

“We have reports to write,” Hartson said. “We can wait a little before we book you, but the longer it takes to decide, the higher your blood alcohol level will go since you just stopped drinking a little while ago.”

Henreid blew an exasperated sigh, pushing a cloudy fog against the window. “Breath,” he said.

Then he blew a .18.

Once at the jail, Hartson held his palm over Henreid’s head, protecting it from the top of the doorway as he slid out onto the concrete of the sally port. Henreid heard a loud click. A metal door slid open and the trio walked into the jail where Luke searched the prisoner for weapons one last time.

A second click reverberated. A grated door opened and Henreid stepped into a holding tank where a dozen other prisoners drooped lazily on the bolted metal benches or lay on the floor as far from the single toilet as possible.

As the heavy door slammed shut, leaving Henreid surrounded by hardened criminals and disheveled drunks he swore a silent oath never to do this to himself again. He’d decided to accept responsibility for his own predicament.