

BORDER JUSTICE

by Aubrey Smith

CHAPTER ONE

About nine-thirty P.M. on Friday night, Mary Fowler pushed her grocery cart through the double sliding glass doors. It was three weeks before Christmas. The sun had set and the temperature had begun to cool rapidly in Magic Valley, Texas. Mary had noticed the store was still crowded, even at this time of night. Inside, she had talked nearly half an hour to her next door neighbor, Alice. They had visited in an aisle, standing between boxes of sugar and spices on one side and paper bags of flour on the other. Mostly they talked about Mary's pregnancy, and how crowded the area was with Winter Texans, who had made their yearly migration to the warmer climates of South Texas. Both women agreed that they would be glad when March came and all the snowbirds went home.

Outside, Mary was preoccupied as she crossed the well lit parking lot toward her blue Toyota. She thought, Alice is nice. It's a shame I never really get to see her. But, with both of us working and her husband and two children at home to take care of, there's not enough hours in the day. What am I going to do for time after my baby comes?

Alice was a good neighbor and Mary liked her and her husband, Tom. She was a skinny redhead with lots of energy. Up close she looked a little gaunt, slightly bucktoothed, with an unattractive strawberry mark on her right cheek that distracted people from seeing how truly graceful she was. All-in-all, Mary thought, Alice is kind of homely, but she's sweet and so good to her kids.

Mary was a perfect contrast to Alice. She was very attractive with dark shimmering hair, large brown eyes and a knock-out figure. That is, until about two months ago when she entered her second

trimester. This morning before her husband Ricky left for work, he had told her how beautiful she was.

I know he was just trying to make me feel good, Mary thought as she approached her car. Then, without warning, a new Dodge truck roared through the parking lot toward her. The blue, four wheel drive, truck had dark tinted windows, and was jacked high off the ground.

She said out loud, "What idiots. They could kill someone."

The Dodge raced around a line of parked cars coming to a screeching stop beside her just as she closed the trunk of her car. Mary stepped between her car and the car parked next to her for safety. Suddenly, two men jumped from the pickup, not three feet from where Mary stood still holding a sack full of frozen food.

The first man out of the truck was a young Mexican with jet black hair. He had no chin. He was a beanpole with big ears and an Adam's apple that bobbed up and down when he talked. He was saying something to her in Spanish. The second man was older and bigger. His hair was slicked back, held in place with a red banana. His eyes were wild and menacing. Danger clung on these men like a foul scent. Mary dropped her sack of food and ran for her car door. She fumbled with her keys desperately trying to unlock her car. It was too late. The skinny Mexican grabbed her arms and jerked her around to face him.

My God, Mary thought, they're going to rape me.

The second man, with the red handkerchief, grabbed her from behind and closed his foul smelling hand over her mouth. With his other hand he reached under her arm, and around her chest, pulling her toward the waiting vehicle. Within a matter of fifteen seconds from the time the men had jumped out of the truck, one was back inside with his victim and closing the door. The skinny Mexican was already in Mary's Toyota and driving away.

Neither Mary nor her car were ever seen again. They simply disappeared. There were some who said Mary Fowler had simply run off. But, everyone who knew her was convinced that something terrible had happened to her. They knew she just wasn't the type of

girl to run away knowing her family would be sick with worry. To the police, it was another missing person report. . . The third report of a pregnant woman to disappear without a trace in the last six months.

