

Chapter 1



The sky was gray. It was going to rain soon. Jake Woods didn't want to go outside. But he didn't have a choice. Jake was in jail. And he had work duty. He had to go outside.

Jake lined up for the prison bus. He was on trash detail. All the men wore orange jumpsuits. They all looked alike.

Jake sat alone. He looked out the

window. He had just turned 21. And his life was a mess. He hadn't done anything too bad. Not bad enough to be in jail.

Jake's father left. Jake dropped out of school. Jake started stealing animals in the Everglades. Alligators sold for \$200 on the black market.

This was illegal. But he made a living. Because he knew the swamp, Jake was good at stealing.

But Jake didn't get arrested for stealing. He was in jail for something he didn't do. He was innocent.

The trouble started one night. Jake stopped in a store for bread. It was 3 o'clock in the morning. Jake had been out stealing. The store was empty. A clerk was behind the

counter. He read the newspaper.

Jake went to the back of the store. He got the bread. As he turned around he saw Rip Poole. Rip wasn't a good friend. But Jake knew him. Rip was a bad guy.

"Hey, Rip, what's going on?" Jake asked.

Rip smiled. But Jake thought he looked strange.

"Nothing, yet," Rip answered.

Jake turned around. He walked to the counter. Rip followed him. Jake put the bread on the counter.

Rip pulled out a gun! He pointed it at the clerk.

"Open the cash register! Make it fast!" Rip yelled.

Jake was shocked.

“Put the gun away, Rip!” Jake yelled. “What are you doing?”

“Shut up, Jake!” was all Rip said.

The clerk froze. Then he stepped on a silent alarm. The silent alarm called the police.

“I can’t open the drawer,” the clerk said.

“Come on, Rip. Stop this!” Jake yelled.

“I told you to shut up!” yelled Rip.

Then Rip grabbed the clerk by the shirt. He pushed the gun into his chest.

“Get the money now!” Rip ordered.

The clerk opened the cash drawer. Rip jumped over the counter. He pushed the clerk aside. He grabbed the money. Just then, two police cars