

# "Down in the Keys"

The sun had just set over Key Largo. Tommy and his little sister Patty sat on a bench in front of the restaurant. They were tired from the drive.

In the parking lot, their dad paced in front of his Cadillac, mercilessly smoking a Marlboro and gesturing toward the door of the restaurant. "Go on now. I'll be right in."

Tommy stood up. "Come on Pats." He grabbed his sister's hand, leaned into the weathered door and looked back. He saw his dad slide into the driver's seat of the Caddie.

The restaurant was thick with the smell of fried shrimp. A large woman, the waitress, bent down and smiled. "My, aren't you a couple of little darlings. Where's your mama?"

Tommy frowned. "My Daddy's in the car. He said you're supposed to give us a table."

"Well then that's what I'd better do. Follow me sugar." Tommy took the woman's hand. She sat them in a booth. "How 'bout a couple of Cokes? Sound good?"

"Yes ma'am!"

Suddenly, what sounded like a firecracker popped outside. The waitress followed the cook out the door. Somebody screamed.

"What's that Tommy?" Patty asked.

"I don't know." Tommy peered out the window. People were gathered around the Cadillac. The windshield glowed dark crimson beneath the street lamp. His dad's head was tilted back and his eyes were closed. Tommy thought he looked peaceful.

Patty was drawing four stick figures on a paper placemat. A family. Tommy saw it and started to cry.

—Paul M. Mann