

Sergeant Roman was a tall, thin black man with a shaved head and a dour expression.

"You stole this car and you want me to let you get into it and look around?"

"I didn't steal it. I—"

"Sorry. You're 'under indictment' for stealing this car, and you expect me to do that."

"It's not as if I could drive it away," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean it doesn't have any tires."

"Doesn't have tires? Oh. That's the antique came in on the flatbed."

"That's probably it." Maybe he hadn't looked inside. "I have some stuff on the front seat, an experiment from school. I'm a graduate student at MIT."

"You got an ID, then."

Matt took it out of his wallet and passed it over. Roman scrutinized both sides. Please, please don't call to check it.

"You can't take any evidence out of the car."

"I don't want to remove it. Just make sure it's okay."

He handed back the card and gave Matt a sharp look. "I suppose. But I'm goin' with you."

Please do, Matt thought. An eyewitness. "Sure. Where is it?"

He pointed with his thumb. "Still on the flatbed."

They walked between two long rows of impounded cars to a flatbed trailer. The Thunderbird was under a canvas. The sergeant helped Matt peel it back. The canvas crackled and shed frost.

"Good God . . . what a paint job like that cost?"

"A bundle," Matt said. He clambered up onto the trailer and slid into the driver's seat through the hole that used to be a door. The Mexican seat leather was frozen stiff.

The machine was there, apparently untouched, the conducting cable still clamped to the doorframe. The inflatable raft was wadded up in the backseat. It probably had enough residual air to act as a life preserver.

His thumb hovered over the button. He looked back at Sergeant Roman. "You got the time?"

He checked his wrist. "About ten till—2:48."

"Okay. The fourth of February—14:48." He pushed RESET.

Just like the last time, he was suddenly blinded by gray. It probably wouldn't last long; he groped behind the seat and hauled the bundle of raft up into his lap and held on to it for dear life—if he materialized over water he'd have to dive out the door. It was going to be 465 days, May 15, about 4:00 in the afternoon—at least the water won't be freezing—

*Tires screaming facing the wrong way on a superhighway a pickup truck spiraling toward him—* Matthew slapped the button just before impact and everything went gray again.

He hoped nobody had been hurt. If somebody dies every time he pushes the button, maybe he'd better stop doing it!

This time would be about fifteen years. He braced himself for water, for traffic, for anything—

Except applause. He materialized in the middle of what looked like a football or soccer field, thousands of people on bleachers, cheering, jumping up and down. A tuba band started playing a triumphant march.

Beyond the bleachers, a solid crowd of people. Tens of thousands?

A fat man with a Santa Claus beard, wearing a sky-blue tuxedo, strode toward him. It was Professor Marsh!

"Welcome home, my boy," he said, reaching into the car to shake Matt's hand. "My boy"? Marsh had called him a lot of names, but never that one.

He took Matt's elbow. "Come with me. Your public awaits."

Somewhat dazed, Matt staggered along with Marsh toward a grandstand where several older people stood applauding. That tuba band below them must have had a hundred tubas, large and small. Matt had never seen a small tuba before.

There would probably be even stranger things, up here in the future.

They mounted the grandstand, and everyone sat down except for one of the women, who turned out to be the governor of Massachusetts. She had a few general and mildly confusing remarks before she introduced the other woman, the president of MIT, who praised Matt for his originality and daring, not mentioning that his last connection with MIT had been a disconnection.

By the time the director of the National Institute of Chronophysics had spoken, and introduced Professor Marsh—Nobel Prize-winning discoverer of the Marsh Effect—the pieces had started to fall into place.