

rimmed glasses sat at a corner table drinking draft beer and playing gin. A tall hollow-chested bartender with a gay-nineties mustache and hairstyle was polishing stemware and inserting it upside down into the overhead racks.

I slid onto a padded bar stool and said, "Mishy Burns around?"

"She comes on at four," he said.

"Draft beer, please."

He served it with a nice head. He said, "When she does come on, she's working. She has to set up the tables. When she comes on, she's not on her own time."

"Are you trying to be unpleasant?"

"I'm just telling you the way it is, friend. What she does on her own time is her business."

"You own this place?"

"I'm one of the owners."

I was getting very tired of contentious attitudes. I smiled at him. I said, "I've always wondered about places like this."

"Wondered what?"

"Suppose, just for the hell of it, you took a list of all the regulatory agencies that have any kind of authority over the way you do business here. County, city, state, federal. You know, the food-handling ordinances, and the tax people and the liquor people. Then suppose you went through this place and made a list of every single violation of every law, ordinance, and regulation."

"We run a good clean place here. We don't violate anything!"

\* "Nonsense, good buddy. There is no way to avoid being in violation of something. The rules are contradictory. You know it and I know it. Right now you are subject to fines, suspension of licenses, civil suits. That's the way the establishment keeps you in line. If you get feisty, they come and look you over and tell you you have to build a whole new kitchen, or replace all your wiring, or put in ten more parking spaces."

"Who the hell *are* you?"

"I am the fellow who came in here a little while ago, very quietly, and sat right here and asked you if Mishy Burns was around, and got a big discussion of her working hours and who pays her. We can start over again. Okay? Mishy Burns around?"

"She comes on at four," he said.

"Draft beer, please," I said, and he took the empty and refilled it and moved down the bar and left me alone, which was exactly what I wanted.

Michele came in ten minutes later. I had been building a mental picture of her, and so I was totally unprepared for a twenty-two-year-old Doris Day. She came a-dancing and bubbling in, full of warmth and life and high spirits. She brightened the place up. The salesman knew her and the gin players knew her. The bartender motioned to me and she came over and put her hand out and said, beaming, "Hello! I'm Mishy Burns."

"Travis McGee. The man says you're on his time and you can't talk to me."

"About what, love?"

"I've been talking to Licia about your cruise."

She made a face. "Oh, God. That again!"

She was in constant motion, constant changes of expression, posture, tossing her hair back, rocking from heel to toe, so much so that one wanted to clamp firm hands on her shoulders and settle her down, position her, quiet her. I realized that all the animation gave the impression of prettiness, and that perhaps in repose her face would look quite plain.

"Harley gets itchy, don't you, Harley? Look, love, let me go put on the house garments and brush up the dining room a little and then we can talk, because things will be dead as a snake until five past five and all the car doors start chunking shut out there in the lot."

I saw her in a little while, trotting back and forth in the dining room, wearing a crotch-length tennis dress with a sailor collar and a little white yachtsman's cap. Another waitress had joined her. A couple of construction workers—off at four—came

