



# THE TERRIBLE ORCHID SKY

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**PAGETURNERS®**

# Chapter 1

**K**en Talbot was eighteen when he started community college.

“You won’t get anywhere without a degree,” his stepdad had told him. The man didn’t think his stepson would succeed anyway. Ken had heard him say it plenty of times. “That kid’s a real loser. He’s just like his father.”

It was important that Ken prove his stepdad wrong. He set out to do his best. But college turned out to be just like high school. Ken hated it. The classes were boring. He tuned the teachers out. All he wanted to do was escape.

College wasn’t for everyone, Ken thought. He could get a job without a

degree. His mind was made up. He quit. Of course his stepdad wasn't surprised. "I knew you wouldn't last," the man had said. "You're a lazy, good-for-nothing kid."

George Garvin had finally pushed his stepson over the edge. The hateful comments were too much to take. Ken could no longer ignore his feelings. He'd never liked Garvin anyway. Now he disliked the man even more.

"I'm leaving, Mom. I'm going to Florida."

"Don't be a fool," she'd said. "Your father never amounted to anything. That's because he was a quitter. It's the reason I divorced him. Now you're turning out the same. Can't you see what will happen if you go back to Florida? You'll just learn more bad habits."

Ken grabbed his backpack and kissed his mother goodbye. That afternoon he stepped onto a bus headed for Florida. All he wanted to do was put everything behind

him. He slid down in his seat. Music blasted through his earphones. He rode that way for nearly two hours. It took that long for the angry thoughts to leave his head. But he knew they'd be back. Ken had been angry for as long as he could remember. It seemed like nothing could make that anger go away.

For now there was a feeling of calm. Thoughts of his father started to fill his head. He wondered what the man was like these days. It had been six years since the two had seen each other. Back then, Dad was working as a fisherman. The work wasn't steady, though. Sometimes he had to take whatever work he could find. There were also times when he didn't work at all. Mom called him a bum. He was the exact opposite of Ken's stepdad. Garvin was a good plumber and a steady worker.



The bus drove past a sign. It said "Breeze End." Ken thought it was a funny name. Is

this where the breezes end? It didn't seem like it. A strong wind was blowing at that moment. The palm trees were moving back and forth.

There wasn't much to the town. The streets were practically empty. His father had told him that Breeze End was small. But there should have been *some* activity. This was supposed to be a popular place with tourists. Where was everybody?

The bus came to a stop. Ken waited while the other passengers got off. He looked out the window at the businesses along the main street. Only a few seemed to be open. There was a gas station and a grocery store. On the next block was a 99-cent store. A bait and tackle shop was on the corner. Dad had said to turn left there. His house was on Breeze Way. "You can't miss it," he'd said. "It's white with purple trim."

Suddenly Ken was excited to see his father. He hurried off the bus and headed

for the house. Sure enough, there it was! The yard was a mess. Junk was everywhere. This was how Dad had always lived. It was one of reasons Mom couldn't stand him. She liked things to be neat and tidy.

Ken's parents divorced when he was five. His mother had married Garvin. The other two kids in the family were Garvin's children.

Alex and James were tall and athletic. The brothers got good grades in school. They were everything their half-brother was not. Garvin made sure everyone knew it. He never tried to make his stepson feel part of the family.

Instead, he treated Ken like some junk left behind by Ed Talbot. Ed hadn't left much. Just a few old tackle boxes and some sweatshirts. Then Mom finally threw it all out. Had she wanted to throw her son out too? It was clear that Garvin would have liked that.

Now here was Ken in front of his father's junky old house. Nothing had changed. But somehow that made him feel relaxed. Maybe he belonged here.

Ken went up to the door and knocked. The whole house seemed to rattle like rickety old bones. He felt a little nervous. The two hadn't seen each other for so long. There were times when Dad would visit him. But his parents would always have a big fight.

The divorce made it final. Mom would have nothing more to do with Ed. She was afraid his presence would be a bad influence on her son. So she had devoted her life to keeping father and son apart.

Suddenly the front door swung open. A man with a weathered face stood there. "Yeah? What do you want?" he barked.