

INTRODUCTION BY LEE CHILD

JOHN D.
MACDONALD

A TRAVIS MCGEE NOVEL

THE DEEP
BLUE
GOODBYE



About the Book

Travis McGee isn't your typical knight in shining armour. He only works when his cash runs out, and his rule is simple: He'll help you find whatever was taken from you, as long as he can keep half.

Travis McGee isn't particularly strapped for cash, but how can anyone say no to Cathy, a sweet girl who's been tortured repeatedly by her manipulative ex-boyfriend Junior Allen? What Travis isn't anticipating is just how many women Junior has torn apart and left in his wake.

As Travis hunts for the ruthless man who steals women's sensibilities and livelihoods, he can't guess how violent his quest is soon to become. He'll learn the hard way that there must be casualties in this game of cat and mouse...

First published in 1964, *The Deep Blue Goodbye* features an introduction by Lee Child.

Contents

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

Dedication

Introduction from Lee Child

Chapter Uno

Chapter Dos

Chapter Tres

Chapter Cuatro

Chapter Cinco

Chapter Seis

Chapter Siete

Chapter Ocho

Chapter Nueve

Chapter Diez

Chapter Once

Chapter Doce

Chapter Trece

Chapter Catorce

The Travis McGee Series

Nightmare in Pink

About the Author

Also by John D. MacDonald

Praise

Copyright

John D. MacDonald

THE DEEP BLUE GOODBYE

*For Knox Burger,
McGee's first editor*

Introduction

Lee Child

Suspense fiction trades on surprising and unexpected twists. Like this one: A boy named John Dann MacDonald was born in 1916 in Sharon, Pennsylvania, into the kind of quiet and comfortable middle-class prosperity that became common in America forty or fifty years later but which was still relatively rare early in the century. Sharon was a satellite town near Pittsburgh, dominated by precision metalworking, and John's father was a mild-mannered and upstanding citizen with secure and prestigious salaried employment as a senior financial executive with a local manufacturer. Young John was called Jack as a child, and wore sailor suits, and grew up in a substantial suburban house on a tree-lined block. He read books, played with his dog, and teased his little sister and his cousin. When he was eighteen, his father funded a long European grand tour for him, advising him by letter "to make the best of it ... to eat and function regularly ... to be sure and attend a religious service at least once on each Sunday ... to keep a record of your expenditures as a training for your college days."

Safely returned, young Jack went on to two decent East Coast schools, and married a fellow student, and went to Harvard for an MBA, and volunteered for the army in 1940, and finished World War II as a lieutenant colonel, after thoroughly satisfactory service as a serious, earnest, bespectacled, rear-echelon staff officer.

So what does such a fellow do next? Does he join General Motors? IBM? Work for the Pentagon?

In John D. MacDonald's case, he becomes an impoverished writer of pulp fiction.

During his first four postwar months, he lost twenty pounds by sitting at a table and hammering out 800,000 unsold words. Then in his fifth month he sold a story for twenty-five bucks. Then another for forty bucks, and eventually more than five hundred. Sometimes entire issues of pulp magazines were all his own work, disguised under dozens of different pen names. Then in 1950 he watched the contemporary boom in paperback novels and jumped in with his first full-length work, which was followed by sixty-six more, including some really seminal crime fiction and one of history's greatest suspense series.

Why? Why did a middle-class Harvard MBA with extensive corporate connections and a gold-plated recommendation from the army turn his back on everything apparently predestined, to sit at a battered table and type, with an anxious wife at his side? No one knows. He never explained. It's a mystery.

But we can speculate. Perhaps he never wanted a quiet and comfortable middle-class life. Perhaps, after finding himself amid the chaos of war, he felt able to liberate himself from the crushing filial expectations he had previously followed so obediently. As an eighteen-year-old, it's hard to say no to the father who just paid for a trip to Europe. Eleven years later, as a lieutenant colonel, it's easier.

And we know from what he wrote that he felt he had something to say to the world. His early stuff was whatever put food on that battered table—detective stories, westerns, adventure stories, sports stories, and even some science fiction—but soon enough his long-form fiction began to develop some enduring and intertwined themes. From *A Deadly Shade of Gold*, a Travis McGee title: "The only thing

in the world worth a damn is the strange, touching, pathetic, awesome nobility of the individual human spirit.” From the stand-alone thriller *Where Is Janice Gantry?*: “Somebody has to be tireless, or the fast-buck operators would asphalt the entire coast, fill every bay, and slay every living thing incapable of carrying a wallet.”

These two angles show up everywhere in his novels: the need to—maybe reluctantly, possibly even grumpily—stand up and be counted on behalf of the weak, helpless, and downtrodden, which included people, animals, and what we now call *the environment*—which was in itself a very early and very prescient concern: *Janice Gantry*, for instance, predated Rachel Carson’s groundbreaking *Silent Spring* by a whole year.

But the good knight’s armor was always tarnished and rusted. The fight was never easy and, one feels, never actually winnable. But it had to be waged. This strange, weary blend of nobility and cynicism is MacDonald’s signature emotion. Where did it come from? Not, presumably, the leafy block where he was raised in quiet and comfort. The war must have changed him, like it changed a generation and the world.

Probably the best of his nonseries novels is *The Executioners*, which became *Cape Fear* as a movie (twice). It’s an acute psychological study of base instinct, terror, mistakes, and raw emotion. It’s about a man—possibly a man like MacDonald’s father, or like MacDonald himself—who moves out of his quiet and comfort into more primeval terrain. And those twin poles are the theme of the sensationally good Travis McGee series, which is a canon equaled for enduring quality and maturity by very little else. McGee is a quiet man, internally bewildered by and raging at what passes for modern progress, externally happy merely to be varnishing the decks of his houseboat and polishing its brass, but always ready to saddle up and ride off in the service of those who need and deserve his help.

Again, not the product of the privileged youth enjoyed by the salaried executive's son.

So where did McGee and MacDonald's other heroes come from? Why Florida? Why the jaundiced concerns? We will never know. But maybe we can work it out, by mining the millions of words written with such haste and urgency and passion between 1945 and 1986.

LEE CHILD
New York
2012

uno

It was to have been a quiet evening at home.

Home is the *Busted Flush*, 52-foot barge-type houseboat, Slip F-18, Bahia Mar, Lauderdale.

Home is where the privacy is. Draw all the opaque curtains, button the hatches, and with the whispering drone of the air conditioning masking all the sounds of the outside world, you are no longer cheek to jowl with the random activities aboard the neighbor craft. You could be in a rocket beyond Venus, or under the icecap.

Because it is a room aboard, I call it the lounge, and because that is one of the primary activities.

I was sprawled on a deep curve of the corner couch, studying charts of the keys, trying to work up enough enthusiasm and energy to plan moving the *Busted Flush* to a new mooring for a while. She has a pair of Hercules diesels, 58 HP each, that will chug her along at a stately six knots. I didn't want to move her. I like Lauderdale. But it had been so long I was wondering if I should.

Chookie McCall was choreographing some fool thing. She had come over because I had the privacy and enough room. She had shoved the furniture out of the way, set up a couple of mirrors from the master stateroom, and set up her rickety little metronome. She wore a faded old rust-red leotard, mended with black thread in a couple of places. She had her black hair tied into a scarf.

She was working hard. She would go over a sequence time and time again, changing it a little each time, and when she was satisfied, she would hurry over to the table and make the proper notations on her clip board.

Dancers work as hard as coal miners used to work. She stomped and huffed and contorted her splendid and perfectly proportioned body. In spite of the air conditioning, she had filled the lounge with a faint sharp-sweet odor of large overheated girl. She was a pleasant distraction. In the lounge lights there was a highlighted gleam of perspiration on the long round legs and arms.

“Damn!” she said, scowling at her notations.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing I can’t fix. I have to figure exactly where everybody is going to be, or I’ll have them kicking each other in the face. I get mixed up sometimes.”

She scratched out some notes. I went back to checking the low tide depths on the flats northeast of the Content Keys. She worked hard for another ten minutes, made her notes, then leaned against the edge of the table, breathing hard.

“Trav, honey?”

“Mmm?”

“Were you kidding me that time we talked about ... about what you do for a living?”

“What did I say?”

“It sounded sort of strange, but I guess I believed you. You said if X has something valuable and Y comes along and takes it away from him, and there is absolutely no way in the world X can ever get it back, then you come along and make a deal with X to get it back, and keep half. Then you just ... live on that until it starts to run out. Is that the way it is, really?”

“It’s a simplification, Chook, but reasonably accurate.”

“Don’t you get into a lot of trouble?”

“Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Y is usually in no position to make much of a fuss. Because I am sort of a last resort, the fee is fifty per cent. For X, half is a lot better than nothing at all.”

“And you keep it all sort of quiet.”

“Chook, I don’t exactly have business cards printed. What would I say on them? Travis McGee, Retriever?”

“But for goodness’ sake, Trav, how much work like that can you find laying around when you start to get so broke you need it?”

“So much that I can pick and choose. This is a complex culture, dear. The more intricate our society gets, the more semi-legal ways to steal. I get leads from old clients sometimes. And if you take a batch of newspapers and read with great care, and read between the lines, you can come up with a fat happy Y and a poor X wringing his hands. I like to work on pretty good-sized ones. Expenses are heavy. And then I can take another piece of my retirement. Instead of retiring at sixty, I’m taking it in chunks as I go along.”

“What if something came along right now?”

“Let’s change the subject, Miss McCall. Why don’t you take some time off, and make Frank highly nervous, and we’ll assemble a little group and cruise a little houseboat party on down to Marathon. Let’s say, four gentlemen and six ladies. No drunks, no whiners, nobody paired off, no dubious gender, no camera addicts, nobody who sunburns, nobody who can’t swim, nobody who ...”

“Please, McGee. I’m really serious.”

“So am I.”

“There’s a girl I want you to talk to. I hired her for the group a couple of months ago. She’s a little older than the rest of us. She used to dance, and she’s working back into it very nicely, really. But ... I really think she needs help. And I don’t think there’s anyone else she can go to. Her name is Cathy Kerr.”

“I’m sorry, Chook. I’ve got enough right now to last for months. I work best after I begin to get nervous.”

“But she thinks there is really an awful lot involved.”

I stared at her. “She thinks?”

“She never got to see it.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“She got a little drunk the other night and very weepy, and I’ve been nice to her, so she blurted it all out to me. But she should tell you herself.”

“How could she lose something she never saw?”

Chookie wore that little fisherman smile which means the hook has been set. “It’s really too complicated for me to try to explain. I might mess it up. Would you just do this, Travis? Would you talk to her?”

I sighed. “Bring her around sometime.”

She padded lithely over to me and took my wrist and looked at my watch. Her breathing had slowed. Her leotard was sweat-dark and fitted her almost as closely as her healthy hide. She beamed down at me. “I knew you’d be nice about it, Trav. She’ll be here in twenty minutes.”

I stared up at her. “You are a con artist, McCall.”

She patted my head. “Cathy is really nice. You’ll like her.” She went back to the middle of the lounge and started her metronome again, studied her notations, and went back to work, leaping, thumping, making small grunts of effort. Never sit in the first row at the ballet.

I tried to get back to channel markers and tide levels, but all concentration was gone. I had to talk to the woman. But I was certainly not going to be shilled into some nonsense project. I had the next one all lined up, waiting until I was ready. I had enough diversions. I didn’t need more. I was sourly amused that Chook had wondered where the projects came from. She was living proof they popped up all the time.

Promptly at nine there was a bing-bong sound from the bell I have wired to a push button on the pier piling. If

anybody should ignore the bell, step over my chain and come down my gangplank, the instant they step on the big rope mat on the transom deck there is an ominous and significant bong which starts many abrupt protective measures. I have no stomach for surprises. I have endured too many of them. They upset me. The elimination of all removable risk is the most plausible way of staying alive.

I flicked on my rear deck lights and went out the aft doorway of the lounge, Chookie McCall gasping behind me.

I went up and unsnapped the chain for her. She was a sandy blonde with one of those English schoolboy haircuts, where the big eyes look out at you from under a ragged thatch of bangs. She had overdressed for the occasion, the basic black and the pearl clip and the sparkly little envelope purse.

In explosive gasps Chook introduced us and we went inside. I could see that she was elderly by Chook's standards. Perhaps twenty-six or -seven. A brown-eyed blonde, with the helpless mournful eyes of a basset hound. She was a little weathered around the eyes. In the lounge lights I saw that the basic black had given her a lot of good use. Her hands looked a little rough. Under the slightly bouffant skirt of the black dress were those unmistakable dancer's legs, curved and trim and sinewy.

Chookie said, "Cathy, you can go ahead and tell Travis McGee the whole bit, like you told me. I've finished up, so I'll leave you alone and go back and take that bath, if it's okay, Trav."

"Please do take a bath."

She gave me a pretty good rap behind the ear and went off and closed the master stateroom door behind her.

I could see that Catherine Kerr was very tense. I offered her a drink. She gratefully accepted bourbon on ice.

"I don't know what you can do," she said. "Maybe this is silly. I don't know what anybody can do."

“Maybe there isn’t a thing anybody can do, Cathy. Let’s just start by assuming it’s hopeless and go on from there.”

“I drank too much one night after the last show and told her and I guess I shouldn’t have been telling anybody.”

In her light, nasal voice I could detect some of that conch accent, that slightly sing-song way the key people talk.

“I’m married, sort of,” she said defiantly. “He took off three years ago and I haven’t heard a thing from him. I’ve got a boy age of five, and my sister keeps him, down at the home place on Candle Key. That’s why it’s stinking, not so much for me as the boy Davie. You want a lot for a kid. Maybe I dreamed too much. I don’t know, rightly.”

You have to let them get to it their own way.

She sipped her drink and sighed and shrugged. “The way it happened, I was nine years old. That was in nineteen forty-five. That was when my daddy came home from the war. Sergeant David Berry. That’s my maiden name, Catherine Berry. I named my boy after him, even though my daddy had been in prison a long long time when the boy was born. What I think happened, my daddy got onto some way of making money when he was overseas in World War Two. A lot of money, I think. And he found some way of bringing it back. I don’t know how. He was over there in India and Burma. He was gone over two years. He was a drinking man, Mr. McGee, and a strong man and he had a temper. He came back on a ship and got off it in San Francisco. They were going to send him to some place in Florida to get discharged, and he was coming home. But in San Francisco he got drunk and killed another army man, and because he thought they would keep him and he wouldn’t see us at all, he cut and ran. And he got all the way home. Running like that didn’t do him any good at the trial. It was a military trial, like they have. He came home in the middle of the night, and when we got up he was out there on the dock, just looking at the water. It was a foggy day. He told my mother what happened. He said they were going to

come and get him. I have never seen a woman cry like that, before or since. They came and got him like he said, and they put him in prison for life in Leavenworth, Kansas. It was an officer he killed. My mother took a bus out there to see him that Christmas, and every Christmas from then on until he died two years ago. When there was enough money, she'd take along me or my sister. I got to go twice. My sister went out there three times."

She went off into dreaming and memories. In a little while she gave a start and looked at me and said, "I'm sorry. The way it was, he thought he would get out sooner or later. I guess they would have let him out, but there was always some kind of trouble coming up. He wasn't a man to settle down to prison like some can. He was a very proud man, Mr. McGee. But here is the thing I have to tell you. Before they came and got him. I was nine. My sister was seven. He sat on the porch with his arms around us, and he told us all the wonderful things that would happen when they turned him loose. We'd have our own boats and our own horses. We would travel all over the world. We would have pretty dresses for every day in the year. I always remembered that. When I was older, I remembered it to my mother. I thought she might make fun. But she was serious enough. She told me I was never to talk about it to anybody. She said my father would work things out in his own way, and some day everything would be fine for all of us. But of course it never was. Last year a man came to us, name of Junior Allen. A smiling man. He said he had spent five long years in that place and knew my daddy well. And he knew things about us he could only know if my daddy told him. So we were glad to see him. He said he had no family of his own. A freckledy smiling man, quick to talk and good with his hands at fixing things. He came in with us, and he got work over at the Esso station, and the money helped. My mother was started sick then, but not so sick she couldn't care for the kids by day, when Christine—that's my sister—and I were

working. Her two, and my boy Davie, three little kids. It would have neatened out better if Junior Allen had took up with Christine, her husband being killed by the hurricane of sixty-one, when the cinderblock wall of the Candle Key Suprex blew over onto him. Jaimie Hasson his name was. We've had all this bad luck with our men." She tried to smile.

"Sometimes it comes in bunches."

"Lord knows we've had a bunch. It was me Junior Allen liked best. By the time we took up together, my mother was too sick to care too much. As she got sicker she seemed to turn inward like some people do, not noticing much. Christine knew what was going on between us, and she told me it was wrong. But Junior said the way Wally Kerr took off and left me, I was as good as divorced. He said I couldn't even ask for a divorce until seven years went by without hearing from Wally. I since found out he lied.

"I lived like man and wife with Junior Allen, Mr. McGee, and I loved that man. When Mother died, it was good to have him close. It was near Christmas. She was washing greens, and she just bent over the sink and made a little kitten sound and slid down dying and she was gone. Christine stopped her job because somebody had to be with the kids, but with me and Junior Allen working, there was just enough to get by. There was one thing strange in all that time he was with us. I thought it was because he had gotten so close to my daddy in prison. He liked to talk—about Daddy. He never stopped asking questions about him—about what things he liked to do and what places he liked to go, almost as if he was trying to live the same life my daddy had lived 'way before the war, when I was as little as Davie is now. Now I remember other things that didn't seem as strange then as they do now. I remembered about the fish shack my daddy built on a little no-name island, and I told Junior Allen, and the next day he was off he was gone all day in the skiff, and he came back bone tired and grouchy. Little things like

that. I know now that he was hunting, Mr. McGee. He was hunting whatever my daddy hid, whatever it was he brought back that was going to give us those dresses and horses and around the world. Using one excuse and another, he managed to dig up just about every part of the yard. One day we awoke and Junior Allen was gone. That was near the end of this last February, and both the markers by our old driveway were tumbled down. My daddy built them long ago of coquina rock too big and grand for such a little driveway, but built rough. Junior Allen tumbled them down and away he went, and in the ruin of the one on the left was something I don't know what it was to start. Scabs of rust and some rotten cloth that was maybe once army color, and some wire like a big clip, and some rust still in the length of a little chain, and something that could have once been some kind of a top to something.

“He took along his personal things, so I knew it was just like Wally Kerr all over again. No good looking for him. But he showed up again three weeks later, on Candle Key. Not to see me. He came back to see Mrs. Atkinson. She's a beautiful woman. She has one of the big new houses there, and I guess he met her when he was working at the Esso and putting gas in her Thunderbird car. People told me he was staying in her house, and that he'd come down in expensive clothes and a big boat of his own and moved right in with her. They would tell me and then look at me to see what I'd say or do. The fourth day he was there I came upon him in the town. I tried to speak and he turned around and hurried the other way, and I shamed myself, running after him. He got into her car and she wasn't there and he was pawing his pockets and cursing because he couldn't find the key, his face ugly. I was crying and trying to ask him what he was doing to me. He called me a busted-down little slut and told me to go back and hide in the swamp where I came from, and he roared away. Enough people saw it and enough heard it, so it gave them a lot to talk about. His boat

was right there, a big cruiser, registered to him and owned by him, right at Mrs. Atkinson's dock, and she closed the house and they went off in it. Now I know she lived careful, and couldn't buy him a boat like that. And I know that living with us, Junior Allen didn't have one dollar extra. But he looked and looked and looked and found something and went away and came back with money. But I can't see there's a thing in the world anybody can do about it. Chookie said tell you, so I've told you. I don't know where he is now. I don't know if Mrs. Atkinson knows, if she isn't still with him someplace. And if anybody could find him, what could they do?"

"Was there a name and port of registry on the boat?"

"Called it the *Play Pen*, out of Miami. Not a new boat, but the name new. He showed a couple of people the papers to prove it his. I'd say it was a custom boat, maybe thirty-eight foot, white topsides, gray hull and a blue stripe."

"Then you left Candle Key."

"Not long after. There just wasn't enough money with just one of us working. When I was little a tourist lady saw me dancing alone and gave me free dancing lessons every winter she came down. Before I was married I danced two years for pay up in Miami. So I came back into it and it's enough money so I can send Christine enough and she can get along. I didn't want to be in Candle Key any more anyway."

She looked at me with soft apologetic brown eyes, all dressed in her best to come talk to me. The world had done its best to subdue and humble her, but the edge of her good tough spirit showed through. I found I had taken an irrational dislike to Junior Allen, that smiling man. And I do not function too well on emotional motivations. I am wary of them. And I am wary of a lot of other things, such as plastic credit cards, payroll deductions, insurance programs, retirement benefits, savings accounts, Green Stamps, time clocks, newspapers, mortgages, sermons, miracle fabrics,

deodorants, check lists, time payments, political parties, lending libraries, television, actresses, junior chambers of commerce, pageants, progress, and manifest destiny.

I am wary of the whole dreary deadening structured mess we have built into such a glittering top-heavy structure that there is nothing left to see but the glitter, and the brute routines of maintaining it.

Reality is in the enduring eyes, the unspoken dreadful accusation in the enduring eyes of a worn young woman who looks at you, and hopes for nothing.

But these things can never form lecture materials for blithe Travis McGee. I am also wary of all earnestness.

“Let me do some thinking about all this, Cathy.”

“Sure,” she said, and put her empty glass aside.

“Another drink.”

“I’ll be getting along, thank you kindly.”

“I can get in touch through Chook.”

“Sure.”

I let her out. I noticed a small and touching thing. Despite all wounds and dejections, her dancer’s step was so firm and light and quick as to give a curious imitation of joy.