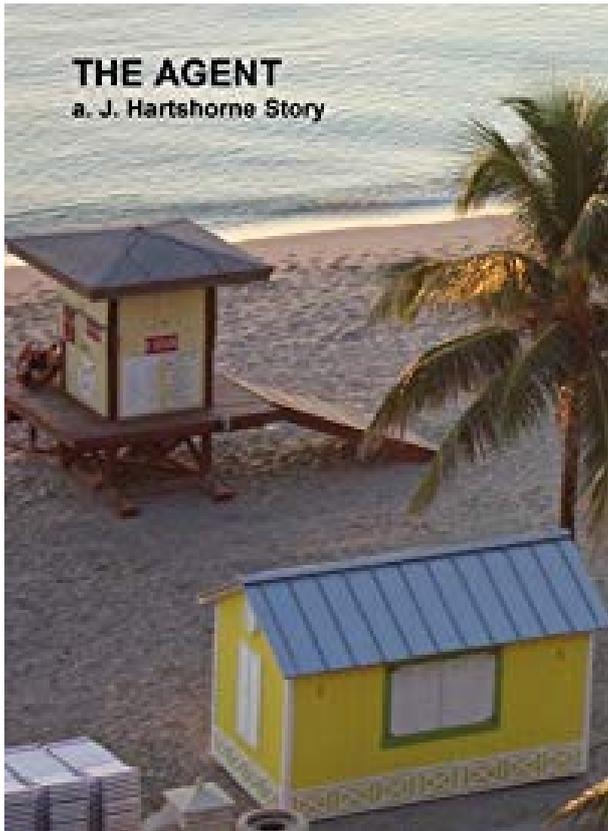


# The Agent



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“We can't have you freaking out all the time at the sight of blood,” Harris had said after an earlier, similar incident. “It's a professional hazard.” I know, I know. “This never happened to you before?” Of course it hadn't.

I wouldn't have passed my application if it had. I promised him I'd get hypnotized or undergo therapy or something the next time I had a break in my schedule. “This is not going to impede this mission, is it?” “No, no - of course not.” “Are you sure?” “I'm sure.” “The Agent” picks up where “Winter” left off – with a tragic incident in North Dakota in the rear-view mirror and a fresh suspect in the Williston drug ring now a fugitive in Costa Rica. The title character is a master of disguise but also only human, and prone to mistakes, lapses in judgment and second thoughts. Beach after beach down the Pacific Coast, the story unfolds, building up to its shocking conclusion. "The Agent" is part of the "Prairie Noir" series Go west...There are only two reasons to hit the road for somewhere new: a person is either running toward something or running away from something else. The first reason brings most of the characters to the North Dakota oil fields in "Winter" It's a new assignment, a new job, reinvention, a taste of adventure. (It's most certainly not the weather or vast selection of dining options.) This is what Americans, and those who come to America to join them, do - and have done since the times of the homesteaders and the San Francisco Gold Rush. During the journey, you'll find adventure - blinding blizzards, hazardous work sites. There is deprivation. Accommodations are scarce. You'll find humor. Because things could always be worse.

And you'll find flight. By the end of "Winter" and the opening scenes of "The Agent," two of the characters have fled - one east, the other south, for reasons that seem dissimilar and unconnected only in the beginning. Their journeys are not entirely voluntary. The final destinations are happy only for some. The characters travel by plane, by third-hand American school bus, by fully-loaded SUV and Camaro and by beat-up jalopy. They haul campers and contraband. They make runs to and across borders with varying degrees of success. "Fall" delivers insight into an antagonist's motivation. "Spring" answers the question: What do you do when someone in your life suddenly disappears? By the time "The Immigrant" comes along, it's all about hearth and home.

Love, family, roots, settling down - and fighting to preserve all of the above. But can you really go home again? By "Dakota," the journeys are shorter and more frequent. And more urgent. Until the final trip to identify a body.