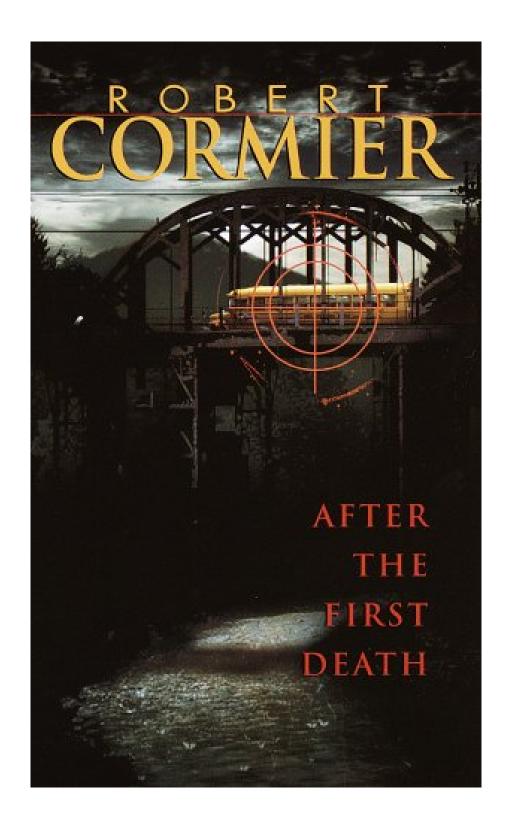


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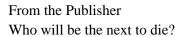




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More horrors must come...

From the Inside Flap
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Sixteen-year-old Miro had instructions to kill the bus driver immediately.

They would then take the busload of children to the bridge and begin the standoff. Artkin was Miro's mentor; the mastermind behind this act of terrorism that would get the world's attention. But Artkin had told Miro that the bus driver would be an old man.

Sixteen-year old Kate sometimes substituted for her uncle and drove his bus when he was ill. She even got a special license to do so, and she'd always liked kids. She wondered what was going on when the van in front of her stopped, but when the man and the boy with guns forced their way onto the bus, she knew her worst nightmare was beginning.

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"You know your father doesn't like to be called a general," she said.

"True," I said, and felt myself drifting away from her, something I have been doing recently, drifting away while standing still, letting myself go as if the world is a huge blotter and I am being absorbed by it. "But he is a general, isn't he?" I asked, persisting, suddenly not wanting to drift away, not at this particular moment, wanting to make a point. What point?

And then my mother's strength asserted itself. "Ben," she said, her voice like the snapping of a tree branch. It reminded me of old movies on television where someone is screaming hysterically but I must admit that I was hysterical all right. You can be hysterical without screaming or ranting and raving, or hitting your head against a wall. You can be quietly hysterical sitting in a dorm talking to your mother, watching the September sun climbing the wall like a ladder as it filters in through a sagging shutter. And the slap doesn't have to be a physical act; it can be one word, Ben, your own name lashing out. Yet she did it with love. I have always been assured of her love. And even as I responded to her shouted Ben, snapping me back from the drifting, I still said to myself: But he is a goddam general, whether he likes it or not, and that's why I'm here.

So we carried on a fairly normal conversation. About my classes, the guys: Yes, Mother, they're a good bunch. They leave me alone, mostly because I've come on the scene too late and it's hard to absorb me (they are not blotters, after all), but they are tactful, which surprised me really. I mean, Elliot Martingale is such a character with his clowning and all, and yet he came up to me the other day and said: "Marchand, old bastard, I looked up the back issues of the papers the other day and you're all right, know that?"

I felt either like bawling like a baby or laughing madly; either way, he'd think I was a complete nut. I felt like bawling because those were the first words anyone at Castle had said directly to me and they confirmed my existence here, something I was beginning to doubt. Until that moment, I might have been invisible or not there at all. And I felt like laughing madly because what Martingale said was so very wrong. What Elliot Martingale read about in the papers, my part in the Bus and the incident at the Bridge, was a million miles from the truth. Not lies exactly, of course. But information that was misleading, vague where it should be specific, specific where it should be vague. Inner Delta is very good at that sort of thing, of course.

There, I've said it: Inner Delta

Like pulling a bandage off a festering sore.

Or a disease...

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