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ELMORE LEONARD

AUTHOR OF *GET SHORTY* AND *OUT OF SIGHT*

CUBA



A NOVEL

LIBRE

**ELMORE
LEONARD**

**CUBA
LIBRE**

A Dell Book

Published by
DELL PUBLISHING
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Random House, Inc.
1540 Broadway
New York, New York 10036

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ISBN: 0-440-22559-0

Reprinted by arrangement with Delacorte Press

Printed in the United States of America

Published simultaneously in Canada

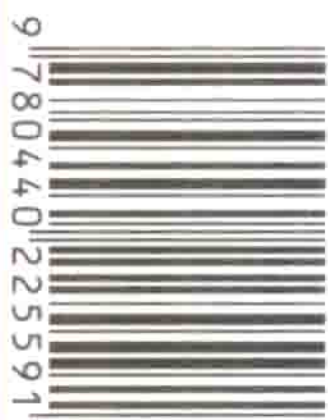
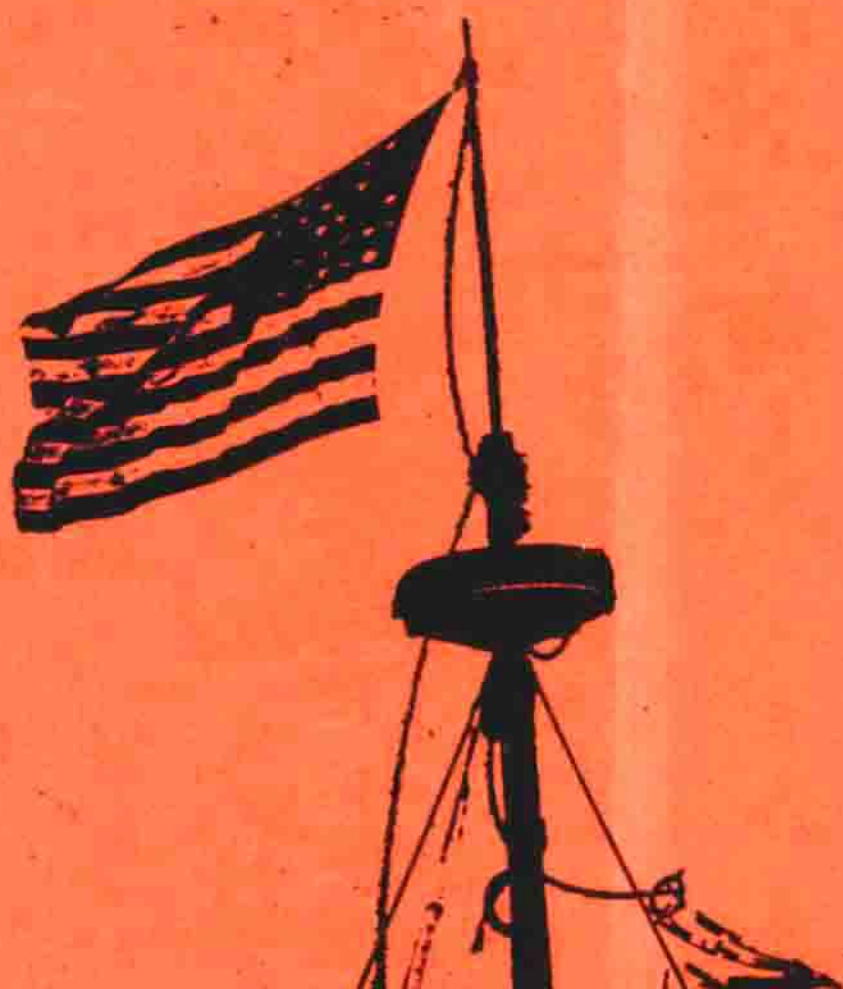
Design by Virginia Norey

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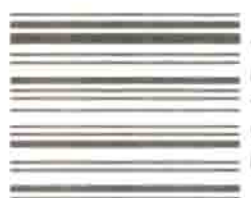
**He came to Cuba to
make a killing.
She came to find
a purpose.
And on an island
overrun with passion
and violence,
they each found
something to live for.**



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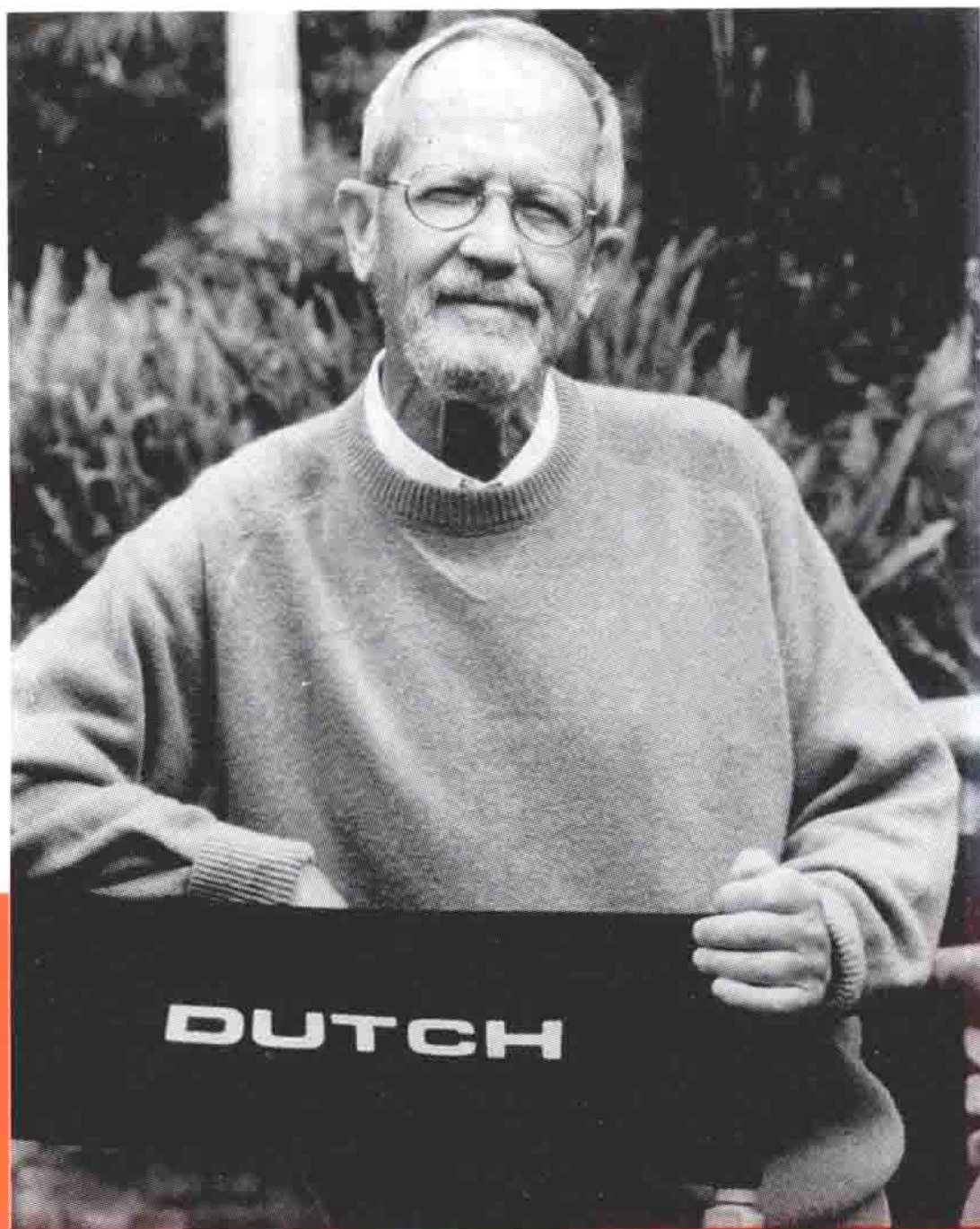
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Elmore Leonard has written thirty-four novels, including such bestsellers as *Out of Sight*, *Riding the Rap*, *Pronto*, *Rum Punch*, and *Get Shorty*, and numerous screenplays. He lives with his wife, Christine, in Bloomfield Village, Michigan.

HIGH PRAISE FOR ELMORE LEONARD'S
BESTSELLING NOVEL
CUBA LIBRE

"A MASTER STORYTELLER. . . . The lingo and settings are as precise and accurate as they are in his contemporary crime thrillers. Leonard's story line successfully blends history with wistful imagination. To Leonard's immense credit, after more than 30 books, he still explores new terrain, continues to expand his turf, and pulls it off with class."

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Please turn the page for more extraordinary acclaim. . . .

“Leonard fans may be surprised by the locale and time frame of this novel but they won’t be disappointed. His spare, precise descriptions and masterful comic touches still grace each page.” —*Entertainment Weekly*

“The guy keeps turning these things out, and damned if every one doesn’t read better than the last.”

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“ANOTHER DUTCH TREAT! The attitudes and motivations that stream through this book are both as modern and timeless as all of Leonard’s work. Leonard is a master at dialogue. The worst thing about the book, as with all Leonard books, is the ending. It ends, and you don’t want it to.” —*The Detroit News*

“*Cuba Libre* is unusually rich in period atmosphere . . . [Leonard] seems, as always, so uncannily at home with the slang and terminology of the times. What Mr. Leonard does with his usual skill is modulate the reader’s like and dislike of the various characters so that *Cuba Libre* resolves itself in a satisfying finale of revenge.” —*The New York Times*

“*Cuba Libre* is a fascinating exercise in blending Leonard’s trademark punchy style with the sweep of a resounding moment in history.” —*The Seattle Times*

"A WILD RIDE. . . . A riotous blend of the historical with the hysterical, *Cuba Libre* lets Leonard travel back to the western settings of such early novels as *Hombre*. It's a good old-fashioned western, served with a sly grin and a side dish of scams."

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"Elmore Leonard proves with *Cuba Libre* that he's still got a surprise or two up his sleeve. All other Leonard staples are here: crisp dialogue, brisk plotting, dramatic climaxes, wonderfully sleazy bad guys—and enough moral quandaries to keep philosophers dizzy for days."

—*New York Post*

"[Leonard's] bad guys and good guys, who often can't decide which side of the line they're on, keep this wonderful romp bayonet-sharp and galloping along at a breathless pace." —*People*

"A historical consciousness-raiser it may be, but there is no fear of Mr. Leonard losing his touch as a storyteller. There is plenty to be gained here, and not an orphan paragraph from start to finish. Elmore Leonard crafts escapism, and he knows how to do it right."

—*The Dallas Morning News*

BOOKS BY ELMORE LEONARD

The Bounty Hunters	City Primeval
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Unknown Man No. 89	Rum Punch
The Hunted	Pronto
The Switch	Riding the Rap
Gunsights	Out of Sight
Gold Coast	Cuba Libre
	The Tonto Woman and Other Western Stories

For my old friend Allan Hayes

1

TYLER ARRIVED WITH THE HORSES February eighteenth, three days after the battleship *Maine* blew up in Havana harbor. He saw buzzards floating in the sky the way they do but couldn't make out what they were after. This was off Morro Castle, the cattle boat streaming black smoke as it came through the narrows.

But then pretty soon he saw a ship's mast and a tangle of metal sticking out of the water, gulls resting on it. One of the Mexican deckhands called to the pilot tug bringing them in, wanting to know what the wreckage was. The pilot yelled back it was the *Maine*.

Yeah? The main what? Tyler's border Spanish failed to serve, trying to make out voices raised against the wind. The deckhand told him it was a *buque de guerra*, a warship.

Earlier that month he had left Sweetmary in the Arizona Territory by rail: loaded thirty-one mares aboard Southern Pacific stock cars and rode them all the way to Galveston on the Gulf of Mexico. Here he was met by his partner in this deal, Charlie Burke, Tyler's foreman at one time, years ago. Charlie Burke introduced him to a little Cuban mulatto—"Ben Tyler, Victor Fuentes"—the man appearing to be a good sixty years old, though it was hard to tell, his skin the color of mahogany.

Fuentes inspected the mares, none more than six years old or bigger than fifteen hands, checked each one's conformation and teeth, Fuentes wiping his hands on the pants of his white suit, picked twenty-five out of the bunch, all bays, browns and sorrels, and said he was sure they could sell the rest for the same money, one hundred fifty dollars each. He said Mr. Boudreaux was going to like these girls and would give them a check for thirty-seven hundred fifty dollars drawn on the Banco de Comercio before they left Havana. Fuentes said he would expect only five hundred of it for his services.

Tyler said to Charlie Burke, later, the deal sounded different than the way he'd originally explained it.

Charlie Burke said the way you did business in Cuba was the same as it worked in Mexico, everybody getting their cut. Tyler said, what he meant, he thought they were going directly from here to Matanzas, where Boudreaux's sugar estate was

located. Charlie Burke said he thought so too; but Boudreaux happened to be in Havana this week and next. It meant they'd take the string off the boat, put the horses in stock pens for the man to look at, reload them and go on to Matanzas. What Tyler wanted to know, and Charlie Burke didn't have the answer: "Who pays for stopping in Havana?"

That evening Charlie Burke and Mr. Fuentes left on a Ward Line steamer bound for Havana.

It was late the next day Tyler watched his mares brought aboard the cattle boat, the name *Vamoose* barely readable on its rusted hull. Next came bales of hay and some oats, one of the stock handlers saying you didn't want a horse to eat much out at sea. Tyler stepped aboard with his saddle and gear to mind the animals himself. That was fine with the stock handlers; they had the cattle to tend. They said the trip would take five days.

IT WAS BACK toward the end of December Charlie Burke had wired: FOUND WAY TO GET RICH WITH HORSES.

He came out on the train from East Texas and was waiting for Tyler the first day of the new year, 1898, on the porch of the Congress Hotel in Sweetmary, a town named for a copper mine, LaSalle Street empty going on 10:00 A.M., the mine shut down and the town sleeping off last night.

Charlie Burke came out of the rocking chair to

watch Tyler walking his dun mare this way past the Gold Dollar, past I.S. Weiss Mercantile, past the Maricopa Bank—Charlie Burke watching him looking hard at the bank as he came along. Tyler brought the dun up to the porch railing and said, "You know what horses are going for in Kansas City?"

"Tell me," Charlie Burke said.

"Twenty-five cents a head."

They hadn't seen each other in almost four years.

Charlie Burke said, "Then we don't want to go to Kansas City, do we?"

He watched Tyler chew on that as he stepped down from the dun and came up on the porch. They took time now to hug each other, Charlie Burke's mind going back to the boy who'd come out here dying to work for a cattle outfit and ride horses for pay. Ben Tyler, sixteen years old and done with school, St. Simeon something or other for Boys, in New Orleans, this one quicker than the farm kids who wandered out from Missouri and Tennessee. Charlie Burke, foreman of the Circle-Eye at the time, as many as thirty riders under him spring through fall, put the boy to work chasing mustangs and company stock that had quit the bunch, and watched this kid gentle the green ones with a patience you didn't find in most hands. Watched him trail-boss herds they brought down in Old Mexico and drove to graze. Watched him quit the big spread

after seven years to work for a mustanger named Dana Moon, supplying horses to mine companies and stage lines and remounts to the U.S. cavalry. Watched him take over the business after Moon was made Indian agent at White Tanks, a Mimbrenño Apache subagency north of town. The next thing he saw of Ben Tyler was his face on a wanted poster above the notice:

\$500 REWARD
DEAD OR ALIVE

What happened, Tyler's business fell on hard times and he took to robbing banks. So then the next time Charlie Burke actually saw him was out in the far reaches of the territory at Yuma Prison: convicts and their visitors sitting across from one another at tables placed end to end down the center of the mess hall. Mothers, wives, sweethearts all wondering how their loved ones would fare in this stone prison known as the Hell Hole on the Bluff; Charlie Burke wondering why, if Tyler had made up his mind to rob banks, he chose the Maricopa branch in Sweetmary, where he was known.

He said on account of it was the closest one.

Charlie Burke said, "I come all the way out here to watch you stare past me at the wall?"

So then Tyler said, all right, because it was where LaSalle Mining did their banking and LaSalle Mining owed him nine hundred dollars. "Four times