



**ONE**  
**High**  
**Season**

J.F. Gump

# ONE HIGH SEASON

1st edition ebook 2010

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ISBN 974-85129-3-2

eISBN 978-616-7270-43-2

**Published by**



**Internet:** [www.bangkokbooks.com](http://www.bangkokbooks.com)

**E-mail:** [info@bangkokbooks.com](mailto:info@bangkokbooks.com)

**Fax Thailand:** (66) - 2 - 517 1009

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## CHAPTER I

*Jarapan Chavadecha*  
*Khon Kaen, Thailand*

Jarapan's motorcycle died when she was less than halfway home from the city of Khon Kaen. Not a sputtering, lingering death, but a sudden one, as if someone had pulled the sparkplug wire. She cranked the engine until her leg ached, but the motorcycle remained dead.

The sun had faded to early evening but the night's coolness had not yet arrived. Jarapan did not sweat easily or often but she was sweating now. She considered leaving the motorcycle at the side of the road, but worried that someone might steal it. For the millionth time in her life she wished she had a cell phone. If her father or brother knew she was stranded, they would come to help. She gripped the handlebars and pushed the motorcycle forward.

She was less than a kilometer from her house when a small gray pickup slowed to match her pace. Two men sat in front and two in the open bed. Their clothes and dark skin said they were construction workers or migrant farmhands. One had nasty scars on his face. The others were nondescript. She didn't recognize any of them.

"Do you need help?" one man asked.

"No, thank you," she panted. "My home is not far."

"I'm a mechanic. Let me look." He jumped from the truck-bed and took the motorcycle from her. He turned the key and then kicked the starter. When it didn't start, he did a quick inspection of wires, hoses, and switches.

Jarapan watched closely to see if he checked something she'd forgotten. If he did, she didn't notice. In a moment the

man smiled and cranked the engine again. This time it roared to life. She couldn't believe her luck.

As she started to thank him, she was grabbed from behind and her arms pinned against her body. Someone stretched a piece of duct tape across her mouth and around her head. Her screams were muted to less than a whimper. Her hands were forced behind her back and bound with a thin plastic strap that cut deep into her wrists.

The men dragged her into a thick copse of young bamboo and stripped her bare from the waist down. One man pushed her to the ground and then positioned himself for his assault. Jarapan squirmed and twisted to avoid his clumsy thrusts.

At that moment the man with the scars appeared and kicked away the would-be rapist. Jarapan looked up and saw his face close for the first time. It was grotesque and distorted, as if he had been badly burned, or as if someone had tried to erase his face with a grinding wheel.

"Are you okay?" he asked, his tone polite, apologetic.

She shook her head yes, praying he would set her free.

The scar-faced man turned to her attackers and told them what low animals they were. After a minute he turned and stared at her half naked body. At that instant his expression changed from apologetic embarrassment to animal lust. He ordered the others to hold her still and he lay down on her thin body.

She shut her eyes to the ugliness of the scar-faced man and the pain of his forced penetration. The smell of Mekong whiskey was overpowering. Tears flowed at what she was losing, the gift she had saved for her future husband.

When he finished, the other men each took a turn. Afterwards they taped her feet together and left her in the bushes. She heard the sounds of her mother's motorcycle being loaded into the truck. The tailgate slammed shut with a loud bang.

Jarapan jerked awake; her heart pounded. She always woke up at this point in the dream, but the images of that

night continued nonstop. Her brother finding her naked from the waist down, her father going into a rage, and her mother crying; she relived the nightmare every time she slept. She looked at the clock: it was not yet three. She rolled over and prayed for sleep without dreams.

## CHAPTER 2

*Josh Johnson*

*South of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA*

Josh Johnson reached the north side of Charleston at six-fifteen in the morning. The rising sun tinted the sky a soft red mixed with dark grays. "Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning," his mother's words floated through his thoughts. It wasn't a good sign. With luck he would be south of the city before the sun crested the low mountains to the east. With even more luck, the red sky would turn out to mean nothing except that morning had arrived.

He cracked the car window and took a breath of cool air to shake his drowsiness. It didn't help. He turned up the radio. A classic rock station was cranking it up for the early morning commuters. An old ZZ-Top tune pulsed through the speakers. He didn't remember the title but he had heard the song before. He lit another cigarette and concentrated on the road ahead. White lines on blacktop zipped past at seventy miles per hour. The unending procession had a hypnotic effect. His thoughts drifted back.

Probably the worst thing anyone had ever said to him was that he was a sociopath. He didn't know what a sociopath was but it sounded bad, like he was crazy or something. He had been pretty buzzed on coke at the time and felt like Superman, so he had kicked the guy's ass for saying it. Later, when they were both straight, his friend explained that he had said what he said because of the way Josh treated his parents, like he hated them or something.

Josh had never hated his parents. He had simply found

ways to manipulate them to get what he wanted. He had the routines down pat.

His father had always been the easiest but he had also been the most unpredictable. Sometimes he was pliable as putty and sometimes stiff as steel. His dad had grown up a poor boy in rural West Virginia, and that had apparently fucked up his sense of reality. Some of his ideas about life were so bizarre they were stupid. For instance, he thought his career was the most important thing in the world. It came before everything, including the people he proclaimed to love. He was like a machine, a robot; up before dawn and home after dark—if he came home at all.

But after twenty-some years of hard work and a lot of serious ass-kissing, his dad had accumulated enough stuff to be considered middle-class. His small successes were enough to make him believe people could be anything they wanted as long they worked hard. That mindset made his dad an easy target and Josh played him like a classic Les Paul.

His mother wasn't so easy. She could be played, too, but it was more like thumping a worn-out bass drum. He had to physically and verbally intimidate her to get what he wanted. The names he'd called her were not nice, but it had been the only way to make her give in. It was a game, his game. When she was stubborn, Josh would coerce his dad into coercing her. It always worked.

Things changed after Josh dropped out of school. First his parents stopped his allowance. Then they started making a lot of ridiculous demands like get a job, be home by eleven, and crazy shit like that. Josh understood why, but he didn't like it. To keep peace, he pretended to have an evening job. Actually, he had started a nighttime business that was fun, profitable, and illegal. He had found his niche in life and it was good.

He had been surprised the day his dad kicked him out of the house, but looking back he knew he should have seen it

coming. He suspected his twenty-four hour drug highs played a role in his stupidity.

Back then his dad's life hadn't been going so good. He had returned from a project in Thailand only to find out he was being laid off. "No work," his boss had said. To Josh that meant low-ass-kisser-on-the-totem-pole. His dad's lay-off had added a lot of unwanted tension into their already stressed-out home.

His mom and dad had been having problems, too. They had even stopped sleeping in the same bed. In a way he felt sorry for dad. Not only had he been kicked in the face by the company he had slaved for, but he'd also stopped having sex.

He had tried to be friends with his old man during that time but it had never worked. Every conversation deteriorated into his dad bitching about his friends, his hair, his tattoos, and his work habits. Josh had always found that funny, considering he didn't have any work habits. It was an oxymoron of sorts.

His dad had kicked him out the day he caught him selling pot from the basement. The old man had been so angry that veins throbbed on his neck and forehead, and specks of white spittle flew from his mouth when he screamed. Josh had tried to get him to share a J to calm down but he had responded by calling the cops. If his dad had known the other things he'd been selling, he likely would have called the National Guard. Josh did what anyone with an ounce of street-smarts would do—he disappeared.

He spent a few weeks with a friend in a small college town directly south of Pittsburgh near the West Virginia border. There was a high demand for what he was selling and the students had plenty of cash. The money came rolling in. He made a couple of trips to Pittsburgh to buy more "supplies" but he never called his parents. He figured he would do that later, after his dad had a chance to cool down and set