

DOMINION  
*of the*  
LIONFISH

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W. L. THOMPSON

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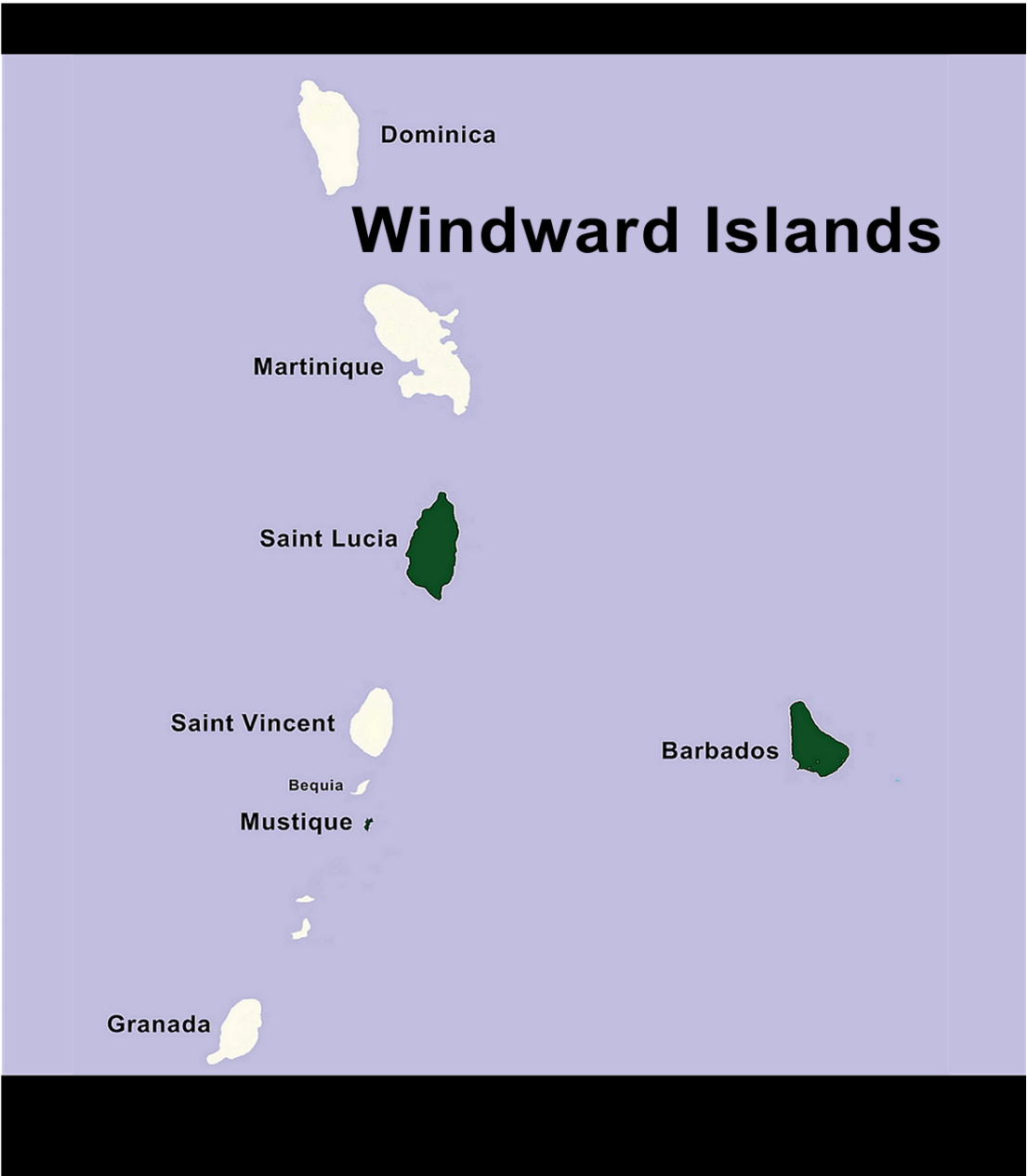
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THIS BOOK IS FOR JILL.

“... wolves ... are wolves only in pack, and, singly, are just another dog.”

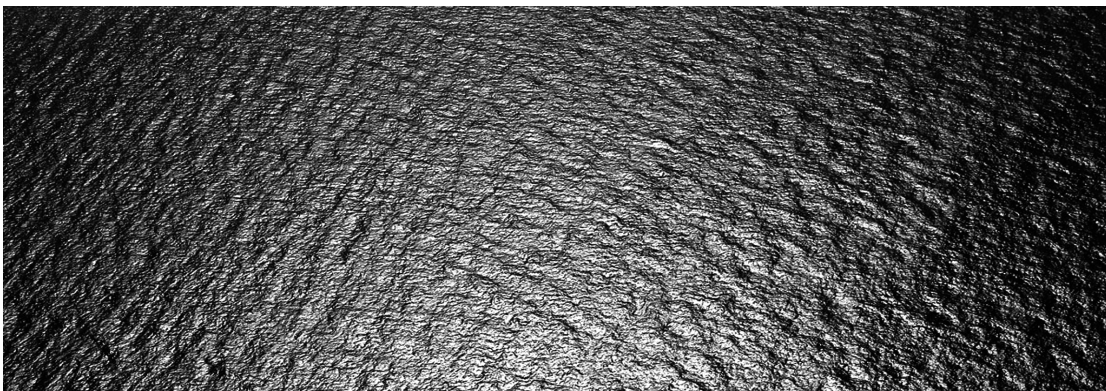
— WILLIAM FAULKNER

# MAP - AREA



# MAP DETAIL





## PART I

### CHAPTER 3



**DOVER BEACH, ST. LAWRENCE GAP**  
**FRIDAY, MAY 15TH, 11:30 PM, THREE YEARS EARLIER**

**H**e didn't turn into St. Lawrence Gap. Still too crowded with tourists despite the hour. Instead, he went through the roundabout, out Maxwell Main, and took the right at Dover Road. He came cruising past the American Embassy Marine House that stood behind a wall on the right. Still warm with lights. Detective Sergeant Inch-Marlowe followed the road to the end of the Gap, and there, less than a block away, was Constable Brickhouse, standing under the flare of the streetlights. The shoes had been shined. The trousers, a deep blue, perfectly creased, and the gray shirt looked well starched. It featured its own creases, and these ran up through the pockets that were neatly buttoned down. The face, he could see, was smooth with youth, and the eyes seemed to glitter with a refined eagerness. Even the parade hat sat square on the head, its bill a proper two fingers above the nose.

He pulled over, cutting the lights. The parking brake he pulled up with a happy squeak, then he slipped out, slamming home the door with a bang. Brickhouse's eyes came to his, and Inch-Marlowe could see something remote on the face, a perplexed sadness perhaps, as if Brickhouse had allowed himself a dangerous thought: who would own a car such as this? He said,

— “Apologies for disturbing you, sir. I tried to raise Inspector Huntley, but

— your call went straight into voicemail,” said Inch-Marlowe, giving out his soothing laugh. “My, what a surprise.”

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"Well, sir, it's pretty late."

Inch-Marlowe looked around at the night sky, the stars obliterated by the light that glowed out from the Gap.

"It's only 11:30, Brickhouse," he said. "Been able to confirm anything more?"

"No, I'm afraid not. I looked for a Grand Cherokee with diplomatic plates at the Ocean2 and White Sands hotels and along the Gap here, but nothing." The Constable continued with a hint of the defensive, "I thought it best not to leave the body too long."

Brickhouse found the break in the hedges that screened the vacant lot from the road. He turned in, and they picked up the path that led under the trees. Inch-Marlowe could smell the sandy ground and hear the two-stroke squeaking of the tree frogs and the lapping of the ocean beyond. The path went left, then turned right. It came out of the trees, and Inch-Marlowe could see the ground opening up towards Dover Beach. On the right was a short, blue-stone jetty built into the water to protect the swimming area. Over on the left, as if marking where the sand made its run down into the water, stood some palm trees. Behind these, a light poured out from the face of the White Sands Hotel. It gave the sand a silvery patina edged in places with tinges of blue, and it threw down heavy shadows from the trees whose sharp and jagged fronds moved and swayed in the wind.

Suddenly, a flashlight flickered on. It played about until its yellow beam finally homed in and settled on Brickhouse and Inch-Marlowe as they came out and onto the sand. The Constable sang out,

"It's us, Lionel."

Mercifully, the beam broke off and went pointing into the sky. As they came up, Inch-Marlowe could just make out, backed up in front of the palm trees, a slight man dressed in a dark-blue work suit with the company logo stitched over the shirt pocket. His face was etched with astonishment, and he held the flashlight up against his body, tightly, with both hands, as if he were having trouble controlling it. Brickhouse said peacefully. "Lionel, this is Sergeant Peter Inch-Marlowe from our detective unit."

Inch-Marlowe extended a hand, but Lionel watched it come towards him as though the shifting head of a cobra. He shrunk back against the tree, yelling out,

"But he was already dead!"

Brickhouse stepped forward, putting strong, delicate fingers on the flashlight and pulling it from Lionel's grip, like removing a sword from stone.

"Go on home now. I'll stop by and see you and Pat tomorrow evening. Promise."

With that, Lionel smiled, but the smile made no impression on a face etched with amazement and fear. He now slipped behind the tree and vanished away into the night.

"You got his statement, right?"

"Yes. Clocked out, he had come onto the beach here for a taste of rum and fell right over the body."

Inch-Marlowe turned away and looked out towards the ocean. The sand was white and silvery, and tinged with blue along the periphery. Deep and elongated shadows of the palm trees ran gracefully over the beach until their fronds came together to form a broad swath of shadowing, the sharp



and jagged leafing made monstrous from the slant of the lighting. They were moved by the wind, cutting and uncutting with black shadow the silver and blue that came shining off the sand. At first, there was nothing. Just the shadows, moving and shifting around and moving and shifting some more. Then he caught a glimpse, a brief distorted view. Half-lidded, staring eyes. Shadows snapped it shut, but the wind blew it open once more. Flip-flop sandals, green shorts, a cream-colored shirt. Gone again, but the view reopened large this time: an outstretched arm and a face surrounded by a purple stain that had run into an aura over the head. And there it was, a silver gun gripped in a pale-white hand.

There was no question, and Inch-Marlowe felt a bitter disbelief. "Identification?"

"None that I could find, sir. As I explained earlier when I rang."

"Right, Constable. As to armament?"

"A P226 Sig Sauer," Brickhouse answered.

Inch-Marlowe battled the implication straight on, "Suicide?"

"Well, sir, it gives every appearance. In fact —"

"— impossible. I had dinner over at Caroline's and —" But Inch-Marlowe again looked across the to the shadowing, where the wind moved the fronds affording a glimpse of the body in the sand. Brickhouse himself could feel a rising uneasiness. After all, he was new to the Constabulary. He couldn't argue that he knew much from experience, at least not yet, only from what he had read — worse yet, from what he had studied. But then ... there was something about Peter Inch-Marlowe that didn't care much for the prerogatives of rank or even the time-honored hazing of junior officers. So he took a chance, his first of many in what he believed would be a promising career.

"Yes, suicide, sir, but there ARE a few points that I would like to draw your attention to, if I may." He clicked on the flashlight, threw its yellow light down over the body, and proceeded to take a step. Just then he felt his starched shirt pinched in the back.

"Later, Constable," Inch-Marlowe said. "Just stick around and tell me what's on your mind." Ordinarily, Brickhouse would have felt the sting, but in the back of his mind danced the recognition that Sergeant Inch-Marlowe — an odd, minor celebrity around Headquarters — must not like dead bodies in general and this one in particular. It gave Constable Brickhouse a certain steadiness, if not courage.

"It LOOKS very much like suicide. Particularly, the use of the P226, what, I understand, is an American Embassy-issued — or at least an American Embassy-approved — weapon."

"Weapon did you say?"

"Yes sir," said Brickhouse, mildly puzzled. Inch-Marlowe nearly smiled. Bitterness had passed into a sadness that was beginning to dissipate into a professional stoicism. Brickhouse could hardly know how much he disliked the term "weapon." On the one hand, it sounded like a reference to battle-axes, warhammers, and maces; and on the other, it sounded qualitatively so ... pedantic, squared-headed, the lingo of gun-range racoons. Of course, privately, he would admit that he preferred "gun" not because the term had any merit, but because he enjoyed the universality it had gained from watching black and white cowboy pictures during the darker days of his vexed childhood. With a gesture to the shadows still recutting themselves in

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the wind, he said:

"So ... you know who this is, right?"

"Never much doubt."

"Ah, well, I was afraid of that," Inch-Marlowe murmured. He looked at Brickhouse directly, saying, "So ... suicide, but there are a few things that trouble you, Constable?"

"Well, yes, sir," said Brickhouse with a muted enthusiasm. "First, of course, there's the absence of identification. And then there's the left arm. Did you notice, sir? It's outstretched, the fingers fully extended. And then there's the wound itself. In a suicide, you'd expect the entry wound would be through the sphenoid or temporal bone and the exit out the back of the parietal, right? But here the axis looks slightly off. At least to me. The entry appears to be towards the back of the temporal bone and the exit out the —"

Inch-Marlowe had already heard a faint crunching of sand against concrete pavement. Along the walkway that led around from the White Sands Hotel appeared a silhouette. The figure was short and thin and carried more than a modest paunch. It had knobby knees and slightly bowed legs, and it wore an island shirt and safari shorts, and a pair of heavy leather sandals that ground the sand that had swept across the walkway. It moved stiffly, but undeniably as if animated with singular resolve. The shape now approached over the sand.

"Evening, Boudleaux," said Inch-Marlowe at last.

"More like midnight, you might say, Peter," said the shape. It walked up past Inch-Marlowe and stood still. Its watery blue eyes, enlarged through glasses, followed the shadow from one of the palm trees out to the deep shadowing where the wind revealed the purple stain and figure in the sand. Something now went out of Boudleaux, but that something soon flowed back in. Finally, he said with measured irritability,

"Where's Huntley?"

"Huntley lies forgotten in the arms of Hypnos," said Inch-Marlowe with a smile over to Brickhouse.

"Ah, to be so blessed," said Boudleaux. "So ... I take it you're in charge, Peter?" But before Inch-Marlowe could answer, the figure turned away, took a step, and offered a hand to Brickhouse.

"How'd you do, Sebastian. How's Perometta?"

"She's fine, I thank you, Dr. Blu. The twins as well."

Dr. David "Boudleaux" Blu looked up at him for a long moment and then said, "I'm so glad." He broke off with a quick, enigmatic smile and cast a look at Inch-Marlowe.

"A sad business, this," he said. "But I suppose WE must do what we must do."

He took two or three crab steps over to the body. He fished out a small metallic flashlight and clicked it on, hitched up his shorts with delicate fingers, bent over the body, and then pulled his glasses down to the end of a sharp little nose. Inch-Marlowe didn't shout, but he did ask with a wailing air, "Boudleaux, how the hell did you get here?"

"By motor car, my boy. Motor car."

Inch-Marlowe absorbed this. "So let me guess. Officer Brickhouse, guessing that the deceased must be with the American Embassy, called Post One and when the marine couldn't locate, ah, what would be the position?"

"The Assistant Regional Security Officer."

"Yes, the A/RSO to use the acronym. Okay, so the marine evoked standing protocol and telephoned the Deputy Chief of Mission, correct?"

"Incorrect. The Duty Officer."

"All right, the Duty Officer. And the Duty Officer then rang you. He asked — let me see if I have this straight — he asked you, as the Embassy's in-country medical factotum, if you wouldn't just nip down here to take a look while the Embassy checked and rechecked and then worked on getting itself — how shall I say — organized? Am I anywhere near the mark, Boudleaux?"

"You know, you always were a clever boy, Peter. Indeed, I can remember telling your charming, and I may even say, debonair father years ago when —"

"— all right, Boudleaux, so when will THEY get here?" Dr. Blu ignored the question, taking up a collateral issue. With a judicial air, he said, "You must understand, Peter, I'm not interfering with police business here."

"Could have fooled me."

"Uhm, no. For as you see, at our beloved Queen Elizabeth Hospital, there's always a forensic pathologist on call, standing in service of our equally beloved (and yes, I dare use the word, Peter, efficient!) Police Department. Until Wednesday next, I remain your designated man in the arena of medical examination."

"So ... you're switch hitting?"

"A curious expression, that. One of your Americanisms, no?"

"All right, you're playing both ends against the middle?"

"Ah, well, that one I'm conversant with. But it takes a cynical mind to —"

"All right, Boudleaux, skip it. Just tell me. When will the cavalry be here? Or will it be the cattle gang?"

"I myself would look for something in the nature of, ah, elk." And here Dr. Blu pinched off a long laugh that ended in a squeak. Catching Inch-Marlowe's disapproving eye, he added, "Given my experience — and it is undoubtedly considerable — I'd say in about 45 to 50 minutes. You should prepare yourself."

Just then there was a chirp of a cell phone, remarkably loud over the lapping of the surf and the wind through trees. Brickhouse pulled the phone from his shirt pocket and answered. He stepped out into the darkness, closer to the water. Inch-Marlowe watched him go. Dr. Blu, however, absorbed himself in the finer medical points of the body.

"My," he breathed out, "that's one thumping hole in the head, wouldn't you say?"

But Inch-Marlowe thought of other things. "Just to confirm what's obvious, we have no doubt who this is, right?"

"Peter, a fortnight ago Saturday I sat across from you at Mrs. Caroline Ferraro's finely laid out table. I recall asking you twice to pass the Barracuda fritters, but there you sat, bantering away with the Ferraros' daughter. The lovely, ahem, what was her name?" Dr. Blu looked as if he enjoyed making cunning use of advancing years. He now clicked off the little blue flashlight and pulled himself up. He stood erect and put arms akimbo. He bent left, then right. He cranked the spine back all the way, working out the crick.

"Mr. Kevin Michael Ferraro, A/RSO, American Embassy Eastern

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Caribbean,” he announced to no one. “As was.”

A gloom descended, but Inch-Marlowe came around and confronted the question.

“As to the cause of death... .”

“Well, Peter, we’ve been down this thorny path many times, have we not?”

“That we have, Boudleaux, but you forget I’m not the heroic Godfrey Meeks. Or even Harry Huntley.”

“More’s the pity, Peter, more’s the pity.” Dr. Blu shook his head with a philosophic air. “You know perfectly well at this stage, even before the lab conducts its first tests, that it would be remiss of me to —”

Just then, Constable Brickhouse stepped back into the light. “Forensics lab is on the way, gentlemen. An ambulance as well.” He looked from Inch-Marlowe to Dr. Blu, then back again. “They got a generator and lights,” he added as enthusiastically as he could. But this died a speedy death when Inch-Marlowe clapped an avuncular hand on the Constable’s shoulder. “Now as to the cause of death, whether it be murder or suicide, Dr. Blu, I want you to know that Constable Brickhouse here has formed an opinion. Or, should we say, a theory based solely on what he had gleaned from a forensics course taken at university under, under ... who was it, Sebastian?”

“Dr. Muehler, sir, but really I —”

“Yes, the renowned Dr. Benjamin A. Muehler. My professor as well, as I recall. Sweet man, Little Bennie. Very charming, very learned indeed.”

Brickhouse clicked on the flashlight and approached the body, the doctor and detective sergeant following in train. He put one knee in the sand and went through the catalog of his observations, mounting his arguments as they depended therefrom. All the while Dr. Blu stood away, his feet splayed out in the sand, arms akimbo, his glasses pushed back onto the bridge of his nose. His chin he held as though scenting something from off the ocean. He didn’t watch, he only listened, but whether it was to the wind through the trees or to the explanations of this newly-minted policeman, it was impossible to tell, even for Inch-Marlowe.



Boudleaux, as always, was as good as his word. Within the hour they came indeed. Somewhere in the back of his mind, Inch-Marlowe preserved what amounted to a video clip: he could see them arriving in a caravan of black Suburbans. He could picture the road dust sweeping past; it would eddy and descend. Then armored doors would swing open. Out would come slender men in black suits, wearing heavy shades in defiance of the night, and they would step forth all rigged up with tactical earpieces, and these would have those coiled, curlicue tubes running down the neck to hide beneath white, button-down collars. And ... .

But it was nothing like that.

The lights were on. Sterilizing in their brilliant efficiency. Inch-Marlowe could hear the forlorn puttering of a gasoline-fed generator. The lads had taken all the pictures they could, and the body lay hidden beneath a hunter-green shroud. The paramedics were about to slip Ferraro into a brown, plastic body bag. Inch-Marlowe himself was signing off on yet another form when his eyes caught movement beyond the lights. Up the beach, he could see two figures laboring along in the sand. They came out of the mottled

blackness and were suddenly side lit by a tunnel of light from the street. One was straight and inches shorter than the other. He was well-knit with wide frigatebird-like shoulders. He wore shorts and a white golf shirt with an emblem of sorts on the chest. Ah, Stephen Boatner, the Regional Security Officer. Might have known. He had met him before. A likable guy, at least on the surface. For one thing, he hadn't been a cop or a soldier, but a park ranger. On one occasion, he had told a droll story of how he had gotten exiled from Glacier National Park to a wasteland called Big Bend on account of some *contretemps* with a supervisor's daughter, a brouhaha that led inevitably downward to a banishment from grace. That's when he joined the Department of State.

The other guy was big and soft, but the fat didn't lay in folds. Rather, it had a symmetry and solidity to it as if the man had simply walked into a gas station one evening and had himself blown up with an air hose. His waistline sloped away to narrow shoulders and a smallish head. The face, though, was fresh and smooth, bright even, and adorned with a brown goatee. It sloped upward past a small mouth and big eyes to where the shaven hair met up with a perfectly bald pate. He wore a rugby shirt with red and white stripes, and worked along in a pair of Birkenstock sandals. Inch-Marlowe could see he carried a phone in his hand. He seemed to be studying it, even working the device now and then with a dexterous thumb. Inch-Marlowe thought of the Lilliputians and their surmise that Gulliver's great pocket watch must be his god because he never did anything without consulting it. Boatner stepped up and shook the Detective Sergeant's hand with an unhappy smile. He then turned and made the introduction.

"Detective Sergeant Peter Inch-Marlowe, please meet J.J. "Jerry" Moosbrugger, the Embassy Duty Officer."

"Oh, yesss," said Inch-Marlowe pleasantly. "We met at one of your Embassy soirées."

"Awesome," Moosbrugger answered. He shifted his phone and offered a hand. Just when their eyes met, Moosbrugger rolled his away as though searching out ghostly objects with fleeting material existence. The Duty Officer's eyes came around and back and looked at Inch-Marlowe, then rolled away and settled on the shroud that covered Kevin Ferraro.

"That him?" Moosbrugger asked, with a wave of his smartphone.

Dr. Blu, in anticipation, crossed over and stood beside Inch-Marlowe, arms akimbo. "As to identification ... already done, my boy."

"Dudn't matter," said Moosbrugger. "Understand that the Embassy requires that mission-accredited personnel ONLY make the positive ID."

"WELL," said Dr. Blu with a bow. "Please, Jerry, be my guest." But Moosbrugger just stood rooted in the sand, and Boatner, on his own initiative, walked over and crouched down. Dr. Blu followed, and Brickhouse lifted the corner of the plastic tarp. Gently. Inch-Marlowe could see a shudder pass through Boatner's shoulders. Maybe twenty or thirty seconds passed, and then the RSO stood up and walked out into the half-light. There he stood, facing the black ocean, the wind at his back.

Moosbrugger watched him go. He then cut away, and his large eyes worked around and around but without settling on anybody or anything. Inch-Marlowe said, "JJ, I trust you're completely satisfied as to" — and here he broke to underscore the absurd — "who specifically lies dead here on the beach."

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"I am. I mean, we are. The Embassy is —"

"Good!" said Inch Marlowe, cutting him off agreeably. "Then you'll excuse us, for we have duties yet to perform. Constable Brickhouse!"

But Moosbrugger knifed in, "Wait a minute, Sergeant — it is Sergeant, isn't it?"

"Yes, at present," said Inch-Marlowe with a certain sly sadness.

"Well, Sergeant, what do you think I'm doing here?"

"On that score, I haven't the faintest idea. Technically speaking, of course."

"Well, lemme tell you something. I'm here, Sergeant, on EMBASSY BUSINESS."

The eyes rolled off again, but they swung back around and fixed on Inch-Marlowe's with an official severity. "I'm charged here by the Ambassador — or rather by Ambassadorial authority — to remind the Constabulary that Kevin M. Ferraro is a member of the diplomatic mission to the Eastern Caribbean."

"I thank you kindly for that intelligence."

Moosbrugger seemed to jump at this. "But you need to get that, the relationship between our two countries is one of treaty, not one of your own local laws. This relationship has long been codified in the Vienna Convention, and the Vienna Convention provides a legal fiction, namely, that the United States Embassy for the Eastern Caribbean stands on American soil, and this reality, legally created, means that diplomatic personnel accredited to our mission are likewise living and standing on American soil. Am I making myself clear?"

"Oh, yes. I'm aware of the many fictions by which various embassies and high commissions operate on our little island," said Inch-Marlowe with a smile he hoped didn't show.

"Yeah, well, cool. But obviously not aware enough, I see."

"Perhaps. But the snag is, you're standing undeniably on Dover Beach. And Dover Beach lies in Christ Church parish, and Christ Church parish is but one of the twelve parishes that make up the great state of our little island, all 167 square miles of it — and please may God help us." This last bit Inch-Marlowe murmured as if in prayer, but he went sprightly on. "This unassailable fact means whenever we drudges of the Constabulary discover a — how should I say it? — an unpleasantness lying dead on one of our white sand beaches, we stand under the legal obligation to —"

"Goddamn it, Sergeant!" said the Embassy Duty Officer. "Now listen up! That body, that body out there is ... is ... is LEGALLY INVIOABLE!"

"And here I thought it was merely dead," mused the Sergeant with a wag of the head.

However, something small had broken — a Celadon cup, say, lightly chipped. Moosbrugger's eyes had gone a roaming but had returned to steal a glance at his phone before fixing hard on Inch-Marlowe.

"You're not to touch the corpse, is that clear, officer! You and your team here — and even Dr. Blu over there — are to perform no, I repeat, no procedures on ... on ... on the REMAINS, is that understood? If you do, if you do anything that violates or otherwise impinges upon prerogatives, the Ambassador will take steps and see to it that ... that ... that you people will receive punishment for any and all violations of standing rights under the Vienna —"

“— just shut up Jerry, for God’s sake.” It was Boatner. He had come out of the shadows and slipped into the light. Inch-Marlowe could see anger subdued by anguish. Ferraro was his subordinate, maybe even his friend. Somewhere Boatner had let Kevin down, somehow maybe he hadn’t paid him what he owed him. The RSO now considered Moosbrugger’s smooth and outraged face, and said plainly, even softly.

“We’re done here, JJ. Go back to the car, please. Be there in a minute.”

Moosbrugger looked like a high-caliber paintball had slammed him square in the chest. Stricken, he wheeled about and tramped off. Everyone watched him go. Not ten strides out Inch-Marlowe could see a hand come up and the phone flicker on. He watched the residual glow as the red and white striped shirt disappeared into the darkness. He said:

“Sweet fellow. Poised and deliberate, I’d say.”

“Ah, the Moose Burger ... .”

“Is that what you wags call him?”

“Hard not to ... at least at times. But actually not that bad a guy ... really ... .”

But Inch-Marlowe had other things on his mind. “So what’s in the meat grinder, Steve?”

Wearily, Boatner said, “The mission’ll send a *démarche* to your Foreign Ministry tomorrow, and then get hold of the Prime Minister, if they haven’t rattled the poor guy out of bed already. Expect some pressure, Inch, maybe an explosion or two.”

“Well,” said the Sergeant not unhappily. “We all live for the fireworks, don’t we?”

But Boatner said nothing. He only steered Inch-Marlowe out from the light, then turned and said with confidentiality: “Look, Inch. You know Caroline. She’s home, sitting up. She’s lost, worried, sick at heart, desperate even. And I have to go over there and tell her —”

“— that Kevin’s gone?”

“Yeah. And what had been her life is now gone too. Won’t believe it, but a couple of nights ago, Tuesday to be exact, they had a fight. A bad one.”

“A fight?!”

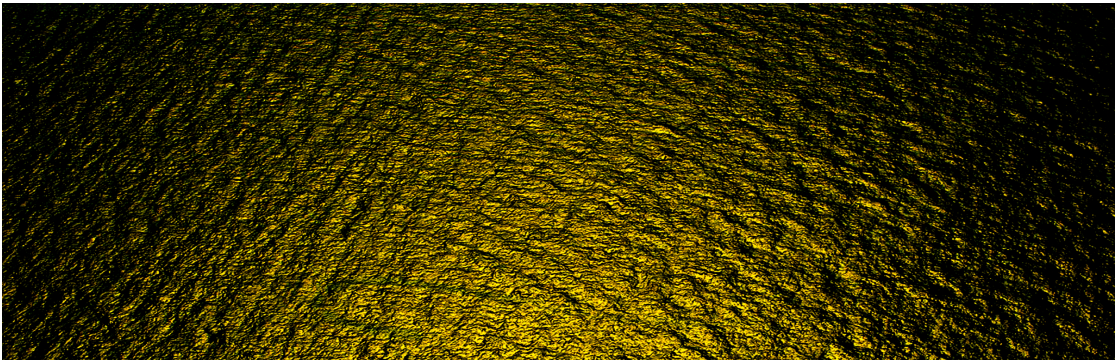
“You know, a row, a quarrel. But an ugly one, Inch. I mean, there was yelling, screaming, talk of separation, divorce even.

“That’s impossible. Boudleaux and I were just over there at —”

Boatner lifted a hand, and Inch-Marlowe could see that this was merely a preface. “Please don’t do an autopsy,” he said. “Don’t cut the poor guy up. Caroline ... Caroline wouldn’t be able to take it. The daughter too. It would —”

But Inch-Marlowe punched through, saying, “Steve, look, in a situation like this — I won’t even say a case — we just do a forensics exam, you know, just the usual due diligence. Boudleaux wouldn’t do an autopsy unless forensics pointed to something significant and out of line. So ... .”

“Thanks, Inch.” And with that, Boatner turned and walked off. Anguish and anger, but Inch-Marlowe knew there was something else, something the Embassy wanted to keep under wraps. Brickhouse came over and they exchanged a look. Behind them, before the plastic shroud, stood Dr. Blu. His feet were splayed out, slue-footed in the white sand. His watery eyes looked out as the darkness collapsed over the RSO and Boatner too vanished away.



## CHAPTER 4



**POLICE HEADQUARTERS, BRIDGETOWN  
FRIDAY, MAY 15TH, 10:02 AM, THREE YEARS EARLIER**

So it had been a long night, even for Inch-Marlowe. He didn't arrive at Headquarters until an hour or so before midday. He pulled into the lot and, seeing that his favorite spot had already been taken, drove down to the end of the park and swung in behind the Superintendent's gleaming blue-black SUV. He figured, well, the Super never goes anywhere, at least not in his own car. You know, the perks. He got out, slammed home the door, turned, and there was Constable Brickhouse, perfectly dressed and the bill of the parade hat two-fingers above the nose.

"Good morning, sir." But Inch-Marlowe could see in the reaches of that smooth face a problem gnawing away. Even so, it appeared to be a good day, hot with clouds starting to build but with a wind out of the east-northeast. They started walking down the car park towards the steps, portico, and arched entrance leading into the station.

"All right, Sebastian — ah, Constable Brickhouse," he said, switching into officialdom, "how bad is it?"

"In my experience, bad as it gets."

"Ah, so we're under Huntley's cruel thumb, are we? And Huntley being Huntley requires that —"

"— no, sir. I mean, we've been sacked from the case."

Inch-Marlowe stopped dead in his tracks. "Sacked? Now, what's that mean, Constable?"

"It means, sir, that I'm under orders to escort you to the Superintendent's office immediately upon your arrival."

Yes, a nice hot day it was, but this brought in a chill. "Okay," said Inch-Marlowe, suddenly all mettle and pluck. "Give me the story, the blow-by-blow as it were, and don't leave anything out."

"But that's just it, sir. I don't know what happened. I mean, not precisely. All I know is that when I came in, I went to see Inspector Huntley, to see what instructions he might have for us going forward and to answer whatever questions he might have about, ah, well, you know, about last



night.”

“Oh, that,” said Inch-Marlowe, walking serenely again.

“But — and here’s the thing — he wasn’t in his office. Colleen, you know, his secretary —”

“— yes, known her since grade school actually.”

“Well, she finally confided that Inspector Huntley was on the third floor waiting to see Superintendent Meeks.”

“Oh, that’s just bloody great ... .”

“But there’s more. I cut around to Forensics, but the place was ... empty. Completely. Laskin had put a note on the door, a kind of Lutheran proclamation” — and here Brickhouse chuckled at his turn of phrase — “and it directed the Forensic staff to gather in the conference room the moment they came in.”

“Oh, lord ... .”

“But it gets worse, sir.”

“How can it?” said Inch-Marlowe turning to gloom.

“Well, I had this very bad feeling and so I nipped on over to Queen Elizabeth to check at the morgue. I wanted to see what was happening with the body, whether Forensics was busy working up a schedule. I also wanted to see if a date and time had been penciled in for Dr. Blu and the autopsy.”

Inch-Marlowe's impatience got the better of him.

“Aaannnd?”

“You won’t believe it, sir.”

“Well, try me. I’ve seen many incredible things during my long and tedious existence.”

Sebastian Brickhouse spread his long fingers before him. “Ferraro was not in the morgue.”

Inch-Marlowe's eyes widened before he scoffed, “So the late Kevin Ferraro skipped off to Sandy Lane for a pumpkin latte, did he?”

“Well, no, sir. You see, Lyle had just come in to start the morning shift. We talked a bit, and then he checked the listing. We went into the vault. There, he unlatched the tray, Number 11, I believe, and out it rolled. And Ferraro was —”

“— gone?” Astonished, Inch-Marlowe still said, “Oh, get along, Sebastian. Good Lord, man, you’re making this sound like some cartoon haunted house.”

“Well, sir, must say, it had that feel.”

“Really?”

“Truly. Lyle and I both just stared. You see, there was this indentation in the sheets, and we looked at it for a while. And then Lyle noticed behind me, just over my shoulder, something very, well, odd, sir. Turns out the metal door to one of the dissection rooms was ... open. Just a hair.”

Reaching the archway that led into the foyer, Brickhouse continued, saying, “So Lyle puts the clipboard down and slips past me, and I follow him over. And then he swings the door open and there seated inside holding —”

“— oh, come on, Sebastian, out with it.”

“— there seated on an orange plastic chair and holding a Motorola two-way radio was —”

“— who?”

Brickhouse's fingers drew in carefully. “Commander Billsby.”

Inch-Marlowe's incredulity popped into anger. “What the hell was HE

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doing there?”

“Guarding the body, sir.”

“Good God, you mean —”

“Yes, sir. Right behind the Commander, lying there on the dissecting table was —”

“— Ferraro.”

They crossed the foyer, their footsteps echoing off the dark, marble flooring. As they went, Brickhouse was thinking back: Ferraro lay wrapped in some gauzy, opaque cloth. No more than ten feet away, he could see the swollen head, the ghastly wound. When Lyle had eased away, the Constable stepped into the doorway, and Billsby saw the threat, not in the person, but in the uniform. There the Commander was, hauling out of the plastic chair and waving the two-way radio and shouting that the room “off limits” and that the island had already bowed to the insistence of the American government per — and here it came rolling out again — the Vienna Convention. Brickhouse, as Brickhouse often did, stood without rancor and just listened. He could tell that the outrage, anger, or whatever was driving Billsby wasn't directed at him, the uniform, or even the country, but at Ferraro himself. It was as if the late A/RSO had betrayed not only wife and daughter, friends and colleagues, but in the very nature of his death had broken faith with those who had depended on him, on his presence and good sense, possibly even the small workings of what may have been a wide and sympathetic heart.

They were now in the stairwell, the worn polished, marble steps leading inexorably up to the third floor and the Superintendent's office. Brickhouse heard scraps of conversation, the faint ringing of telephones, and the muffled opening and closing of doors, the natural noise of the workday, all of which traveled from the offices and through the corridors to pour into the stairwell and there to echo off the plastered walls against the very cadence of their footsteps. They came up the last wind of the staircase, crossed the hallway and entered through a handsome wooden portal, aged with antiquity, to the anteroom serving the Superintendent's office. Their arrival was much anticipated, for the secretary said nothing. Joy merely stood and motioned to the door as they passed by her orderly, but very busy desk.

At the great door, they could see the mahogany was beautifully grained, but its finish cracked and peeling in places. The gold lettering, stenciled on so many years ago, read: The Honorable Godfrey Everton Meeks, Criminal Investigations Division. Inch-Marlowe nodded, and with that Brickhouse rapped on the door, not timidly, but without eager insistence. Immediately, there came from within:

“Yeeesss?”

It was a deeply resonant, almost musical voice, one animated by authority, cramped with impatience, maybe even weary of constant and vexatious responsibility. Brickhouse put a head in, pulled it back out, and opened the door, letting Sergeant Inch-Marlowe take precedence.

And there he was ... the Super. Meeks still had something of the shoulders from his cricket days, but the hair was graying now and the figure was comfortably well-fed. There were lines on the forehead and creases cut in about the mouth. Even so, the chin had its strength, and there was a clear dominance in the engaging eyes. Meeks was wearing a lightweight, dark-blue pinstripe suit (or rather the pants to the suit, for the coat was draped

over the back of his desk chair), a light-blue shirt, and a dark-blue tie made almost natty with an array of cream-colored polka dots, tied in a tight and handsome Windsor.

"Ah, now, gentlemen, come in, come in, do please." He sat at his desk and beckoned them forward with his open hands. With Brickhouse on his right, Inch-Marlowe studied the expansive desk. Late Victorian. Sadly pocked and pitted, scarred and gouged out here and there. Even the fine Gothic Revival appointments had splintered in places, and yet the wood had darkened over the ensuing years so that what damage the piece had suffered seemed more natural than disfiguring. Inwardly, Inch-Marlowe smiled. He would wager that Meeks' desk had reached Bridgetown about the same time as Lord Cromer's had reached Cairo.

"Now that we're all here, properly assembled," began the Super in earnest, "I want to tell you fine, fine people a little story."

He said this as if he were about to read a fairy tale over the radio to preschool children. At this, Inch-Marlowe made a move to sit in one of two upholstered chairs that sat in broad emptiness before the great desk.

"You're to stand!" the Super said sharply. Reproved, Inch-Marlowe straightened up and again stood. There now succeeded a deep, uncomfortable silence, but the voice came back, full and resonant. Gently it said:

"You see, gentlemen, I want you to know something of my morning. I was up around six. And here I was, walking about the kitchen in my old house slippers. I had my old robe on too, you see, and I'd made a little coffee. I decided I should make a little porridge for myself, for the digestion, you know, for my poor ailing stomach. So I got the oatmeal made up nice and hot, and I sprinkled on a little sugar. Next I dropped a pat of butter in, then I poured on some cream. Oh, yes, cream. But now I know what you younger men are thinking. You're saying to yourselves, 'good Superintendent Meeks, you shouldn't be using cream, you should be using skim milk or maybe some of that 'coffee-mate stuff,' but then" — and here the Super looked significantly at Inch-Marlowe — "we all have our, ah, peccadilloes, now don't we?"

Meeks stopped. Then with expert timing, he began again, "So I take out a spoon and I mix it all up, and just when I'm ready to enjoy my little breakfast, just when I think everything is right for a blessed and brand-new day, guess what? I get a telephone call. And it's not just any call, gentlemen. It's a call from the Prime Minister. And, you know what? I'm flattered, I'm impressed. I say to myself 'Godfrey' you're a man of consequence, you've become a resource to the good and powerful of the nation. But ... not three or four seconds later, the Prime Minister's chewing my ass out, and you know why he's chewing my ass out?"

"Now, sir, really —"

But the Super stood now, leaning over the desk, his hands carrying the weight, his fingers splayed out on the desk. Inch-Marlowe happened to notice that the nails were neatly manicured, but then came the thundering voice:

"You don't have shouting matches with diplomats on our beaches in the middle of the night!"

"Right you are, sir. But may I point out that there happened to be a dead body —"

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“— I don’t care if Jehovah and his arch angels had descended from the Holy Rose to dance buck naked before the choir invisible!”

In the stricken silence, eyes glared like a pair of high beams, but then an easy, cascading note entered the voice. “Besides, you, Peter Inch-Marlowe, should know better than anyone what these people are like, especially their diplomats. I mean, you’re practically American yourself.”

“No, sir. Just my mother —”

“Yes, well, I remember your mother. A charming woman, your father too, quite a character.”

The Super sat back down slowly, impressively. He adjusted his tie and seemed to commune a moment with himself, and then a moment longer with the rose-colored past, and then the gleam shot back into the eyes, “Well, that’s even worse, Peter! I mean, you know us and you know these people. And you know exactly what we’ve faced for years in this office. So don’t give me that ‘I-was-just-doing-my-duty’ —”

“But, sir ... .” said Brickhouse, attempting a polite interjection. However, this only brought the bricks down upon his head.

“And you? Some wet-headed rookie from the hickies!”

“I’m from Shorey Village, sir.”

“Well, that’s no excuse, Brickhouse. So am I! Or have you forgotten? In fact, I remember whenever I got back for a visit seeing you running around the place, and I tell you if I had been your father I would have paddled your fanny but good.”

“But, sir, what happened last night was largely my —”

“Out of my office, Sebastian! You’re wasting my time here.” Swinging back to Inch-Marlowe, Meeks said with a sweet, smoldering calm, “There remain a couple of points I still need to make good and clear to our Sergeant here.”

Brickhouse did a smooth about-face and walked to the heavy, paneled door. He stepped out, and closed the door behind him, sealing the two off. He walked past Joy without a word. He went across to the hall until he found himself stopped dead before the stone stairs. The open stairwell seemed to loom up beneath with a strange attraction. It was broadly lit, and he looked to the windows that illuminated the hall and the stone steps, and he saw that the large window jambs had been glazed with a glass that looked wrinkled like the ocean at twenty thousand feet, and he could see that it had this chicken-wire mesh imprisoned in the center. There were several cracks, and one of the larger ones seemed to call and capture his attention, and he ... picked one of these and followed it from the jamb until it disappeared away into one of the mullions. Now he found another, and he followed it down until it disappeared also. And he, Constable Brickhouse, did another about-face.

He walked back across the corridor and through the portal once again. And when Joy’s face came out from behind the computer screen, he saw a recognition, an approval even, and he found the first chair on the left against the wall. He sat down, stretched out his fingers on his thighs, and waited. Through the office bustle from the third floor, he could hear the rumbling of the baritone and Inch-Marlowe’s measured counters, parries, sly blocks, even challenges. Now he heard Meeks’ voice sing out high and strong: “That’s no reason, Peter. Just because you think Huntley’s a horse’s ass,” then the voice dropped off again, and there were even more rumblings

and peremptory deflections, defensive blocks that eventually fell away into what sounded surprisingly like well-mannered conversation.

The Super's secretary stepped out from behind her desk and slipped on some black heels. He could hear the movement of her legs as she came towards him, and Joy bopped him on the top of his parade hat with her yellow pencil as she went hurrying out through the portal. He listened to the heels dying away down the corridor. With a smile, he pulled off the hat and tucked it under his arm. Just then the booming voice came up loud and clear again. "You're going to sit and listen, that's why." It faded off. Brickhouse thought he heard the screech of a file drawer, then something dropped heavy on the desk like a thick folder or heavy book. The voices went sailing up again, held for a moment, dropped off, and the deep rumbling then went on and on for a long time. Finally, both voices came up, but the intonations sounded polite this time. At last, they died away altogether. Maybe half a minute later, the mahogany door swung open, and Inch-Marlowe stood framed in the door jamb. In the background, Brickhouse could see that the Super was already on the phone. He got a glimpse of the shirt, the tie with the cream-colored polka dots, and the eyes, bright and moving with battle-tested craftiness.

Inch-Marlowe shut the door behind him. Brickhouse could see him coming forward now, just sauntering along. He had some papers in his hands. No, photographs, the Constable could see. Foolscap glossies. And the Sergeant was studying one, then the next, then the next. One after the other. Ah, the crime scene surely. Instantly, Brickhouse could picture the figure in the sand, the outstretched arm, the purple stain so ghastly under the lights. Now Inch-Marlowe stopped, but he continued to look at the photographs, one after the next. Finally, he said:

"It's Christmas."

"Sir, I believe it's May 15th."

"Perfectly correct, as to the calendar, Sebastian. But don't you know, it's Christmas. See for yourself."

Inch-Marlowe handed over the first batch of photos. The constable received them warily as if he knew he would be looking at something hideous. He studied the first photograph, then his hands flipped to the second, then to the third. Finishing, he went back through the set again, but faster and with fervor and feeling.

"These ... these are United States Coast Guard Cutters."

"Island class no less. One hundred and ten feet long, twenty-one abeam. They'll do thirty knots. And there's another gift besides."

Inch-Marlowe handed over the second batch. Brickhouse took the photos straight away this time, his hands flipping through, one after the other, artfully. His eyes narrowed more, growing increasingly enthusiastic.

"Long-range Interceptors," said Inch-Marlowe, "Thirty-six feet long. I understand they'll do forty-five knots. Meeks says we may get as many as five, and they'll come with the latest radar. And with — and you'll love this, Brickhouse — machine guns."

"But ... but when?"

"As I said, Christmas. Look, the American government's new fiscal year begins October 1st, and depending on funding (always the snag, right?), we may get the first of our presents as early as December or January. Are we happy yet?"

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"Yes, sir, we are. I mean, perhaps it's not my place to say so, but this ... this will mean a lot of changes around here. Certainly we'll need new staff, there'll be more positions, more training, more —"

He stopped with a realization. He looked at the photographs again, then up at Inch-Marlowe. Their eyes studied one another, and he could see the smile disappear and flow into a disquieting blankness that flashed towards anger. Suddenly Inch-Marlowe was gone, and Constable Brickhouse, startled momentarily, leaped up and went out through the portal. The Sergeant, he could see, was already disappearing down the stairwell. He could hear the leather shoes, gritty against the stone. Brickhouse crossed the hall and yelled. But Inch-Marlowe didn't stop. He only shouted up, "Where? Where I should've gone first thing this morning, damn it."

Brickhouse saw the Sergeant come around the last wind of the staircase and disappear into the foyer. Again came the muted sounds of the office echoing off the wainscoting, the plastered walls, and the stone-stepped stairwell. Listening, he looked again to the light streaming in from the windows, glazed with panes that looked like the wrinkled ocean at twenty thousand feet, with that chicken-wire mesh caught curiously in the center. He found another crack, and he followed it down from the jamb until its refracted light disappeared into one of the dull black mullions. There would be a lot of changes, he knew, but how many, he wondered, could possibly be for the better?

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