PROLOGUE

THINGS THAT GO BANG
IN THE NIGHT
ONE

THE BOY WOULD be famous around the world one day, but there was no way he could imagine that now. What little kid could predict the future, or begin to understand it? Seven-year-old Ned Sinclair reached out in the darkness, his hand blindly feeling for the wall as he stepped outside his bedroom. He didn’t dare turn on a light in the hall. He didn’t dare make a sound. Not even a peep. Not yet.

Slowly, Ned tiptoed down the long, narrow hallway, the chill of the hardwood floor in the dead of an Albany winter reaching right up through his footed Superman pajamas. He was shaking, ice cold, his teeth on the verge of chattering.

Searching for the railing at the top of the stairs, Ned’s arm waved back and forth like a delicate branch caught in the wind. He felt nothing . . . still nothing . . . then—yes, there it was—the smooth curve of the lacquered pine against his fingertips.
He gripped the railing, white-knuckled, all the way down to the first floor, one quiet step at a time.

Earlier that day, Ned almost forgot how terrified he was of the night. His big sister, Nora, had taken him to see the new movie in town, a sequel, *Back to the Future Part II*. He’d been too young to see the original four years earlier.

Sitting in the dark theater with a big bucket of buttered popcorn in his lap and an RC Cola, Ned was completely and wonderfully transfixed by the film, especially that DeLorean car.

*If only I could travel through time,* he wished afterward. *I don’t want to be here anymore. I don’t like it here.*

He wouldn’t care where he went, just so long as it was away from his house—and the terrible bogeyman who haunted it late at night. He and Nora would make their great escape and live happily ever after. A new town. A new house. And in the garden of the new house? Nothing but yellow lilies, Nora’s favorite.

He loved his sister so much. Whenever the other kids on the block made fun of his stutter—*Ne-Ne-Ne-Ned,* they would cruelly tease—Nora always stood up for him. She had even fought for him. Nora was as tough as any boy. Maybe wherever they went it would be okay to marry your sister.

But for now, he was still stuck in his house. A prisoner. Trapped. Lying awake each horrible night waiting for the sound he prayed would never come…but always did.

Always, always, always.

The bogeyman.
NED TURNED RIGHT at the bottom of the stairs, his hands still guiding him in the darkness as he made his way through the dining room and den, covered in beige shag carpeting, before stopping at the door to his father’s library, where he wasn’t allowed inside, not ever.

He froze as the baseboard heating gurgled and then clanked a few times, as if it were being hit hard and fast with a hammer. The noise was followed by the sound of a river of water rushing through the old, rusty pipes. But nothing more than that. There were no other footsteps, no voices in the house. Just his own heart pounding madly against his chest.

Go back to bed. You can’t fight the bogeyman now. Maybe when you’re bigger. Please, please, please, go back to bed.

Except Ned no longer wanted to listen to that voice inside
his head. There was another voice talking to him now, a much stronger one. Bolder. Fearless. It told him to keep going. *Don’t be afraid! Don’t be a scaredy-cat!*

Ned walked into the library. By the window was a mahogany desk. It was lit by the hazy glow of a small electric clock, the kind with those flip-style numbers that turned like those on an old-fashioned scoreboard.

The desk was big, too big for the room. It had three large drawers on the left side of the base.

The only drawer that mattered, though, was the bottom one. It was always kept locked.

Reaching across the desk with both hands, Ned gripped an old coffee mug that was used to hold pencils and pens, erasers and paper clips. After a deep breath, almost as if he were counting to three, he lifted up the mug.

There it was. The key. Just as he’d found it weeks before. Because curious seven-year-old boys can find most anything, especially when they’re not supposed to.

Ned took the key in his hand, pinching it between his thumb and forefinger before easing it into the lock on the bottom drawer.

He gave the key a slight twist clockwise until he heard the sound. *Click!*

Then, ever so carefully, slowly, so as not to make a sound, Ned pulled open the drawer.

And took out the gun.
OLIVIA SINCLAIR SHOT up in bed so fast it made her a little dizzy. Her first thought was that the heat had come on, that god-awful clanking noise from the pipes that would practically shake the house.

But that’s why she always wore the wax earplugs when she went to bed, so she could sleep through it all. The earplugs always worked, too. Not once did she remember waking up in the middle of the night.

Until now.

*If that noise wasn’t the heat and the pipes, what was it? It had to be something.*

Olivia turned to her left to see the time. The clock on the nightstand said 12:20 a.m.

She turned to her right to see the empty pillow next to her. She was alone.
Olivia took out her earplugs and swung her legs off the bed, her bare feet quickly finding her slippers nearby. The second she flipped on the light, she was jolted by another noise. This one she recognized instantly. It was a horrible scream, just awful.

*Nora!*

Bursting out of the bedroom, Olivia sprinted down the long, narrow hallway toward her daughter’s bedroom, where the light was on.

When she turned the corner at the doorway, she felt worse than dizzy. She felt sick to her stomach.

There was blood everywhere. On the floor. On the bed. Splattered on the pink-painted wall between posters of Debbie Gibson and Duran Duran.

Olivia’s eyes pinballed around the rest of the room. She took in a breath. The smell of the gunshots was still thick in the air. In one quick and utterly horrifying moment, she realized what had happened.

And what had been happening for more than a year.

*Oh, my God! My daughter! My sweet and innocent daughter!*

Nora sat curled up in the tiniest ball by the headboard of her bed. Her arms were wrapped tightly around her knees. She was naked. She was crying. She was looking at her brother.

Across the room in the corner, Ned, pale as the winter’s snow outside, was standing frozen like a statue in his Superman pajamas. He couldn’t even blink.

For a second, Olivia stood frozen, too. The next second, though, it was as if she’d suddenly remembered who she was. These were her children.
She was their mother.
Olivia rushed over to Ned and kneeled down to hug him, her arms squeezing him tight against her chest. He started to mumble something, repeating it over and over and over. “The bogeyman,” it sounded like.

“Shh,” Olivia whispered in his ear. “Everything’s okay. Everything’s okay, honey.”

Then, very carefully, she took the gun out of his hand.
Slowly, she walked over to the door, looking back one more time at the room. Her daughter. Her son.
And the “bogeyman” lying dead on the floor.
Moments later, she picked up the phone in the hallway. She stood there holding the receiver for a long moment, then she dialed.

“My name is Olivia Sinclair,” she told the 911 operator. “I just killed my husband.”
BOOK ONE

THE STRANGE CASE OF THE O’HARAS
ETHAN BRESLOW COULDN’T stop smiling as he reached for the bottle of Perrier-Jouët Champagne chilling in the ice bucket next to the bed. He’d never been happier in his whole life. He’d never believed it was possible to be this happy.

“What’s the world record for not wearing clothes on your honeymoon?” he said jokingly, his chiseled six-foot-two frame barely covered by a sheet.

“I don’t know for sure. It’s my first honeymoon and all,” said his bride, Abigail, propping herself up on the pillow next to him. She was still catching her breath from their most daring lovemaking yet. “But at the rate we’re going,” she added, “I definitely overpacked.”

The two laughed as Ethan poured more Champagne. Handing Abigail her glass, he stared deep into her soft blue eyes. She was so beautiful and—damn the cliché—was even
more so on the inside. He’d never met anyone as kind and compassionate. With two simple words she’d made him the luckiest guy on the planet. Do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?

I do.

Ethan raised his Champagne for a toast, the bubbles catching a ray of Caribbean sunshine through the curtains. “Here’s to Abby, the greatest girl in the world,” he said.

“You’re not so terrible yourself. Even though you call me a girl.”

They clinked glasses, sipping in silence while soaking everything in from their beachfront bungalow at the Governor’s Club in Turks and Caicos. It was all so perfect—the fragrant aroma of wild cotton flowers that lingered under their king-size canopy bed, the gentle island breeze drifting through open French doors on the patio.

Back on a different sort of island—Manhattan—the tabloids had spilled untold barrels of ink on stories about their relationship. Ethan Breslow, scion of the Breslow venture-capital-and-LBO empire, onetime bad boy of the New York party circuit, had finally grown up, thanks to a down-to-earth pediatrician named Abigail Michaels.

Before he’d met her, Ethan had been a notorious dabbler. Women. Drugs. Even careers. He tried to open a nightclub in SoHo, tried to launch a wine magazine, tried to make a documentary film about Amy Winehouse. But his heart was never in it. Not any of it. Deep down, where it really counted, he had no idea what he wanted to do with his life. He was lost.

Then he’d found Abby.

She was loads of fun, and very funny, too, but she was
also focused. Her dedication to children genuinely touched him, inspired him. Ethan cleaned up his act, got accepted at Columbia Law School, and graduated. After his very first week working for the Children's Defense Fund, he got down on one knee before Abby and proposed.

Now here they were, newly married, and trying to have children of their own. Really trying. That was becoming a joke between them. Not since John and Yoko had a couple spent so much time in bed together.

Ethan swallowed the last sip of Perrier-Jouët. “So what do you think?” he asked. “Do we give the DO NOT DISTURB sign a break and venture out for a little stroll on the beach? Maybe grab some lunch?”

Abby nudged even closer to him, her long, chestnut-brown hair draping across his chest. “We could stay right here and order room service again,” she said. “Maybe after we work up a little more of an appetite.”

That gave Ethan an interesting idea.

“Come with me,” he said, sliding out of the canopy bed.

“Where are we going?” asked Abigail. She was smiling, intrigued.

Ethan grabbed the ice bucket, tucking it under his arm.

“You’ll see,” he said.
ABBY WASN’T SURE what to think at first. Standing there naked with Ethan in the master bathroom, she placed a hand on her hip as if to say, You’re joking, right? Sex in a sauna? Ethan put just the right spin on it.

“Think of it as one of your hot yoga classes,” he said. “Only better.”

That pretty much sealed the deal. Abby loved her hot yoga classes back in Manhattan. Nothing made her feel better after a long day at work.

Except maybe this. Yes, this had great potential. Something they could giggle about for years, a real honeymoon memory. Or, at the very least, a tremendous calorie burner!

“After you, my darling,” said Ethan, opening the sauna door with good-humored gallantry. The Governor’s Club was known for having spectacular master bathrooms,
complete with six-head marble showers and Japanese soaking tubs.

Ethan promptly covered the bench along the back wall with a towel. As Abby lay down, he cranked up the heat, then ladled some water on the lava rocks in the corner. The sauna sizzled with steam.

Kneeling on the cedar floor before Abby, he reached into the ice bucket. A little foreplay couldn’t hurt.

Placing an ice cube between his lips, he leaned over and began slowly tracing the length of her body with his mouth. The cube just barely grazed her skin, from the angle of her neck past the curve of her breasts and all the way down to her toes, which now curled with pleasure.

“That’s... wonderful,” Abby whispered, her eyes closed.

She could feel the full force of the sauna’s heat now, the sweat beginning to push through her pores. It felt exhilarating. She was wet all over.

“I want you inside me,” she said.

But as she opened her eyes, Abigail suddenly sprang up from the bench. She was staring over Ethan’s shoulder, mortified.

“What is it?” he asked.

“There’s someone out there! Ethan, I just saw somebody.”

Ethan turned to look at the door and its small glass window, barely bigger than an index card. He didn’t see anything—or anyone. “Are you sure?” he asked.

Abby nodded. “I’m sure,” she said. “Someone walked by. I’m positive.”

“Was it a man or a woman?”

“I couldn’t tell.”
“It was probably just the maid,” said Ethan.
“But we’ve still got the DO NOT DISTURB sign on the door.”
“I’m sure she knocked first and we didn’t hear her.” He smiled. “Given how long that sign’s been out there she was probably wondering if we were still alive in here.”

Abby calmed down a bit. Ethan was probably right. Still. “Can you go check to make sure?” she asked.
“Of course,” he said. For a laugh, he picked up the ice bucket and put it in front of his crotch. “How do I look?”
“Very funny,” said Abigail, cracking a smile. She handed him the towel from the bench.
“I’ll be back in a jiff,” he said, wrapping the towel around his waist.

He grabbed the door handle and pulled it toward him.
Nothing happened.
“It’s stuck. Abby, it won’t open.”
“WHAT DO YOU mean the door won’t open?”

In a split second, the smile had disappeared from Abby’s face.

Ethan pulled harder on the handle, but the sauna door wouldn’t budge. “It’s like it’s locked,” he said. Only they both knew there was no lock on the door. “It must be jammed.”

He pressed his face against the glass of the little window for a better view.

“Do you see anyone?” Abigail asked.

“No. No one.”

Making a fist, he pounded on the door and shouted. “Hey, is anyone out there?”

There was no response. Silence. An annoying silence. An eerie silence.

“So much for it being the maid,” said Abby. Then it
dawned on her. “Do you think we’re being robbed and they’ve locked us in here?”

“Maybe,” said Ethan. He couldn’t rule it out. Of course, as the son of a billionaire, he was less concerned about being robbed than being locked in a sauna.

“What do we do?” asked Abby. She was starting to get scared. He could see it in her eyes, and that frightened him.

“The first thing we do is turn off the heat,” he answered, wiping the sweat from his forehead. He hit the Off button on the control panel. He then grabbed the ladle sitting by the lava rocks and held it up to show Abby. “This is the second thing we do.”

Ethan wedged the ladle’s wooden handle into the door-jamb as though it were a crowbar, leaning on it with all his weight.

“It’s working!” she said.

The door shifted on its hinges, slowly beginning to move. With a little more muscle Ethan would be able to—snap!

The handle splintered like a matchstick, sending Ethan flying headfirst into the wall. When he turned around, Abby said, “You’re bleeding!”

There was a gash above his right eye, a trickle of red on his cheek. Then a stream. As a doctor, Abby had seen blood in almost every conceivable way and always knew what to do. But this was different. This wasn’t her office or a hospital; there were no gauze pads or bandages. She had nothing. And this was Ethan who was bleeding.

“Hey, it’s fine,” he said in an effort to reassure her. “Every-thing’s going to be okay. We’ll figure it out.”

She wasn’t convinced. What had been hot and sexy was
now just hot. Brutally hot. Every time she breathed in, she could feel the sauna's heat singeing the inside of her lungs.

“Are you sure the sauna’s off?” she asked.

Actually, Ethan wasn’t sure at all. If anything, the room was beginning to feel hotter. How could that be?

He didn’t care. His ace in the hole was the pipe in the corner, the emergency shutoff valve.

Standing on the bench, he turned the valve perpendicular to the pipe. A loud hiss followed. Even louder was Abby’s sigh of relief.

Not only had the heat stopped, there was actually cool air blowing in from the ceiling vent.

“There,” said Ethan. “With any luck, we’ve triggered an alarm somewhere. Even if we didn’t, we’ll be okay. We’ve got plenty of water. Eventually, they’ll find us.”

But the words were barely out of his mouth when they both wrinkled their noses, sniffing the air.

“What’s that smell?”

“I don’t know,” said Ethan. Whatever it was, there was something not right about it.

Abby coughed first, her hands desperately reaching up around her neck. Her throat was closing; she couldn’t breathe.

Ethan tried to help her, but seconds later he couldn’t breathe, either.

It was happening so fast. They looked at each other, eyes red and tearing, their bodies twisted in agony. It couldn’t get worse than this.

But it did.

Ethan and Abby fell to their knees, gasping, when they
saw a pair of eyes through the small window of the sauna door.

“Help!” Ethan barely managed, his hand outstretched. “Please, help!”

But the eyes just kept staring. Unblinking and unfeeling. Ethan and Abby finally realized what was happening. It was a murderer—a murderer who was watching them die.
IF I’VE SAID it once, I’ve said it a thousand times. Things aren’t always as they appear.

Take the room I was sitting in, for instance. To look at the elegant furniture, plush Persian rugs, and gilt-framed artwork adorning the walls, you would have thought I’d just walked into some designer show house out in the burbs.

Definitely not some guy’s office on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

Then there was the guy sitting across from me.

If he had been any more laid-back his chair would have tipped over. He was wearing jeans, a polo shirt, and a pair of brown Teva sandals. In a million years you’d never have guessed he was a shrink.

Up until a week ago, I seemed pretty laid-back, too. You’d never have known that I was on the verge of trashing a some-
what promising eleven-year career at the FBI. I was hiding it well. At least that's what I thought.

But my boss, Frank Walsh, thought otherwise. Of course, that's putting it mildly. Frank basically had me in a verbal headlock, screaming at me in his raspy, two-pack-a-day voice until I cried uncle. You have to see a shrink, John.

So that's why I agreed to meet with the very relaxed Dr. Adam Kline in his office disguised as a living room. He specialized in treating people suffering from “deep emotional stress due to personal loss or trauma.”

People like me, John O'Hara.

All I knew for sure was that if this guy didn't ultimately give me a clean bill of mental health, I would be toast at the Bureau. Kaput. Sacked. The sayonara special.

But that wasn't really the problem.

The problem was, I didn't give a shit.

“So, you're Dr. Grief, huh?” I said, settling into an armchair that clearly was supposed to make me forget that I was actually “on the couch.”

Dr. Kline nodded with a slight smile, as if he expected nothing less than my cracking wise right from the get-go.

“And from what I hear, you're Agent Time Bomb,” he shot back. “Shall we get started?”
THE GUY CERTAINLY didn’t waste any time.

“How long ago did your wife die, John?” Dr. Kline asked, jumping right in.

I noticed there was no pen or notepad in his lap. Nothing was being written down. He was simply listening. Actually, I kind of liked that approach.

“She was killed about two years ago.”

“How did it happen?”

I looked at him, a bit confused. “You didn’t read any of this in my file?”

“I read all of it. Three times,” he answered. “I want to hear it from you, though.”

Part of me wanted to leap out of my chair and pop the guy with a right hook for trying to make me relive the single worst day of my life. But another part of me—the part that
knew better—understood he wasn’t asking me to do something that I hadn’t already been doing on my own. Every day, no less. I couldn’t let it go.

I couldn’t let Susan go.

Susan and I had both been FBI special agents, although when we first met and married, I was an undercover police officer with the NYPD. I became an agent a few years later and was assigned to a completely different section from Susan’s, the Counterterrorism Division. A few exceptions notwithstanding, that’s really the only way the Bureau allows for married couples.

Susan gave birth to two beautiful boys, and for a while everything was great. Then everything wasn’t. After eight years, we divorced. I’ll spare you the reasons, especially because there wasn’t one big enough to keep us apart.

Ironically, it wasn’t until I worked on a case involving a black widow serial killer who nearly poisoned me to death that we both realized it. Susan and I reconciled, and along with John Jr. and Max, we were a family again. Until one afternoon roughly two years ago.

I proceeded to tell Dr. Kline how Susan was driving home from the supermarket when another car ran a stop sign and plowed into her side at over sixty miles an hour. The posted speed limit on the road was thirty. Susan died instantly, while the other driver barely had a scratch on him. What’s more, the son of a bitch was drunk at the time of the accident.

A drunk lawyer, as it turned out.

By refusing the Breathalyzer and opting instead to have his blood drawn at a hospital, he was able to buy himself a cou-
ple of hours—enough time to allow his blood alcohol level to dip under the legal limit. He was charged with vehicular manslaughter and received the minimum sentence.

Was that justice? You tell me. He got to see his kids again while I had to sit mine down and explain that they were never going to see their mother again.

Dr. Kline remained quiet for a few seconds after I finished. His face gave nothing away. “What was she buying?” he finally asked.

“Excuse me?”

“What was Susan buying at the supermarket?”

“I heard you,” I said. “I just can’t believe that’s the first question you’re asking after everything I told you. How is that important?”

“I didn’t say it was.”

“Butter,” I blurted out. “Susan was going to bake cookies for the boys, but she didn’t have any butter. Pretty ironic, don’t you think?”

“How so?”

“Never mind.”

“No, go ahead,” said Dr. Kline. “Tell me.”

“She was an FBI agent; she could’ve died on the job many times over,” I said.

Then it was as if some switch inside me had been flipped on. Or maybe off. I couldn’t control myself; the words spilled angrily out of my mouth.

“But no, it’s some drunk asshole who plows into her on the way back from the supermarket!”

I was suddenly out of breath, as though I’d just run a marathon. “There. Are you satisfied?”
Dr. Kline shook his head. “No, I’m not, John. What I am is concerned,” he said calmly. “Do you know why?”

Of course I did. It was why the Bureau had suspended me. It was why my boss, Frank Walsh, insisted on my coming here to get my head examined.

Stephen McMillan, the drunk lawyer who killed Susan, was being released from prison in less than a week.

“You think I’m going to kill him, don’t you?”

Kline shrugged, deflecting the question. “Let’s just say people who care very much for you are worried about what you might be planning. So, tell me, John… are they worried for a good reason? Are you planning revenge?”
RIVERSIDE, CONNECTICUT, IS about an hour’s drive from midtown Manhattan. Channeling my inner Mario Andretti, I drove it in forty minutes flat. All I wanted to do was get home and hug my boys.

“Jeez, Dad, you trying to crush me or something?” chirped Max, who was throwing a baseball against a pitch-back on our front lawn when I pulled in. For a ten-year-old, the kid could really rifle it—all fatherly bias aside, of course.

I finally unwrapped my arms from around him. “So are you all packed?” I asked.

School had been out for a week. Max and his older brother, John Jr., were heading off to sleepaway camp the next morning for a month.

Max nodded. “Yeah. Grandma helped me get everything
together. She even wrote my name in all my underwear with a Sharpie. Weird. Whatever.”

I would’ve expected nothing less from Grandma Judy. “Are she and Grandpa here?”

“No. They’re out shopping for dinner,” said Max. “Grandpa wanted steaks for our last night all together.”

When Susan died, her parents, Judy and Marshall Holt, insisted on moving up from Florida, where they’d retired. They said it would be impossible for me to raise the boys alone while I was still working at the Bureau, and they were right. Also, I think they knew that being around Max and John Jr. would help—if only a little bit—ease the pain of having lost their daughter, their only child.

They’d been nothing short of incredible since the day they arrived, and while I could never fully express my gratitude for their time, love, and sacrifice, the least I could do was treat them to a four-week Mediterranean cruise while the boys were off at camp. I was just glad I paid for it while I was still getting a paycheck from the Bureau. Not that I would’ve changed my mind. It’s that Marshall and Judy would’ve never accepted the trip. That’s the kind of people they are.

“Where’s your brother?” I asked Max.

“Where else?” he answered with an eye roll underneath his Yankees cap. “On his computer. The geekazoid.”

Max went back to striking out imaginary Red Sox batters while I headed inside the house and upstairs to John Jr.’s room. Naturally, the door was closed.

“Knock, knock,” I announced, walking right in.

John Jr. was indeed sitting at his desk, in front of his computer. He immediately threw up his hands at the sight of me.
“C’mon, Dad, can’t you knock for real?” he said with a groan. “Haven’t you ever heard of the right to privacy?”

I chuckled. “You’re thirteen, dude. Talk to me when you can shave.”

He rubbed the peach fuzz on his chin, smiling. “It might be happening sooner than you think,” he said.

He was right. My older boy was growing up fast. Too fast, maybe.

John Jr. was eleven when he lost his mother, a very tricky age. Unlike Max, J.J. was old enough to feel everything an adult would feel—the full pain and anguish, the overwhelming sense of loss. But he was still just a kid. That’s what made it so unfair. The grieving forced him to mature in ways no kid should have to endure.

“What are you working on?” I asked.

“Updating my Facebook page,” he answered. “They won’t let us do it at camp.”

Yes, I know. That’s one of the reasons why you’re going, sport. No video games, cell phones, or laptops allowed. Only fresh air and Mother Nature.

I walked behind him and shot a peek at his MacBook. He instantly flipped out, slapping his palms against the screen. “Dad, this is personal!”

I never wanted to be a parent who spied on his kid or secretly logged on to his computer to make sure he wasn’t saying or doing things he wasn’t supposed to. But I also knew that there was nothing “personal” about the Internet.

“Once you post something online, anyone in the world could be looking at it,” I said.

“So?”
“So you need to be careful, that’s all.”
“I am,” he said. He was looking away.
It was moments like these when I really missed Susan. She’d know just what to say and, equally important, what not to say.
“John, look at me for a second.”
Slowly, he did.
“I trust you,” I said. “The thing is, you have to trust me, too. I’m only trying to help you.”
He nodded. “Dad, I know all about the creeps and stalkers out there. I don’t give out any personal information or stuff like that.”
“Good,” I said. And that was that.
Or so I thought. Walking out of J.J.’s room, I had no idea, no clue at all, that I was just about to crack one of the biggest and craziest cases of my career.
And as fast as you can say “Dinner is served,” it was all about to begin.
“DO YOU KNOW what the Italians call dining outdoors?” asked Judy, looking at her two grandsons as if they were sitting at desks in a classroom instead of at our round patio table.

Susan’s mother had been an elementary school teacher for twenty-eight years. Old habits sure die hard.

“Honey, give the boys a break,” said Marshall, cutting into a full pound of New York strip. “School’s out.”

Judy happily ignored him. They’d been married even longer than she’d been a teacher.

“Alfresco,” she continued. “It means ‘in the fresh air.’” She then repeated the word slowly, as it would have been pronounced on one of those classic Berlitz language tapes. “Al-fres-co.”

“Hey, wait a minute, I know him!” announced Marshall,
shooting the boys a wink from behind his wire-rimmed glasses. “Al Fresco! He and I fought in Vietnam together. Good old Al Fresco. What a character.”

Max and John Jr. cracked up. They always did at their grandfather’s jokes. Even Judy cracked a smile.

As for me, I was smiling, too. I was looking around the table at a family that had been devastated by a tragedy but had somehow managed to regroup and carry on.

_Gee, any thoughts of regrouping and carrying on yourself, O’Hara? Maybe get your badge back? Some semblance of a life? Yes? No?_

A couple of minutes later, Judy was even doing something she hadn’t done since Susan’s death. She was talking about someone else’s death. For a while there, the mere mention of the word would trigger her crying.

“I saw the most awful thing on the news earlier today,” she said. “Ethan Breslow and the doctor he just married were murdered on their honeymoon.”

Marshall shook his head. “I never thought I’d say this, but I actually feel sorry for his father.”


“He’s the son of a very wealthy man,” I said.

“A very, very wealthy man,” added Marshall. “Warner Breslow is a lot like Donald Trump… only less modest.”

Judy shot him a disapproving look, although she wasn’t about to disagree. Warner Breslow’s ego was world-renowned. It even had its own Wikipedia page.

“Have they caught the killer?” I asked.

“No,” said Judy. “The news said there were no witnesses. They were in Turks and Caicos, I think.”
“Turks and where?” asked Max, unaware that he’d just walked into another one of his grandma’s teaching moments.

“Turks and Caicos,” she said. “It’s an island in the Caribbean—really a bunch of islands.”

As she began a brief history lesson about the British West Indies, I heard the phone ring inside the house. I was about to get up when Marshall beat me to the punch. “I’ll get it,” he said.

Less than twenty seconds later, he returned to the table, looking utterly shocked and confused. He had his hand over the phone.

“Who is it?” I asked.

“It’s Warner Breslow,” he said. “He wants to speak to you.”
COINCIDENCE WAS NOT the word; downright spooky was more like it.

Marshall handed me the phone and I walked inside the house, finally sitting down in the den off the kitchen. I’d never met Warner Breslow, let alone spoken to him. Until now.

“This is O’Hara.”

He introduced himself and apologized for calling me at home. I listened to every word, but what I really heard—what really struck me—was his voice. When I’d seen him on television doing interviews, he spoke every bit like the powerful and überalpha male that he was. A true world beater.

Now he just sounded beaten, and maybe vulnerable.

“I assume you’ve heard about my son and his wife,” he said.
“Yes, I have. I’m very sorry.”

There was silence on the line. I wanted to say something more, but I couldn’t think of anything useful or appropriate. I didn’t know this man, and I didn’t know yet why he was calling.

But I had a gut feeling.

“You were recommended to me by a mutual friend,” he said. “Do you think you can help me?”

“I guess that depends. What do you need? What kind of help are you looking for?”

“I can’t put my faith in a bunch of palm-tree detectives,” he said. “I want to hire you to conduct your own investigation separate from the police in Turks and Caicos.”

“That’s a little tricky,” I said.

“That’s exactly why I’m calling you,” he retorted. “Do I need to recite your resumé?”

No, he didn’t. Still.

“Mr. Breslow, I’m afraid FBI agents aren’t allowed to moonlight.”

“What about suspended FBI agents?” he asked.

I was racing through my mental Rolodex, trying to think who our mutual friend at the Bureau could be. Breslow had access to somebody.

“I suppose I could talk to my boss,” I said.

“I already have.”

“You know Frank Walsh?”

“He and I are old friends. Given the circumstances, both yours and mine, he’s willing to make an exception in this case. You have a green light from the Bureau.”

Then, before I could even take a breath, Breslow got right
down to it. He might have been consumed by grief, but he was still a businessman. An extremely formidable one.

“Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars,” he said.

“Excuse me?”

“For your time and services. Plus expenses, of course. You’re worth it.”

When I didn’t respond right away, he applied some pressure. Or was it leverage?

“Correct me if I’m wrong, John, but your suspension is without pay, correct?”

“You certainly do your homework.”

“What about your boys?” he asked. “Do they do their homework? I mean, are they good students?”

“So far,” I said, a bit hesitant. He was bringing my children into this. “Why are you asking about my boys?”

“Because I didn’t mention the bonus. You should know what it is before you give me your answer,” he said. “It’s what you get if your work helps give me the only small measure of relief that I could ever have in this situation,” he said. “Justice.”

And then Warner Breslow told me exactly what justice was worth to him. He specified my bonus.

And I’ll tell you this: the man really knew how to close a deal.
THREE THOUSAND MILES away, on the seventh floor of the Eagle Mountain Psychiatric Hospital on the outskirts of Los Angeles, thirty-one-year-old Ned Sinclair lay in his bed counting the white ceiling tiles above him for maybe the one millionth time. It was a mindless routine, all in the name of self-preservation—and, well, sanity. Counting the tiles, over and over, was his only escape from this godforsaken hell-hole.

Until now.

Ned heard the squeaking wheels of the drug cart heading down the gray linoleum floor of the hallway, as it always did for what the nurses sarcastically called the nightcaps—the various narcotics used to keep the psychiatric patients nice and quiet during the night, when the hospital employed a skeleton crew.
“Time for your meds,” came a voice at the door. “No playing games tonight, Ned.”

Ned didn’t turn to look. He kept counting the ceiling tiles. Twenty-two . . . twenty-three . . .

For the past four years, ever since Ned arrived at Eagle Mountain, the same female nurse had pushed that drug cart on weekday nights. Her name was Roberta, and she was about as friendly and engaging as one of the hospital walls. She was built like one, too. She hardly ever spoke to her fellow workers, and certainly didn’t chat up the patients. All she did was what she got paid to do: dole out drugs. Nothing more. And that was fine by Ned.

But two weeks earlier, Roberta had been fired. Sticky fingers with some of the pills, it was rumored. It’s always the quiet ones.

Her replacement was a guy who liked to be called by his nickname, Ace. Asshole would’ve been more fitting. The aide was loud, obnoxious, ignorant, and didn’t know when to shut up. Clearly, the applicant pool for the graveyard shift was as shallow as a California puddle in August.

“C’mon, Ned. I know you can hear me in that screwed-up little head of yours,” said Ace, wheeling in the cart. “Say something. Talk to me, dude.”

But Ned had nothing to say.

Ace didn’t let up. He hated being ignored. He got enough of that in the L.A. bars, where he would hit on women with the deft touch of a wrecking ball. Glaring at Ned, he wondered, Who the hell is this dickwad patient to give me the silent treatment?

“You know, I did some asking around about you here,” he
said. “Found out you were some kind of math genius, a hot-shot college professor. But something bad happened to you. What was it? You hurt somebody? Hurt yourself? Is that why you’re up here on the seventh floor?”

The seventh floor at Eagle Mountain was reserved for the PAINs—staff shorthand for “patients abusive in nature.” Accordingly, they were never—not ever—supposed to get hold of anything that was sharp, or could be made sharp. They weren’t even allowed to shave themselves.

Ned remained silent.

“Oh, wait, wait—I remember what it was now,” said Ace. “They told me you lost your shit when your sister died.” He smiled wickedly. “Was she hot, Ned? I bet your sister was hot. Nora, right? I’d tap that sweet ass if she were here. But of course, she’s not here, is she? Nora’s dead. She’s a bony ass now, that’s all she is!”

The aide laughed at his own joke, sounding like the kids who used to taunt Ned for his stutter all those years ago in Albany.

That’s when Ned turned to Ace for the first time.

He finally had something to say.
“MAY I PLEASE have my pills?” Ned asked calmly.

Ace’s puffed-out chest deflated like a bounce house after a church carnival. After all his goading, his baiting, his outright cruelty, he couldn’t believe this was the best Ned could do. Nothing. The supposed hotshot professor had no fight in him.

“And you know what? I think you’re a pussy,” scoffed Ace, reaching for the pill cup on his drug cart.

The night before, though, Ace wasn’t thinking at all. He’d been asked to cover for Eduardo, who usually delivered the dinner meals to all the patients. Eduardo had called in sick. Ironically, the reason was food poisoning, perhaps caused by sampling one of the hospital’s entrées.

So Ace made the rounds the previous evening, mindlessly dropping off trays to every room on each floor. Including the
seventh floor. That’s when he forgot that the PAINs were supposed to get a different dessert from the rest of the patients. It was a simple mistake.

Then again, sometimes the difference between life and death is as simple as the difference between an ice cream sandwich and a cherry Bomb Pop... 

On a stick.

“Here you go, take it,” Ace said, pill cup in his hand.

Ned reached out, but it wasn’t the cup he grabbed. With a viselike grip, he latched on to Ace’s wrist.

He yanked him toward the bed as if he were starting a lawn mower. In a way he was. Let the cutting begin.

Ned raised his other hand, viciously stabbing away with the popsicle stick, which he’d honed to razor sharpness against his cinder-block wall. He stabbed Ace’s chest, his shoulder, his cheek, and his ear, then went back to his chest, stabbing over and over and over again, the blood spraying high in the air like fireworks.

Then, for the finale, Ned plunged the stick deep into the incompetent aide’s bloated neck—bull’s-eye!—slicing his carotid artery as if it were a piece of red licorice.

*How’re you holding up there, Ace?*

He wasn’t. Falling to the floor, Ace tried to scream for help, but all that came out was more blood. The guy who couldn’t shut up suddenly couldn’t say a word.

Ned stood up from the bed and watched Ace bleed out on the floor, counting how long it took for the aide to die. It was just like counting ceiling tiles, he thought. Almost soothing.

Now it was time to go.

Ned gathered his personal items, the few things the hospi-
tal allowed him to have in his possession. He was checking out. He would slip past the skeleton crew as quietly as a mouse.

Or a little boy with his daddy's gun.

But before leaving, Ned took one last look back at Ace, lying dead on the floor. The guy would never know the real reason why Ned had killed him—he would have no clue whatsoever. It didn't matter that he was a mean son of a bitch. Ned couldn't have cared less.

Instead, it was something Ace did his very first day on the job that set in motion something terrible deep inside Ned's brain.

_Just awful, hideous_ . . .

Ace had told Ned his real name.
A RUSH OF hot air—*whoosh!*—hit me as I stepped off Warner Breslow’s private jet at Providenciales International Airport in Turks and Caicos, where the temperature was ninety-six and climbing.

Immediately, my jeans and polo shirt felt as if they were Velcroed to my skin.

Breslow’s jet, a Bombardier Global Express XRS, had a maximum occupancy of nineteen passengers plus a crew, but this flight barely carried the minimum. There was only a pilot, one flight attendant, and me. Talk about extra legroom…

I no sooner had one foot on the tarmac than I was approached by a young man, thirtyish, wearing white linen shorts and a white linen short-sleeved shirt.

“Welcome to Turks and Caicos, Mr. O’Hara. My name’s Kevin. How was your flight?”
“It was Al Gore’s worst nightmare,” I said, shaking the guy’s hand. “Otherwise, the flight was pretty amazing.” He smiled, but I was pretty sure he didn’t get the joke. Carbon-footprint humor is pretty hit-or-miss.

I didn’t yet know who Kevin was, but everything else up to that point had been made crystal clear. I’d already spoken with Frank Walsh at the Bureau, who confirmed that he had indeed approved my working for Breslow.

As for the nature of his and Breslow’s relationship, he declined to elaborate. To know Frank was to know not to press the issue. So I didn’t.

Meanwhile, Breslow had dispatched one of his expensive attorneys, who arrived the following morning at my house to give me a signed contract. It was only two pages long, and was clearly more for my benefit than his. I hadn’t asked to have our agreement in writing, but Breslow insisted.

“Trust me when I say you should never take anyone at his word,” he said in a tone pregnant with meaning.

In addition to the contract, I was also given a sealed envelope. “What’s in it?” I asked.

“You’ll see,” said the attorney, smiling. “It might just come in handy.”

He was right.

My only regret of the morning, however, was not being able to join Marshall and Judy on the drive up to the Berkshires to drop Max and John Jr. off at camp. After giving the boys huge hugs before they left, I promised I’d see them in a couple of weeks for the camp’s Family Day.

Max, eager to make sure I wouldn’t break my vow, made
me “super quadruple promise” I’d be there. “No crossies, either,” he warned me as John Jr. rolled his eyes.

I already missed them both like crazy.

“Shall we get going?” asked Kevin, motioning over his shoulder to a silver limousine parked nearby. When I hesitated for a second, it dawned on him.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I assumed you knew. I’m with the Gansevoort resort,” he explained. “Mr. Breslow has arranged for you to stay with us while you’re here.”

I nodded. The Mystery of Kevin had been solved. Happily, too. I’d seen the Gansevoort featured in the New York Times travel section, and it was absolutely beautiful—top-notch. Not that I was down here to enjoy it. After I dropped off my bag and grabbed a quick shower, I was heading straight over to the Governor’s Club to begin my investigation.

Breslow had initially assumed I’d want to stay there—the “scene of the crime”—but I told him I’d be more comfortable somewhere nearby. By “comfortable,” of course, I didn’t mean the thread count of the sheets.

It would’ve been different if I were flashing a badge, but I wasn’t Agent O’Hara down here, I was just John O’Hara. And for the time being, I didn’t want the Governor’s Club to know even that.

Same for the local police. Soon enough, I’d pay them a polite visit and compare notes with the detectives on the case, if they were willing. With any luck, they would be. Until then, though, I’d travel as incognito as possible.

But before I could take a step toward the limo, I saw a flashing light out of the corner of my eye. I turned to see a
white sedan speeding toward us. I mean, really speeding. If it had wings, it would’ve taken off.

The question now was, Did it have brakes?

The car wasn’t slowing down. If anything, it was getting faster as it got closer.

Finally, pulling a move straight out of the Starsky and Hutch school of driving, the car skidded to a stop right in front of us, the back wheels drifting across the hot asphalt of the tarmac.

On the side of the car it read ROYAL TURKS & CAICOS ISLANDS POLICE.

I glanced over at Kevin, who looked as if he were about to soil his linen shorts. “Mr. Breslow didn’t arrange for an escort by any chance, did he?” I asked.

Kevin shook his head no.

And I just shook my head, period.

So much for incognito. Apparently, I was going to meet with the police a little sooner than I expected.

Did I mention how hot it was down here?

*Welcome to Turks and Caicos, O’Hara.*
POLICE COMMISSIONER JOSEPH Eldridge, whose jurisdiction was every square inch of all forty islands and cays that made up Turks and Caicos, lit a cigarillo behind his spotless desk, blew out some smoke, and stared at me as if he knew something I didn’t.

Undoubtedly, he did. Namely, why I’d been “escorted” from the airport straight to his office.

In addition to him, there were two other men in the room: the chairman of the tourism board and the deputy police commissioner.

I didn’t get their names, but it didn’t matter. They were sitting off to the side and showed no intention of talking. This conversation was strictly between Eldridge and me.

“I didn’t know what to expect from Mr. Breslow,” began
Eldridge. “Only that it was going to be something. Or, I should say, someone.”

Clearly, Breslow’s wealth and reputation preceded him. I smiled. “Well, it’s always good to be someone, right?”

Eldridge leaned back in his chair, letting go with a deep laugh. He looked a little like an older Denzel Washington and sounded a lot like James Earl Jones. All in all, he seemed to be a pleasant enough guy.

Still, there was a fine line between my being welcome or unwelcome on Turks and Caicos, and I was obviously straddling it like a Flying Wallenda in boat shoes.

“So what are your intentions while you’re here?” he asked.

If Eldridge was savvy enough to anticipate Breslow hiring a private investigator, and thorough enough to check the manifest of every arriving private plane until he found one owned by Breslow, I wasn’t about to get cute with him. My personal circumstances aside, I was an FBI agent “on leave” from the Bureau trying to help a man who had suffered an incredible loss.

That’s what I told him, adding: “I’m simply here to make sure no stone is left unturned in the investigation. No harm in that, right?”

Eldridge nodded. “Are you carrying a firearm?” he asked.

“No.”

“Does the FBI know you’re here?”

“Yes.”

“Are you working alone?”

“That depends.”

“On what?”

“Your willingness to share information with me,” I said.
“For starters, what has your investigation uncovered so far? Any suspects? Results of the autopsy?”

Eldridge tapped his cigarillo into a large conch shell on his desk that was doubling as an ashtray. He had a decision to make.

On the one hand, I could be a help to him and his investigation. It’s not likely he had anyone with my background and experience working under him. On the other hand, we’d only just met. I could be cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs for all he really knew. Oh, and did my boss happen to mention I was seeing a shrink, Commissioner?

Eldridge held my stare for a moment before glancing over at the two men sitting against the wall. It was the first time he’d even acknowledged their presence.

Maybe it was the look he gave them, or maybe it was the plan all along, but the two men suddenly stood up and exited the room as if they were double-parked outside.

I now had Eldridge all to myself.

Or maybe it was the other way around.
I WATCHED AS Eldridge took another puff of his cigarillo, the smoke leaving his lips in a perfect thin line.

“Agent O’Hara, when you arrived here, what did you see outside my office?” he asked.

“A horde of reporters from all over the world,” I answered. “Even the Middle East.”

“And how did they look?”

“Hungry,” I said. “Like a pack of wolves that hadn’t been fed enough for the past forty-eight hours. I’ve seen that look before.”

He smiled. “Yes, exactly. So please don’t take this personally when I tell you I can’t divulge any details of the investigation. If for no other reason than I’d like to think I’ve learned from other people’s mistakes.”
Right away, I understood what he was talking about: Aruba.

So much information and misinformation had leaked in the Natalee Holloway case that the Aruban authorities ultimately came off looking like the Keystone Kops. Eldridge seemed determined not to let that happen under his command.

Still, I had a job to do here, and he knew it.

“Can I at least assume that you have your entire CID working on the case? Every inspector? Every person, down to your last constable?” I asked.

I’d already done a little homework on the setup down here. Whereas NYPD detectives were ranked by grade—first, second, and third—on Turks and Caicos there were four levels of seniority to the CID, or Criminal Investigations Division: detective inspectors, then sergeants, followed by corporals and constables.

Hell, the way I saw it, even the janitor should’ve been trying to catch the killer.

“Yes, you can assure Mr. Breslow that we have everyone working on the case,” said Eldridge. “Everyone including you, too, now. Can I assume you’ll be heading over to the Governor’s Club as soon as possible?”

I nodded. “Yes.”

“I’m sure you know that the Governor’s Club is a private resort, and they can press charges for trespassing, if they so desire.”

I stared at Eldridge again, trying to get a read on him. I couldn’t. Was he really trying to stand in my way?

“Do you think that’s a possibility?” I asked. “I mean,
would they really consider my being there to be trespassing?"

“It’s very possible,” he said. “They cater to a high-class clientele, people in the know, and are very sensitive about respecting the privacy of their guests.”

It suddenly dawned on me what Eldridge was doing. He was actually trying to tell me something, only not in so many words. This was off the record. Between the lines. Code.

So long as I was smart enough to figure it out.

“Yes, I see what you mean,” I said. “I’d hate to put you on the spot with something as frivolous as a trespassing charge. You’d have to arrest me, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes, I’m afraid I would,” he said. “Without hesitation.”

I stood up and shook his hand. “Then I’ll do my best to save you the trouble.”
I FELT A little like a kid with a secret decoder ring from a box of Cracker Jack. Quite cleverly, Eldridge had managed to tell me that he had no leads and would appreciate my help, although I’d have to help him on the sly. The management of the Governor’s Club had apparently been uncooperative, and while they couldn’t block his access to the staff, the guests at the resort—people in the know—were another story.

As for that talk about my being arrested for trespassing, that was just Eldridge advising me to check into the resort as a guest. They could get wise to me and kick me off the property, but it wouldn’t be for trespassing. They couldn’t press charges.

So after only an hour on Turks and Caicos, my plans were changing yet again.
“Would you like smoking or nonsmoking, Mr. O’Hara? We have both types of rooms available.”

The polite and pretty brunette behind the check-in desk at the Governor’s Club didn’t let on, but it didn’t take a rocket scientist or even a suspended FBI agent to figure out that in the wake of two guests being murdered at the resort there’d be, oh, maybe just a few cancellations. How else to explain my walking in without a reservation in June—peak honey-moon season—and getting a room?

“Nonsmoking, please,” I said.

“Very good, Mr. O’Hara.”

I was staying in a garden-view bungalow, the cheapest they had—or, more accurately, the least expensive. It was still seven hundred and fifty dollars a night. What a bargain! Good thing Breslow was covering all my expenses.

I cooled off with a quick shower in the room before changing into my blending-in clothes for the afternoon: a bathing suit, T-shirt, and some SPF 30. I was now just another registered guest, heading off to the pool and ready to mingle. Discreetly, of course.

Did anyone witness anything strange before Ethan and Abigail Breslow were murdered?

Unfortunately, if anyone did, he or she wasn’t hanging out at the pool. Talk about discreet: the place was just about deserted. One empty chaise lounge after another.

My next stop was the beach, a beautiful strip of white sand sloping gently down into what was called Grace Bay.

I saw some guests sunning themselves, but they were spread out, literally few and far between. Not exactly conducive to striking up a conversation.
Plan D. When all else fails, start drinking. I sidled up to the resort’s beach bar, a small hut with a half dozen empty stools and a lone bartender, who looked bored. I ordered a Turk’s Head, the local beer, and considered my next move.

It turned out I didn’t have to move at all. Five minutes later, a man who looked to be in his mid-sixties approached the bar and ordered a rum punch. While exchanging friendly nods, I noticed that his sunburn was just beginning to turn into a tan.

In other words, he’d probably been at the resort for more than a few days. I took a sip of my Turk’s Head, turning to him. I had my opening line all planned out. “Boy, it’s dead around here, isn’t it?” I said.

The man suppressed a chuckle. “So to speak.” I smacked my head, as if to say, “I could’ve had a V8!” “Jesus, that’s right. Poor choice of words,” I said. “I just got here today, but I heard all about it. Scary, huh? I guess that explains why the place is so empty.” “Yeah. A lot of people skedaddled right after it happened. I suppose I can’t blame them.”

The man had remnants of a Western drawl. Texas, or maybe Oklahoma. Business owner, maybe a lawyer. Not a doctor, though. Doctors usually don’t wear gold Rolexes.

I smiled, pointing at him. “But you decided to stick around, huh? How’s that?” “It’s like that movie,” he said. He thought for a second, his forehead scrunching as he came up with the title. “The World
According to Garp. You know, when the plane flies into the house and Robin Williams still buys it?"

“Oh, yeah, I remember,” I said. “What are the odds that it’s going to happen again, right?”

“Exactly.”

“My name’s John, by the way.”

“Carter,” he said, shaking my hand.

“Of course, I’m sure everyone would feel a lot better if they caught the killer. Have you heard anything?” I asked.

The bartender placed a rum punch in front of Carter, who immediately removed the slice of orange and tiny umbrella from the rim of the glass as if they threatened his manhood.

“I haven’t heard boo,” he said between two quick sips. “It’s all been very hush-hush. Obviously, the hotel—make that the entire island—doesn’t want any more publicity.”

“What about before the murder?”

“How do you mean?” asked Carter.

“I don’t know,” I said with a shrug. Nice and easy now, O’Hara. “Did you notice the couple talking to anyone in particular?”

“No,” he said. “I only saw them one time. They were having a late dinner at the restaurant here. Very lovey-dovey, keeping to themselves.”

Swing and a miss with my new buddy Carter, I thought. But then I watched as his forehead scrunched up again. This time real tight.

“What are you thinking?” I asked.

“I just remembered something,” he said.
SPEAK TO ME, Carter.

“I actually did see them one other time,” he said. “Now that I think about it.”

Carter put down his rum punch, the glass sweating from the heat, and described how he saw Ethan and Abigail Breslow taking a sunset walk on the beach. He thought it was a day or so before they were murdered. A man walking in the opposite direction had stopped to talk to them.

“You hear the conversation?” I asked, still trying to sound casual and chatty.

“No. They were down by the water and I was right here having a cocktail with my wife. All three of them were smiling, but I sensed that Breslow and his new bride were uncomfortable.” He leaned in a bit. “And not just because the other guy was wearing one of those skimpy Speedo bathing suits.”
“How could you tell they were uncomfortable?”
“Body language,” he answered. “I’m good at reading people.”
“You a poker player?”
“Yeah, poker and craps, that’s what I play. In fact, that’s why I’m so surprised I forgot about this guy they were talking to. I’d seen him before... at the casino,” he said. “Shit, I should tell the police about this, shouldn’t I?”
I didn’t say anything. At least I thought I didn’t. But Carter wasn’t kidding; he was fluent in body language.
He leaned in again, this time even closer. “Wait a minute. You’re a cop, aren’t you?”
“Something like that,” I said.
I was hoping I wouldn’t have to elaborate. Maybe it was how fast I bought Carter another rum punch—“Hold the fruit, please”—but he didn’t pursue it. I asked him to describe this guy he saw with the Breslows.
“Dark hair, decent-looking,” he said. “Probably in his late thirties.”
“Tall? Short?”
“Average height, I think. Around the same height as the Breslow boy. He looked to be in pretty good shape, too.”
“Do you think he’s a guest here?”
“I don’t know. Like I said, the only other time I saw him was at the casino.”
“Which one?” I knew there were a couple on the island.
“The Casablanca,” he said. “Speedo and I were at the same craps table, only he was playing the don’t pass line. He was betting a lot. Winning a lot, too.”
“Did he seem to know the dealers?”
“You mean, like, maybe he was cheating?”
“No... like maybe he was a regular, someone who lives on the island.”
“Yeah, now that you mention it, the dealers did seem to know him,” he said. “That’s good, right? Chances are you can find him there.”

Down went my last sip of the Turk’s Head beer. Pretty good for an island brew.
I thanked Carter for his time and help. As I was about to push off my stool, though, I saw his eyes go wide.
“I don’t effin’ believe it,” he said, looking over my shoulder. I turned. “What is it?”
“That’s him... the guy! Coming in on the Jet Ski. See him? Right there.”

I cupped my eyes to cut out the sun’s glare. The guy certainly fit Carter’s description, right down to the Speedo—or, as Susan used to call it, the banana hammock. “Are you sure it’s him?” I asked.
“As sure as sugar,” he said.
I took that for a yes.
I WALKED QUICKLY across the white sand of Grace Bay beach, the various studies and statistics I’d read over the years about criminals returning to the scene of the crime running through my head.

Burglars? About 12 percent of the time.
Murderers? Nearly 20 percent. Kick it up to 27 percent if there was a sexual component to the killing.

I didn’t want this guy to think I was making a beeline for him, so I stopped first to dip my toes in the water. From about twenty feet away, I watched as he began to pull his Jet Ski up on the sand so the waves wouldn’t take it.

“Need a hand?” I asked, meandering over.

“No, thanks, I’m good,” he said without even looking at me. “I’m good” was an American expression, but his ac-
cent wasn’t American. Mr. Speedo was Monsieur Speedo. A Frenchman.

There were two other Jet Skis—Yamaha WaveRunners, actually—that belonged to the resort sitting side by side a little farther down the beach.

“Hey, I was thinking about going out for a spin tomorrow. What do they charge you here for renting these things?” I asked.

Speedo, however, wasn’t riding a Yamaha. His was a royal-blue Kawasaki, a beat-up one at that. It may or may not have been his, but it almost certainly didn’t belong to the Governor’s Club.

In other words, I was playing dumb. My real question was, *Are you a guest here, Speedo?*

“I’m visiting,” he said curtly. “Don’t know what they charge.”

“I guess I’ll have to ask the guy,” I said, looking at a water activities hut next to the bar. The guy sitting in front of it, taking care of zero customers, looked even more bored than the bartender. It was the same theme all around. There was nothing like a couple of murders at a high-priced resort to kill off business.

Speedo turned and walked away from me, the clichéd reputation of the French attitude toward strangers fully intact.

*Wait a minute, mon frère, I wasn’t done with you yet. In fact, I was just getting started.*

He was heading toward the pathway that led back to the pool. I caught up to him about halfway there.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “There was one other thing I wanted to ask you.”
He couldn’t have looked more incredulous when he turned to me.

Sacré bleu! What does this stupid American tourist want now?

“I’m kind of busy,” he said.

“Me, too,” I shot back. “I’m trying to solve a murder.”

I was hoping to see him flinch. He didn’t. Cool as could be, he simply nodded. “Yes, the Breslows,” he said.

“You know about it, huh?”

“Of course. It’s the talk of the island.”

“Funny you should say that word. Talk, that is. From what I understand, you were talking to the Breslows here on this beach about a day or two before they were murdered.”

“So?”

“Did you know them?” I asked.

“No.”

“What were you discussing?”

He shifted his feet. “Who exactly are you?” he asked.

“Will it change your answer if I tell you?”

Speedo eyed me for a moment and I eyed him straight back.

“Snorkeling,” he said, finally.

“Snorkeling?”

“Yes. They asked me about Dead Man’s Reef,” he said, pointing over my shoulder.

But the second I turned to look I knew I’d made a mistake.
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