

# FINDINGS

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A Novel

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find·ings (n.)

1. Those whom or which have been found
2. Conclusions reached after examination or investigation
3. Small tools and materials used by an artisan

*What fates impose, that men must needs abide;  
It boots not to resist both wind and tide.*

—William Shakespeare, King Henry VI

*The first four months at home tested him in ways he hadn't expected. On restless nights he longed to quiet his mind and purge his dreams of all the what-if questions, the endless scenarios, and unwelcome images. Often, the dreams included that old woman in black, usually hovering somewhere in the background. It must mean that she demanded something more of him. But what? At least his body was recovering well—no complaints there. Family and friends helped with their cheery prescriptions of rest, diet, exercise, and other diversions. He was grateful, of course, knowing they only wanted the best for him. But as he gained strength, he felt ever more unsettled, hemmed in, futile. The time came when he needed to distance himself from all of their good intentions. In mid-June he decided on Ireland, certain that his grandmother would support it and the others would sympathize with her. Granted, the trip was not for her benefit alone. He hoped that this journey to their Irish past might bring new perspective and a sense of purpose. He did not imagine that it might also bring the prospect of an untimely death.*

#### TUESDAY, JULY 4, 1972

He arrived stale and stiffened by travel. With all the delays, the flights from San Francisco had taken thirty-seven hours. Coming in late to Dublin, he laid over in a dank little hotel above a noisy pub. The next day on the train under leaden skies he mostly dozed through the afternoon until he could see the Slieve Mish Mountains in Kerry. In Tralee he caught a bus to Dingle. Originally, he had planned to rent a car in Dublin, but thinking about the hassle of left-hand driving had put him off that idea. Even so, from his seat near the front of the bus he visualized himself motoring through the west of Ireland, negotiating all of the turns and roundabouts. *Chance favors only the prepared mind.* A professor of his had so quoted Louis Pasteur, and this aphorism struck a chord. It became his mantra to live by.

The second night he didn't sleep much better in a local B&B, an elderly woman's home smelling of boiled cabbage and fresh paint. The next morning he wanted nothing more than to walk in the fresh air near some body of water and have no schedule to meet. As a bonus, the drizzle of the past two days had retreated into a gray rampart of clouds offshore in the Atlantic. The sun shone again on this colorful harbor town. A warm breeze blew off the bay.

Getting to Dingle was only the first step, his real point of departure. He figured to work his way up the coast from there. He had taken on a family mission, now half a century overdue.

He felt the growing weight of his commitment, realizing how faint the trail would be and how small the chance of success. Whatever came of his effort, at least it would buy him time and room to walk and think and look at things inside and out. That was the other more private mission, and not one he could yet define, even to himself.

He began his walk at a pub, with a pre-noon fish sandwich and a liter of ale. Those and the heat conspired to rekindle his jet lag. Besides that, he had left his sunglasses in his room, and now the squinting made him even sleepier. His inquiries could wait until tomorrow. For now, he was content to amble west along the Strand toward the harbor and the distant music of seagulls. Beyond the Goat Street intersection, he passed a row of narrow two-story shops in pastel colors. In honor of the date, some enterprising merchant had taped a large cutout of Lady Liberty onto a lamppost. In her torch hand she held a bouquet of tiny American flags. Someone had scrawled in blue marker on her tablet: Nix On Nixon.

The shop next door was under renovation, and workmen were stacking ancient plumbing and electrical fixtures on the sidewalk. He avoided that and then stood aside for a heavily built woman, whose terrier strained at its leash toward something furry and flattened in the gutter. He strolled on, eyes nearly shut against the sun. Just in front of him two sparrows swept down onto the sidewalk, mated hectically, and whirled away in a puff of dust.

He wandered through islands of different smells: fried potatoes, diesel, cigars, beer . . . A little farther on he came to a shop where they had let in the sea air by propping open the glass door with a gold brick. Of course, it was a brick of something else painted gold, though it did gleam convincing in the sunlight. What a testament to small town virtues, he thought, that even a fake gold brick could survive for long on a public sidewalk.

As he glanced up, something else about the shop caught his eye. The window display featured an enlarged newsclipping with a murky photograph of a diver hovering over a kelp forest. The headline read: *ARMADA TREASURE DISCOVERED ON ANTRIM COAST*. He squinted at it. *Sunken Spanish treasure here?* The implausibility of it stirred his curiosity. He leaned over to scan the text.

A Spanish warship called the *Girona* was part of the great Armada that attacked England in 1588. After many disasters, the shattered remains of the fleet continued to sail northward, planning to loop to the west around Scotland and Ireland before heading south again for Spain. Ferocious winter storms drove the battered *Girona* onto the rocks near Port Ballintrae, Northern Ireland. That's where a team of divers had recently located and salvaged the wreck, finding a great treasure of jewelry and coins.

Next to the display, a shallow tray contained simulated pieces-of-eight protruding from sand and a dark piece of wooden timber with a rusty spike sticking out of it. A necklace bearing a faux gold cross was draped over it. A label next to it said, "Ask about our *Girona* reproductions." Otherwise, the window space was cluttered with random items, old and new, mundane and exotic. It suggested the personal collection of an eccentric. He would not have been surprised to see a stuffed armadillo or a jackalope in the mix.

He glanced up at the sign over the door: "Jewelry and Curios, Ancient & Modern". It reminded him that his mother admired Celtic designs, and this might be the place to find such a pendant—an antique one, preferably. There might be someone inside who could explain more about the *Girona* display and show him those reproductions. This modest goal would give his aimless wandering some purpose. Escaping the glare might soothe the ache behind his eyes.

He eased himself through the half-open door. Along both walls of the entry area, stuff was crowded onto shelves and suspended from the ceiling. It was the mother lode of everything implied by the window display and much more. Toward the back of the shop it changed into a more conventional jewelry store, with glass display cases cheerfully lit from above. And there were customers. He saw the backside of a portly man discussing something with two women behind the counter. A second man was bent over, examining the jewelry in another case to the right. That put him third in line.

No matter. It was cool inside, and there was plenty to occupy the curious mind for a while. In the anteroom between the two aisles was an inviting little alcove where the owners had provided a small sofa with a lamp and three well-stocked bookcases enclosing it. This was the kind of shop where an infatuated husband or wife might browse for a half hour, while the tolerant spouse read a book or gazed out the window at the picturesque harbor across the street.

On a small coffee table he noticed a scrapbook of clippings with the words Spanish Armada on the cardboard cover. He settled onto the sofa and began to browse through it. Pasted on the pages were news articles from several papers, all unfamiliar to him: *The Northern Constitution*, *the Daily Mail*, *the Daily Express*, *the Daily Mirror*, *the Times of London*. He began to read the clippings in order. Most of them, dated after mid-May, 1968, were rather pedestrian accounts of the wreck's discovery by the Belgian Robert Sténuit and his team of salvage divers. The writers said little about the historical event itself, but focused more on side issues: the locals' astonishment on learning that the salvage of the treasure had been going on in secret since the previous summer; rumors—later proven false—that numerous gold bars had been found; a failed attempt by some renegade members of a

Belfast diving club to muscle in on the treasure hunt. He scanned through the redundant information until he came to the final article in the scrapbook. It was cut from a June 1969 copy of *National Geographic* magazine. The title read, *Ireland's Rugged Coast Yields Priceless Relics of the Spanish Armada*. This was more like it.

The article began with a dramatic reconstruction of the last fatal minutes of the galleas *Girona*, when it foundered during a violent nighttime storm on October 26, 1588. Overloaded with some 1,300 survivors of the defeated Armada, the ship was being driven east by gale winds along the northern tip of present day Northern Ireland. The Spaniards were desperate to clear the remaining thirty miles of rock-bound coast and reach safe harbor in Catholic Scotland. It was not to be. Just short of their goal, the rudder carried away. The helpless vessel wallowed in heavy seas, drifting toward the invisible cliffs. Soon afterward, it smashed onto a rocky point and was quickly torn apart by the huge waves. Only a few survived.

There in mid-article, a photograph of the disaster scene spread across two pages. The perspective was from above the cliff top, looking seaward. A promontory rose from the ocean like a green-shrouded dragon's back that arched up from the sea toward the viewer. Where the monster's head should have been rose four great spires of basalt, their mossy columns ribbed like the vertebrae of fish. Down to the right of them, waves broke over the black skeletal finger of Lacada Point, where the *Girona* had been dashed to pieces. He could not have imagined a more spectacular monument to shipwreck and tragedy. And reimagined on another two pages, the tragedy itself: a lurid painting of the *Girona* ravaged by the storm at the moment of its destruction on the Lacada rocks—its back broken, its rigging in tatters, and hundreds of doomed Spaniards strewn around the wreck in a raging sea.

As he stared at this hellish scene, he was gripped by a sensation as familiar as it was unsettling. The doctors had their names for it. They made it sound like a disease or congenital defect—not something you cared to own up to. He took perverse pleasure in thinking of these episodes as his “mind melts”, a riff on the Vulcan mind melds of *Star Trek*. The Vulcans got to choose what minds they melded with and when, their conjuring under conscious control. His decidedly was not. His own dream-like melts lurched through collages of people, places and actions—one crisis or another vying for his attention, demanding he react, taunting him with his failure to do so. The episodes could arrive at any time from nowhere, and so abruptly that there was no preparing for them. But this particular melt did not involve experiences of the past year. This time it swept him back four centuries in an instant and, seamlessly, he became one of

those desperate souls on the *Girona*, moments before the ship broke her back on the reef.

Unlike most of the non-sailors on board, he knew exactly what was coming once the rudder gave way and panic spread through the ship. Fortunately, he had begun preparing himself well before that. *Chance favors only the prepared mind*. Now he took the final urgent steps. While his fellow soldiers huddled terrified and miserable below deck, he quickly dressed in the warmest woollens he owned. His personal wealth—a gold chain and his stash of *escudos*—were already sewn into the lining of his great coat. The short rapier and two knives were secured with extra lashings to his belt. His felt-lined boots were laced tightly on his feet. Lastly, he retrieved from his hammock the sailcloth bag filled with empty wine bottles, each well-corked and wrapped in extra clothing. In that churning, frigid sea with all that clothing and metal weighing him down, only this buoyant sack would get him to shore alive. He tied the drawstrings of the bag to his wrist and, tucking the float under his arm, he struggled up the companionway.

On the pitching deck, the din of a dying ship swirled around him on the wind. Knots of shouting men rushed about to God-knows what purpose. Sailors were abandoning their posts in the shredded rigging. The two hundred galley slaves were still futilely stroking away, though half the time their long oars waved in the air; they were chained and had no choice. Now, in what must be the *Girona's* final minutes, he crouched under the port-side stairs leading to the upper deck in the vessel's bow. This was the windward side, and even a common soldier should know that the opposite leeward side faced the shore and would strike the rocks first. He might stand a better chance of jumping clear of the wreck as it rolled over that way. Intent as he was—fully engaged—he could still observe the crisis as though from afar. He somehow knew that only a handful of the 1,300 on board would survive this disaster, and he was determined to be one of them. For the moment, he could only hold on and wait for the terrible blow to fall.

In all that chaos, an odd thing drew his attention. Across the deck at the opposite rail stood a diminutive old woman dressed in black, leaning on a stick. She seemed to look past him, unperturbed by the pandemonium around her. Her exposed face and hands were hardly less black than the rest of her; her eyes were only darker recesses in her shadowed face. It was not that surprising to see her again, though logic told him she had even less business here than in other places he'd seen her. But what good was logic where that black-shrouded old woman was concerned? Just the sight of her triggered the thought that in some convoluted way he bore responsibility for what was about to happen.

As he waited there—besieged by the tumult of wind and waves and howling chaos—somehow, he could also discern individual human voices. One voice gradually rose above the others: at first insistent, then indignant, demanding . . . It came from behind him, at the stern of the ship—no, the shop. The spell broken, he looked up from his scrapbook to listen. It might be the voice of the man he had seen earlier at the counter. At first it seemed the man was regaling the clerks with a story or joke, raising his voice for emphasis. The customer spoke English with an unfamiliar accent, the words unclear at this distance. The voice grew louder. The guy was peeved, even angry. The listener stopped breathing, fully alert now. He leaned around the bookcase to take an unobtrusive look.

The portly man stood with his feet apart, gesturing and pointing at something on or in the glass case. Beyond his bulk, a middle-aged woman stepped back, arms folded, her face a mask of apprehension. The conversation seemed to have reached a point where the proprietor's response would make little difference to this plaintiff. Another, younger woman appeared from behind Portly as she stepped quickly through a doorway into the back room. Abruptly, the big man stopped speaking and turned to look over his shoulder. Immediately, a sharp snap and splintering of glass came from the right side of the shop. It was followed at once by a harsh, insistent clang-clanging, like that of an old school bell. The watcher leaned around the other end of the bookcase. He saw a slender man in a T-shirt and jeans hunched over the shattered case, hastily raking up something with a gloved hand. *Robbery!* He was already dumping his haul into a black cloth bag. As the watcher looked on, fascinated, he felt the floor shake behind him and glanced back to see Portly surge through the open doorway onto the street, and disappear to the left. Turning back toward the counters, he heard a woman scream belatedly as Slim finished his work and wheeled toward the door. A second later the man was pounding down the aisle toward him, bag in hand.

Thought played no part in what he did next. Slim was nearly upon him when he rose and swung his leg into the aisle at knee height. The collision spun him around. As he fought for balance, the sharp corner of the bookcase speared him in the pit of his right shoulder. Somehow he kept his footing. Slim pitched forward onto his chest with a grunt and slid for several feet. The black bag flew out of his hand and smacked into the window box. Another thoughtless two seconds later, he was straddling Slim's narrow back on the floor.

*How ludicrous is this?* The sheer unreality of it was disorienting, stalled him for a second. Then some echo of his training pushed that aside, and he thought of O'Brien. Keep it simple, he would say. *Bend a hand—anything. Pain rules.*

That was the idea as his right hand grappled for one of Slim's flailing arms. This simple thing took longer than it should have. He finally gripped the bony hand with the glove, but Slim quickly twisted it out of his grasp, the glove flying off. Again, he caught the hand, lost it; then a wrist, losing that, too. Only then he recognized the ache and numbness spreading down from his shoulder to his right hand, his favored hand. What little grip he had left was fading fast. He felt a pang of uncertainty.

In that moment, Slim seemed to gain confidence and rolled his torso around with surprising strength until he lay face up. His long arms went on the attack, his teeth bared in an animal snarl. Slim was still pinned between his knees, but with only one good arm he could barely fend off the talon fingers that clawed wildly at his face. A hand broke through his guard and he felt sharp nails rake down his left cheek. It struck him that in mere seconds his simple impulse to right a wrong had turned disastrous. That relentless clanging became a ringside warning that he was nearly down for the count. He pictured himself lying there disabled and disgraced as Slim gathered up his bag of jewels and fled, triumphant. Punctuating that thought, a swinging fist exploded on his right eye socket, blinding him for the moment. As more blows rained on his head and shoulders, his left hand groped desperately for Slim's head until his fingers closed on the man's lank hair. He would salvage this now or never. *To hell with your methods, O'Brien.* Powering with his left shoulder, he shoved the head against the floor, where it made a satisfying thump. When the struggling continued, he did it again—and again.

"Stop! Please stop! You're killing him!"

He glanced right, and through the haze saw a woman's legs below a blue skirt. He turned back toward Slim, who lay still now, eyes rolled up in his head.

The woman's hand gripped his shoulder and she said, "Don't you see he's had enough?"

He stared down at the slack face. The man's arms were limp at his sides. "I guess so."

He released his death grip on the hair and dragged himself off the body and sideways, until he could sit propped against the bookcase. His heart pounded. He could only pant, the air too thick to breathe. His right shoulder sagged, the arm completely numb.

At that moment the clanging stopped, silence rushing in behind it.

The younger woman who had spoken to him was kneeling beside Slim, holding his wrist, a look of concentration on her face. Her lips moved, counting. After a few seconds, she dropped the wrist, and delicately felt around the back of Slim's head. She examined his eyes closely, pushing the lids up with her fingertip.

She glanced up. "Thank God, he's breathing, but he's probably concussed. We've already called the Gardaí."

“The what?”

“An Garda Síochána. Our national police.”

He blinked hard to clear his mind. *Say something sensible.*

“You might tie his hands,” he offered, “in case he wakes up.”

“Believe me, he’s in no condition to run away. Anyway, the Gardaí will be here soon.”

She moved over to where he sat and began to study his face.

“You don’t look so good yourself,” she said. “You have two nasty bleeding scratches. And I think you’re heading for a black eye. Any other problems?”

He pulled his right arm into his lap.

“What’s wrong with your arm?”

“I must have sprained it. It’s OK.”

She nodded. “Rest easy then.” She rose abruptly. “I’ll be back directly.”

He said, “Don’t forget your jewelry over there.”

She picked up the bag and hefted it, looking at him. “Yes.” She seemed about to add something, but changed her mind.

“Actually,” he said, “better leave it there—evidence.”

“Right.” She set it down on the floor, and hurried away.

Spent for the moment, he slumped in a daze. He breathed deeply, beginning to feel his pulse slow.

She returned with a damp towel, and began to blot away the blood seeping from his scratches. “This will need some disinfecting. I’m Robyn,” she said. “Who might you be?”

“Brit,” he said. “Nyland. I was going to be a customer.”

“Well, that’s water under the bridge.” Still blotting, she said, “You’re not a British ‘Brit’, though. American?”

“Right.”

“How long were you in here? I mean, before all this began.”

“A little while.” He tried rotating his shoulder, which had begun to throb and stiffen. “I didn’t know crooks shopped here.”

Her mouth tightened. “Hardly our usual clientele.” She turned to look at Slim, still prostrate. “This all seems so unreal.” She stood up. “I need to check on my aunt. She’s beside herself, as you can imagine.”

“Could you please bring some water?”

“Yes.”

Brit had gulped a mug of water and hoisted himself onto the sofa by the time the Gardaí arrived, to be met in the doorway by Robyn and her aunt, Mary Clarke. Slim had regained consciousness somewhat, and lay on his side, groaning. Two guards brought in a stretcher and removed him to their van. A small crowd of locals had gathered around the front door and peered through the window. Brit was introduced to someone more senior, a Sergeant Connolly, who recorded his contact information. The two women gave a synopsis of the robbery attempt as they walked the Gardaí through the shop. They

examined the shattered case and put warning tape around it. The three of them looked at the contents of the would-be thief's bag.

The Sergeant said, "We'll need statements from each of you. I gather you're a tourist, Mr. Nyland. How long have you been in Ireland?"

"It's my second day." He felt foolish, still sitting on the sofa while the others stood around him. To stand up and faint would be even worse.

"And how long are you staying?"

"A week or so. I'm not sure."

"I'm requesting that you remain near Dingle until we've completed our interviews in the next day or two. Is that agreeable?"

"OK."

"Good. Meanwhile, it looks like you'll need to visit the hospital and have those cuts looked after. Do you have transportation?"

Robyn said, "We have a car, and I'm a nurse intern there. We'll take care of him."

"How convenient." The Sergeant snapped his notebook closed. "We'll be in touch shortly about the interviews." On his way out, he turned back toward Robyn. "By the way, you might want to take a photograph of his injuries. It may be important later on."

When they were gone, Brit said, "So, a nurse."

"We should head over to the hospital," she said. "Are you able to walk to the car? It's not very far."

"What's your last name?" he asked.

"Ellison. Can you walk?"

"Sure," he said. He got up slowly, holding onto the bookcase with his left hand. He paused, feeling light-headed.

She leaned in to look. "You're holding your right arm very oddly. Are you sure it's only a sprain?"

"Most likely."

"It may be more than that. Let me have a look."

He said, "It was broken a while back. I probably over-used it today."

She rolled her eyes. "I should think so. Flex your fingers for me, please."

He did so carefully.

"Now try to bend your elbow, and then raise your whole arm. If it hurts too much, don't do it."

He managed to do a little of each, wincing.

"You will need that x-rayed," she said.

She turned toward the door, and he followed clumsily. As they were leaving the shop, Mary Clarke stepped forward to take his left hand in hers.

"I'll have more to say later, Mr. Nyland." Her eyes glistened. "But for now, thank you so much for your chivalrous act."

As soon as they were gone, Mary locked the door and hung the “closed” sign in the window. She turned off the foyer lights and stood for a moment gazing at the floor where the struggle had taken place. She stared blankly at first, her attention turned inward. *Good Lord. How could such a thing happen in my little shop? And why?*

Gradually, her mind began to register what her eyes saw. The bookcase by the sofa leaned off-kilter. Several books were scattered on the floor, knocked from their shelves. She noticed a gleam of light from a shard of glass. The thief must have carried it there on his clothing. Nearby were a few small spots of blood, most of them smeared. *From Mr. Nyland, no doubt.* She remembered his distant expression as he answered Sergeant Connolly's questions, blood oozing from the two scratches on his face. He seemed oddly detached, almost as though he had anticipated this event and his focus was now elsewhere.

Her gaze continued to wander the floor until it lighted on something dark and crumpled next to a sea chest. She moved to pick it up gingerly with thumb and forefinger: a black leather glove. As she unfolded it, she saw a tiny hoop of wire snagged on the fabric—the clasp of a necklace. *The thief wore this. Perhaps Connolly will want to see it.* She placed it on top of the chest.

She stepped toward the middle of the shop to take another look at the main damage. The whole front of one case was shattered. Slivers of glass covered the remaining jewelry and sparkled on the floor. At least, most of her stock was undisturbed. With the Gardaí present, she had looked in the thief's bag and noted that it contained inexpensive reproductions of historical pieces: a few small pendants of Celtic and Spanish designs. That was the theme of merchandise on the top shelf of that case—the “ancient” part of her offerings, pitched mainly to tourists. Fortunately, what the robber had tried to steal was not that significant, considering what better pieces he might have chosen. Even if he had escaped with his bag, the loss would not have been great. But it chilled her to think how differently it might have gone. *What if Robyn had not been there to call the Gardaí, so I could protect the register and bear witness?* Luckily, the American had stopped the thief and made him pay for his sins. It was only too bad that the arrogant big man hadn't suffered as well for his insulting behavior.

She glanced back toward the foyer. *What had this Mr. Nyland been doing there while the crime developed?* Sitting and reading something, presumeably. Neither of them had noticed him come into the shop, but then that huge foreigner had blocked their view and kept both of them distracted. They had barely noticed the thief until the moment he smashed the case. Those two must have been working together, she guessed, judging from the latter's flight as soon as the robbery

commenced. For a fleeting moment, she wondered if the American might possibly have some connection with one or both of those men. She remembered hearing him say that this was only his second day in Ireland, and it was probably his first in town. *Was it pure coincidence that he chose my shop to visit? Wasn't it a little odd that he had come in and waited unobserved?* But she could not think of any logical reason why he would thwart the robbery if he were somehow involved in the scheme.

Mary sighed. This encounter, or whatever it was, had been a frightening experience. That it had occurred at mid-morning on a busy street was particularly unsettling. She already suspected that the bizarre nature of it might presage some turning point in her business. Robyn would not be around to help for much longer. *How can I ever again feel comfortable alone in my shop?*

She took a deep breath and resolved to deal first with the here and now. She would make a cup of tea and then arrange to leave this damage behind for today. Secondly, she would decide how to act in some purposeful way to restore the spiritual balance of right and wrong.

Mary Clarke was a Catholic woman of practical faith, who believed that living by Christian principles was simply the more rational and efficient course. In her view, any policy designed to take unfair advantage of others would ultimately backfire and end in wasted time and energy. But she recognized that fairplay was not innate to all human nature and must be prescribed by laws of man and God. She also believed that, whenever possible, virtue should be rewarded and evil punished in this life, not postponed for the Hereafter. The present case might be an opportunity to do something about that.

St. Elizabeth's Hospital was built on high ground at the north end of town. The distance was only a few blocks, but the tourist traffic moved slowly. En route, Robyn was silent for a time.

As they waited at a corner, she said, "I suppose you meant well, but that was appalling." She glanced at him sharply. "Would you have killed that man?"

"No," he said. "I don't know. Anyway, you stopped it."

"But what if I hadn't been there?"

"But you were."

Her eyes narrowed. "That seems rather fatalistic."

"Yes, it is."

She stared straight ahead. "And frankly, it also strikes me as irresponsible."

"Why?"

"Because you depended on someone else—me—to save you from a bad decision."

He sighed. "I wasn't depending on you at all. And I *am* responsible," he said. "Always." The very notion that he wasn't almost made him smile.

The intersection cleared, and she let out the clutch a little too quickly. The car lurched ahead.

“But thanks,” he added.

She darted a look at him. “For . . . ?”

“Keeping me out of jail.”

She said nothing more. He was glad enough to close his eyes and wonder about the pulsing ache in his arm. It was an unwelcome step backward.

St. Elizabeth’s loomed ahead, a white three-story block of masonry perched on the hillside overlooking the town and harbor. Its humorless rows of small-paned windows were relieved only by a carved arch over the front door. Stone walls lined the approach on both sides.

“It looks more like an asylum,” he noted.

“The design is purely functional,” she said. “It was built as a workhouse over a hundred years ago, just after the famine. And it has saved the lives of a great many destitute people.” Her manner had stiffened noticeably.

He considered showing a polite interest in Irish workhouses. Normally, he would have been genuinely curious. Now it was easier to let it pass.

They entered the spartan waiting room, and she left him to register at the desk while she went looking for a Dr. Quinn. “I’ll see if he can slip you in between other appointments,” she had explained. Returning moments later, she said, “About fifteen minutes or so. He must have a soft spot for Americans,” she added in a disapproving tone.

When he had finished the admission form, she led him down the hall to an empty examining room. “Have a seat there,” she said. “We’re going to dress those scratches.”

She put on a white lab coat, and pulled her hair back into a clasp. She washed her hands at the sink and dried them on a paper towel.

He said, “You’re supposed to take a photo of me first.”

She regarded him with wry amusement. “I don’t have a camera here. Shall I go home for it?”

“I’ll just remember this fondly,” he said.

From the cabinet she took two bottles and a box of cotton swabs. She turned a lamp toward his face and looked intently at the two puffy red streaks running from below the left eye to the angle of his jaw. She had slipped into business-like manner that seemed less judgmental.

“Actually, it could have been much worse,” she said, still looking him over. “I see that you also have a recent scar on your neck. What caused that?”

“A piece of metal.”

She considered asking, “Swordfight?” but thought better of it. *Don’t encourage him with humor.* She said, “You’re lucky that it missed the carotid.”

“Yep.”

“And this nick in your ear?”

“The same.”

“Are you accident prone?”

“Evidently.”

Robyn dripped some of a white liquid onto a cotton swab.

“This is an antibacterial soap, and it will sting a little. I’m starting near the eye, so please keep still.”

While she worked on the scratches, he distracted himself with an occasional furtive glance at her face, mere inches away. Unexpected with her chocolate hair were the blue-gray eyes. At least one was. By some trick of light, the other eye appeared to be darker. When he glanced again, he was surprised to see that the lower half of her right iris was brown, shading to blue-gray on top. He didn’t recall ever seeing that before.

“You’re wondering about my eye,” she said.

“I was, sorry.”

“It’s called sectoral heterochromia.”

“Like different colored sectors?”

“Exactly.”

“Are there other versions?”

She nodded. “It’s simply more noticeable with darker colors on lighter backgrounds.”

“What causes it?”

“In my case it’s inherited, but somewhat rare.”

“How rare?”

“They say less than one percent of people have some degree of it. It’s much more common in border collies,” she said, deadpan.

“Did one of your parents have it?”

“A great aunt did, I believe.”

“Does it affect your vision?”

“Not at all.” She leaned back. “You are very inquisitive.”

“It’s inherited.”

She leaned closer again. “Look this way, please.” With a forefinger she carefully pushed the lids away from his left eye, around one side of it. “Now the other way.”

More to herself, she said, “The ball doesn’t look scratched. That’s good.”

As she finished her inspection, he mumbled, “What’s this thing about Irish eyes smiling?”

She sat back on the stool. “Pure Hollywood. The Irish smile when we’ve a reason to. I’ve noticed that Americans smile habitually.” Her eyes flickered at him. “There—you see?”

“Tourists tend to be happier. I’m a tourist.”

He winced as she dabbed more soap solution on the scratches.

“You don’t look so happy just now.”

“I’ve had a trying experience. Or would you say ‘vexing’ here?”

"I might say either. Or neither. We *are* familiar with synonyms."

She carefully blotted the soap away with a damp swab.

"Speaking of eyes," she noted, "your shiner is showing up nicely purple."

"Heterochromia."

Only the trace of a smile slipped by her guard. The soap was followed by a swabbing with hydrogen peroxide.

"That does it," she said. "We won't put any bandage on it. The open air is good, and we'll want to keep an eye on it. Unfortunately, it will look rather gruesome for a while. Does that bother you?"

"It's my badge of honor."

Her eyebrows ticked up. "But rather hard to explain, I think. You might claim it's makeup for a pirate film."

"Or you could connect my scratches and make the Mark of Zorro."

"What is that?"

"It's from an old movie. Zorro—kind of a Robin Hood type—would cut a Z on his enemies with the tip of his sword."

"Why on earth?"

He shrugged. "Just his calling card, I guess."

"Hmm." She leaned to inspect her results from another angle. "We don't do that kind of work here," she said. "You might try Venezuela."

Robyn stood up briskly and put away the antiseptics.

He said, "Who is the 'we' you keep referring to?"

"The Irish Public Health Care System."

He was dozing on the examining table when the doctor arrived. Robyn had met him in the hallway and briefly explained the circumstances. As they entered the room Brit struggled to sit up, and she stepped forward to help.

"Hello, I'm Dr. Quinn." The man extended his hand and Brit took it awkwardly with his left.

"Brit Nyland."

Quinn went straight to the wall sink and began to wash his hands. Over his shoulder he said, "Hardly the best way to celebrate your Independence Day, eh? But Robyn tells me you've done a public service today, and at some cost to your anatomy." As he dried his hands on a paper towel, he looked the patient over. "I gather that right arm is causing you some pain. Where was your original fracture?"

Brit indicated his upper arm near the shoulder.

"And how long ago?"

"About five months."

"Hmm. Should be quite solid by now. I also heard you had some temporary paralysis in the arm."

"I banged it on a bookcase."

“Show me where.”

Brit indicated a spot between his shoulder and chest.

Quinn nodded. “Several nerves pass through there on the way to the arm. Let’s have the shirt off, and we’ll take a look.”

Robyn asked, “Should I leave?”

To the doctor, Brit said, “No problem for me, if she’s a nurse.”

She shot him a look.

“A nurse in training,” said Quinn. “And a good one, I’d say.”

As Brit worked on the buttons left-handedly, Robyn responded to the doctor’s questions about Aunt Mary and her damaged shop. At length he got the shirt open, and slipped it off his left shoulder and down his right arm.

Dr. Quinn and Robyn stopped talking and stared.

“My word,” Quinn said. “How did you come by these other injuries?”

“Vietnam.”

“What caused them?”

“A mortar round.”

“And the arm fracture? Was that part of it?”

He nodded. “They put in some screws.”

“I see.” Dr. Quinn moved closer to examine the dimpled scars on the upper arm, right shoulder, and rib cage. He ran his fingertips lightly over the indentations. “The skin has healed well,” he noted. “Scarring could be worse.” He waved Robyn closer. “See here? Some puckering should be expected with this kind of trauma. A little more surgery to reduce scar tissue would be in order. But over all, I’d say his Army medics have done creditable repairs so far.” To Brit he said, “What about internal injuries?”

“Four broken ribs, a punctured lung, some liver damage. And a concussion.”

The doctor glanced at Robyn. “Did you know about this?”

Her face colored slightly. “He only mentioned his arm fracture, not how it happened.”

“Never hurts to pursue these details when you do your histories,” he said.

“Yes, I will in future.”

“Anyway,” Quinn said, “the ribs and lung should be well healed by now. And liver regenerates quite easily.”

The doctor touched his right arm. “So, this is the main question. Let’s check your function, Brit.”

Quinn had him flex the arm in various ways, most of which caused him to grit his teeth. As he performed, Quinn asked him, “Were you in the Army?”

He nodded. “Still am.”

What was your role over there, if you don’t mind?”

“Platoon leader. Sometimes.”

“Ah, a lieutenant of infantry then.”

“Right.”

As Brit eased back into his shirt, the doctor said, "I doubt it's re-fractured, but I want to make sure everything looks right in there. I'm sending you over to x-ray. Meanwhile, we'll need to keep it immobilized for a while, so Robyn will fix you up with a sling. I'm also giving you a prescription for a tetanus shot and some pain pills. Are you allergic to anything? Good." He took out a pad and scribbled on it. "Just present this at our pharmacy."

Quinn turned to leave, but paused by the door. "By the way, I'm something of a military buff—ex-Royal Navy, in fact. What about those Viet mortars? Are they like your 81-millimeter?"

Brit shook his head. "They have an 82, but there's also a 60 like ours made by the French and Chinese. That's probably what it was."

"What kind of fragments?"

"Mine were little shards." He held up a fingertip.

"Did you remember hearing it," Quinn asked, "before the explosion?"

He nodded. "I heard the whine—too late by then. Hit us dead on."

Quinn wrinkled his brow. "How did they do that? I thought the mortar is an indirect fire weapon, and the first round is only area-precise. An observer has to walk it into the target."

Brit nodded. "That's right, usually. We got some small arms fire crossing a dike and dropped to check it out. They meant to pin us down there. Still, a lucky first shot."

"Unlucky for you, though. You the only one hurt?"

"No, two others wounded. And my RTO—radio man—was killed."

"Worse still."

Quinn's expression was still curious. Then his eyes drifted down, and he waved his hand. "Well, take it easy then, Mr. Nyland, and I'll see you in a day or so. You can make the appointment on your way out."

Robyn used the phone booth just off the waiting room. "Auntie, it's my first chance to call. Are you all right?"

Mary sighed. "Well, the shock has worn off, but I'm still feeling violated, so to speak. I suppose that's normal after a robbery. I've locked up the shop, of course, but haven't done much else since you left. It's quiet and spooky here at the scene of the crime, and I'm rather anxious to leave it."

"I know you must be, Auntie—I'm sorry. I'll be back to fetch you just as soon as I can."

"Oh, don't worry dear. Janet O'Meara will be here soon to give me a lift home. She's happy to do it, and it does make her first in the gossip queue. How is Mr. Nyland?"

"Dr. Quinn already looked him over. He's in x-ray now to check his arm, but I doubt it's anything serious. Certainly, he's better off than the robber."

“Well, I've been thinking about it, and I want to do something for him. Not the robber, of course.”

“We're taking excellent care of his medical needs just now.”

“I mean something more than that. I can't forget that when we were under assault, he acted rather daringly to help us. And we're complete strangers in a strange land.”

Robyn said carefully, “I think it was mainly your insurance policy that was under assault. And I wonder if his own attack on the robber was really so helpful after all.”

“He could not have known that. The point is, he was *trying* to be helpful. And I've been thinking that such a decent impulse should not go unrewarded.”

“Rewarded? Do you mean to offer him money?”

“Not money. I doubt he would accept it anyway. No, I was thinking we ought to show him some hospitality. It's only the Christian thing to do.”

“Do you mean like inviting him to dinner?” Her mind skipped ahead. *What on earth would we talk to him about, except for the robbery? Mortars?*

“Robyn, dear, here is what I would like you to ask Mr Nyland for me. Rather for both of us.”

In her aunt's tone Robyn recognized a certainty that was beyond debate.

By mid-afternoon, they were ready to leave the hospital. Brit had finished his x-ray, had the tetanus shot, and collected his pain pills. The pharmacist, an elderly woman, had said, “You mustn't take those on an empty stomach, dearie.” She rummaged in her desk for a box of biscuits and fished out several. She handed them to him. “Here you go, luv. Sleep well.”

The biscuits revived him somewhat. Robyn rigged him with a gauze sling that took some weight off the right shoulder. Little conversation passed between them; she was all efficiency. She left him sitting on a divan in the lobby, while she went off to do something administrative.

Despite the fatigue, his mind churned. He was sure that doctor had known the next obvious question, but had not asked it—perhaps out of tactfulness, or worse, pity. Brit had revisited the question himself a thousand times.

Given their security mission around the airbase, platoons like his patrolled day after day, making giant circles through the rice fields and past local hamlets. You did your best to be unpredictable, but you could circle something only so many times without crossing some of the same ground. As much as possible, he kept changing the route and avoided the main trails, like the one that ran along the top of that brushy dike. Some of the men had grumbled when he made them slog in the damp heat through muck and tall grass along the dike's edge. But they had to cross over it eventually. At length they came to a place where the

wall of brush thinned somewhat, and a path climbed the dike to join the main trail. It was more like an animal path, narrow and overgrown, showing no signs of recent human use. His bush instincts, honed through ten months in country, told him the situation was a normal risk—nothing special. It seemed common sense to cross there, through that small, nondescript gap in the brush. Otherwise, they would have to hack their way through the tangled vegetation, making a racket and slowing them down. *Minimize risk, but don't punish them for nothing.*

After a few seconds of reflection, he decided to take advantage of the path. The point man duly checked things out, alert as usual to trip wires. There were none. He set up flank security along the main dike trail. It was all utterly routine. The platoon was half way over the dike when two AKs opened up on them from across the field ahead. They returned fire in that direction, and the AKs went silent. The mortar round landed only seconds later as a few of them crouched on top of the dike.

The upshot of it all was this: a VC mortar man had correctly imagined that some patrol would sooner or later take this route. And on a trying day, their leader would probably decide to cross the dike where it looked slightly easier. He had pre-registered his mortar for that spot. A distracted Lieutenant Nyland with less imagination had taken the bait. At least, they had managed to hit the architect of this dumb decision; that much was fair and just. But because of his fundamental mistake, Kuralski and Steiner had also paid the damages. PFC Lamoreaux had paid in full.

When Sergeant Robert Connolly arrived for the debriefing, he realized too late that it was exactly teatime. His boss, Inspector Kenneth Damien, was known to be particular about having his tea at 3:30 every day—barring some emergency, of course. The sergeant had always made a point of not showing up at this hour, even though he had no idea what teatime with his superior might entail, or whether Damien cherished his privacy at that time of day. He needn't have worried, as it turned out. The inspector waved him into his office with a smile.

“We'll talk over a cuppa,” he said.

In one corner of the office stood a small, round table with a wall cabinet above it. A standard desk chair and an oak rocking chair flanked the table—the rocker a concession to Damien's chronically bad back. They took seats, and the inspector filled their cups from a miniature silver samovar. He explained that it was a wedding gift from his wife's relations in Leningrad. She was the London-born daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants, but her own taste in tea services ran to Danish Modern. So, the gift samovar was consigned to office use, along with a set of glass cups in ornate holders made with swirls of silver filigree. As Connolly took a sip from one of these, he instinctively leaned

forward. If the delicate looking handle should happen to break off, he wouldn't dump the scalding liquid into his lap.

"This is a favorite Russian black tea with a hint of orange peel and cinnamon," Damien was saying. "In the old days they drank it with a sugar cube between their teeth. It's one of the few consumer goods worth buying over there."

As he sipped, the sergeant nodded approvingly. In fact, he had always preferred even mediocre coffee to almost any kind of tea.

Damien glanced down at the list in front of him. "I see you had to cancel your interview with the Gallaghers."

"Right," said Connolly. "I rescheduled it for tomorrow. That little incident at the jewelry shop came up this morning."

"I saw it on the board," Damien said. "Some American was involved, I gather."

"Yes. Rather odd, I thought."

"The American?"

"The whole business, really."

Damien blew gently on his tea. "How so?"

"In a nutshell, it seems there were three people involved in this attempted burglary, if we can call it that."

Connolly briefly described the sequence of events, as related to him by the shop owner. Damien put in a question here and there.

As Connolly finished his account the inspector nodded. "It sounds straightforward enough. But you said burglary 'if we can call it that'. Are you suggesting there was something else going on?"

"I was only considering that the situation—midmorning on a busy street in a shop with witnesses present—was not ideal for a burglary. The suspect was apparently half-cut, which may help explain it."

Damien smiled. "Sounds to me like classic tool behavior to prepare for your morning larceny at the local watering hole."

Connolly nodded. "It was woefully amateurish."

"Well, doesn't that describe the endeavors of most of our clients? If you ask me, it's rather a good thing they're mostly amateurs. It means we get home to our families a bit earlier."

"All for the best, I agree. It's just that one has some meager expectations of competence, even among small-time criminals."

"Maybe you do, Robert. But I suspect that in a few more years those expectations will dim considerably, as mine have. Damien raised one eyebrow. "Even so, it sounds like your big man with the foreign accent got away clean. And the thief might have, too, but for your American stopping him."

"Ah, yes," Connolly said. "Mr. Nyland. That part was unusual, too. Apparently, he entered the shop some ten minutes or so before the incident, but didn't make his presence known at all. He sat down in the foyer out of sight and read a book."

“What's wrong with that?”

“I think the average customer, especially a tourist on his first day in town, would have established his place in line, and browsed the cases while he waited his turn.”

“American tourists don't take pains to be average, as we know. Perhaps he's a bookworm.”

“He didn't seem the type. Most bookworms don't attack escaping criminals, let alone nearly kill them.”

“How nearly?”

“Murphy was barely conscious when we arrived some minutes later. I understand he had a concussion caused by repeated blows to the head.”

“And how did Nyland fair in this?”

“He had a couple of bleeding scratches on his face. And he seemed rather done in by it all.”

“So, there was some give and take.”

Connolly nodded. “It just strikes me as odd that our visitor would react so aggressively on his first day here. In this kind of situation, the more typical reaction of any newly-arrived tourist would be to sit tight and gawk. Let the action pass him by, and tell his friends about it later.”

“What was his demeanor? Did he act like a hardchaw?”

“Not that I witnessed. When I arrived he was sitting quietly. He seemed rather detached—almost indifferent to the whole business.”

“But he answered your questions willingly?”

“Oh, yes. Without elaboration, but willingly enough.”

Damien rubbed his palms together. “So how would you square all that? Aggressive, but indifferent.”

“I can't at the moment. Perhaps after the interview.”

“Is Nyland a regular visitor here?”

“I'll find that out, too.”

“Any reason to think he might know either of the other two?”

“None that I know of.”

“And the big man? What do you make of his running away like that?”

“That was more odd behavior. Again, most people in that situation would stand and gawk at first, then try to help afterward. But I gather that he was out the door as soon as the glass broke.”

“Hmm,” Damien said. He took a sip of tea with his eyes closed. “Did you ever wonder if our famous Troubles might be attracting such aggressive, oddly-behaving tourists to Ireland?”

Connolly grinned. “Then I think they'd be even more attracted to Northern Ireland.”

“Perhaps we're getting the spillover,” Damien said. “Anyway, Murphy's attempt was straightforward enough, and he'll be so charged. Do you think the proprietress will file a complaint of her own? That Mrs. —?”

“Clarke. Mary Clarke. I hope to interview her and her niece tomorrow. Nyland as well.”

“If your big man was some sort of accomplice, maybe Murphy will give him up when we question him. How's he doing, by the way?”

“He's still under observation and guard at St. Elizabeth's.”

The inspector put his teacup down and smiled. “I know you enjoy puzzling over motives, Robert, and I'd never discourage that. But to paraphrase Tennyson: ours not to reason why unless it's germaine. The fact is, all we seem to have here is an amateurish attempted robbery, and the perpetrator is in hand. If he denies any connection with your big man or with Nyland, and we turn up nothing to the contrary, then those other behaviors— intriguing as they may be—are not so relevant.”

Cannolly said, “I would have to agree.” But agreeing did nothing to diminish his curiosity about those three.

“I'm rather more interested in tourists spending their money here,” Damien added. “What do you say we get that American on his touristy way as soon as possible?”

By late afternoon, they were back in Mary's car and preparing to leave the hospital.

Brit said, “If you don't mind dropping me off, I'm at that little Briarwood B&B. It's on Dykegate.”

“I know the place.” Robyn paused with the keys in her hand. She turned to look directly at him. “I'm still wondering why you didn't tell me at the shop about those other injuries? We could have gone to the hospital immediately.”

“It wasn't anything new or life threatening,” he said. Then: “I didn't mean to embarrass you with the doctor.”

“I don't care about that.” She shut her eyes for a second. “All right, that's not strictly true. But something else bothered me more.”

“What was that?”

“The way you both carried on so casually about mortars and fragments and such. Like two fishermen discussing their tackle.”

“I had to answer his questions.”

“I think you more than answered them,” she said. “I think you *wanted* to talk about it.”

“Actually, I didn't,” he said. “I don't”.

Past her in the distance he could see a grassy hillside, where a man was walking a cow somewhere. Just then, the two figures were overlapped and perfectly silhouetted against the sky. It looked like a man riding a cow with six legs.

He said, “Wasn't it the same kind of thing when you two were discussing my dings? Like I was some used car?”

“Well, *touché*. At least that was in the spirit of preserving life, not taking it. Chatting about war that way makes it sound like just another hobby or business.”

“That’s what it is to some people.”

“Don’t you want to be in that business?”

“I did once,” he said. “Not anymore.”

Robyn frowned, unconvinced. She started the car and they pulled out of the hospital driveway into the left lane—still an unnerving experience for him.

A few silent minutes later, looking straight ahead, she said. “Mary—my aunt—called me when you were in x-ray. She has invited you to stay with us while you recover a bit. While the police are interviewing us.”

“That’s very generous of her.”

“Yes, it is. She appreciates your help.”

“Do you think I should accept?”

“It’s entirely up to you. Mary would never make such an offer insincerely.”

“Well, what do *you* think about it?”

She shrugged. “It’s her home. I’m there temporarily.”

That wasn’t strictly true either. It was Robyn’s home, too, and she did not relish the idea of a strange man in the house where she had spent nearly half her life. She particularly didn’t welcome it now, so near the end of her internship in Dingle. In another month she might be gone, perhaps never to live there again. These past few months with Mary had been a special time, treasured by both of them. Day after day they enjoyed the quiet rituals of doing familiar things together, and the long evenings of cooking and conversation, of sewing and reading. They shared all of this with Uncle Arthur, when he could drive down on weekends from Belfast. After nearly four years, Mary had her beloved niece back home again, if only for this interlude. And after those years, Robyn had returned educated and self-reliant, now ready to be her own woman. Mary was careful to recognize this change. The setting might be old and familiar, but it was a different kind of relationship this time—more as equals and friends, as it should be. It was a corner in life they would never turn again, and Robyn wanted to savor the intimacy of it as long as possible.

He was saying, “But you’re also family.”

“True.” *Won’t you please have other plans, Mr. Nyland?*

Brit rolled it over in his mind. The pain pills and hunger were degrading his concentration. The day seemed endless, and he felt bone weary. The thought of lying around in a stale, dim room by himself was not appealing.

“OK,” he said. “That does sound nicer than my musty room.”

He added, “But I have travel plans, and I won’t be staying long.”

They stopped at the Briarwood to pay for the room and pick up his duffle bag. Returning through town, they headed east on the blacktop, the R559. After a mile or so, they turned off on a narrow dirt road, with alternating fields, hedges and woods on both sides. As he struggled to stay awake, he wondered idly what

the local policy was if you met a car coming the other way. What convention determined who had the right of way, and how could you pull off the lane in a tunnel of hedges? Presently the road opened onto sloping pastures with a view of meandering stone walls and Dingle Bay to the left. Upslope to the right, unseen cliffs dropped off into the Atlantic. The storm was returning to land; an ominous blue-black cloud hung over the near shore.

They turned right off the road onto a grassy lane. Mary's house stood alone at the end of it. The compact two-story dwelling was built of fieldstone below and wood frame above. The styles seemed to represent different centuries. Rose bushes climbed up both sides of the arched doorway. As the car approached it, the wind picked up, and giant raindrops splattered on the windshield. As Robyn came to a stop on the gravel, the sky opened and rain pounded down.

"It's only a squall," she said. "This kind of bucketing happens often here. It shouldn't last long."

For a minute or two they sat silently watching the water sheet down the windows. The warm car and the drumming of rain were hypnotic, and he felt himself drifting off. Abruptly, she turned to face him across the seat, her expression determined.

"Something else has been bothering me."

"I can see that."

"We are barely acquainted," she began, "so this might come out sounding, well, ungrateful, but I don't intend it that way. I'm only trying to understand what happened today and why. Especially, why you did what you did." She pressed ahead. "I mean, here you are, a tourist on holiday in a foreign town where you don't know a soul. You're in a shop minding your own business when a robbery happens out of nowhere, and within two seconds you decide to confront a fleeing criminal who might be dangerous. You're still convalescing from serious wounds, and yet you get into a desperate fight with him on the floor."

"It should have been easier," he said. "I wasn't myself."

"No, you weren't! So, why on earth would you do such a thing without—without any thought about the consequences to yourself or anyone else? Until you got involved, only a glass case was broken, a little jewelry was taken—all covered by insurance—and no one was hurt." She paused to frown at him. "Why wouldn't you just choose to be a witness and let him go by? I have been trying to figure that out, and I just can't fathom it."

He returned her look without enthusiasm. "You want me to explain what I was thinking in those two seconds?"

"Yes! Please!"

"Well, nothing," he said, finally. "Not that I can recall, anyway. What he was doing wasn't right. I guess I wanted to make it right."

"An act of chivalry? A noble rescue of women in distress?"

“Look,” he said wearily. “I wasn’t trying to be noble. There wasn’t time to analyze it. Or read your insurance policy.” That last bit was childish, but he didn’t care.

He closed his eyes, regathering his wits. “Robyn, I can tell you’re a thinker. But don’t think too hard about this one. It was spur of the moment, that’s all. The thing just happened, and I went with it.” The whole discussion had become tiresome. “Truth is,” he added, “I never thought about you and your shop at all. The guy was a crook and getting away with it. That’s all I thought about.” He took a deep breath and let it out. If they didn’t mind getting robbed, that was their privilege. *Let them analyze this little drama on their own time.*

She continued to stare at him.

“The rain’s letting up,” he said. “And those pills have gone to my head. Can we go in now?”

Mary Clarke met them at the door, smiling. “I’m glad you were not washed away! Come in, do come in!”

When they stood dripping in the foyer, she said, “Welcome, Mr. Nyland. Welcome to our home! Oh my, your poor face has borne the brunt. And your arm—I hope it’s nothing serious. At least, we’re lucky our family has a direct link to the hospital.” She hugged Robyn and took a hand from each of them in hers. “What a day to remember, no? Thank God, no one was seriously hurt, not even that robber you subdued. I do hope they catch the other one, too.”

Brit said, “Thank you for putting me up a little while. Sorry about your shop.”

“Oh, that!” She waved it off. “Piffle. It’s only stuff and it’s all fixable. We have insurance anyway. But I must thank you sincerely for your valiant effort to save the merchandise. I wish I could say it included the Hope diamond and was truly worth your sacrifice.” Her laughter was infectious. “Both of you must fill me in further, but I have a fish stew prepared and you are no doubt famished. Let’s have at it!”

Brit had never tasted anything better in his life. After dinner he begged off further conversation, and Mary showed him to the upstairs sewing room with its sofa bed under the gable. Grubby as he felt, he could only take off his shoes and lie down, falling deeply asleep in seconds.

Another squall had come in, and rain coursed through the gutters with a muffled roar. The two women had taken seats with their herb tea before the cold hearth.

“Well, Robyn?”

“Well, what, Auntie?”

“I can always tell when you’re thinking hard, so what are you thinking?”

“Are you sure he’s asleep?”

“Quite sure. He was fairly drooping at the table.”

“Well, I think—I wish this were a simple case of robbers running off with some of your jewelry.”

“Ah well, hardly anything is that simple when you come down to it. Just when you think life is utterly routine, something or someone throws a spanner into it. But this Mr. Nyland seems to me like a straightforward young man who was just doing what he thought best at that moment. Young men are impulsive like that.”

“Apparently, it was a somewhat less-than-noble gesture. He admitted that he only cared about punishing the thief, not protecting you or the shop.”

“I venture the result is the same either way. For me it’s all in the deed.”

“But, considering his circumstances, it just baffles me why he got involved in *that* way.”

“What circumstances?”

Robyn explained what she and Dr. Quinn had witnessed. “He said that he’s still in the military. I suppose he’s a professional soldier and that’s probably why he reacted so violently. But he had every reason to just stand there and witness it.”

“Do you distrust his motives?”

“I distrust anybody who would volunteer for a war, especially Vietnam. You know how I feel about *that*. And he must have volunteered if he’s an officer.”

“Perhaps he was inducted first,” said Mary. Her expression was mild. “As for Vietnam, I’m remembering that we have our very own little war to feel indignant about.”

“Oh, of course.” Robyn blushed, put off balance. “I certainly don’t condone that one either.”

“Anyway, I don’t think we should guess at his motives for being in the military.”

“I’ll concede that. But it also struck me as a bit odd that he happened to be in the shop at just the critical moment. We didn’t even know he was there.”

“It was coincidence, don’t you think?”

“I don’t know—I suppose. He did say he was waiting to be a customer. Still, it would help if he could explain his behavior. Granted, when I pressed him about it, he seemed rather spent at that point.” Robyn took her aunt’s hand. “Auntie, I don’t mean to sound negative. It was very kind of you to invite him here. But aren’t you just a bit uneasy about it? I mean, considering how very little we know of him.”

“No, strangely not,” Mary said. “I just have a feeling about him. Yes, we both saw him pound a man’s head on the floor. But I doubt it was in his true nature to do that sort of thing. He seemed to take no particular pride in winning the fight, the way most men would.”

Robyn raised her palms. “Then how to explain it? After all, he chose a career that’s inherently violent. I think it *must* be in his

nature somewhere. And now, I'm wondering how he's going to justify this altercation to the police. After all, our robber was just trying to get away."

Mary shrugged, smiling. "I suppose we'll find out soon enough. But I'm not worried about it this minute, and neither should you be. Tomorrow I'll learn some more about him and how it all happened."

Mary put her hands on Robyn's arm and squeezed. "My dearest, ever since you were very little, you've wanted everything explained to you and tied up with a neat bow. Some things in life are not so clear, and this might be one of them. Why don't we just let it unfold as it will?"

Robyn smiled back at her. "It's a good thing I have a wise aunt to settle me."

"As long as you don't call me your wise *old* aunt. By the way, is Rupert coming over this weekend?"

"I think so. With all the excitement today, I forgot to call him."

"Rupert Lynch." She winked. "Now there's a young man coming up in the world. Good family, too."

Robyn's smile turned warier. "Not even wise, beloved aunts should be pushy."

The shipment from the American patron arrived by way of a small bottom trawler, home-ported in Dingle. The rendezvous with the 210-foot motorvessel *Hyperion* had occurred on a calm sea in fog some eighty miles off southwest Ireland on the Porcupine Bank. The yacht, owned by a Boston industrialist, was enroute from Marblehead to the Mediterranean, and ultimately to Piraeus near Athens. There, the owner's family planned to join it for a cruise in the Greek islands. Around 9:00 a.m., the *Hyperion's* crew lowered their twenty-four-foot launch over the side, and used it to transfer fourteen, plastic-wrapped wooden crates to the trawler, where they were lifted on board and stored in the empty hold.

After the meeting at sea, the trawler *Morrigan*, with its crew of six, fished for a week until the hold was filled with haddock. When it finally tied up at the loading dock near sundown on July fourth, a refrigerated truck was already waiting for it, half-loaded with fish from another Dingle boat. Three hours later all of the frozen haddock had been pushed ashore in hand carts. The unloading was completed after dark, and the trawler eased away to its berth nearby. The loaded truck departed at once for Dublin. After an hour the driver stopped at his uncle's farm west of Tralee to rest there until daylight. He parked the truck behind the barn and turned the engine off. He left the generator running to power the refrigeration unit, and made sure the cargo door was unlocked.

He awoke at six o'clock the following morning, had breakfast with his relatives, and was soon on his way again with the load of frozen haddock.

*(End of chapter 1. FINDINGS contains 36 chapters and 509 pages.)*