

The Final Detail

Harlan Coben

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CHAPTER 1

Myron lay sprawled next to a knee-knockinglly gorgeous brunette clad only in a Class-B-felony bikini, a tropical drink sans umbrella in one hand, the aqua clear Caribbean water lapping at his feet, the sand a dazzling white powder, the sky a pure blue that could only be God's blank canvas, the sun as soothing and rich as a Swedish masseur with a snifter of cognac, and he was intensely miserable.

The two of them had been on this island paradise for, he guessed, three weeks. Myron had not bothered counting the days. Neither, he imagined, had Terese. The island seemed as remote as Gilligan's—no phone, some lights, no motorcar, plenty of luxury, not much like Robinson Crusoe, and well, not as primitive as can be either. Myron shook his head. You can take the boy out of the television, but you can't take the television out of the boy.

At the horizon's midway point, slicing toward them and ripping a seam of white in the aqua-blue fabric, came the yacht. Myron saw it, and his stomach clenched.

He did not know where they were exactly, though the island did indeed have a name: St. Bacchanals. Yes, for real. It was a small patch of planet, owned by one of those mega-cruise lines that used one side of the island for passengers to swim and barbecue and enjoy a day on their "own personal island paradise." Personal. Just them and the

other twenty-five hundred *turistas* squeezed onto a short stretch of beach. Yep, personal, bacchanalike.

This side of the island, however, was quite different. There was only this one home, owned by the cruise line's CEO, a hybrid between a thatched hut and a plantation manor. The only person within a mile was a servant. Total island population: maybe thirty, all of whom worked as caretakers hired by the cruise line.

The yacht shut off its engine and drifted closer.

Terese Collins lowered her Bolle sunglasses and frowned. In three weeks no vessel except the mammoth cruise liners—they had subtle names like the *Sensation* or the *Ecstasy* or the *G Spot*—had ambled past their stretch of sand.

"Did you tell anybody where we were?" she asked.

"No."

"Maybe it's John."

John was the aforementioned CEO of said cruise line, a friend of Terese's.

"I don't think so," Myron said.

Myron had first met Terese Collins, well, a little more than three weeks ago. Terese was "on leave" from her high-profile job as prime-time anchorwoman for CNN. They both had been bullied into going to some charity function by well-meaning friends and had been immediately drawn to each other as though their mutual misery and pain were magnetic. It started as little more than a dare: Drop everything and flee. Just disappear with someone you found attractive and barely knew. Neither backed down, and twelve hours later they were in St. Maarten. Twenty-four hours after that they were here.

For Myron, a man who had slept with a total of four women in his entire life, who had never really experienced one-night stands even in the days when they were fashionable or ostensibly disease-free, who had never had sex purely for the physical sensation and without the anchors of love or commitment, the decision to flee felt surprisingly right.

He had told no one where he was going or for how long—mostly because he didn't have a clue himself. He'd called Mom and Dad and told them not to worry, a move tantamount to telling them to grow gills and breathe underwater. He'd sent Esperanza a fax and gave her

power of attorney over MB SportsReps, the sports agency they now partnered. He had not even called Win.

Terese was watching him. "You know who it is."

Myron said nothing. His heartbeat sped up.

The yacht came closer. A cabin door in the front opened, and as Myron feared, Win stepped out on deck. Panic squeezed the air out of him. Win was not one for casual drop-bys. If he was here, it meant something was very wrong.

Myron stood. He was still too far to yell, so he settled for a wave. Win gave a small nod.

"Wait a second," Terese said. "Isn't that the guy whose family owns Lock-Horne Securities?"

"Yes."

"I interviewed him once. When the market plunged. He has some long, pompous name."

"Windsor Horne Lockwood the third," Myron said.

"Right. Weird guy."

She should only know.

"Good-looking as all hell," Terese continued, "in that old-money, country-club, born-with-a-silver-golf-club-in-his-hands kinda way."

As though on cue, Win put a hand through the blond locks and smiled.

"You two have something in common," Myron said.

"What's that?"

"You both think he's good-looking as all hell."

Terese studied Myron's face. "You're going back." There was a hint of apprehension in her voice.

Myron nodded. "Win wouldn't have come otherwise."

She took his hand. It was the first tender moment between them in the three weeks since the charity ball. That might sound strange—lovers alone on an island, the sex constant, who had never shared a gentle kiss or a light stroke or soft words—but their relationship had been about forgetting and surviving: two desperate souls standing in the rubble with no interest in trying to rebuild a damn thing.

Terese had spent most days taking long walks by herself; he'd spent them sitting on the beach and exercising and sometimes reading. They met up for food, sleep, and sex. Other than that, they left each

other alone to—if not heal—at least stave off the blood flow. He could see that she too had been shattered, that some recent tragedy had struck her deep and hard and to the bone. But he never asked her what had happened. And she never asked him either.

An unspoken rule of their little folly.

The yacht stopped and dropped anchor. Win stepped down onto a motorized dinghy. Myron waited. He shifted his feet, bracing himself. When the dinghy was close enough to the shore, Win snapped off the motor.

“My parents?” Myron called out.

Win shook his head. “They’re fine.”

“Esperanza?”

Slight hesitation. “She needs your help.”

Win stepped gingerly into the water, almost as though he expected it to hold his weight. He was dressed in a white button-down oxford and Lilly Pulitzer shorts with colors loud enough to repel sharks. The Yacht Yuppie. His build was on the slight side, but his forearms looked like steel snakes coiling beneath the skin.

Terese stood as Win approached. Win admired the view without ogling. He was one of the few men Myron knew who could get away with that. Breeding. He took Terese’s hand and smiled. They exchanged pleasantries. Fake smiles and pointless bandies followed. Myron stood frozen, not listening. Terese excused herself and headed to the house.

Win carefully watched her saunter away. Then he said, “Quality *derrière*.”

“Would you be referring to me?” Myron asked.

Win kept his eyes keenly focused on the, er, target. “On television she’s always sitting behind that anchor desk,” he noted. “One would never guess that she had such a high-quality *derrière*.” He shook his head. “It’s a shame really.”

“Right,” Myron said. “Maybe she should stand a couple times during each broadcast. Twirl around a few times, bend over, something like that.”

“There you go.” Win risked a quick glance at Myron. “Take any action snapshots, perhaps a videotape?”

“No, that would be you,” Myron said, “or maybe an extra-perverse rock star.”

“Shame.”

“Yeah, shame, I got that.” Quality derrière? “So what’s wrong with Esperanza?”

Terese finally disappeared through the front door. Win sighed softly and turned toward Myron. “The yacht will take half an hour to refuel. We’ll leave then. Mind if I sit?”

“What happened, Win?”

He did not answer, choosing instead to sit on a chaise longue and ease back. He put his hands behind his head and crossed his ankles. “I’ll say this for you. When you decide to wig out, you do it in style.”

“I didn’t wig out. I just needed a break.”

“Uh-hmm.” Win looked off, and a realization smacked Myron in the head: He had hurt Win’s feelings. Strange but probably true. Win might be a blue-blooded, aristocratic sociopath, but hey, he was still human, sort of. The two men had been inseparable since college, yet Myron had run off without even calling. In many ways Win had no one else.

“I meant to call you,” Myron said weakly.

Win kept still.

“But I knew if there was a problem, you’d be able to find me.” That was true. Win could find a Hoffa needle in a Judge Crater haystack.

Win waved a hand. “Whatever.”

“So what’s wrong with Esperanza?”

“Clu Haid.”

Myron’s first client, a right-handed relief pitcher in the twilight of his career. “What about him?”

“He’s dead,” Win said.

Myron felt his legs buckle a bit. He let himself land on the chaise.

“Shot three times in his own abode.”

Myron lowered his head. “I thought he’d straightened himself out.”

Win said nothing.

“So what does Esperanza have to do with this?”

Win looked at his watch. “Right about now,” he said, “she is in all likelihood being arrested for his murder.”

“What?”

Win said nothing again. He hated to repeat himself.

"They think Esperanza killed him?"

"Good to see your vacation hasn't dulled your sharp powers of deduction." Win tilted his face toward the sun.

"What sort of evidence do they have?"

"The murder weapon, for one. Bloodstains. Fibers. Do you have any sunblock?"

"But how . . . ?" Myron studied his friend's face. As usual, it gave away nothing. "Did she do it?"

"I have no idea."

"Did you ask her?"

"Esperanza does not wish to speak with me."

"What?"

"She does not wish to speak with you either."

"I don't understand," Myron said. "Esperanza wouldn't kill anyone."

"You're quite sure about that, are you?"

Myron swallowed. He had thought that his recent experience would help him understand Win better. Win had killed too. Often, in fact. Now that Myron had done likewise, he thought that there would be a fresh bond. But there wasn't. Just the opposite, in fact. Their shared experience was opening a whole new chasm.

Win checked his watch. "Why don't you go get packed?"

"There's nothing I need to bring."

Win motioned to the house. Terese stood there, watching them silently. "Then say good-bye to La Derrière and let's be on our way."

CHAPTER 2

Terese had put on a robe. She leaned against the doorway and waited.

Myron was not sure what to say. He settled for "Thank you."

She nodded.

"Do you want to come along?" he asked.

"No."

"You can't stay here forever."

"Why not?"

Myron thought about it for a moment. "You know anything about boxing?"

Terese sniffed the air. "Do I detect the distinct odor of an upcoming sports metaphor?"

"I'm afraid so," he said.

"Ugh. Go on."

"This whole thing is sort of like a boxing match," Myron began. "We've been ducking and diving and weaving and trying to keep away from our opponent. But we can only do that for so long. Eventually we have to throw a punch."

She made a face. "Christ, that was lame."

"Spur of the moment."

"And inaccurate," she added. "Try this. We've tasted our opponent's power. It dropped us to the canvas. Somehow we managed to

get back to our feet. But our legs are still rubbery, and our eyes are still hazed over. Another big blow and the fight will be over. Better to keep dancing. Better to avoid getting hit and hope to go the distance.”

Hard to argue.

They fell into silence.

Myron said, “If you come up to New York, give me a call and—”

“Right.”

Silence.

“We know what would happen,” Terese said. “We’d meet up for drinks, maybe hop back in the sack, but it won’t be the same. We’ll both be uncomfortable as all hell. We’ll pretend that we’ll get together again, and we won’t even exchange Christmas cards. We’re not lovers, Myron. We’re not even friends. I don’t know what the hell we are, but I’m grateful.”

A bird cawed. The small waves hummed their soft song. Win stood by the shore, his arms crossed, his body frighteningly patient.

“Have a good life, Myron.”

“You too,” he replied.

He and Win took the dinghy to the yacht. A crew member offered Myron his hand. Myron grabbed it and hoisted himself on board. The yacht took off. Myron stood on the deck and watched the shore grow smaller. He was leaning on a teakwood rail. Teakwood. Everything on this vessel was dark and rich and teak.

“Here,” Win said.

Myron turned. Win tossed him a Yoo-Hoo, Myron’s favorite drink, kind of a cross between a soda pop and chocolate milk. Myron smiled. “I haven’t had one of these in three weeks.”

“The withdrawal pains,” Win said. “They must have been agony.”

“No TV and no Yoo-Hoo. It’s a wonder I survived.”

“Yes, you practically lived like a monk,” Win said. Then, looking back at the island, he added, “Well, like a monk who gets laid a lot.”

They were both stalling.

“How long until we get back?” Myron asked.

“Eight hours on the boat,” Win said. “A chartered jet is waiting at St. Bart’s. The flight should take about four hours.”

Myron nodded. He shook the can and popped it. He took a deep swig and turned back toward the water.

"I'm sorry," he said.

Win ignored the statement. Or maybe it was enough for him. The yacht picked up speed. Myron closed his eyes and let the water and gentle spray caress his face. He thought a moment about Clu Haid. Clu hadn't trusted agents—"a small step below pedophile" was how he put it—so he asked Myron to negotiate his contract, even though Myron was merely a first-year student at Harvard Law. Myron did it. He liked it. And MB SportsReps soon followed.

Clu was a lovable screwup. He unapologetically pursued wine, women, and song—not to mention any high he could get his hands/nose/veins on. Clu never met a party he didn't like. He was a red-headed big guy with a teddy bear gut, handsome in a boyish way, an almost old-fashioned cad, and immensely charming. Everyone loved Clu. Even Bonnie, his long-suffering wife. Their marriage was a boomerang. She'd throw him out, he'd spin in the air for a while, and then she'd catch him on the return.

Clu had seemed to be slowing down a bit. After all the times Myron had gotten him out of trouble—drug suspensions, drunk driving charges, whatever—Clu had gone puffy, reached the end of his charm reign. The Yankees had traded for him, putting him on strict probation, giving him one last chance at redemption. Clu had stayed in rehab for the first time. He'd been attending the AA meetings. His fastball was back up in the nineties.

Win interrupted his thoughts. "Do you want to hear what happened?"

"I'm not sure," Myron said.

"Oh?"

"I screwed up last time. You warned me, but I didn't listen. A lot of people died because of me." Myron felt the tears come to his eyes. He pushed them back down. "You have no idea how bad it ended."

"Myron?"

He turned to his friend. Their eyes met.

"Get over yourself," Win said.

Myron made a noise—one part sob, two parts chuckle. "I hate when you coddle me."

"Perhaps you would prefer it if I served up some useless platitudes," Win said. He swirled his liquor and tasted a bit. "Please select one of the following and then we'll move on: Life is hard; life is cruel;

life is random; sometimes good people are forced to do bad things; sometimes innocent people die; yes, Myron, you screwed up, but you'll do better this time; no, Myron, you didn't screw up, it wasn't your fault; everyone has a breaking point and now you know yours. Can I stop now?"

"Please."

"Then let us begin with Clu Haid."

Myron nodded, took another swig of Yoo-Hoo, emptied the can.

"Everything seemed to be going swimmingly for our old college chum," Win said. "He was pitching well. Domestic bliss seemed to reign. He was passing his drug tests. He was making curfew with hours to spare. That all changed two weeks ago when a surprise drug test produced a positive result."

"For what?"

"Heroin."

Myron shook his head.

"Clu kept his mouth shut to the media," Win said, "but privately he claimed the test was fixed. That someone had tampered with his food or some such nonsense."

"How do you know that?"

"Esperanza told me."

"He went to Esperanza?"

"Yes, Myron. When Clu failed the test, he naturally looked to his agent for help."

Silence.

"Oh," Myron said.

"I don't want go into the fiasco that is MB SportsReps right now. Suffice to say that Esperanza and Big Cyndi did the best they could. But it's your agency. Clients hired you. Many have been more than unhappy by your sudden disappearance."

Myron shrugged. He would probably care one day. "So Clu failed the test."

"And he was immediately suspended. The media moved in for the kill. He lost all his endorsement deals. Bonnie threw him out. The Yankees disowned him. With nowhere else to turn, Clu repeatedly visited your office. Esperanza told him that you were unavailable. His temper rose with each visit."

Myron closed his eyes.

“Four days ago Clu confronted Esperanza outside the office. At the Kinney parking lot, to be more exact. They had words. Harsh and rather loud words. According to witnesses, Clu punched her in the mouth.”

“What?”

“I saw Esperanza the next day. Her jaw was swollen. She could barely talk, though she still managed to tell me to mind my own business. My understanding is more damage would have been inflicted had Mario and several other parking attendants not pulled them apart. Supposedly Esperanza made threats of the I’ll-get-you-for-this-you-limp-dick-son-of-a-bitch variety as they were being held back.”

Myron shook his head. This made no sense.

“The next afternoon Clu was found dead in the apartment he rented in Fort Lee,” Win continued. “The police learned about the earlier altercation. They were then issued a slew of search warrants and found the murder weapon, a nine millimeter, in your office.”

“My office?”

“MB’s office, yes.”

Myron shook his head again. “It had to be a plant.”

“Yes, perhaps. There were also fibers that matched the carpeting in Clu’s apartment.”

“The fibers are meaningless. Clu was in the office. He probably dragged them there.”

“Yes, perhaps,” Win said again. “But the specks of blood in the trunk of the company car might be harder to explain.”

Myron almost fell over. “Blood in the Taurus?”

“Yes.”

“And the police confirmed the blood as Clu’s?”

“Same blood type. The DNA test will take several weeks.”

Myron could not believe what he was hearing. “Had Esperanza been using the car?”

“That very day. According to the E-Z Pass records, the car crossed the Washington Bridge back into New York within an hour of the murder. And as I said, he was killed in Fort Lee. The apartment is maybe two miles from the bridge.”

“This is crazy.”

Win said nothing.

"What's her motive?" Myron asked.

"The police don't have a solid one yet. But several are being offered."

"Such as?"

"Esperanza was a new partner at MB SportsReps. She'd been left in charge. The company's inaugural client was about to walk out the door."

Myron frowned. "Pretty flimsy motive."

"He had also recently assaulted her. Perhaps Clu blamed her for all the bad things that were happening to him. Perhaps she wanted vengeance. Who knows?"

"You said something before about her not talking to you."

"Yes."

"So you asked Esperanza about the charges?"

"Yes."

"And?"

"And she told me that she had the matter under control," Win said. "And she told me not to contact you. That she did not wish to speak with you."

Myron looked puzzled. "Why not?"

"I haven't a clue."

He pictured Esperanza, the Hispanic beauty he had met in the days when she wrestled professionally under the moniker Little Pocahontas. A lifetime ago. She had been with MB SportsReps since its inception—first as a secretary and now that she'd graduated law school, as a full-fledged partner.

"But I'm her best friend," Myron said.

"As I am well aware."

"So why would she say something like that?"

Win guessed the question was rhetorical. He kept silent.

The island was out of sight now. In every direction there was nothing but the churning warm blue of the Atlantic.

"If I hadn't run away," Myron began.

"Myron?"

"What?"

"You're whining again. I cannot handle whining."

Myron nodded and leaned against the teakwood.

"Any thoughts?" Win asked.

"She'll talk to me," Myron said. "Count on it."

"I just tried to call her."

"And?"

"No answer."

"Did you try Big Cyndi?"

"She now rooms with Esperanza."

No surprise. "What's today?" Myron asked.

"Tuesday."

"Big Cyndi still bounces at Leather-N-Lust. She might be there."

"During the day?"

Myron shrugged. "Sexual deviancy has no off hours."

"Thank God," Win said.

They fell into silence, the ship gently rocking them.

Win squinted into the sun. "Beautiful, no?"

Myron nodded.

"Must be sick of it after all this time."

"Very," Myron said.

"Come below deck. I think you'll be pleased."