



Murder at Battle Rock Lighthouse

Book 19

PREVIEW

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Chapter I

Tuesday, May 19, 1931

Lowan's rental car hummed along the country road, its tires crunching over patches of gravel where the pavement had given way to erosion. He kept both hands on the wheel, staring at the road ahead. Marx occupied the passenger seat, quieter than usual. Neither needed to say anything.

The sky spread out above them, wide and gray, with low, dirty clouds. Marx slouched and faced the side window. Seagulls whirled. Scrubby clumps of pale grass poked through the sand at the edges of the road. The cooler air and heavy smell of salt and fish signaled their proximity to the Atlantic.

The road narrowed. They had left Milford Falls behind half an hour earlier. Lowan slowed for another curve. The road twisted through pine forests and marshland before opening into another sandy expanse. A sign flashed past: *Elwood Penitentiary – 3 Miles*. The engine buzzed on, the wheels slipping in drifts of sand covering the road. To the left, the prison sat like a fortress on a hill, its stone walls mottled with lichen. Beyond the double row of barbed wire fences, watchtowers silhouetted against the overcast sky.

Marx mumbled, looking past the wire fences. Guards patrolled. Large dogs walked with them along the fenceline. The ground for

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a mile around was nothing but barren sand and rocks. All trees and brush had been eliminated, preventing any potential escapees from finding refuge. Lowan felt Marx's mood darken and sensed his thoughts. They'd both sent plenty of men there. Some would spend years inside the thick stone walls. Others would never leave.

No one knew how the prison had gotten its name. The building itself was ancient, and any records of its construction had been destroyed in a fire decades earlier. Pretentious columns and traces of classical architecture hinted at a grander initial purpose. Whether Elwood had been the name of the architect, the original owner, or the first warden, no one could guess. Those confined there more often referred to the limestone fortress as Hellwood.

Lowan shivered and turned his attention back to the road. He passed the intersection leading toward the prison. The penitentiary wasn't their destination.

The road curved to the left and climbed upward. The engine rumbled, and he gave it more gas. Leaving the prison behind, the atmosphere felt less oppressive. At the top, the land dropped off below them, and the ocean broke into view—gray and restless, waves slapping against jagged rocks. Sunlight glared, broken into patches on the turbulent water. A peninsula stuck out like a crooked finger, flanked by cliffs and a few wind-bent trees. The road turned rough, first into gravel, and then sandy dirt.

At the end of the peninsula, the Battle Rock Lighthouse jutted up from a rocky outcropping, connected to the mainland by a cement causeway. The terrain turned uneven, loose sand and rocks. Lowan maneuvered carefully, fighting the wheel to keep on course. The road all but disappeared. Ahead, the tower grew tall and thin, a white splinter against the gray water. Streaks of rust and salt gave it an unintended striped appearance. Glass enclosed the lantern room at the top, the beacon dark in the morning light. A small keeper's cottage clung to its base, the shutters closed.

Lowan parked as close as he could manage. At this point, the peninsula was already too narrow to turn the car around. Water crashed and sprayed over the boulders. He climbed out and turned

up his collar against the wind, shockingly cold for late May. A blast of salty air stung his eyes.

Gulls squawked. Marx stepped out and slammed his door. Wind whipped his coat against him, and he grabbed his hat. He looked up at the glint of sunlight on the lamp room glass.

Water surged on both sides of the causeway, slapping the rocks with rhythmic force. Flecked with moss and algae, and slick with sea spray, the cement walkway was barely wide enough for two people to pass. No railings. Lowan watched the churning water, sickly greenish gray and thick with debris, foam, and tangled strings of algae.

Marx touched his arm. The quiet type, he often avoided speaking whenever it wasn't necessary. At the moment, his offer was clear without words. Marx respected the significant age difference between them. Decades, apparently, though there were several centuries more that Lowan hoped he would never have to explain.

He let Marx take his elbow. Accepting help bruised his pride, but he recognized the practicality of the offer. The causeway was slippery and treacherous. They stepped forward together, pressing against the steady wind.

Water sprayed their faces. Marx hunched down and muttered. "Wouldn't want to cross this in a storm . . ."

"It would be—" Algae squished under Lowan's shoe. He recoiled from it and wrinkled his nose, then paid more attention to the walkway while Marx's firm grip steadied him. "Deadly. Even at high tide . . ."

The lighthouse loomed ahead, streaks of rust staining the white paint. At the base, the keeper's cottage seemed to crouch over the stone foundation. The shutters were closed. Weathered clapboard siding was flecked with algae, and a thin wisp of smoke trailed from the chimney. Seagulls perched on the slate roof.

Before they reached the door, it opened abruptly. A woman stood in the doorway, gray hair pulled into a bun, eyes rimmed with red. Behind her, a young man with a pale face fidgeted and peered out.

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“Are you . . . you’re not . . .” The woman’s voice cracked. She breathed hard, holding back a sob. “You’re not the sheriff.”

“No.” Lowan stepped forward. The force of her emotions grated on his nerves. Marx released his arm, but stayed close. The rocky path leading from the causeway to the door was also wet and slippery. “The museum sent me,” Lowan explained, “to pick up an artifact. A bell—”

The woman stifled a squeaky sob and moved back from the door. The man behind her shifted from one foot to the other, but nodded and motioned them inside.

Lowan stepped through, with Marx behind him. The interior was dim, a small kitchen lit by an oil lamp on the table. A kettle simmered on the woodstove. The woman sank into one of the chairs at the table and buried her face in her hands. The young man, in his thirties, with shaky hands and salt flecks in his sun-bleached hair, stood near the next door and made coughing noises. He tugged on his oversized oilskin coat and shuffled his scuffed boots on the floor.

“What’s going on?” Marx asked. He addressed the man, who appeared less distraught than the woman. “We only came to pick up an old ship’s bell, to take it back to the museum.”

“That’ll . . . probably . . . have to wait.” The man held his arm across his stomach, as if he was about to be ill. His voice wavered. “I . . . I called the coast guard station on the wireless, twenty minutes ago, and asked them to send someone. We were just waiting, and I tried to make coffee . . .”

“What happened?” Lowan asked more firmly, making strong eye contact. The images in the man’s mind whirled in disorder. He had something to hide. But the simplest answer stood out.

Death.



Chapter II

“ . . . I didn’t hear him fall.” The man gulped and looked toward the closed door. His face faded pale white. He bit his lip and ran a rough hand through his hair. “Mrs. Harwick found him twenty minutes ago, and I heard her yell. And then I called on the wireless . . .”

Marx pushed the door open and brushed past him. He returned a moment later, his expression grim. He pointed to the other chair at the table, implying an order. “What’s your name?”

“Cal.” He sank into the chair, still fidgeting. “Calvin Dorsey. I’m the assistant keeper.”

“And that man in there?”

“That’s the keeper.” His voice went flat, and he choked on a nervous laugh. “*Was* the keeper. Thomas Harwick.”

The woman beside him shuddered and hid her face in her shawl. Lowan stepped closer and touched her shoulder, projecting a sense of calm. He wanted to see what Dorsey was hiding, but her overwhelming emotions blinded him to anything else. “And your name?”

“Eleanor Harwick.” She rubbed her eyes with calloused hands. Gray strands pulled loose from her bun. “We’ve lived here together for over thirty years . . .” After one more choking sob, she let her breath out slowly. Her hands steadied, but the strain of holding herself together deepened the lines around her eyes. “He never would have fallen down the stairs. He went up and down them

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every day for thirty years. This couldn't have been an accident." She focused on Dorsey, boring into him with a suspicious glare.

Dorsey shrank back and shivered. "You can't think I would . . . what motive could I possibly have?"

Her shoulders trembled again, but she sat up straight. The oil lamp on the table flickered. "Did you think you would get his job?"

"No!" Dorsey started to rise from the chair, but Marx motioned him back down. He turned on Marx instead. "Who are you, anyway?"

Marx showed his badge. "Police. Detective Lieutenant Marx, Milford Falls. This is technically out of my jurisdiction, but I'll stay until the sheriff or the coast guard gets here. Is there anyone else in the lighthouse?"

"No," Mrs. Harwick said. "Just the three of us."

Dorsey didn't disagree.

"I'd like to make sure." Marx glanced toward the doorway he'd already gone through, then to another at the opposite side of the room.

"I will search," Lowan offered. He had one advantage that Marx didn't—the ability to feel people's presences. No one could hide from him.

"You want to go up all those stairs?" Marx asked.

Lowan paused long enough to consider the options. "I will search the cottage."

"Ha." Marx turned away and disappeared through the doorway. His footsteps faded.

"Is there anywhere that someone might hide?" Lowan checked the pantry first, then stepped to the next door and pushed it open. The hinges creaked. It led to a short hall with three doors.

"No." Mrs. Harwick walked with him and pointed. "Our bedroom, the assistant keeper's room, and the back door."

He opened the first door. The bedroom was tidy, but lived in. A patchwork quilt covered the bed, and a scuffed wardrobe with cloudy mirrored doors stood in the corner. Papers covered a small table under the window. Sensing no one, he moved on. Dorsey's room was smaller, a narrow bed with a rumpled blanket, a similar

wardrobe, and an old trunk. Looking for hidden intruders didn't give him a license to search through belongings in areas too small to conceal a person.

In the hall near the back door, Lowan paused. The door was bolted from the inside without any signs of a forced entry, but a trail of damp salt on the floor indicated that someone had come in this way recently. "Has anyone used this door within the past two hours?"

"Not me." She tugged on her shawl and glanced back down the hall toward the kitchen, where Dorsey peered through the doorway at them. "Did you go outside this morning?"

Dorsey's eyebrows shot up. He sucked in his breath as if he was about to answer. Then he bolted.



Marx stepped through the service room, past a workbench organized with tools, supplies, and logbooks. The next doorway led to a spiral staircase. A man lay sprawled at the bottom, his limbs contorted and his hair disheveled. He had a large bump on the back of his head, though Marx couldn't tell whether the impact had killed him, or if a broken neck or spine had done the job.

Either way, the results were final. He bent down and patted the man's clothing, careful not to move the body. The man's body was already cold. Nothing stood out in any accessible pockets. Other than that, he didn't want to disturb potential evidence. This wasn't his case.

He stepped over the body. His shoes echoed on the iron steps. Around and around, the air grew colder as he climbed. He passed narrow windows at intervals. Wind pressed against the glass panes. Aching crept through the muscles in his legs. Wary of leaving fingerprints, he didn't touch the railing.

At the next window, he stopped to catch his breath. The view, a thin sliver of ocean, didn't hold his attention for long. His knees throbbed as if he'd already walked up five floors. He checked that

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he still had his gun, listened for any sounds nearby, then kept going.

Minutes later, he ducked under a low point in the ceiling and climbed into a small room, arranged almost like a living room. A comfortable chair with an end table and oil lamp, stacks of books, and a desk with a wireless receiver. More narrow windows, evenly spaced, beamed with daylight. A central column ran from the ceiling to the floor, a continuation of the middle support in the spiral staircase below. He pulled himself up the ladder.

At the top, the view made him lightheaded. The ocean stretched out in an endless expanse of choppy, restless waves. The sky unfolded like he'd never seen it before, close enough to touch. Clouds gathered and swirled in bold shapes and patterns. He snapped himself out of the trance and circled the room, completely enclosed in glass. Facing the land, Elwood stood out on a hill like a miniature model in a diorama. A tiny car navigated along the peninsula.

A door led to a catwalk. He pulled it open and leaned out, startled by the harsh wind that tugged at his hat. He couldn't bring himself to step outside, but the quick check assured him that no one was hidden there. A thin metal bar served as a railing, waist high, and the only exit in that direction was straight down. He pulled the door shut and turned around.

Irrelevant to his search for intruders, the lamp intrigued him anyway. He'd imagined a normal lamp. Instead, the massive glass dome was formed in an odd series of symmetrical ripples and lens-like bubbles designed to amplify and focus the light. The whole thing was situated on a geared brass turntable, the mechanism connected to weights on chains running through the central column like a five-story cuckoo clock.

Someone shouted from below. Marx scrambled back down the ladder.



Chapter III

Dorsey dashed through the kitchen, his boots thudding on the floor. He threw the front door open and leapt outside, crossing the rocky inclined path to the causeway in three strides.

Lowan stepped outside, careful of his footing. If he tried to match Dorsey's frantic pace, he risked a serious fall. A wave hit the causeway, sending a spray of dirty water ten feet into the air. Dorsey rushed through it. Down the rocky incline, Lowan reached the causeway. He watched the rough waves, and the wet, slippery cement. More water sloshed over the causeway, leaving bits of slimy algae behind.

Beyond the causeway, Dorsey climbed the rocky path up the edge of the peninsula, his boots slipping on the sand. The only parked car was Lowan's, and he hadn't left the key in it. A second car pulled in, featuring an official seal on the door. Sheriff Baker stepped out, broad-shouldered and unhurried. He adjusted his hat against the wind. The door slammed. Dorsey skidded back and hunched down like a cornered animal.

"Stop him!" Lowan shouted and waved, but couldn't be sure that his voice would carry over the crashing water.

When Baker stepped down the sandy slope toward the causeway, Dorsey backed closer to the edge. His hostile posture gave him away. An argument occurred, inaudible at a distance. Baker put his hand on the holstered gun at his hip. Dorsey put both

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hands up and slunk back across the causeway. Baker followed, but not closely enough that Dorsey could turn on him.

Wet and shivering, Lowan retreated into the kitchen and waited. Mrs. Harwick pulled the coffee pot off the burner. From the next doorway, Marx's footsteps clattered on the iron stairs.

Dorsey trudged in, his hands raised. He cast a scowl across the room and moved into the corner, his back against the wall.

Baker was close behind him, his broad shoulders squared and his voice authoritative. "What's going on here? Half an hour ago, I got a call from the coast guard that someone had died from falling down the stairs."

"I didn't do it." Dorsey grumbled. Despite his anger and fear, Lowan still sensed the truth from him.

"Then why did you run?" Baker asked. He glanced toward the next door, where Marx's footsteps echoed.

"I—I just panicked," Dorsey stammered. "I thought you'd blame me, and I didn't want to stick around for that."

"For the moment," Lowan said, "the only evidence against you is your own guilty behavior."

Marx burst in from the side doorway, panting hard. He gripped the frame to hold himself up. "What happened?"

"Lieutenant." Baker's voice rose. "You're outside of your territory. What are you doing here?"

"I'm with him." Unable to catch his breath, Marx nodded toward Lowan.

"I was hired by the museum," Lowan explained. "I was supposed to pick up a historic ship's bell and return it to them. Marx had the day off and agreed to accompany me. We arrived only a few moments ago."

Baker didn't take his eyes off Dorsey. "And the dead man?"

"In here," Marx panted. "He has a bump on his head. I don't know if it's from falling down the stairs, or if somebody conked him first and then gave him a shove. We searched the rest of the lighthouse, and there's nobody else here." When Marx looked to Lowan for confirmation, his face finally began regaining its

normal color, and his grip on the doorframe loosened. "I just ran down all the steps."

"I searched the cottage while Marx searched the tower," Lowan said. "There were no hidden intruders, and the back door was locked from the inside, but I found damp footprints in the hall. Mrs. Harwick denied that they were hers. When we asked Dorsey if he had gone outside this morning, he ran."

Baker turned on Dorsey. "Did you go outside this morning?"

"Is that a crime?" Dorsey put his hands down.

"If it isn't, why did you run?"

"Because I don't want to get blamed for something I didn't do!"

"Did you go outside?"

Dorsey looked away. "Yes. I went outside to smoke. Mrs. Harwick doesn't like anyone smoking in the house, so I do it outside. Is that a problem?"

"Why didn't you just say so in the first place?" Baker stood over Dorsey and looked down at him.

"Because you've already made up your mind that I did it." Dorsey crossed his arms and glared defiantly. "What's it matter what I say?"

Baker grumbled and signaled for Marx. "Lieutenant, make sure everyone stays put. I'm going to have a look around."

Marx moved in front of the door. Baker's footsteps thudded into the next room, toward the tower. Lowan approached Dorsey and made eye contact. Dorsey sneered, but fidgeted.

"If you did not kill Mr. Harwick, what are you hiding?" Lowan watched the answers flicker through Dorsey's mind. Shadowy night meetings, signaling a rowboat with a flashlight, exchanging money. Money he desperately needed to care for an invalid sister.

"Nothing." Dorsey turned away. "I didn't kill Harwick, and I'm not hiding anything."

Rather than press him further, Lowan faced Mrs. Harwick. She had finished making the coffee and sat at the table with her hands wrapped around a chipped mug. "The ship's bell that I was hired to collect, do you know where it is?"

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“It was in the service room.” She pointed, unwilling to look in the direction where her husband had died. “The room at the bottom, before you go up the stairs. There’s a worktable with tools, and a lot of miscellaneous things end up there. The bell is heavy, so it was placed on the floor next to the table. A man, a historian, came out here two days ago to see if it was the real one. He said it was. I don’t know why he didn’t take it back with him then.”

“Thank you.” Lowan left Marx in charge of the kitchen and stepped into the service room. He approached the worktable.

Sheriff Baker stalked around the room, surveying the body at the bottom of the stairs from various angles. “Don’t step there.”

“What?” Lowan stopped and looked down. A bloodstain stood out on the floor in front of the workbench, with a smear pointing toward the steps. “Oh.”

“Who are you, anyway?” Baker stepped closer, taking his usual authoritative posture. “You work for the museum?”

“I am a private investigator.” He showed his credentials. “The museum hired me to transport a valuable artifact. This is not exactly one of my ordinary duties, but their chief watchman was too busy to pick it up himself, and it sounded like an easy enough task. I frequently work with the lieutenant, including a case involving greyhounds last week. Thank you for returning my radio tracking device after that car accident in the woods.”

“Oh.” Baker nodded. They hadn’t met in person, but after Lowan and Marx had tracked down a murderer hiding at a greyhound track beyond the city limits, the sheriff’s office had handled the final details and cleanup. “This artifact you were supposed to pick up . . .?”

“A ship’s bell. Specifically, the bell from Captain Horatio Milford’s own ship, the *Providence Star*, which sank off the coast in a battle with pirates in 1631.”

Baker snorted. “I bet that’s got all the local history experts in a tizzy. How much does something like that go for?”

“Fifteen hundred was the rough estimate. But the competition among local collectors, museums, and historical societies is likely to be fierce. Especially with the tricentennial celebration

approaching.” Though the amount seemed small in comparison with other artifacts he’d handled recently, it still exceeded a year’s salary for the average workman. Or the price of a new luxury car. “Mrs. Harwick said that an expert already authenticated it.”

“That’s enough for a motive. Nothing to sneeze at, anyway.” Baker bent over the body and checked his clothing. “Here’s something odd. The heels of his shoes are scuffed, like the body was dragged.”

“Motive?” Lowan studied the bloodstain on the floor. It didn’t look like footprints tracked from where the body had fallen. The way it was smeared indicated that the bleeding man had fallen here, then been moved away.

Without stepping closer, he evaluated the odds and ends on, around, and under the worktable. No bell. Despite the clutter, the tools were neatly arranged: screwdrivers, hammers, pliers, saws, files, and a large collection of painting supplies and window cleaning equipment. Small barrels of lamp oil were stacked to the side. Everything had a specific place, the tools all outlined on a pegboard. One outline was missing the corresponding hammer.

An extra hammer was lying on the floor under the workbench.

“Sheriff . . .” Lowan pointed to the misplaced tool. “Might this be the murder weapon?”

With sharp focus in his eyes, Baker stepped forward and bent down. He wrapped the hammer in his handkerchief and picked it up gently, holding it under the light from the window. Dark stains covered the steel head, with a strand of hair sticking to it. “In the words of our lieutenant, I’d say somebody conked him first, then dragged him halfway up the stairs and gave him a shove.”



Chapter IV

Lowan followed Baker back into the kitchen. The wind had died down a little, but not by much, and the heat from the cookstove left the room stuffy. Mrs. Harwick still sat at the table, staring at an unspecific spot on the wall. Marx stood in front of the door, while Dorsey fidgeted in the corner.

Baker approached Dorsey with his shoulders squared, using his bulk and proximity to herd him toward the table. He pointed. “Sit.”

Dorsey glared, but slunk across the room and plopped himself into a vacant chair, perching on the edge. “What?”

“This is now a homicide investigation,” Baker said. “I need to know what happened from yesterday evening through the whole night. You start.” He stood over Dorsey and waited.

“I started the shift, like usual.” Dorsey’s eyes flicked toward the service room door. His tone remained surly, but he answered. “Around five thirty, I carried a night’s supply of lamp oil up the stairs. That took several trips—”

“You still use an oil lamp for this?”

“Yeah.” Dorsey rolled his eyes. “Some of the more *important* lighthouses have been switched to electric lights within the past decade. Battle Rock isn’t a priority for fancy upgrades. Elwood has electric—high voltage, even. You’d think it wouldn’t be that hard to run a line down the hill, but no, the prison and the lighthouse service don’t want to make a deal. So I carried the oil up the stairs, and up the ladder to the top. Then I cleaned the Fresnel lens,

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trimmed the wick, checked the fuel reservoir, wound the weights, washed the windows, and recorded the wind, visibility, and sea conditions in the logbook. At sunset, I lit the lamp. I stayed in the lantern room for half an hour to make sure everything was working like it's supposed to, then I went down to the watch room. That's just under the lantern room, and not so drafty, but close enough to keep an eye on things."

"You stayed there the whole night?"

"No. I checked the lantern several more times, refilled the oil, rewound the weights that keep the geared turntable turning, things like that. At two o'clock, Mr. Harwick came up and took over."

"That was two o'clock in the morning?" Baker made notes in his notebook.

"Yeah."

"And then what did you do?"

"What did you think I would do at two o'clock in the morning? I went to bed. That's all."

"Did you hear anything after that?"

"No. I like to sleep on nights when we don't have to run the foghorn, because sitting on top of that all night is enough to drive anyone mad. I went to bed. I fell asleep. When I woke up in the morning, I went out for a smoke. I'd like another one now." He sent a resentful glance in Mrs. Harwick's direction, since she prevented him from smoking in the house.

"There is something more," Lowan said. The only untruth he'd sensed from Dorsey involved going outside. He'd met someone. "If you know anything else about this . . ."

"I don't." Dorsey's face twisted. His thoughts showed the truth. Lighthouse keepers, like many government jobs, weren't overpaid. A little rumrunning—harmless, he thought—funded his sister's lifesaving medical care. He'd do anything to protect that secret. "I don't know anything else that might help you. I swear."

Baker let the subject drop and turned to Mrs. Harwick. "What do you know of your husband's movements last night and this morning?"

“I felt him get up around two o’clock, then I went back to sleep. It’s normal, this routine, and we don’t usually start early, since so much of the work is carried out at night. I started to make breakfast around eight.” Her voice remained stoic and steady, but she paused for breath often. “He usually ate when he finished his morning work, then took a nap. At first, I wasn’t alarmed when he was late. I thought he was just spending extra time cleaning. With the salt and the moisture and the soot from the lamp, there’s always so much to clean or paint. By nine, I went to check, and—” Her words broke off abruptly and she looked away.

“Was Dorsey with you?”

“He came immediately when I shouted. Then he went to use the wireless. That’s in the watch room. I went to the kitchen and stayed there. I thought he’d fallen . . .”

“There’s evidence . . . it was murder.” Baker stopped short of describing the bloody hammer. A grieving widow didn’t need the worst of the gruesome details so soon. “It looks like the body was moved to make us think he’d fallen. Could someone else have gotten in?”

“I slept soundly, so I wouldn’t have heard anyone. And we don’t usually lock the doors. There’s no need, when it’s just the three of us on what’s practically an island.” She faced Dorsey. “Did you hear anyone?”

“No.” Dorsey flinched, and his fidgeting worsened. “Why? Why would anyone kill him?”

“The bell,” Lowan said. “It was not in the service room. It is worth a fair amount of money, possibly enough to kill for.” He faced Mrs. Harwick again. “How did the bell come into your possession?”

She gripped the mug tighter. Her eyes were distant, but alert. “A freighter went down off the coast here over the winter, but that wasn’t a good time for salvage operations. The salvage crew started working on saving whatever cargo they could about three weeks ago, and they used the lighthouse as a staging point. It was less than a mile out, and easier for them than hauling their gear back and forth to the city every day.”

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“And they found the bell?”

“Not from the freighter.” She nodded. “They found a much older wreck in the same place. When they brought back the bell, the inscription said it was from the *Providence Star*. Captain Milford’s ship, who founded Milford Falls in 1631. I can see why that would be worth money.”

“And you are certain that the bell was genuine?” He watched for the image of the bell in her mind. What she saw, she had judged to be ordinary enough. Underwhelming, even, given the historical significance.

“An expert came out and had a look at it, and he said it was the real thing. I don’t know why he didn’t take it back with him. The head of the salvage crew said he was going to leave it here and send someone to pick it up later. I’d guess that’s you.”

“Yes.” Lowan turned, but the room was too small and crowded to allow for pacing. The others stared at him, as if waiting for him to reveal some brilliant, hidden solution. “Who knew the bell was being stored here? The salvage company, every sailor and diver on the crew, everyone at the museum . . . poor security measures.” He shook his head. “Who was in charge of this?”

“The salvage company is called Atlantic Heritage Recovery. Silas Greaves oversaw this project. My husband handled most of the details with him. I only supplied the food and coffee when the men came ashore. They were a rowdy bunch, but polite enough to me.”

“I will have to inform the museum.” Lowan stepped back, still disconcerted by their stares. “It may be interesting to discuss the matter with Mr. Greaves. Who was the expert who authenticated the bell?”

“A Dr. Quentin Carlyle.” She paused while searching through her memories of the past week. “He said he was formerly with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but now does independent appraisals and authentication for private collectors, auction houses, and salvage firms.”

“The rules about the ownership of salvaged items are a bit murky,” Baker said. “Unless the descendants of Captain Milford

try to claim it, it belongs to Greaves. But, given the historical significance, the city government might step in.”

“And now, there is no bell.” Lowan moved toward the door, where Marx waited. Without a bell, his business here was concluded. The murder was in the sheriff’s hands. “What do you plan to do next?”

“This is still a crime scene, and there’s evidence missing.” Baker looked around the room. “I’m going to search the place.”

“No!” Dorsey sprang into the center of the room, then skidded back and fidgeted. “I mean . . . don’t you need a warrant?”

“This is a murder investigation, and after that stunt, you’re my number one suspect. I’ll start with your quarters.”

Dorsey’s face went pale. “You can’t.”



Chapter V

“Please, no.” Dorsey reached for Baker’s arm, almost a begging motion. “There’s nothing in my room—”

Baker avoided his hand, then deflected and grabbed Dorsey’s arm instead, pulling him toward the back hallway. “The more you object, the more convinced I am that you’re hiding something.”

“I didn’t kill him, I swear!” Dorsey tried to pull away, but Baker handled him easily. His pathetic struggles, the intensity of his panic, and his underlying motives provoked Lowan to sympathy.

This was the sheriff’s case. Marx accepted Lowan’s input without question, but no such working relationship with Baker existed. Lowan had no grounds or precedent to interfere. He stood back and let them pass. Dorsey reached for Lowan, his eyes pleading. His expression fell, and he shuffled along, obeying the pressure on his arm.

“His room is the second door,” Mrs. Harwick said from the kitchen doorway. She remained behind, with Marx.

Baker passed the first door and shoved the second open, dragging Dorsey inside. Lowan followed at a distance, peering after them through the open doorway. The assistant keeper’s room was small. A bare cot with a rumpled blanket, a battered desk, and a few books stacked on the windowsill. Baker opened the wardrobe

and ran his hands through the clothing, then checked the drawers. Not unduly rough, and not destructive, but thorough.

“See? No bell.” Dorsey cowered in the corner near the window, his voice shaky and hesitant with a twist of nervous laughter. “That bell weighed almost a hundred pounds. You’re not going to find it in a desk drawer.” His eyes darted toward the leather trunk at the end of the cot, and he muttered under his breath. Baker checked under the cot, lifted the mattress, and touched the trunk. Dorsey flinched.

The latch stuck. Baker pulled harder. “You can unlock this, or I’ll break it open.”

“Go ahead and break it.” Dorsey’s voice took on a harder edge. Lowan sensed his thoughts shifting, his panic coalescing into a last-resort plan for action.

“Sheriff . . .” Lowan warned.

Bending over the trunk, Baker took out his gun and held it by the barrel. He smashed the butt against the latch. Dorsey pulled the window open and launched himself through it, knocking the books aside in an unexpected display of agility. Outside, his boots clattered on the rocks.

Baker swore and rushed to the window, smacking the swinging pane aside on creaky hinges. He climbed through, his grunting efforts resembling a clumsy bear emerging from a cave after hibernation.

Lowan leapt back into the hall and reached the door at the end. As he opened it, Dorsey rushed past, racing toward the edge, where a little boat was tied to a dock at the bottom. Baker thudded after him on an intercept course, far less agile across the unfamiliar rocks.

Gripping his revolver, Baker chased Dorsey over the rough ground. A gunshot cracked, just a warning. Dorsey veered away from the rowboat and changed course toward the front of the building. Lowan followed, too far behind to make any difference. He kept his hand on the side of the building. Underfoot, the ground was jagged and slippery, and there wasn’t much space between the

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lighthouse and the edge. Nothing but solid stone. Dorsey covered the distance in deerlike leaps.

Marx burst from the front door, close enough to cut him off at the causeway. Waves crashed and sprayed upward, almost hiding Dorsey from view. He glanced back and forth—Marx on one side and Baker on the other. The sea surged over the boulders behind him. Lowan reached the front of the building as Marx and Baker closed in.

“Stop right there.” Baker kept his gun raised. He projected his voice over the crashing water. “There’s nowhere to run. Don’t make this worse for yourself.”

Dorsey raised his hands partway, like he was using his arms for balance rather than surrendering. He stepped back, his boots scraping against the rocks until his heels were at the edge.

Marx guarded the causeway. He also held his gun, but kept his posture less threatening than Baker’s. “Just come back to the cottage, and we’ll give you a chance to explain.”

“You won’t believe me.” Dorsey breathed hard. Wild terror blazed in his eyes. “I needed the money for my sister. She’ll die without it. I swear, I never hurt anybody.” He glanced back—down. The water churned below him. His muscles tensed.

Baker’s voice thundered. “Step away from the edge!”

In half a heartbeat, Dorsey leapt. He twisted in midair, trying to set up a proper dive, but didn’t have time. His body slapped the water with an echoing splash, and another wave rolled over him. Baker and Marx lunged forward, then skidded unsteadily at the edge. Marx put his gun away. Baker swore.

Lowan approached behind them, but not too close. Foam swirled in dirty patterns between the causeway and the shore. Dorsey broke the surface, thrashing hard, then disappeared again. Another wave hit the rocks. The spray drove them back.

“We’re not going in after him.” Baker holstered his gun. His voice turned grim and halting, and he pointed in the general direction of the shoreline. “Not in that current. We’ll . . . search along the rocks.”

Baker strode across the causeway, his shoulders hunched as he watched the ground. Marx followed. Lowan brought up the rear, taking his time on the slippery cement. He looked toward the water, but no further splashes deviated from the pattern of waves, and he couldn't concentrate on sensing a person's presence from this distance while also watching his footing on the treacherous path.

Marx took Lowan's arm to steady him along the rocky shoreline. Their faces stung from the blast of cold and salty sea spray. Beyond the peninsula, the desolate coast stretched southward for miles. Baker climbed down the boulders. The tide was low enough to expose jagged shelves of stone, pounded smooth and slick with seaweed. Seagulls darted toward them and squawked.

"The fool," Baker muttered. "I don't see how anyone would make it out of there alive. If the tide didn't carry him out to sea, the waves would bash him against the rocks."

Marx left Lowan and climbed faster, testing his weight on each new ledge to make sure it was solid. He pointed ahead. "What's that? There, between those rocks."

Baker perked up and advanced. Lowan followed as quickly as he could manage. Rather than a body, Marx pointed to an irregular object. Partly camouflaged in kelp and barnacles, rounded bronze stood out from the jagged background. Sea slime covered the inscription, but the bell shape remained obvious.

"How did it get here?" Baker shaded his face and looked out to sea. "That thing didn't float along with the tide, just to end up nicely perched on the edge like somebody set it on the pantry shelf—practically ten yards from the lighthouse. Did the thief leave it here for us to find?"

"I don't know." Marx pushed on it, evaluating its weight. It wasn't much more than a foot in diameter. "This thing is solid. Give me a hand with it. If it's worth more than a new car, I don't want to scratch it up on the rocks."

They hefted it off the ground together. Marx gripped his side and let Baker set the pace.

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“There.” Baker backed slowly along the ledge, looking for the best place to climb over the boulders to the sandy ground above. His foot slipped into a crevice, and he loosed a few words that startled the seagulls. They set the bell aside while Baker pulled his foot free.

Lowan climbed ahead of them, testing footholds and pointing out the easiest route. They maneuvered carefully over the rocks, adjusting their grip and changing positions as needed.

“Only a little farther.” Lowan reached the top and wiped his hands on his handkerchief. His clothing felt damp, and one shoe had developed a squeak. He looked down at where the others still struggled with their load. “Past the edge of the rocky embankment, the ground turns to sand.”

“On the count of three, we throw it,” Baker ordered. He waited for Marx to brace himself. “One, two, *three*.”

The bell arced over the edge and thudded into the sand, creating an immense divot. Marx and Baker climbed over next. Lowan wiped the grime from the inscription. *Providence Star – 1619*



Chapter VI

“**A**nd Dorsey?” Marx looked out across the ocean again. Choppy waves hissed against the retaining rocks. A few gray clouds skidded along and threatened rain. Seagulls landed on the sharp boulders and squabbled.

“Probably dead.” Baker hefted the bell off the ground and wrapped it in a bear hug, making grunting noises under his breath. “You want it in the trunk?”

“This is a rental car,” Lowan objected. “I cannot put something so filthy in there.” He’d expected the bell to be clean. Returning the car covered in sand might be enough for an extra cleaning fee. Filling the trunk with slime and algae would ruin his reputation with the rental company. “Can we wrap it in something?”

“Alright.” He thudded the bell to the ground beside the car and grunted again as he stood.

Shoes slipping in dry sand, the three strode back toward the causeway. Marx climbed down the hill and panted. He offered his hand again. Lowan crossed the narrow cement bridge with him. Baker shoved the door open without knocking.

Mrs. Harwick stood over the sink, washing the breakfast dishes. By now, the coffee had gone cold. She turned to face them while wiping her hands on a towel. Her eyes held a question that she didn’t voice.

MURDER AT BATTLE ROCK LIGHTHOUSE

“Dorsey jumped off the causeway.” Marx took off his hat and looked down. “We didn’t find him. But we did find the bell on the rocks, instead.”

Silently, she sighed and sank into the chair, twisting the towel around her fingers.

Baker’s shoes thudded across the floor to the back hall. “I’d like to know what’s in the trunk that set him off.”

In Dorsey’s room, he bent over the trunk, jerked the broken latch loose, and lifted the lid. Marx crowded into the doorway beside Lowan.

“Hmm.” Baker reached inside and took out a package wrapped in oilskin. He tossed it to Marx, then turned back to the trunk.

Marx tore the package open and revealed a fat stack of cash and papers. He flipped through it. “At least two hundred dollars.”

Lowan took the papers. Personal letters in a shaky, feminine hand. Postmarked envelopes bore the address of a private hospital in the upper corner.

“And this.” Baker showed off a high-powered flashlight with a modified lens, and a folded paper listing dates and times. “That’s more than his salary. He’s been signaling to smugglers.”

“That does not make him a murderer.” Lowan skimmed letters detailing the routine of hospital care and ineffective treatments in a vague way, as if she had been trying to share personal details without causing undue worry. “By Dorsey’s own admission, his only motive was to provide for his sister.”

“Smuggling is still a crime.” Baker tossed the flashlight back into the trunk. “I’m going to use the wireless to call for backup. This was originally reported as an accidental death from a fall down the stairs, and I didn’t think I’d be here this long.” He patted Marx’s arm. “Lieutenant, if you want to give me a hand until my men get here . . .”

“Sure.” Marx stepped out of reach and glanced sideways at Lowan.

“I need to deliver the bell,” Lowan said. “Maybe we will find a tarp in the service room.”

“Help him load up the bell,” Baker ordered. “Then go look for Dorsey again. The coroner should be here any minute.” He followed them into the service room, stepped over Mr. Harwick, and started up the stairs. Footsteps echoed on iron.

Marx poked around among the painting supplies, careful to disturb as little as possible. He pulled out a small canvas tarp.

Lowan nodded. “That will work.”

They left the lighthouse and crossed the causeway. At the car, Lowan opened the trunk and lined it with the tarp. Marx lifted the bell, exhaled under the strain, and settled it inside. The rear of the car bounced and creaked under the weight.

“I hope you can get someone at the museum to unload that for you.” Marx stepped back and wiped his hands on his coat. The previous month, Lowan had broken two ribs. Though the injury had mostly healed, heavy lifting still posed a risk.

“There are a significant number of watchmen on the premises. One of them should be available.” Lowan slammed the lid shut. The museum was housing another valuable artifact—a gold and ivory staff resembling a unicorn’s horn—through the end of the week, when it was scheduled to be collected by a representative from the British Museum. In the meantime, their security team had temporarily more than doubled. “I will return in less than two hours, if all goes well. It might take a little longer if I talk to Greaves at the salvage company.”

“And I’ll . . .” Marx sighed and faced the jagged shoreline, “look for Dorsey.”



Lowan’s car kicked up sand and gravel as he reversed around Baker’s. In a wider area, he turned around. The engine’s rumble faded down the peninsula road. Marx headed for the rocks, looking for an easy place to climb down. Mostly hidden behind the clouds, the sun hadn’t yet reached its highest point. The lighthouse presented a brooding image against the backdrop of an endless, restless ocean.

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The water level crept higher with each wave, licking at the stone ledge where the bell had been found. Marx moved carefully from rock to rock. Seaweed slipped under his shoes, and he gripped the jagged, irregular wall beside him. Even this close to the shore, he didn't want to test the depth of the water. He also had no idea how much higher the tide would rise.

He paused, breathing in the fishy air. No sign of Dorsey, and no unusual motion in the water apart from the rhythmic crash against the rocks. Gulls cried. The water rose over the ledge, suddenly touching his shoes. The splash caught him by surprise, and he jerked back and hopped on one foot.

Muttering, he retreated over the rocks to the sandy peninsula above. The wind slipped inside his loose raincoat and made his ribs rattle. Salt and sand stung his eyes. He pulled himself over the edge and caught his breath on his hands and knees before standing. Buttoning his coat would prevent him from reaching his gun.

He stood on the edge of the rocks, looking down at the churning, dirty foam. The vastness of the ocean made the chances of finding Dorsey's body seem impossible. His own existence was insignificant, less than a drop in a bucket the size of the Atlantic. Beyond his depth, out of his element, with no idea what he was doing here. He hugged his arms around himself and braced his shoulders against the wind. This wasn't how he'd imagined spending his day off.

Returning to the lighthouse so soon—with nothing to report—would make him look incompetent. The longer he stayed away, the longer he could pretend that he didn't feel completely lost.

Another deep breath left him colder than before, without clearing his head. Faking confidence, he strode along the border between the sand and the retaining rocks. The rhythmic waves dulled his senses and blocked him from hearing anything else.

The peninsula widened, putting him farther away from the road. A coroner's van passed him, the engine inaudible over the surf. Marx put his head down and kept walking. Hands in his pockets, he glanced past the edge of the rocks every few paces. His

position seemed higher relative to the water, as if the retaining wall had become a cliff. Sand somehow worked its way into his shoes.

Another wave hit the shore, but it sounded . . . hollow. Marx paused and counted to three. Three more waves, each landing with a thud rather than a crash. Not even a thud, but an echo. He strode back and forth along the edge, finally locating a series of rocks resembling irregular, natural stairs down to another ledge. A wave rolled past and swirled into a gap, a narrow mouth in the cliff face, shrouded in seaweed and shadows.

Marx crept closer, careful of his footing. The rocky ledge sloped downward toward the opening. The tide had already risen above the cave's floor, only by an inch or two. He crouched at the edge and squinted, unable to tell how far the cave extended.

Inside, something coughed.

Thank you for reading this PREVIEW

of Murder at Battle Rock Lighthouse!

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Lowan, a private detective and telepathic alien, teams up with Detective Lieutenant Marx, an introverted underdog, to catch a clever jewel thief terrorizing Milford Falls.

Book 2: Shamrock Hunt

When a famous Celtic medallion—the prize for a charity raffle—is stolen, Lowan competes with a rival private detective to find it in time for the St. Patrick's Day parade. Meanwhile, Marx investigates the murder of a history professor and faces off with a lifelong enemy.

Book 3: Murder on Harrisonville Road

After writing a newspaper story about the crimeless village of Harrisonville, Tom Nanning is ambushed and left for dead. When Lowan investigates, he finds himself trapped in a small town with a murderer hidden among its quirky residents.

Book 4: Orchid Hunter

While Marx investigates a murder committed via April Fool's prank, which renders alibis useless, Lowan dives into the black market orchid trade to recover the main attraction stolen before the Easter flower show. Both investigations lead to a thirty-five-year-old tiger attack in the jungles of Borneo.

Book 5: The Great Flamingo Robbery

When the mangiest flamingo is stolen from the zoo, Lowan is called in to investigate. He never expected to get mixed up with a beautiful ruby thief or a South American dictator.

Book 6: The Unicorn Staff

The murder of an archeologist and the theft of a staff made from a unicorn's horn lead Lowan and Marx on a wild quest for answers.

Book 7: Lowan's Circus Tricks

Lowan's search for Eloise Meer leads him to a traveling circus in dusty Dry Creek, Kansas. But the only Eloise at the circus is a ring-tailed monkey. Hunting for clues, he joins the circus and promptly finds himself framed for murder.

Book 8: The Starmaster

The Starmaster is hunting for aliens—and he's after Lowan.

Book 9: Murder in the Script

A movie is being filmed in Milford Falls. The script might solve an old crime for which an innocent man was framed, if the real murderer doesn't stop the production first.

Book 10: Murder at Woodward Retreat

Lowan and Marx take a vacation at a cabin in the woods. But their plans are disrupted when the woman in the next cabin claims that she saw her husband kill a man.

Book 11: The Pigeon Wing Murders

A wounded carrier pigeon with a coded message, a train robbery, and a stolen racehorse add up to one of Lowan's strangest cases yet.

Book 12: The Mattison Matter

When Tom Nenning is framed for murder, Lowan must work quickly to clear his name. He finds himself enmeshed in a case of corporate espionage involving the radio company he works for, and misused city funds linked to the mayor's office.

Book 13: The Unicorn Curse

When a madman starts killing the remaining members of the *Bearance* crew with a harpoon, Lowan and Marx begin to suspect that Teddy Bear hadn't been aboard the ship when it sank. To find the truth, Lowan goes undercover at a secret million-dollar auction aboard the killer's luxury yacht.

Book 14: Emerald Deception

After an attempted purse-snatching, a frightened woman goes to Lowan for help. Two men are following her, and she wants to know why. The strange emerald found in her purse might provide a clue—until it's appraised as fake. Why does everyone want it so badly?

Book 15: The First Chase

The three members of the insurance racket are still at large, and the last case ended with three new leads. Tracking down the first one brings Lowan and Marx to an illegal greyhound track outside of the city limits, race fixing, and murder.

Book 16: The Second Course

Lowan and Marx track down the second member of the insurance racket, and he's nothing like they expected. Caught between a case of mistaken identity and a prestigious banquet at his restaurant, he agrees to tell them everything he knows—if the killer doesn't get to him first.

Book 17: The Third Conspirator

The third and final member of the insurance racket proves to be the most elusive and dangerous of them all.

Book 18: The Unicorn Heist

The unicorn staff is going on display at the museum, and Lowan is hired to guard it. When Poseidon escapes and Mori returns, both intent on stealing the staff, the fundraiser gala turns deadly.

Book 19: Murder at Battle Rock Lighthouse

Lowan is hired to pick up a historic ship's bell from the Battle Rock Lighthouse and return it to the museum. But when the lighthouse keeper is found murdered, the bell turns out to be counterfeit, and Marx disappears, the problem becomes far more dangerous than he expected.

Book 20: The Pesticide Plot

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