

# COLD ISLAND

A coastal scene with houses on stilts and a boat in the water. The houses are multi-story with grey siding and white trim, built on wooden pilings over the water. Several boats are docked or floating in the calm water. The sky is overcast and grey.

A NOVEL

PETER COLT

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**PETER COLT**

 **THOMAS & MERCER**



This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Otherwise, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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*For Steve Bender, one of two men I called my uncle.  
The world is an infinitely duller place for his passing.  
Also Cathy, Henry, and Alder, without whom there'd be little  
point in any of this*

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## October 1981

*The day had been warm. It had been a lot of fun playing with the other kids in the neighborhood, and they stayed longer than they should have. It would mean trouble when he finally got home. It was early October, when the days were warm but at night, when the wind came up, it turned chilly. Especially without a jacket. He was wearing just jeans, ragged at the knees, a T-shirt, and a grubby sweatshirt.*

*It had grown dark, the sky having gone from bright blue to pink with india-ink clouds. He rubbed the palm of his hand along the underside of his nose and then on his jeans. He was a big boy, too big at eight years old to be scared of the dark. He kept telling himself that. The wind rustled the trees, and the cold as much as the sound made him shiver. He heard a twig snap and dry leaves moving somewhere behind him in the bushes.*

*“A dog. It must be a dog,” he told himself. Except he knew it wasn’t a dog. He was afraid of dogs, but he would never admit it. He shivered and decided he should start moving again. His knee hurt from where he banged it up earlier, scraping it, ripping through his jeans. He knew it would scab over, but right now it stung when the cold air hit it. He got up from where he was lying, hiding behind a bush just off the road.*

*His side hurt as he started walking down the road. He rubbed his palm against his nose again to wipe away the dampness there. His other arm hurt, too, but that was all right. He would be all right when he got home. It was warm there, and Mommy—he wasn’t too big to call her Mommy—would make him some tomato soup or maybe a grilled cheese sandwich. That was his favorite.*

*The car glided up to him. He hadn’t heard it until it was right there next to him, tires crunching on loose gravel or scallop shells. He hadn’t seen its headlights because they were turned off. The passenger door opened, and the man leaned over.*

*“Hey, little man.”*

*“Hi,” the boy said, his voice uncertain.*

*“You look cold.” The man smiled. The boy nodded.*

*“Come on, hop in. I’ll run you home.” The boy stood there; his feet were made of stone, it seemed. Then the wind picked up, and he shivered again. He heard a dog bark in the distance. He had to pee, and he wanted to go home.*

*“Come on, little man, you don’t have to be scared.” The man’s smile never seemed to move—it was just all teeth, almost like a dog when it growled. The boy didn’t want to get in the car with the man, but he was cold. He wiped his nose again, then wiped the moist palm on his thigh. Then he made up his mind and climbed into the car onto the seat next to the man. The car was warm, hot air pouring out of the vents, and the radio was playing soft music about a girl with faraway eyes. The boy’s side hurt, he was hungry, and he was tired. He eased his head back against the seat. He didn’t take notice of the man reaching across him to push the door lock down.*

# CHAPTER 1

**2016**

Tommy Kelly leaned against the front of the Ford Crown Victoria. It was one of the last models, and he adored it. It was black with tinted windows and had a spotlight on a swivel on the driver's side; everyone in the troop called it Black Beauty. Everything about it screamed "unmarked cop car." He had loved that Black Beauty from the moment it was assigned to him as his take-home car when he first made detective eight years ago. He felt like he was king of the road when he was pushing it down the Pike at a buck ten. Kelly was determined to keep the old warhorse on the road as long as he could.

The same could be said of him. Kelly ran at least twelve miles a week and spent a minimum of five mornings in the gym, lifting weights. His partner, Jacques, referred to it as "beating on your pecs." Kelly couldn't stand the thought of losing a suspect in a foot pursuit or losing a fight because he was out of shape. He drank a lot of expensive protein drinks, drank his coffee black, and avoided the drive-through the way a vampire avoided garlic.

He twirled a coin absentmindedly in his fingers as he watched the white hull of the Steamship Authority ferry ease into the berth. It had made the trip over from Nantucket, and he would be taking it back to the island. He was not eager to go there. Only part of it had to do with the fact that Jeanie was already on his ass about it. She had left an angry voicemail in which she inquired if she was "expected to do everything to raise our two children?" Liam and Connor were good boys, but they were a handful. Then if you added in Cub Scouts, sports, and karate lessons . . . it was a lot for two parents, let alone one left to cope on her own.

Kelly had walked into the detective bureau in the Troop Headquarters a little after seven in the morning. He shared it with five other detectives. His

cubicle was next to Jacques's, which had a framed photo of his family from two Christmases before and a small wooden cross as its only decorations. The rest of his cubicle was plastered with pictures from cases he was working on: a car dealership with a broken glass door, a body slumped over a steering wheel; a drug rip gone fatal. Each photo had accompanying photos of the crime scenes from different angles, all with the report numbers written on the bottom in Jacques's neat script.

Kelly's own cubicle had a picture of Jeanie and the boys from a trip to Edaville Railroad the summer before. He had a memorial prayer card from his father's wake tacked to the cubicle wall next to a printed-out photo of the detective squad from the Worcester Troop. His desk had a computer, keyboard, and monitor; a phone with more buttons than he ever seemed to need; and piles of Massachusetts State Police manila folders.

His dark hair was still damp from the post-workout shower when Jacques looked up from his computer and said, "Big Dick wants to see you. Now." Big Dick was the troop's head of detectives.

"Shit, I haven't even had a cup of coffee yet." Kelly went through the mental index of things that could have landed him in the hot seat with Detective Lieutenant Richard "Dickie" Savoy.

"That's your fault, man. There's only half a dozen Dunkin's between your house and here."

"I can't have coffee before I work out." He was tall, broad shouldered, with eyes that had served him well with women.

Kelly dropped his gym bag next to his chair and walked down the hall to his boss's office. Kelly had transferred from Worcester to Middleborough, Massachusetts, six months earlier. He was still getting used to his new boss and was unsure what was so pressing it couldn't wait until he at least had his morning coffee. He stopped, knocked on the open door, and went in.

Savoy was in his mid-fifties with an iron-gray crew cut and the lean build of a marathon runner. Kelly heard that Savoy had spent a long time in the gang unit, much of it undercover posing as an outlaw biker. Rumor had it that Savoy once had a ponytail and a ZZ Top beard. Someone had said that

he carried a stainless-steel Colt .45 in his waistband and had pistol-whipped a couple of bad dudes with it. It was impossible to imagine that the wiry man with the impeccably pressed suit and marine corps tiepin could have passed for a “one percenter.” Others said that a bike gang couldn’t believe Savoy had been a trooper.

The story going around was that bikers had put a price on his head. Legend had it Savoy had met with the president of the club and told him, *Come after me. I get it. I’ll bury everyone you send at me, or they’ll bury me. It doesn’t matter. Come near my family, and all the rules go out the window.* No matter what had gone down, Kelly was certain he didn’t want to be on Savoy’s bad side.

“Kelly. Good. Don’t bother sitting down.” Savoy was not one to say more than he needed to, but he was never curt with Kelly.

“Okay, why not?”

“They found a dead body on Nantucket. Construction crew found it as they were breaking ground for some millionaire’s new vacation house.”

“Sure, Lieu”—no one called the boss Big Dick to his face—“but I thought one of the closer barracks . . .” Kelly trailed off, treading lightly. He didn’t really want to go to Nantucket, but he didn’t want to piss off Dickie Savoy either. No one likes a whiny subordinate.

“There are other dicks, but everyone is shorthanded right now. So, you get to go. Plus, you had plenty of homicide experience in Wormtown.” Every city had a nickname, and Worcester, Massachusetts, was no different.

“Sure, Lieu, but something tells me this isn’t a drug rip or gang feud on Nantucket.”

“No, it’s a kid.”

“What?”

“Yeah, the backhoe managed to dig up a kid’s grave. Local cops don’t get a lot of dead bodies, much less kids . . . so go home, tell the wife one less plate on the dinner table, pack a bag, and get your ass to the ferry. If you hurry, you might just catch the next one.”

“Sure, boss,” Kelly said and walked back to his desk. Jacques looked up as Kelly came over. He was smiling broadly.

“You going to the island?”

“Yep, that’s what Big Dick said. What, did he offer it to you first?”

“I can’t help it if you have more experience with homicides than I do. Plus, he is worried that at the pace I work, I might never leave the island.” Jacques had immigrated to Boston from Haiti as a boy. He was a meticulous detective who annoyed his superiors by working at his own pace, which was slow. His cases were rock solid, and he was unshakable on the witness stand. Jacques got convictions, and the bosses liked convictions. He and Kelly got along well and worked together when they could.

“Fuck. Jeanie’s gonna be pissed.”

“Yeah, but at least you aren’t in trouble with Savoy. You shoulda seen the look on your face when I told you he wanted to see you right away.” Jacques laughed.

“Yeah, there is that.” Kelly sat in front of the computer and checked the schedule. If he hurried, he could make the next ferry and be on the island before lunch.

After a quick trip home to pack and a terse conversation with Jeanie, he’d driven with his lights on the whole way down Route 6 and made it to the ferry with minutes to spare. They’d been married for more than a decade. Being married to a trooper was hard enough; being married to Kelly was tougher still. This wasn’t the first or worst imposition that the Massachusetts State Police had inflicted on her. There’d been lots of long hours away from her and the boys, lots of last-minute calls involving overtime, crime scenes, or carnage on the highways of the commonwealth. There’d been many missed holidays and family celebrations. There’d been one bad car accident while on duty that sent him to the hospital for a few days. Jeanie had put up with it, and Kelly had worked hard to be there for her and the boys, often forgoing sleep to stay up after a shift to spend time with them. It had gotten better when he came off the road and went to dicks, but not much better. Jeanie was sick of it.

Kelly made it in time to see the ferry in the distance as he pulled up to the small, shingled shack in the parking lot. He showed the attendant his badge, and the man assured him that there would be room for Black Beauty on the ferry. Kelly pulled into the spot in line he was directed to and went to get his ticket. The bored clerk looked at his badge and took his credit card. The ferry service always kept a couple of spots open for things like police on official business or ambulances.

He went out to wait for the boat. It was mid-April and uncharacteristically sunny but cool and breezy. Kelly leaned against the grille of his car. The breeze pushed at his navy-blue fleece jacket, cutting away the warmth of the early-spring sun. Gulls wheeled overhead, making their plaintive, high-pitched cries as they rode the thermals. He loved watching them fly but always found their cries to be off-putting. Kelly could smell food cooking from the Dockside Restaurant, which was next to the terminal. It brought back happy memories from his childhood.

He got in the car and, when his turn came, eased it onto the ferry. He pulled up the car ramp and into the cavernous car hold, following the man who directed him to a spot as the sun was blotted out. Kelly felt a small knot of uneasiness in his stomach. There was no part of an investigation into a dead kid on Nantucket that could bring anything good into his life.

He parked and locked the car and made his way up to the passenger deck. The wooden heels of his dress shoes made a clonking noise on the steel deck plating. The ferry seemed huge to him, and he wondered if the crossing would be rough. It wasn't crowded, and he found a seat next to a window. It had a table, and he was able to lean against the bulkhead in such a way that his issued pistol didn't dig into his side. With a blast of the horn, the ferry pulled away from the dock, navigated through the breakwater, and was on its way.

He watched as the cape slid away and they made their way into the ocean. The ferry picked up a decided roll to it. Things got rockier in Nantucket Sound, the midway point. The waves were capped with white foam, and the ferry seemed to pitch a little more. Kelly sat watching the

ocean, wrapped around his own thoughts about what he would find on the island—what he would find at the crime scene, what the local cops would be like. He couldn't imagine that there were a lot of homicides on Nantucket. Kelly wasn't a man overly endowed with imagination, and his success as a detective had more to do with hard work and attention to detail than anything else. He preferred to watch the Red Sox or Bruins play than to read a book. In fact, the last book he read had been for his master's in criminal justice a couple of years ago.

The snack bar had a cup of coffee and blueberry yogurt. He hadn't had time for his protein shake this morning, and he was getting that hollow feeling in his stomach. He usually drank a chocolate or vanilla one while reading reports in front of his computer. Savoy's marching orders had made sure that he hadn't done either. Instead, he contented himself with *The Boston Globe* and what his body considered rationed amounts of caffeine and protein.

The *Globe* was full of news about a mass shooting in California and North Korea preparing to launch missiles to remind the world that it was still relevant. The political news was depressing, not that Kelly followed it. He paid attention to local politics because that impacted his salary, either in terms of raises or taxes. That and the politicians at the statehouse passing laws that made life easier for criminals. That was of more interest.

Kelly read the paper, and when the rolling swells got to be too much, he went up on deck to get some fresh air. He stood at the bow of the lumbering, white, slab-sided ship as it thrust through the waves toward the island. The island was a flat line before him that grew taller and more textured as the ship pushed onward. He could make out water towers, church steeples of white and red, and white TV towers. As the ferry drew closer to the island, the gulls appeared above it, wheeling on thermals, shrieking their madman's shrieks.

It wasn't long before it was gliding between the stone jetties that marked the entrance to the harbor. The PA system crackled with instructions for drivers to go to their cars. Kelly looked at Brant Point Lighthouse, the

coast guard station, and the two white church steeples, and whistled softly. A million-dollar view. He took one last look at the island and then went down to his car. His stomach tightened as he got into it.

Kelly watched as the big hatch in the front of the ship very slowly lifted upward, revealing a sunny early-April sky. The ferry was rounding Brant Point, turning into the harbor. Local legend held that when leaving the island, people should throw pennies overboard at Brant Point to ensure a speedy return. Kelly could picture little kids doing that, if they ever came out to the island. The big ferry eased into its berth, and when it was safe, the crewman lowered the chain barring their way.

Kelly put Black Beauty into gear and rolled off the ferry and down the docking ramp. He turned off Steamboat Wharf onto Broad Street. It was strange how little things had changed. The Whaling Museum was still there, all red brick, celebrating a brief but glorious history at sea. He passed the Sunken Ship, a shop specializing in scuba gear, diving needs, and tourist clothes. He passed the town hall, which could have been the redbrick sibling of the Whaling Museum. He took a left onto Federal Street and stopped briefly at the intersection with Chestnut Street.

He turned down Chestnut, thinking he would box around and head to the town hall. He was stymied by the small town's one-way streets. There was a small two-story building of red brick with a Ford Crown Victoria wearing Nantucket Police livery parked in front. The building had a large garage door flanked by two huge windows that had once been garage doors too. In the red stone insert above the garage door, he could make out the almost completely sandblasted words NANTUCKET FIRE DEPARTMENT. There was a sign bolted to the side of the building that read NANTUCKET POLICE DEPARTMENT SUBSTATION. He parked, then walked into the building, up to a wooden counter. A young officer stood up from behind a desk with a computer and came over. He was in his twenties, tall, fit, and fair-haired.

"Can I help you, sir?" he asked with the professionally detached politeness that cops developed over time.