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Opening Extract from...

Moonlight Mile

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Chapter One

On a bright, unseasonably warm afternoon in early December, Brandon Trescott walked out of the spa at the Chatham Bars Inn on Cape Cod and got into a taxi. A pesky series of DUIs had cost him the right to operate a motor vehicle in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for the next thirty-three months, so Brandon always took cabs. The twenty-five-year-old trust-fund baby of a superior court judge mother and a local media mogul father, Brandon wasn't your run-of-the-mill rich kid asshole. He worked double shifts at it.

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By the time the state finally suspended his license, he was on his fourth DUI. The first two had been pled down to reckless driving, the third had brought him a stern warning, but the fourth had resulted in injury to someone besides Brandon, who escaped without a scratch.

This winter afternoon, with the temperature hanging just below forty degrees, Brandon wore a manufacturer-stained, manufacturer-faded hoodie that retailed for around \$900 over a white silk T with a collar dragged down by a pair of \$600 shades. His baggy shorts also had little rips in them, compliments of whichever nine-year-old Indonesian had been poorly paid to put them there. He wore flip-flops in December, and he sported an insouciant mop of blond surfer's hair with an adorable habit of drooping helplessly over his eyes.

After drinking his weight in Crown Royal one night, he'd flipped his Dodge Viper coming back from Foxwoods with his girlfriend riding shotgun. She'd only been his girlfriend two weeks, but it was unlikely she'd be anyone's girlfriend ever again. Her name was Ashten Mayles and she'd been in a persistent vegetative state ever since the top of the car compacted against the top of her skull. One of the last acts she'd attempted to perform while she'd still had use of her arms and legs was

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to try and take Brandon's keys from him in the casino parking lot. According to witnesses, Brandon had rewarded her concern by flicking a lit cigarette at her.

In possibly the first brush with actual consequence that Brandon had ever known, Ashten's parents, not wealthy but politically connected, had decided to do everything in their power to ensure that Brandon paid for his mistakes. Hence the Suffolk County DA's prosecution on DUI and reckless endangerment. Brandon spent the entire trial looking shocked and morally outraged that anyone could get away with expecting personal responsibility of him. In the end, he was convicted and served four months' house arrest. In a really nice house.

During the subsequent civil trial, it was revealed that the trust-fund baby had no trust fund. He had no car, had no house. As far as anyone could tell, he didn't own so much as an iPod. Nothing was in his name. Things had once *been* in his name, but he'd fortuitously signed them all over to his parents one day before the car accident. It was the *before* part that killed people, but no one could prove otherwise. When the jury in the civil trial awarded damages in the amount of \$7.5 million to the Mayles family, Brandon Trescott emptied his pockets of the nothing that was in them and shrugged.

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I had a list of all the things Brandon had once owned and was legally prohibited from using. Use of said items, it was deemed by the court, would constitute not just the appearance of ownership but the fact of it. The Trescotts protested the court's definition of 'ownership,' but the press beat the shit out of them, the public outcry was loud enough to lead ships ashore through night fog, and they ultimately signed off on the deal.

The next day, in a wonderful 'fuck you' to both the Mayles family and those loud voices of the great unwashed, Layton and Susan Trescott purchased their son a condominium in Harwich Port, since the Mayles' attorneys had not covered future earnings or future possessions in the agreement. And it was to Harwich Port that I followed Brandon early on a December afternoon.

The condo smelled of mold and rug beer and food left rotting in the sink on crusted plates. I knew this because I'd been in there twice to plant bugs and swipe all the passwords off his computer and generally do all the snoop, sneaky shit clients pay top dollar to pretend they don't know guys like me get up to. I'd gone through what little paperwork I could find and hadn't found any bank accounts we didn't know about or any stock reports that hadn't been reported. I hacked his computer

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and found pretty much the same – nothing but his self-serving rants to ex-frat buddies and some pathetic, never sent, letter-to-the-editor screeds rife with misspellings. He visited a lot of porn sites and a lot of gaming sites and he read every article ever written about himself.

When the cab dropped him off, I pulled my digital recorder out of the glove compartment. The day I'd broken into his place and hacked his computer, I'd placed an audio transmitter the size of a grain of sea salt under his media console and another in his bedroom. I listened to him let out a bunch of small groans as he prepared for the shower, then the sound of him showering, drying off, changing into fresh clothes, pouring himself a drink, flicking on his flat screen, turning it to some soul-crushing reality show about stupid people, and settling onto the couch to scratch himself.

I slapped my own cheeks a couple times to stay awake and flipped through the newspaper on the car seat. Another spike in unemployment was predicted. A dog had rescued his owners from a fire in Randolph even though he'd just had hip surgery and his two hind legs were strapped to a doggie wheelchair. Our local Russian mob boss got charged with DUI after he stranded his Porsche on Tinean Beach at high tide. The Bruins won at

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a sport that made me sleepy when I watched it, and a Major League third baseman with a twenty-six-inch neck reacted with self-righteous fury when questioned about his alleged steroid use.

Brandon's cell rang. He talked to some guy he kept calling 'bro,' except it came out 'bra.' They talked about *World of Warcraft* and *Fallout 4* on PS2 and Lil Wayne and T.I. and some chick they knew from the gym whose Facebook page mentioned how much extra working out she did on her Wii Fit even though she, like, lived across from a park, and I looked out the window and felt old. It was a feeling I had a lot lately, but not in a rueful way. If this was how twentysomethings spent their twenties these days, they could have their twenties. Their thirties, too. I tilted my seat back and closed my eyes. After a while, Brandon and his bra signed off with:

'So, a'ight, bra, you keep it tight.'

'You keep it tight, too, bra, you keep it real tight.'

'Hey, bra.'

'What?'

'Nothing. I forgot. Shit's fucked up.'

'What?'

'Forgetting.'

'Yeah.'

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‘A’ight.’

‘A’ight.’

And they hung up.

I searched for reasons not to blow my brains out. I came up with two or three dozen real fast, but I still wasn’t certain I could listen to many more conversations between Brandon and one of his ‘bras’.

Dominique was another issue entirely. Dominique was a blue-chip working girl who’d entered Brandon’s life ten days earlier via Facebook. That first night, they’d IM’d back and forth for two hours. Since then, they’d Skyped three times. Dominique had remained fully clothed but wildly descriptive about what would happen should (a) she ever deign to sleep with him and (b) he came up with the sizable cash allotment necessary to make that happen. Two days ago, they’d traded cell phone numbers. And, God bless her, she called about thirty seconds after he clicked off with bra. This, by the way, was how the asshole answered a phone:

Brandon: Talk to me.

(Really. And people continued to contact him.)

Dominique: Hey.

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Brandon: Oh, *hey*. Shit. Hey! You around?

Dominique: I will be.

Brandon: Well, come here.

Dominique: You forget we Skyped. I wouldn't sleep with you there wearing a hazmat suit.

Brandon: So you're thinking about sleeping with me finally. I never met a whore decided who she'd do it with.

Dominique: You ever meet one who looked like me?

Brandon: No. And you're, like, near my mom's age. And still. Shit. You're the hottest chick I ever—

Dominique: How sweet. And let's clarify something — I'm not a whore. I'm a carnal service provider.

Brandon: I don't even know what that means.

Dominique: I'm totally unsurprised. Now go cash a bond or a check or whatever you do and meet me.

Brandon: When?

Dominique: Now.

Brandon: Now now?

Dominique: Now now. I'm in town this afternoon and this afternoon only. I won't go to a hotel, so

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you better have another place, and I won't wait long.

Brandon: What if it's a real nice hotel?

Dominique: I'm hanging up now.

Brandon: You're not hang—

She hung up.

Brandon cursed. He threw his remote into a wall. He kicked something. He said, 'Only overpriced whore you'll ever meet? You know what, bra? You can buy ten of her. And some blow. Go to Vegas.'

Yes, he actually called himself 'bra.'

The phone rang. He must have tossed it along with the remote, because the ringtone was distant and I heard him scramble across the room to get to it. By the time he reached it, the ringtone had died.

'*Fuck!*' It was a loud scream. If I'd had my window rolled down, I could have heard it from the car.

It took him another thirty seconds before he prayed.

'Look, bra, I know I did some shit, but I promise, you get her to call back again? I'll go to church and I'll deposit a boatload of the green in one of those baskets. And I'll be better. Just have her call back, bra.'

Yes, he actually called God 'bra.'

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Twice.

His ringtone had barely burped before he flipped his phone open. ‘Yeah?’

‘You get one shot here.’

‘I know it.’

‘Give me an address.’

‘Shit. I—’

‘Okay, I’m hanging—’

‘Seven seventy-three Marlborough Street, between Dartmouth and Exeter.’

‘Which unit?’

‘No unit. I own the whole thing.’

‘I’ll be there in ninety minutes.’

‘I can’t get a cab that fast around here, and it’s rush hour soon.’

‘Then get the power of flight. See you in ninety. Ninety-one? I’m gone.’

The car was a 2009 Aston Martin DB9. Retailed for two hundred thousand. Dollars. When Brandon pulled it out of the garage two town houses over, I checked it off the list on the seat beside me. I also snapped five photos of him in it while he waited for traffic to thin so he could enter it.

He hit the gas like he was launching an expedition to

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the Milky Way, and I didn't even bother chasing him. The way he weaved in and out of traffic, even someone with the awareness of meat loaf, like Brandon, would see me riding his ass. I didn't need to follow him anyway – I knew exactly where he was going and I knew a shortcut.

He arrived eighty-nine minutes after the phone call. He ran up the stairs and used a key on the door, and I caught it on film. He ran up the interior stairs, and I entered behind him. I followed him from fifteen feet away, and he was so wired that he didn't even notice me for a good two minutes. In the kitchen on the second floor, as he opened the fridge, he turned when I snapped off a few shots on the SLR and he fell back against the tall window behind him.

'Who the fuck're you?'

'Doesn't much matter,' I said.

'You paparazzi?'

'Why would paparazzi give a shit about you?' I snapped a few more shots.

He leaned back to get a good look at me. He grew past the fear of a stranger popping up in his kitchen and moved on to threat-assessment. 'You're not that big.' He cocked his surfer's head. 'I could kick your bitch ass out of here.'

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‘I’m not that big,’ I agreed, ‘but you definitely couldn’t kick my bitch ass out of anywhere.’ I lowered the camera. ‘Seriously. Just look in my eyes.’

He did.

‘Know what I’m saying?’

He half-nodded.

I slung the camera onto my shoulder and gave him a wave. ‘I’m leaving anyway. So, hey, have a good one, and try not to brain-damage any more people.’

‘What’re you going to do with the pictures?’

I said the words that broke my heart. ‘Pretty much nothing.’

He looked confused, which was hardly uncommon for him. ‘You work for the Mayles family. Right?’

My heart broke just a tiny bit more. ‘No. I do not.’ I sighed. ‘I work for Duhamel-Standiford.’

‘A law firm?’

I shook my head. ‘Security. Investigations.’

He stared back at me, mouth open, eyes narrowed.

‘Your parents hired us, you dumb shit. They figured you’d eventually do something moronic because, well, you’re a moron, Brandon. This little incident today should confirm all their fears.’

‘I’m not a moron,’ he said. ‘I went to BC.’

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In place of a dozen comebacks, a shiver of exhaustion rippled through me.

This was my life these days. This.

I left the kitchen. ‘Best of luck, Brandon.’ Halfway down the stairs, I stopped. ‘By the way, Dominique’s not coming.’ I turned back toward the top of the stairs and leaned my elbow on the railing. ‘And, oh yeah, her name’s not Dominique.’

His flip-flops made a sloppy-wet-kiss noise as he crossed the floorboards and appeared in the doorway above me. ‘How do you know?’

‘Because she works for me, dumbass.’