Winterbourne

Chapter One

The old tennis ball had seen better days. The cracked, soggy, and smelly ball was the black Labrador’s only toy.

“Give it to me, Winston.”

The powerful dog held his position, straining enormous paws and military strength legs. His bite crushed the ball. Slobber flew through the air, the dog struggling to keep the prized possession. His body was straining as the man eventually pulled the toy free from his canine’s bite. Franklin realized that the dog let him win the friendly tug-a-war, retrieving the ball, repeatedly, Winston’s ultimate goal. This pastime could go on for hours, but the rain was beginning to fall this early morning in October of 1962.

“Last throw, Winston.”

With that, the dog was off like a bolt, sliding into the riverbed, the meager winterbourne now only just becoming a running stream. Winston splashed into the water and retrieved his vital possession.

When Winston returned, he dropped the tennis ball at Franklin’s feet, hoping for another throw. “Sorry, boy, we’re done for today.” Franklin looked to the sky. “It will soon be pouring. Let’s get home.”

And so, the two friends made their way out of the winterbourne and along the community road, lined by houses, leading to Franklin’s home, on Rivulet Way. The rain was falling, as the man predicted.

Barking began as Winston suddenly took off and raced ahead. A poorly kept man flew into their vision, hobbling and dragging one barefoot, and struggling across the road. He was shirtless, with long straggly dirty hair, a black tennis shoe on his one good foot. The man was hysterically screaming in fear, lugging himself frantically across the busy road.

Careening along, the car tried unsuccessfully to avoid the hobbling man. It seemed, from Franklin’s vantage point, that the auto drove entirely over the fleeing man, throwing him out across the shoulder of the road in a tussle.

“Are you alright?” Franklin asked the man as he arrived. The man was very, definitely not alright. A serious chest crushing injury was apparent. He was writhing in pain, bloody, frothy, spit flowing from his mouth.

The rain was beating down now as Franklin kneeled by his side. The man was repeatedly mouthing a word. “What? What happened to you? What are you saying?”

“M,” said the dying man over and over again, a wild look in his eyes. The mortally injured fellow handed Franklin a crumpled card and repeatedly said, “M, save M.” Franklin looked briefly at the apparent ID, then pushed it into his shirt pocket.

Winston ran back and forth, barking without knowing what to do. Soon, he was off, running up the road, howling a plaintive roar. The brown leather satchel was sitting as usual on the wooden porch bench. The dog grabbed it in his mouth and returned quickly to the bloody scene. He dropped it at Franklin’s foot and sat on his rear haunches, now wet with the rainfall, panting and drooling, as if waiting for an assignment.

Franklin tried to turn the man on his back. He felt for a carotid pulse, which was thready. At his side sat the dog, panting. The bag was welcome, and he opened it, dropping the contents on the road. He grabbed a stethoscope and listened to the man’s chest. Absent breath sounds and a flail chest confirmed his assessment.

The man was struggling now, each breath weaker and weaker. Franklin grabbed a scalpel and a chest tube from the collection of items on the street. Within a minute, he had a tube into the man’s chest. A gush of bloody air confirmed that the man had a collapsed lung and tension pneumothorax. He moved to his head and began mouth to mouth resuscitation.

A crowd gathered around the scene. The woman driver was crying, distraught, while several people comforted her. “What is he doing?” A murmur went through the group.

Franklin was breathing for the dying man. Periodically, he would compress the man’s chest, check a pulse, and return to the mouth to mouth. Eventually, Franklin stopped, placing a hand on the carotid artery in the man’s neck. “No pulse,” Franklin said with dejection.

In the crowd, a policeman moved to the front. “All of y’all move back,” he said, directing the group to retreat. He stepped towards the scene. “Doctor Carson, is he dead?”

Franklin stood slowly, looking down on the dead man. He deliberately shook his head in the affirmative. The doctor brushed back his wet hair as a crack of lightning flashed in the sky. Bending down, he began replacing the contents into his doctor bag. After closing it, he held it out to Winston, who took it in his mouth. “He is gone,” he said sadly to the officer.

Franklin and the officer stood and looked down at the man. It was the first time that they could examine the victim. The man was of average height, with long greasy brown hair tied in a ponytail. His crushed chest was shirtless, black and white striped pants covering his legs. Franklin bent down to examine his left leg. There was a deep laceration angled over the Achilles area of the ankle, the pant leg sliced as well.

Franklin stood and moved to the officer. The doctor was sad, the man dead at his feet. Responsibility, he always felt responsible. “Nothing more I can do here; I have several people waiting for me at the clinic.”

“I understand. Why don't you just take off? I will call to debrief you later today.”

Franklin whistled, and Winston came alongside him as they walked up the hill. The dog was carrying the doctor bag in his mouth. The sky was slowly clearing; the rain now stopped. The two reached a driveway and entered the doctor’s property.

The house was to the right, a white clapboard structure with gray trim and an aging shake roof. The two walked along the driveway to the back of the property. Here was a small auxiliary white building with several people standing at the door. A wooden bench sat on the porch; two women, seated at either end. Winston placed the doctor bag between the two and followed Franklin through the door.

“Where have you been?” A pretty brown haired woman dressed in a white scrub suit asked.

The man’s frightened stare and dying eyes came into Franklin’s mind. “Horrible, an accident, the guy’s dead.” The doctor looked at his wife with sadness for a brief moment. “Who’s here to see me, Patrice?”

Franklin’s statement stopped the woman for a moment. She was busy, however, and soon handed a paper chart to the surgeon. “Mr. Moody and the two Merritt twins are out on the porch. Someone’s dead, Franklin?”

Franklin walked into his office. He just now realized that he was emotionally exhausted. As he sat behind his desk, he began to brief his wife. “Some man was running into the street. A car ran him over, and he died from a crushing chest injury. I did closed-chest cardiac resuscitation. You know, like at the Maryland Medical Society in Ocean City. Never seen it done before, didn’t work.”