

**IF YOU HAD THE CHANCE
TO COMMIT
THE PERFECT CRIME,
WOULD YOU?**



IGNIS FATUUS

MARTIN C C GRAHAM

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by

Martin C C Graham



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Dedicated to my wife, family, and friends for their support and patience—especially to my father for teaching me to “get the bull by the horns.” Hope this counts, Dad.

My sincerest and humblest apologies to Mr Andrew Ridgely. He won't know or remember what for, but it is a promise I made to myself if the opportunity ever came to do so publicly.

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PROLOGUE

The windows of opportunity exist; it's just a matter of recognising them when you see them and having the audacity to slip through before they are slammed shut.

There's no such thing as the perfect crime because, well, what is perfect? The definition of a perfect crime is subjective; my perfect crime will not be the same as yours. That said, allow me to tell you about mine, anyway.

Chapter 1

SCOTLAND I

Calves burning, pumped rigid with blood, complaining with every step up the worn road—if “road” was a fit description for the gravel-strewn scar that switched back and forth across the face of the mountain. Overhead wires hummed as the wind brushed over them and stole the voices of the legs that dangled from the chairlifts on their journey up to the top of the mountain, or at least the end of the lift run. The inappropriately shod feet indicated that the owner was a thrill-seeking tourist clad in denim or, worse, the lurid and bulging bought-for-the-holiday leggings—comfortable, but telling of a less-than-active lifestyle.

A sudden gust of wind caught out what looked like a butterfly. The object, a sweet wrapper, brushed against Connor’s chest on its downward spiral to the ground. He looked up at the legs swinging excitedly, hearing wisps of more excited laughter.

Connor stooped carefully to pick up the wrapper. The weight of his backpack shifted, and he leaned hard into his walking pole to maintain his balance. He stood again and pushed the wrapper into his jacket pocket. He untied his neckerchief and wiped his brow. The sweat was drying quickly in the breeze, and he could feel his skin tightening from the salt. Another gust of wind chilled him, the cooling sweat overcoming the complaining muscles as he began to walk.

Walking alone, Connor looked not up, but forward two or three steps, picking out a rock, a ridge or a tussock of grass. As he reached each landmark, he set a new goal, trying not to

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count the steps, battling against the endless calculations that seeped into the forefront of his mind. Right foot to right foot, one step, seventy steps, one hundred metres, another click on the pace counter. Naismith calculations, Naismith corrections for ascending, temperature difference with altitude, and wind chill.

He stopped and looked up. The Ptarmigan restaurant sat squat and ugly on the shoulders of the abused mountain like a crashed spaceship—both angular and rounded, once a cutting-edge architectural design, purpose-driven with no illusion of aestheticism. Just precast steel, reinforced concrete, and glass, but still a feat of engineering, considering its lofty perch, a welcome harbour on the edge of a stony sea.

Turning, Connor gazed down the side of the mountain, the best part of a climb, looking on the Lilliputian appearance of man behind—matchbox-size buildings, stiff and rectangular. Coloured ants glistened in the watery sunlight and followed each other along the asphalted roads, like cartoons drawn across the panorama. Best of all was the demarcation of the tree line, the frontier above which civilisation hung on, tenuously fighting a continuous battle against the elements. The shackles were falling away; the years of meticulous planning had reached fruition. Ahead lay six months of freedom. It wouldn't be easy, of that he had no doubts, but he hoped that the tree line, as long as he was above it, would keep him safe. He turned again and once more started not counting the steps.

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