

Chapter Sixteen, in which nothing much happens, but we see where people stand, literally and figuratively, and Angie has a slight attitude adjustment, which she almost fails to notice.

Angie didn't need to play the dumb tourist, as she had intended if they ran into anyone, as the act seemed to be coming naturally. Dan was similarly afflicted, so Mickey, shaking his head comically at Luke and rolling his eyes, stepped forward.

"Good thing we're not dogs," he said affably, sticking out his hand. "Mickey Finn, I run a little bar down at the end of the island."

"Luke, Luke McNaughton, and that's my friend, Dan," he said correcting Dan who had just introduced himself to Angie as Nad.

Luke and Mickey sized each other up, both secretly wishing they were more like dogs, not the sniffing part so much as the **figuring out who could take who, by going at it in a sand pit** part. They were both clearly of the sheep-dog persuasion and by the looks of their two charges, they were going to need to be on their guard.

Dan and Angie were also watching the dogs, and looked as if they might find the sand pit a little too **convivial**. Perhaps Luke and Mickey could get along without a preliminary wrestle they silently agreed with some sort of secret man signal as they instinctively accepted their roles as second fiddles, a role they were both a little **too familiar** with.

And as the four of them stood there, surrounded by the encroaching undergrowth, they felt a kind of natural bond, as if they too were foreign objects getting bound to the island and each other by invisible tendrils. Explanations were quickly made, and honestly, which saved much time. Dan was eager for information and Mickey was a fount of local knowledge, and the four of them sat down on the **benches of the remains of the outdoor amphitheatre** letting the dogs play to their hearts' content.

Dan's excitement at getting to actually stand on land he had only dreamed of owning, and then meeting Angie, had him more forth-coming about his plans than he normally would have been and it wasn't long before the conflict between what he intended to do and how it would impact where he was standing and where Angie and Mickey were living began to make conversation awkward. Mickey was particularly conflicted. Development would undoubtedly be good for business, but things had been just fine as they were. Local employment was always good, but strangers brought strangers' problems. And he felt protective of Angie.

Dan sighed and stood up, stretching to cover his discomfort. "Well, I really must walk the property, and see what the salvagers have left me. And this afternoon I want to have a look at the reef and the dredging. No matter what happens, at least I have been able to stop that."

"They hadn't been able to get very far, until recently when the lawsuit against the previous owners was thrown out," said Angie who had been following the case closely. "It isn't too late ..."

"I know, I hope," replied Dan, "I have been watching it too. That's kind of how this whole strange situation came up. When the bankers contacted me they knew about my involvement with REEF. That's partly why it seemed to make sense. But the reality of it, standing here ... do you see how maybe a resort could be done gently?" he added wistfully.

Angie looked over and was about to say something flippant, struck by his saying the bankers had contacted him first, but stopped when she saw the look on his face as his eyes swept over the trees and sand. He liked it just the way it was. You could tell. Instead she stood quietly by his side, looking through the trees towards the ocean and wondered how she could help him.

