DEVIL

IN THE DUNES

BY WENDY BYARD

CHAPTERS 1-4

FOR MICHIGAN COUNTRY LINES READERS ONLY

Devil in the Dunes

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"We are each our own devil, and make this world our hell."

-Oscar Wilde

FRIDAY NIGHT

CHAPTER 1

The Weirdo

I see you.

Hidden behind tall tufts of spiked dune grass, the shifting sands and impenetrable pitch-black waters of Lake Michigan mere feet away, I watch – crouched and ready. Past the golden grasses and below the sloping dune, Cadie McLeod is twirling girlishly in the cool sand. She acts as if no one is watching her because, of course, she doesn't know that I am. Would she keep swaying around the flickering fire if she knew I was here – observing her - hidden from view?

I'm quivering with anticipation. It's midnight in Harbor Cove. Up above, a red supermoon casts rays through incoming clouds to shine a hazy spotlight on the endless beach. It allows me to study her every movement. I am transfixed; in the soft light, the popular young woman is more captivating than ever. Her face is toasted warm and glowing. Dancing in her flowing yellow sundress beside the crackling bonfire and red sparks shooting high into the night sky, she smiles brightly at her good friends – and eager eighteen-year-olds in expensive swim trunks who hope they'll get lucky tonight.

Like all men: fools.

A sudden gust of wind catches the young woman's long crimson hair, and it lifts upward, causing her and a friend to laugh and stumble in the wind-blown sands. The breezes are cooling, picking up. The smells of sweet fire and earthy lake water fill my nostrils as strengthening waves claw at the nighttime beach. I observe Cadie touch the gold necklace around her slender neck, the neck my fingers soon will be choking.

She's blissfully unaware. Just a lovely girl on an idyllic beach enjoying her end-of-school celebration. Completely at ease – well, maybe not completely. Her parents *were* murdered (but that's another story).

Oh, how I despise her and her happiness.

While I bide my time, a thought suddenly springs to mind. The little girl (Emily was it?) who disappeared from these very dunes ten years ago. Her tender body was never found. Some of the locals say the Devil in the Dunes got her.

Poor little girl.

Now shifting from knee to aching knee, I try to calm my excitement, waiting for the final minutes to pass, and feeling the syringe in my coat pocket move slightly. I pat it reassuringly. It's almost time.

Be patient.

Too many times to count, I've approached girls like her – beautiful girls with fit bodies, tan faces, and straight, white teeth. They've got it good growing up in Harbor Cove. Just being women, honestly. They're sweet at first, happily chatting with you for a minute, eyes animated, providing you a moment of their precious time. Then, slowly, that look appears: the dark shadow of recognition.

Oh, this guy's weird.

They're not smiling anymore. Nervous and uncomfortable, they scan the room. They're looking to be rescued. From me. The Weirdo.

Who do they think they are? I'm worth a million of them.

So, I made a vow to live free of them.

I've never been happier.

As I have for quite some time, I study Cadie from afar – always learning her patterns and routines. Finalizing my plan and choosing the perfect day. I chuckle as she dances a bit unevenly from too much beer. Ironically, "Cruel Summer" by Taylor Swift is playing on someone's speaker. I see Cadie leave the drunken group of silly teens and slowly make her way to the dark lake – the high winds tossing her hair. The glowing moon continues to allow me to observe her, and the circling light from the nearby Point Betsie Lighthouse occasionally travels across the sand. I can see Harbor Cove Pier in the distance and fondly remember all the times I've stalked her, quietly walking the wooden planks behind her.

Invisible.

But growing in strength and conviction.

She noticed me - once. It was a cool Sunday evening, and Cadie and her friends were eating ice cream as they strolled the pier – a Sunday tradition in Harbor Cove. The colder temperature didn't stop the carefree girls from wearing jean cut-offs and short tops. They were in high spirits, laughing about something they found extremely funny. It was hard to hear. I couldn't get too close. I thought I heard Julie mention her puppy, Murphy, but I couldn't be sure. They were all smiling so damn much.

Must be nice to be that happy.

As the threesome made their way down Harbor Cove Pier as it jutted deeper into Lake Michigan, I kept a steady distance behind so as not to seem oddly close. Stratus clouds creeped overhead, dampening the mood and making the people seem like shadows – soulless. Cadie brushed long hair from her face and took a lick of ice cream. I was mesmerized by her fleeting flick of tongue. So pink and little. Was I aroused or disgusted? It's hard to tell anymore.

Then suddenly, she looked right at me. Straight into my eyes. She saw me watching her intently. Yet, she didn't look away or scowl in disgust. She just smiled warmly - like she was doing me a huge favor – and I felt deep anger slice through me like a switchblade.

Sure, grace me with your smile. You don't know what's coming.

I continue to observe her as the strengthening winds sweep over me.

Cadie suddenly lifts her sundress and kicks off her matching yellow flip flops. I marvel at her long, graceful legs moving in the cool water. Years of running high school track has sculpted enviable calves. She is a strong athlete.

That might be a problem.

Then I notice her perfectly formed face seems darkly pensive and lost in thought as she toys with her necklace. Half a heart on a gold chain.

Where is the other half, Cadie?

It pleases me to witness her pain. Alone with her surely sad thoughts. I, too, have unpleasant thoughts - not that anyone cares. Unspoken, hidden thoughts about the people who have wronged me. No wonder my mind is consumed with vengeance and death.

How do you let go of a grudge that destroyed your life?

One bright Saturday in late May, I was shocked to see her. She was jogging down Laurel Lane, coming right at me. Her green eyes glowed, and her luxurious hair blew free in the Lake Michigan breeze. She was enchantment. In that very moment, the curtains parted, and I saw it all. She was everything: smart, beautiful, sexual - liked and loved by all. An exceptional person with big plans for her life.

I hated her so much.

I stepped backward behind a towering oak tree as she ran by. All the feelings I'd shoved down deep in my barren soul began bubbling upward: unrelenting pain, anger, resentment, and bitterness. I slid down in the grass and leaned against the tree. I closed my eyes, trying to remember the last time I'd truly felt hope and happiness. It was when I believed my soulmate liked me – maybe even loved me. Yet, I overhead the whispers. People saying I didn't stand a chance. That I was delusional. That she was too good for me. That I was even ugly.

Unfortunately, I knew they were right.

I sat there in the grass for a long time, maybe hours, ruminating in pain and simmering in my anger until every cell of my body was saturated in hate. Finally, as the evening clouds rolled in, blotting out the sun and making me shiver, I stood up. I began walking down the dark, desolate street. And just as I passed underneath a streetlamp, its mercury vapor light twitched to life, and the blue-green glow immediately illuminated my path – and my mind. That's the moment I truly understood. It didn't matter that she was all of those things. I was still better than her. I was better than all of them.

Now, as I watch Cadie wave goodbye to friends and walk away from the fire's dying embers, I take position and ready myself; the time has come.

For me to be set free - to win.

Is this a tale of simple vengeance? If only.

CHAPTER 2

Cadie McLeod

When I was a little girl, just twelve years old, the people who loved me best died in a car crash. Except, to be completely accurate, they weren't in a car. A car crashed into them. Harbor Cove police said the car that hit my parents was traveling fifty miles per hour. Aileen, my joyful, free-spirited artist mom and Thomas, my loving, hardworking scientist dad, were plowed into by a drunk driver on a spring evening as they ran across M-22. Aileen and Thomas McLeod – my own Scottish saints - were killed instantly. Obliterated. That's the word the newspaper used. They were only thirty-five. At least they were together. Police theorize they were holding hands.

Does that make it less painful?

Reportedly, they were celebrating my dad's work promotion. That evening, instead of raising a champagne toast, they headed to Frosty Bar for their favorite Traverse City Cherry Ice Cream. Always two scoops in a waffle cone with sprinkles. Unfortunately, they never made it. A drunk driver ran them down in cold blood and drove away. Police never caught their killer.

I try not to think about the cause of their death because all sorts of horrifying images take hold of my mind. The police said there were no brake marks at the scene.

How drunk would you have to be to run people down and simply drive off?

Every year, on the anniversary of their deaths, I'm racked with the deepest sorrow, but I conceal it best I can. All evening, I've pretended I'm enjoying myself, pasting on a smile and trying to convince even myself. I've laughed – even giggled. I've danced on the beach. I've even talked with a few guys I never really got to know and a few who make me uneasy.

Boys will be boys, right?

I also worked up courage to talk to Nick. (We haven't spoken seriously since that dreadful morning on Mackinac Island when he pushed too far.) Tonight, he's getting drunk and acting off. He has a bit of a temper lately.

All night, I try to behave like a normal 18-year-old girl the best I can, but six years ago, my parents were ripped away, I was orphaned, and my life changed forever. For so long, I have dragged profound sadness behind me like a heavy chain. I can never be the happy-go-lucky girl I once was.

I can never truly be normal. But I am trying. I know my parents would want me to be happy.

Suddenly, I feel as if someone is watching me. I survey the dunes but see nothing but dark, endless shapes of shifting sand. Maybe it's the Devil in the Dunes, I laugh hollowly. Actually, it's the cryptic note that's got me worried and the truck that sometimes parks outside my house late at night. The other night its bright lights flashed into my bedroom window, waking me up. Then the lights went dark. I got out of bed, crept to the window, and looked out over the yard to the end of the driveway. I could see the black silhouette of someone inside the truck - just sitting there, watching the house. I nervously got back in bed and heard the truck slowly back out of the driveway.

Maybe it was turning around? Should I say something to Aunt Marie? I really don't want to worry her.

I stop walking the beach and look up. Overhead, the strawberry moon is enormous and deep red. When it's like this, I reminisce about the many times I trekked the beach with my parents and sometimes arm in arm with my mom. Whenever there was a supermoon shining bigger and brighter, my mom would get excited and burst out singing, "When the moon hits your eye, it's a big pizza pie. That's amore!" I would join in, singing badly, and mom would look down at me and laugh. She had a distinct laugh for a woman: loud and bold. Sometimes, other beachgoers would turn and look at my boisterous mother, but she didn't care. She was confident.

Occasionally, though, I could sense anxiety in my parents. It was subtle; I don't think anyone else would sense it. But sometimes, I could overhear them talking quietly about something - maybe the past? Their faces would cloud over and darken, and my dad would touch the scar around his eye. I usually walked away when they were like that. It made me uncomfortable.

Aileen had mysterious, light green emerald eyes that were almost translucent when she was happy, but they could suddenly darken when she became passionate or upset. Just as quickly, she could be laughing madly. I think that was the Scottish in her: a full spectrum of feelings she was never fearful to convey. My dad never joined in the craziness, though. He was more reserved – the conservative scientist - and would roll his eyes at us, but there was often a broad smile on his handsome, tanned face (years of playing outdoor Lacrosse). He was protective of my mother, and he loved her fiercely. I knew he enjoyed her silly, spontaneous humor (although she could certainly be serious and strong). She was the playful ying to his more serious yang. He looked at her like she was his bonnie lass – his good fortune. He also looked at me that way.

I can picture them: my father's square jaw, sandy brown hair, and ice-blue eyes and my mother's sometimes transparent green eyes and thick red hair cascading down her shoulders. No wonder they were voted Most Beautiful Couple their senior year. Not to brag, but I'm thankful I look just like her. Whenever I look in the mirror, I see my mom. However, when I do, I'm also reminded I'll never see her – never see them - again.

The tears begin to fall.

I hear someone yell my name from far away. Even my name reminds me of my mother. As a child and adult, my mom adored Nancy Drew books. She admired their clever and competent heroine who was never afraid to speak her mind. My mom once told me, "Nancy Drew shows us all the ways a woman can be. Women can be powerful and strong and live an independent life. You're the smartest person I know, Cadie. You could live a life like that. You can be free."

I often wondered what she meant by that.

Free how?

She said I reminded her of Nancy Drew, which, coming from her, was the supreme compliment. (Mom claimed to have read all 175 books; I've read 25, I think.) The books were written under the pseudonym Carolyn Keene, so my mother named me Carolyn. My little cousin Isla had a speech impediment and could never pronounce Carolyn. She began calling me Cadie, and the nickname stuck. Dad wanted to name me Elspeth after his Mhamo – so old fashioned! Can you imagine me being named Elspeth? Then I'd be called Ellie or Pethie or Peth.

Groan.

"So, your name is Beth?"

"No, Elspeth."

"Seth?"

Ugh.

I have a hard enough time getting people to pronounce my last name correctly.

“It’s Mc Lee-od?

“No, McLeod.”

“Mac Load?”

“No, McLeod as in, ‘I wish I was floating away right now in a cloud.’”

Thankfully, my strong-willed mother won out, and Carolyn - Cadie - it is.

Instinctively, I touch my necklace. It provides comfort and sends me back to my twelfth birthday. (A few months later we laid my parents to rest in a small cemetery in Manistee). They gave me the necklace in a little pink box: half a gold heart on a small chain. The other half was my mother’s. I smile remembering how she always wore the other half on her slender neck. Her necklace was never found at the accident scene. I went there once to look for it, but it was too painful. All I could think about is the horror they must have felt when the car hit them. I always prayed that their deaths were instant, so they never suffered. I’m heartbroken for dad: In the end, he couldn’t protect his wife.

My parents - my friends – oh, how I miss you.

My mind travels back to the night before they were killed. We were in my cozy bedroom - mom tucking me in for the night. Dad peeked in to say goodnight, patted me on the head, and gently shut the door. With bright eyes, mom told me about a book she bought. She always loved to surprise me with a new book. That’s how my love of reading – and learning - began.

“Can we read it now,” I pleaded. “I would love to hear a new story!”

I knew she probably planned on reading it with daddy on the porch swing tomorrow or a in a few days, but I was hoping to stay up a bit later.

“Oh, okay,” Aileen smiled. “How can I refuse my precious Carolyn?”

My mother was so good to me.

That night, we cuddled together under my fluffy pink comforter and read *The Legend of the Sleeping Bear Sand Dunes.* The book told the Ojibwe story of a mother and her two cubs. The three of them, to escape a raging Wisconsin fire, jumped into Lake Michigan and swam for their lives. The bears were strong swimmers, but it was dark, and they swam for hours. The poor cubs became separated from their momma. Exhausted, they drowned before they reached the shore.

I looked up and saw a hint of tears in my mother’s eyes - the last time I would see my mother cry.

Momma Bear was heartbroken. She climbed the high bluff and called out to her babies over and over, but received no reply. There she waited, atop that bluff, scanning the horizon, looking for her children. So, the legend goes, the Great Spirit Manitou created two islands – North and South Manitou - to honor the bear cubs’ bravery and a single sand dune to represent the resilient Momma Bear who spent the rest of her life in vigil, waiting for her babies to return.

Of course, I started sobbing. My mother didn’t think I would take the story so much to heart, but I did. Aileen stroked my hair until I fell asleep, her warm body snuggling with mine. She finally fell asleep as well, and I remember waking up later and hearing her steady breathing. I snuggled in closer, and she placed her arm over me. It brought me contentment, and I remember thinking how lucky I was to have her as my mom. I felt nothing but peace and love and safety.

That's the final memory I have of my mom - and dad. The next day they were dead.

Now when I drive by Sleeping Bear, I recall that Indian legend, but my story is reversed. I'm the solitary sand dune eternally keeping vigil – staring into the deep Lake Michigan waters - waiting for my mother and father to return to me. Of course, like the legend, they never do. They are gone forever. Not drowned at sea, but murdered.

Even though I'm not a religious person, I sometimes pray there is a Great Spirit, so one day I can see Thomas and Aileen once more. Whenever I go to Sleeping Bear and walk to the edge of its massive dunes, I look out over the vast waters and am reminded of my parents. I feel a sense of hope that someday we will be reunited.

I'm crying again and suddenly conscious that my wet feet are freezing and becoming numb. I'm at the deserted end of the beach, far from the laughter and

dying fire. I have a weird, disquieting feeling. I think about the truck parked outside my bedroom last night, its lights briefly shining in my window before the driver turned them off. Did they leave me that strange letter? If so, why?

I have an instinct I should leave the beach and head for the safety of home.

The westerly winds are now colder and picking up, creating sizeable waves and swirling my sundress. I'm shivering, and I wonder if it's from a gust front or something more sinister. The moon makes the approaching tall clouds appear whitish, and I notice their wispy tops. I also smell the earthiness of the Great Lake. A thunderstorm is on its way. I wipe away the cold tears from my cheeks and pat down my dress. It's time to head back. Back to the cozy cottage. Back to my Aunt Marie who will be waiting up for me.

Turning north toward the bonfire, I see the solitary sand dune – momma bear - off in the distance, and my mood lightens slightly.

I run down the beach, faster and faster – actually sprinting - and feel the cool sugar sand between my toes. My speed gives me strength, and running helps me forget. The cool, incoming storm winds toss my hair, and my mind is clear, at least for the moment, of the deep, piercing sadness that visits me every year on this day.

As I continue to sprint down the beach, my heart pounding, I also feel my spirit, my powerful desire to live and to make my parents proud. I remember my mother's favorite quote by Nancy Drew: "Nothing is impossible. The word itself says, I'm possible."

Thank you, mother, for all you taught me. I will never forget.

As I near the waning fire, all I can think about is the promise I made to my parents six years ago that I would get justice for them. That I would find their killer.

I finally reach the bonfire and slow down, walking toward the smoldering embers, trying to catch my breath and quiet my mind. My remaining classmates look up at me as I pass by - a determined look etched across my face as a final thought dominates my thinking.

Six years ago, you murdered my parents. You ran them down like dogs in the street and never looked back. And whoever you are, wherever you are,

I WILL FIND YOU.

CHAPTER 3
The Weirdo

Strangling her was not that hard, surprisingly. In seconds, she was unconscious. That educational *YouTube* video was quite accurate. She gargled slightly and then slumped like a bag of rocks. I about fell over a tree branch trying to keep her from flopping into the sand. When her head slumped over, some of her hair shoved into my mouth. I'm still picking her long red hairs off my jacket.

She was heavier than I thought. A hundred and forty pounds? A hundred and fifty? I knew she was tall – she towers over her friends - but she's thin. No, not thin - athletic. I guess I just thought she'd be lighter. They say muscles are heavier. They're not kidding.

Who am I kidding? I loved it.

If I'm honest, I'd have to say the moment she was in my control was thrilling – electrifying! I had positioned myself in the woods, just off the trail. Hidden by trees, I watched and waited. I stayed utterly silent, knowing she would take this trail back to her bike. Finally, I saw her. Long, flowing red hair and bits of her pretty sundress peeking through the trees. The overhead moon provided just enough light. And I heard her. She seemed somewhat tipsy and playfully yelled goodbye to her friends, taking a final selfie over her shoulder.

"Love you guys!" she waved. "Stop by Scoops tomorrow. "I'll be there all afternoon. I'll give you free ice cream. Just don't tell anyone." She laughed and turned, walking into the dark trail. Those were the last words she uttered before she became mine.

As she plodded by in the sand, humming to herself, I calmly stepped out from behind a tree, quietly advanced, and quickly encircled my left arm around her neck. I grabbed my left lower bicep with my right hand, and pulled hard. (This put pressures on both carotid arteries, cutting off blood.) She was clearly shocked and began to struggle but went unconscious fairly quickly – in five or six seconds. Then lights out.

As she drooped on the ground in front of me, I carefully put my hand into my coat pocket and removed the syringe. Staying very still, I leaned over and lifted Cadie's lifeless arm. Then I forcefully plunged the Ketamine needle deep into her muscle.

Enjoy your ride down the K-Hole, Cadie McLeod.

After putting the syringe back into my pocket, I worked my forearms under her armpits, and locked them together just above her small breasts. I was excited to have her under my control until I felt her moist armpits.

I don't like it when women sweat. It's not ladylike. Not that I should know. I've never really touched a woman.

I dragged her in the sand – long legs sticking out - over the uneven, twisting trail through the small dunes, rocks, and occasional tree branch past the bike rack to my truck that was parked behind large grasses. I could hear happy, drunken laughter in the distance. I had to hurry.

It took only six minutes to reach my vehicle, open the tailgate, and heave her up into the truck bed (not the easiest moment) and roll her in. It did take a minute to hoist up both of her long legs. Earlier, I had placed a black bookbag in the back of my truck. From it, I grabbed zip ties and bound her wrists. Then I tied a bandana tight over her eyes and head, securing my guest for the ride to her new – albeit brief - home.

I hope I didn't give her too much Special K. I don't want to kill her – *not yet anyways.*

Before I closed the truck's tailgate, I remembered I had one last thing to do. I leaned in and put my hand down her dress. I felt for the necklace and then grabbed it. I ripped the half a heart necklace from her slim neck and shoved it in my jeans' pocket. Then I slammed the tailgate and was off.

Exceeding my expectations, in a little over twelve minutes, Cadie and I were on the road. As I peered over my steering wheel into the darkness, grinning like a damn fool, my mood began to darken. My smiled faded, and my eyes narrowed into steely slits.

This was really happening. My fantasy was really coming true – and coming to an end.

As I drove down that lonely road, raindrops now falling softly on my window, my thoughts turned to what lie ahead: to the next several days and what I was surely owed.

CHAPTER 4

Thomas and Aileen McLeod

Right up until the night the couple was murdered, Cadie's parents lived a mostly charmed life. The high school sweethearts were blessed with love and a strong marriage, a sweet daughter, their homey cottage in Harbor Cove, and good friends and neighbors on Laurel Lane – a happy existence along Michigan's west coast. The singing sand beaches and freshwater breezes as well as the deeply forested state parks and the world's largest freshwater dunes added joy to their lives as they loved hiking and weekends boating on Lake Michigan. They had no reason to believe their seemingly blessed lives would ever be any different.

However, as the saying goes, "Into every life rain must fall."

Often called the Third Coast of the US, the west Michigan coastline – all 130 miles - stretches from Silver Lake in the north to St. Joseph in the south. All along I-96 and up to M-31, M-109, and M-22, from the Indiana border to the northern tip of Leelanau County and Grand Traverse Lighthouse, the shoreline is lined with lush, emerald-green forests and wilderness islands, towering dunes that rise several hundred feet above Lake Michigan, and picturesque beach towns. Inviting hamlets and colorful, scenic communities like South Haven, Saugatuck, Holland, Grand Haven, Pentwater, Empire, Glen Arbor, Leland, Charlevoix, and Petoskev dot the coastline. In 2011, *Good Morning America* even named the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, "the most beautiful place in America." The marketing geniuses call it "Pure Michigan," and it is a lovely place to live.

However, no place is perfect. Even the Garden of Eden had its slippery snake.

After graduating high school, the Most Beautiful Couple attended Alma College. Like any good Scotsman, Thomas loved Lacrosse; he was the Scots' midfielder and helped win the MIAA title his senior year. The young man was strong and agile - in the best shape of his life. His teammates often joked that Thomas, the team leader who played both offense and defense, grew eyes in the back of his head as he could see everything on the field. He was fortunate to have loyal teammates who were more like a band of brothers, and they added depth to Thomas's life.

After college, when Thomas, Sam, Al, and the rest would meet up for the annual Highland Festival, their fists full of Glenfiddich, the men might get a little crazy and loudly sing "Onward Scotsmen" until they fell about laughing. Regardless of the previous night's reverie, though, every year the 'brothers' managed to win tug-of-war. Sometimes, the guys made it to Detroit for St. Andrew's Society Highland Games. After, they would all head to The Scotsman to share a wee dram. In the decade before Thomas was murdered, he was living a good life surrounded by the best of men, and every single one of them thought Thomas was the best guy they knew.

He was the type of favored young man, however, who might inspire jealousy in lesser men.

Thomas and Aileen married, and Aileen, who had earned an Art and Design degree from Alma, became a watercolorist. Her west Michigan landscapes, noted for their intense blue pigments and bold strokes, sold well throughout the Midwest. Several years after college, she opened an art studio in an historic building in downtown Alma next to Old City Hall. Aileen loved the building's Italianate architecture with its low overhanging roof and tall, narrow windows that allowed sunlight to flood her studio and colorful canvases. She even spearheaded the Alma Heritage Foundation to preserve Alma's historic buildings. Thomas, who ultimately earned a PhD from MSU, became an environmental chemist for the State of Michigan and worked twenty minutes away in Mt. Pleasant.

It was most definitely a good life - so far.

For a long time, the couple was content in their agricultural college town - until they weren't. As the years went by, they grew restless for a change, and their westside roots beckoned them home. Thomas and Aileen also decided they wanted Cadie to have the childhood they had – a sunny lake life filled with boating, beaches, and nighttime bonfires. So, when Cadie was eleven, they made the difficult choice to leave Alma behind and begin anew. They headed for the west coast of Michigan, specifically Harbor Cove.

The small coastal town is situated in Benzie County along Lake Michigan just northwest of Crystal Lake and south of the entrance to the Sleeping Bear Sand Dunes. The nearby lakes are quiet, secluded, and surrounded by lush forests just outside the National Lakeshore. Harbor Cove is a quaint, picturesque town with charming shops, a winery, bustling farmer's market, a much-loved ice cream shop, and, of course, a crystal blue harbor.

To Thomas and Aileen, Harbor Cove was Shangri-La – the truly perfect place to raise their only child. Of course, Shangri-La is a myth, and most people don't realize the fabricated literary town was in fact not paradise; instead, it was preparing for catastrophe.

So, in the end, the metaphor *was* fitting.

Their Shangri-La did experience catastrophe, and, like the cold rain that falls from a Lake Michigan storm cloud, bad luck finally fell on the McLeods.

First, it fell on Thomas and Aileen. Then their daughter Cadie.

Six years after the death of Thomas and Aileen, on a warm Friday night in June, when the community of Harbor Cove was celebrating its seniors, their beautiful and talented daughter left an end-of-school bonfire on the edge of Lake Michigan. She had her whole life ahead of her that included a full ride scholarship to Michigan State University to study chemistry and run hurdles for the MSU track team. It was a stellar future.

At midnight, their daughter left her friends and the fire's glowing remnants and walked down an isolated trail into the windswept dunes. All she wanted to do was retrieve her bike and ride home to the safety of Aunt Marie's cottage. But that was not to be; someone in the universe had other plans. That night the young woman never made it to the cozy cottage only miles away. Instead, in the desolate dunes under a now cloudy sky, Cadie McLeod came face to face with a devil in the dunes: pure evil in human form.

Then, in an instant, the exceptional young woman was gone. Thomas and Aileen's much beloved daughter simply vanished like an evening breeze blowing across the shifting sands.

AVAILABLE

Devil in the Dunes: A Great Lakes Mystery (A Cadie McLeod Novel) is available at Amazon.com in paperback, hard copy, and Kindle. It's also available at walmart.com, barnesandnoble.com, and many other online sites and Michigan bookstores. Go to wendybyard.com/purchase to learn more. Visit wendybyard.com.

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