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SHADOWS OF SUPERIOR: A GREAT LAKES MYSTERY

A Cadie McLeod Novel

By Wendy Byard

Category: Adult

Genre: Psychological Thriller

"I knew nothing but shadows, and I thought them to be real."

-Oscar Wilde

PROLOGUE

PRISONER OF THE PINES

Lena
Man from the Other World

His bright headlights sliced through our thick tangle of pines, and I knew. The man in the scarf had finally come to kill me.

I was seated at our dinette table, drinking tea with Mother, when she suddenly jumped and screamed. She, too, saw his lights advancing through the trees. She flung her teacup on the linoleum table, and the porcelain shattered, flinging its hot contents across the kitchen.

“He’s here! Hide! Hurry! In the closet!” Mother howled.

I sprinted to our cabin’s broom closet. I could hear the sickening crunch of his tires on our stone driveway. His van door slamming. He would be within our cabin in seconds. Swiftly, I opened the knotty pine door and wedged my tall body into the small, dark space. As I did, I hit my head hard on the closet overhang, my teeth clamping down on the soft, side flesh of my mouth. It took everything in me to keep from crying out as metallic blood filled my mouth. I struggled to breathe and felt burning in my chest. Rage began to mount within me at the man outside our house. A second later, our solid oak front door flung open and banged against the paneled wall.

He was here.

“Where is she?” the man screamed at Mother. Through the crack, I could see his blue eyes darting wildly - like a madman from the Other World.

“She went for a walk,” Mother replied, smoothing her thinning hair, trying to appear calm. “To the wildflower garden.”

I saw the man warily eye the kitchen table with its hot tea splattered everywhere. I was so sick him!

“Like hell she did!” he yelled. “You always lie! And it’s storming outside!”

Suddenly, the man hurled his car keys on the table and angrily shoved a kitchen chair across the floor. I pressed myself as hard as I could against the wooden closet wall. I couldn't catch my breath in the claustrophobic space.

"See for yourself. She's not here."

Now the man was circling the table to get at Mother. She looked so weak compared to him. Then I saw her eyes. The way they narrowed and darkened when she was angered and at her breaking point.

"I told you not to come," Mother hissed.

The man only scowled and replied, "And then what? We both go to jail for the rest of our lives?"

Mother took a step toward him.

"There must be another way."

The man slammed his fist on the table.

"There isn't another way! This is the way! Now go fucking get her!"

Instead, Mother snatched his car keys off the table and ran to the living room!

"You're not taking her!" she screamed over her shoulder.

Through the crack, I saw him stomp into the living room.

"Do you really think you are going to stop me? Give me the keys!"

He looked like the devil in his big, black rain coat. He walked up to Mother who was standing in front of the basement steps. She was shaking and crying.

"She has to die! It's the least we can do!"

I grabbed the vacuum to steady myself as my head felt light. Hateful tears raced down my face. Then I remembered my bear necklace. My neighbor Mr. McKinley called it a talisman. I grasped the tiny brown bear for strength.

Do not let him win! You deserve so much more than this!

My teeth chattered so violently I thought the man might hear. He then stepped closer to Mother.

“I have to do this! For both of us! Now give me the keys!”

Mother clutched them tighter.

“No, no, no!” she screamed. “I won’t give them to you! I won’t! I’m not letting you kill her!”

The man took two large steps, put his hands on Mother’s bony shoulders, and with all his strength shoved her down the stairs! Her anguished screams engulfed the cabin. I heard her falling, bones cracking on every concrete step. Then she hit the basement floor with a sickening thud. The man immediately tore down the stairs after her.

Move! Go now!

I cautiously opened the closet door and tiptoed down the narrow hallway as fast as I dared. I didn’t realize my blood was dripping on the floor. In the hallway, I quietly opened the small drawer in the little table. I grabbed Mr. G’s whistle and put it in my jeans’ pocket. Then I carefully lifted the backpack from the cupboard. I was sneaking to the back door when Mother suddenly screamed! Like she was dying! Then all was quiet.

I’m sorry, Mother, but this is how it has to end.

Through angry tears, I unlatched the cabin door and ran down the rain-slickened steps. Lightning flashed in the distance; thunder roared overhead.

I was free of them! For now.

The time had finally come to put my plan in motion.

As a took a step forward, I heard a hideous shriek. Like Mr. G’s Wiindigoo- the monstrous cannibal spirit in his Ojibwe stories - the man in the cabin let out a blood-curdling cry! It was my name! He was screaming my name!

“Leeeeeena!!!”

I couldn’t wait a moment longer. Cold rain pelting my face, I sprinted out into the gale-force winds and raced down the flooded path. I ran faster and faster into the dark woods toward my only source of refuge: the lighthouse and a violent lake.

PART I

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF EMILY HADLY

"We are like butterflies who flutter for a day, and think it is forever."

– Carl Sagan

Chapter 1

Mariner's Beach 14 Years Ago
The Day She Went Away

The winged insect flitted over the little girl's head.

She looked up and squinted into the hot midday sun. An unusually large monarch butterfly, with its brilliant orange wings and thick black veins, hovered mere inches from her face. Then it did something unexpected. The creature landed gently on the child's sun-toasted cheek and basked in its warmth while tasting her skin with its feet. The girl felt a slight tickle from its claws and bristles and was delighted.

The six-year-old dropped her plastic sand pail and, keeping her head so very still, slowly stood up, her left eye locked on her new winged companion. However, despite her efforts, the skittish butterfly startled and flexed its wings. It left the child's cheek and fluttered upward, immediately catching a lake current that lifted it high into the warm July air.

Emily turned excitedly to her parents but saw that her father and mother were still sleeping soundly on the quilt. She could hear her father's low snore through his thick mustache and see her mother's sunburned arm draped lazily across her face.

The girl looked up. Now, the ethereal butterfly was twirling gaily on the wind, rising and falling on Lake Michigan's playful eddies and swirls and gliding toward the nearby dune. Its oversized black eyes looked down and seemed to smile at the little girl - beckoning her to follow.

The child took one last look at her unconscious parents and then made an unfortunate decision. She dug her tiny toes into the warm beach and began to chase happily after her new-found friend, running farther and faster until she crested a mound of windblown sand.

Seconds later, she was out of sight.

Chapter 2

Jagged Glass

Just off the shore of the Great Lake, a man who had been sitting in his van and watching a small family from a secluded pull-off immediately sat up straighter. The little girl he'd been observing suddenly began to run. For some reason, the child had jumped up from the sand and begun scampering straight at the dune that sloped upward just feet from his car.

His breath quickened. He lost sight of her for a moment and looked upward expectantly - excitedly - hoping the girl would crest the hill. First, he saw a large orange butterfly appear over the dune. Then, seconds later, he saw the girl.

The child's bright eyes were looking up - glued to the mesmerizing butterfly floating above her head as she attempted to chase after it down the hill, her feet sinking with every step into the thick sand.

Adrenaline coursed through him. He couldn't believe his good fortune. Only minutes ago, he had been observing the child through a small opening the trail afforded, and now she was only feet away! He sucked in quick bursts of air while his mind raced with competing thoughts. This was quite the opportunity unfolding!

While he wildly contemplated his next steps, the girl suddenly stopped. She cried out in pain and flopped down in the sand, grabbing her tiny foot and whimpering. The man quickly looked over at her parents, but the two of them were still sleeping soundly.

Disgusting people.

As the butterfly flew away, the child began to cry, and he could see large droplets of blood oozing from the wound on her sandy foot. The man suddenly remembered the Band-Aids in his van. He leaned over to his glove box, pulled out the package, and placed it on the passenger seat, removing two of them.

Was he really doing this?

“Hello, it looks like you hurt yourself,” the man yelled kindly through his open van window. “Are you okay?”

The girl, her warm face awash in fresh tears, was startled and looked up at him in surprise. She was so intent on the butterfly that she never saw the man sitting alone in his van. She shook her head slowly but didn’t answer. She just kept clutching her foot, her little hands now covered in what seemed like a lot of blood. Her brown eyes were wide and her dark eyelashes wet from crying. A lone seagull suddenly squawked and flew overhead.

“Look, I’ve got Band-Aids. I’ll bring you some,” the man said, holding them up through the window to show her. They fluttered gently in the lake breeze.

The girl pulled back in fear and began to scoot backwards.

He exited his van and looked over once again at the parents. They were still sleeping. He quickly walked to the top of the dune and looked both ways. Off in the distance, there were people playing volleyball. Other than that, there were no people on the beach – at least for the moment. He couldn’t believe his luck. He walked back down the small dune, carefully approached the little girl, and knelt down in front of her.

“Wow, that looks like a bad cut,” he said quietly. “I think you need to go to a doctor. I don’t think my Band-Aids are going to be enough to stop the bleeding. How about I drive you over to your parents?”

His mind exploded at this course of events. It was hard to form words as his excitement mounted. The hot sun beat down on his oily, sweating forehead, and he knew he had only seconds to grab her. Surely, someone would come along and spot them at any time.

“Okay,” the child spoke nervously. “My mom and dad are just over there.”

Her tiny finger pointed to the other side of the dune.

“Oh, don’t worry,” he said. “I’ll drive us over there.”

She slowly nodded yes, while her blonde ponytail caught a breeze and shifted. She could sense something not right about the man and began to tremble.

"Here, let me pick you up," he said. His mild manner masked the intense emotions he felt swelling inside.

The man suddenly encircled her with his large arms. She clawed at the sand, but he grabbed her and quickly lifted her up. As he did, he experienced her sweet smell and radiating warmth.

I'm really doing this.

He carried the shivering, weightless child the few steps to his van. Her foot continued to ooze blood drops as he walked, and a few fell on his khaki slacks.

"Jesus," he muttered. "My new pants."

The little girl began to cry. With his right hand, the man opened the back side door and placed the girl's tiny body on the cloth seat, her foot now bleeding on the floor's plastic tray. Her closed fist still held its handful of sand and small leaves. As the man closed the door, her wide, big brown eyes looked up at him in fear, and her lips quivered.

He turned and when he did, he saw a large piece of green glass in the sand sticking out in a pool of the little girl's blood. The jagged glass from a beer bottle was glinting in the sunlight. He ran over, picked it up, and then quickly ran to his van and jumped into his driver's seat.

In seconds, the van was driving away from the secluded spot and pulling out onto the main road, heading north toward coastal highway M-22. He set the 'trophy' – the bloody piece of glass - down on the console between the seats.

The man looked in his rearview mirror at the shaking child, and a broad smile broke across his sweat-drenched face. Then, the happiest of thoughts exploded into his dark, throbbing brain.

This may be the luckiest day of my life.

PART II

LAKE GIRL

Chapter 3

Michigan State University
Senior Year

Six-year-old Emily Hadly had been missing from the shores of Lake Michigan for over a decade when 22-year-old Cadie McLeod strode across the MSU campus. The bright autumn sun shone down on the tall, slender college senior as she walked alongside the fast-flowing Red Cedar River. Her crimson hair billowed in the breeze behind her, and she strode with purpose on the winding sidewalk. Suddenly, she found herself standing on a carpet of brilliant yellow leaves. In awe, she bent down and lifted a large, golden leaf to her face, admiring its notch down the middle, two identical lobes, and veins radiating outward.

Ginkgo Biloba. How beautiful.

she was infatuated with leaves. It didn't matter if they were big or little, oak or sycamore, Cadie was fascinated by their hidden colors, intricate architecture of complex veins, and waxy smoothness or papery crispness. Yet, it was more than that. Leaves reminded her of Mr. Cupal, her favorite science teacher, who called her to the front of the class one day to share how proud he was of Cadie. It was a moment she never forgot. Because of his faith in her, a glowing recommendation, and close guidance, Cadie was accepted into MSU and its forensic program.

Cadie smiled and let the ginkgo leaf twirl away and continued on, the cheery fall day seeming absolutely perfect. Yet Cadie's eyes were always moving – always observing her surroundings. She understood that at any moment someone might step out from behind a tree and grab you. She understood that because four years ago it happened to her.

Cadie passed a grove of sugar maples and beamed at their beauty. The woman suddenly felt gratitude wash over her. It had been a good three years - mostly. Despite all she suffered in her early life (and

last fall), Cadie was now having a good year – with the occasional self-doubt and sleepless night thrown in. So yes, her life wasn't perfect; there were moments of profound grief and mental distress over the murder of her parents and her own brushes with evil, but it did seem the good times were finally outweighing the bad.

Three years of therapy, her Landon Hall support group and, of course, Nick helped immensely when her mind crept back to its dark past. More often than not, though, she felt she was approaching some measure of peace in her life. Her friends noticed her playfulness and wit - albeit corny at times – returning. Last night at Jenison Field House, Cadie cracked to a track teammate, "I'd give you a running pun right now, Marcie, but I ran out of ideas."

Marcie rolled her eyes, laughed, and said, "There she is."

As Cadie turned north on Farm Lane, the autumn breeze picking up, she thought she saw a man watching her from his parked car. His eyes seemed to follow her as she walked. Cadie was immediately on edge.

Is that him? But he's still in jail, right?

She thought about the young college student she met last September: Mitch Lawson. The shy but awkward student with oversized glasses seemed nice at first – always opening Baker Hall's wooden door for her when they exited their History of Crime and Punishment class together. But then he began stalking her: sending her strange notes, following her around campus, showing up to her classes, and even looking in her dorm window. He told Cadie that he had read every article about the McLeods and was fascinated by her history. Cadie's therapist said Lawson was a public figure stalker and most likely felt a personal connection with her after reading about her in the news. The police investigated Lawson's activities, and ultimately, he was found guilty of misdemeanor stalking and sentenced to one year in Ingham County Jail. Now that time was almost up, and Cadie wondered what would happen when he was released.

Over the past years, Cadie had worked hard to control her thoughts, and she wasn't about to let Lawson change that, so she willed herself to stop thinking about the man. She forced herself to focus on her many blessings at Michigan State. Of course, all the typical college fun, like Big Ten football games and dorm parties. She also was thankful for her god-given speed. In the spring, she set a school record in the 55-meter hurdles. Running always gave her a sense of strength and freedom – even distraction. Yet, far outweighing these wonderful college experiences were the countless hours spent with the caring, attentive, and playful Nick Brennan.

Thank god for you, Nick.

The two had grown very close. Nick would travel to MSU at least once a month, or Cadie would drive her dad's Camaro over to Ann Arbor for a weekend visit. Cadie almost laughed out loud picturing the many times Nick pulled his silver vintage Corvette into the Landon Hall parking lot. He waited until she looked out her ground floor window and then popped the car's headlights up and down – as if the Corvette was winking at Cadie. She'd grab Aunt Marie's indigo blue and white patch quilt off her bed and race out the door.

As Cadie walked briskly, quickly looking over her shoulder to see if the man in the car had followed her, she recalled the many late nights with Nick on the hushed campus. The twosome would find a spot and lay down together. Cadie loved looking into his warm, brown eyes, holding hands, and talking under the massive redwood trees and nighttime stars. She also loved the evenings spent curled up together in her tiny twin bed in Landon Hall, talking late into the night about the issues that mattered to them. With him, Cadie always felt safe.

She was extremely proud of Nick. His months-long research into sexual abuse on Michigan campuses and his columns on social issues had been published in the *Michigan Daily*, including his longer essay on the need for colleges to strengthen services for victims of sexual assault and stalking. In fact,

Nick was now so concerned about Cadie's safety that he gave her the Louisville Slugger signed by Kirk Gibson that his father had given him as a child.

"This bat will do you more good than me," Nick said seriously. "Keep it in your car."

Cadie smiled at the gesture, but inwardly the bat gave her pause.

I really hope I don't need to use this bat in my future.

After the murder of her parents, Nick became the most important person in her life besides Aunt Marie – and Nick's dad who saved her life. Of course, Cadie considered her parents to be her best friends, even if they were dead.

I wish you were still with me, mom and dad. Are you out there? Am I doing the right thing pursuing this internship?

Not only had Cadie made the Dean's list every semester at MSU, but, with her quick, agile mind, won the Distinguished Debater Award the previous season. As an outstanding debater on the MSU team, Cadie helped the University make it to the Final Four last year. Her performance debating the challenges of digital forensics in investigating cybercrimes helped her team secure its place in the finals.

As the young woman approached Giltner Hall, the leaves rustled in the fall breeze, and her mood dampened slightly when she pondered that she hadn't seen Nick in six weeks. Both students were terribly busy with school and activities. Now Cadie was traveling a deeply meaningful new path that would change her life. Yet, she wondered how it would impact her and Nick in the days to come. She also wondered what was in store for their future after graduation.

Hey, knock it off. You will see Nick soon. It will all be fine. Goodness!

Her thoughts then wandered to the letter tucked in the canvas bookbag slung over her shoulder. It was an important letter she received from the University in early August – the letter she had been waiting for. She recalled its opening lines: *We are pleased to inform you that you have been selected to*

participate in the Michigan State Police Cold Case Unit Internship! Michigan State University is proud to offer you this unique learning opportunity! Cadie really couldn't believe it: She had been selected for the prestigious internship.

Sometimes, I still feel like an imposter, though. Was I really chosen for me? Or am I a pity case?

Cadie tried to remain confident. And she was ready to put her knowledge and skills to use. She was now in the final year of her Forensic Science program and ready for real life – ready to help others. It wasn't always easy choosing this path. There were times Cadie was consumed with hatred for the man who ran down her parents. Why wouldn't she be filled with contempt? However, she knew her parents wouldn't want her to live a life full of anger and vengeance – and sleepless nights. They were kind, gentle people. Cadie wouldn't be turned into the people who had wronged her. She wouldn't let them win! So, she made a vow. Like the MSU School of Criminal Justice promised on its website, Cadie intended to "solve crimes and serve justice."

To her, though, the phrase wasn't just a slogan. She truly intended to fight her darker feelings and live a life that would make her deceased parents proud – and make the world more just. Thomas and Aileen were exceptional people, so it was important to Cadie that she lived their values and morals. Also, helping others was a way to create meaning out of chaos; it was a catalyst for healing her pain and finding purpose.

Yet, other times, she wondered if she was mentally healed enough to withstand the challenges of this internship. Was she strong enough to face more criminality? Might there be more suitable candidates? Cadie didn't want to underperform and weaken any investigation that might be better served by a stronger individual.

Can I really do this? I think I can, but I've gone through so much. Maybe there is a more suitable candidate to help solve these cold cases?

As she walked across the concrete patio to Giltner, she noticed the change in weather. The winds had strengthened, and the sky was now becoming moody and overcast – matching her pensive mood. She thought about the man in the car who seemed to be watching her and struggled against the intrusive thought.

Not everyone is a monster. Just keep going.

Cadie walked past a massive oak tree, its lengthy limbs stretching high into the now darkening sky, and a wind gust suddenly snatched her long, red hair and blew it skyward. Her green eyes looked up and were startled.

There, perched stoically on a branch was a massive Great Horned Owl. It had a reddish-brown face and watched her intently. While all around it leaves trembled, the owl only cocked its head and studied the girl below. Over the last three years, owls had visited Cadie from time to time. It seemed that whenever Cadie was facing serious self-doubt or on the verge of making an important decision, she would be visited by an owl, and suddenly her path would be made clearer. Cadie didn't always know what to make of the owls, though.

Could they be my parents – messengers sent from beyond to guide me? They seem to visit me when I am at a crossroads. Or maybe it's just my trauma playing with my mind? Or wishful thinking.

Thomas and Aileen McLeod - Cadie's parents – had loved owls. They appreciated the symbolism of the owl known for wisdom, intuition, as well as keen observation that metaphorically has meant finding truth in darkness. Thomas and Aileen's love of owls certainly influenced Cadie's thinking whenever an owl paid her a visit.

Cadie's mind quickly traced to the most important time she saw an owl: it was three years ago on the night she was held hostage by a sociopath. The owls who visited her that terrifying night were comforting as she struggled with the decision to die or keep fighting. Now, here was another owl,

stationed on a branch, watching her. Was it some sort of message? Were mom and dad trying to tell her something yet again?

She had been feeling uncertain about this internship – wondering if she was truly the best candidate to solve its cold cases. But now, with the owl staring at her, she suddenly felt a spirit moving through her.

Why not me for this internship? After all my family has suffered at the hands of a sociopath, after all my studying, after all I've learned, I surely must be equipped for what lies ahead. Who more than me wants justice in this world?

Suddenly, wind rushed through the trees, and with a gentle beat of its large wings, the large owl glided upwards. Cadie smiled and blew a kiss to the bird and began to feel more optimistic and confident. She then saw the massive owl circle once overhead, and as a cool wind whipped through, tossing her long hair, it disappeared into the trees. She watched it go, and her thoughts turned to the cold case and what was to come.

Is it a sexual assault? A missing person? Could be an attempted murder – even a homicide? What if it's a child?

Cadie shivered and pulled her blazer closer. She reached the entrance to the impressive building and pulled hard on the heavy door. As she did, she couldn't help but shudder as she wondered what type of crime awaited her on the other side.

Nearby, a man sitting quietly in his parked vehicle smiled to himself. He thought about the young woman with the long red hair. After a few minutes, he maneuvered his car out onto Farm Lane and drove away.

Chapter 4

The Smell of Death

Cadie entered the towering 15-story building, home to the Anthropology Forensic Lab, and quickly spotted the sign: Classrooms 1-5 to the right. Walking down the gray marbled tiles, Cadie looked for the room that would orient her to the next intense six weeks of her life.

Suddenly, as she passed the science lab on her left, Cadie smelled the pungent mix of formaldehyde and body decomposition. Her knees went weak, and she touched the wall to steady herself. Seeing and smelling the lab triggered disturbing memories from spring semester in her Forensic Pathology 101 class. A metal tray with two hundred human bones. Five rib bones with deep stab wounds from the woman's jealous boyfriend. Then the imaginings of her own parents' torn and bloody bodies strewn across highway M-22. She closed her eyes tight and willed herself to banish the terrifying images. For a moment, Cadie felt woozy, but she forced herself to breath deeply and keep walking.

In the twelve years since her parents' deaths, Cadie still struggled to keep the imaginings of their horrific deaths at bay. Unfortunately, terrible thoughts were sometimes triggered. In these difficult moments, Cadie often thought of her mother's wisdom. Aileen, understanding that people gain fortitude from stories, would sometimes say to her young daughter, 'Cadie Bug, why don't you think of Nancy Drew. What would Nancy Drew do? What would Cadie do?'

Cadie realized some people would find it silly or juvenile if they knew she gained strength from the fictional Nancy Drew, a character in a book, but the feisty heroine always provided Cadie inspiration. And her mother loved Nancy Drew, so much so that she named her only child Carolyn after Carolyn Keene, the pseudonym for the women who authored the Nancy Drew books. Cadie, like her mother, knew that throughout time, people found heroic figures in literature to be encouraging. So, during challenging times in her life, in addition to thinking about her resilient parents, Cadie thought of the independent, resourceful, and intellectual Nancy Drew – and now the cold case that awaited her. Then

she remembered the line, “Nancy, every place you go, it seems as if mysteries just pile up one after another.”

That sure sounds like me. Nancy and I have a lot in common.

Cadie wondered if criminals and mysteries would continue to pile up in her own life. She reached the end of the tiled hallway and in the streaked sunlight that poured in through the tall-paned windows saw the number 5 on the vintage door. Her heartbeat quickened. Her cold case awaited on the other side.

Cadie trembled slightly.

You can do this.

With the smell of death and formaldehyde still lingering in the air, Cadie steadied herself then walked through the door.

Chapter 5

The Man
Hate and Anger

It was no longer simmering anger. In the last week, it had boiled into full-blown fury.

Ever since he spotted her sickening picture on the front page of the newspaper, smiling and telling everyone in Harbor Cove how her life was just dandy, his drug-fueled wrath turned to rage.

"My heart's finally healing," she grinned.

"It's been a tough road, but I'm regaining my life," she gushed.

"I'm starting to feel hope, to feel moments of happiness again," she raved.

She seemed to be almost laughing in the picture.

That fucking bitch! Who was she to be happy?!

Her positivity made him want to puke.

The man had always strived to hide his rage behind a façade of cool professionalism when he visited the coastal towns, but now his fists were clenched as he walked heatedly down the sidewalk of the quaint harbor town. His cold eyes searched for the decades-old diner he remembered from his youth. Much had changed about Charlevoix since he was last there with his father. The man sneered at the now too-cheerful town that was comprised of art galleries, fancy boutiques, and men in upturned pink collars and Sperry deck shoes. Across the street, what used to be an empty tract of grass on the west end of Round Lake was now an over-the-top yuppie park complete with a music pavilion and marina filled with million-dollar yachts – toys of the rich. He missed the Charlevoix of his youth. He didn't like things that were bright and shiny.

The man zipped his jacket to his neck and continued to walk briskly south down Bridge Street until he reached Antrim and turned right. As he did, a Lake Michigan wind gust blasted him square in the face. Gritty sand stung him.

“Fuck you!” he yelled into the breeze, shielding his eyes from the whistling winds, his hair whipping wildly in the gust.

Up ahead on the left he saw the diner and began to run. The older diner was one of a handful of good childhood memories before that fateful day. He and his old man driving up 31 to Harbor Springs, Petoskey, and Charlevoix. Stopping at all the marinas. He would spend time with his dad, looking at Charlevoix’s mushroom houses with their cedar-shake roofs that looked like mushroom caps. Then his dad would take him for coneys at Westside Diner. It was one of the few times his father let him ride along on a business trip.

Another wind gust slammed him in the face, and he grew angrier thinking about his dad’s absences. Usually, his dad was up and gone by five am - never saying goodbye. Just being gone for days and then returning home late at night without a word to anyone - not even mother. As he grew in age, the man came to suspect there was more to his dad’s frequent trips up and down Michigan’s west coast than business, and his feelings toward his father began to change – and harden.

Struggling against the wind, the man pulled open the diner’s glass door, and he was surprised to hear the same tiny bell ring as it did all those years ago. The Westside was as he remembered. The smell of dirty grease, black vinyl booths covered in a crisscross of tape, a pale-yellow counter with rusting stools, and walls peppered with local business cards and faded photos of fisherman displaying their catches of the day.

The restaurant was stuck in the 1950’s. He quickly scanned the wall for his father’s old business card but didn’t see it. In that moment, walking through the door alone, it suddenly became just another restaurant. What little charm it held was gone. A woman behind the counter smiled warmly at him, and the man smiled back.

Bitch.

The handwritten sign next to the ancient cash register said “seat yourself,” so the man made his way to a booth in the back. Just as he stopped at the last booth, its many rips covered in duct tape, he realized that seated directly across were two Michigan State troopers in their navy-blue uniforms. He caught his breath but slid into the booth anyway. Even though he felt his heart quicken, he didn’t want to arouse suspicion by suddenly getting up and sitting somewhere else.

Just play it cool.

Anyway, the cops were engrossed in their conversation and never even looked at the man, so all was good.

I’ll just get a bite to eat and get out of here.

The man was starving, and his mouth uncomfortably dry. He ordered two Flint-style coney dog with fries, then he turned his back to the cops and began scrolling through his phone. Acting nonchalant but feeling extremely anxious about the two police officers sitting just feet away, he looked at reels on his phone. He tried to concentrate on the inane social media posts, when he heard something that caught his ear.

What did he just say?

Suddenly, the man’s heart was beating fast. He pretended to look at his phone, ignoring the bleeding scab on his hand, and strained with every fiber to hear what the two cops were talking about. He swore he heard the name *Emily.*

His face flushed hot. He could feel his armpits moistening with sweat. Then one of the cops said the name again.

Emily! Oh, fuck!

The man sat up and grabbed hold of the table.

Jesus, get a hold of yourself! There’s no way they’re talking about Emily Hadly. No way in hell. Calm the fuck down.

Just then, a fifty-something waitress in a faded red dress, dirty apron, and hair in a tattered bun walked up and set down two hot bowls of chili in front of the police officers. The man could smell the sweet beef and spices, and his dry mouth watered. Several agonizing minutes went by while neither officer spoke. They were busy eating. The man just sat there, now sweating profusely, still pretending to look at his phone, while he inwardly begged the men to speak.

Of course, it's not Emily Hadly. Why would they be talking about a girl who's been missing for over a decade?

Then the larger cop with red hair said something that caused the man to almost stop breathing.

"They're reopening the case. Dana Bakker is heading it up. She's partnering with MSU students as part of a cold case class. They're hoping to find the girl – dead or alive – but most likely dead, I'm sure."

The man's breaths were now quick and shallow; he was almost panting.

Could it be?

After swallowing a bite of chili, the younger cop said, "That's really cool. How long has the little girl been gone?"

Then the older cop spoke the words that would change everything – words that would put into motion dreadful events in the days to come.

"Emily Hadly has been gone 14 years."

NOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

And there it was.

They were reopening the Emily Hadly case. The man swayed in his seat. He felt faint and that he would be sick. He fought to hold back the bitter bile rising in his throat.

Just then, the waitress walked up with the man's glass of water and coney dogs, but of course he couldn't eat. In fact, the hot dogs now repulsed him. He took a quick drink of water, got up quickly

from the booth, and paid the bill, leaving his food untouched. One of the police officers eyed him as he left. After exiting the restaurant, the man lurched out the door and walked unsteadily in the gusting winds down the street toward his van. His fevered mind reeled as he yanked open the van door.

He sat down and looked over at the passenger seat, his eyes resting on the leather sheath and Ka Bar knife's black handle. He leaned over and removed the gleaming knife from the leather. He stared at it, eyes wide, flipping the cold knife back and forth, back and forth, in his rough, scabbed hand. He suddenly thrust the tip of the knife into his left palm and twisted it, grinding and tattering the flesh until he caused a flow of blood. He watched it drip down his arm but felt nothing.

He had always dreamed of killing her on the anniversary of that day, which was approaching quickly. This was the final push he needed. Then he thought about Dana Bakker.

It's about time I killed that bitch.

Chapter 6

Could It Be?

Miles away, as a man contemplated murder, Cadie McLeod entered the well-lit classroom. She glanced around at her five internship colleagues who were seated and facing forward – ready for the challenge. She knew most of them. Everyone in the classroom was in the same overall program, so Cadie was acquainted with them already, except for the young man toward the back who was drumming his pencil on the desk. Two of the students were chatting, while the other three looked down at their phones.

When Cadie walked in, the two talking students nodded and smiled, but didn't say anything to her, just continued their conversation.

Cadie headed back and sat two seats down from the unknown guy. He smiled at her, but Cadie had learned to never immediately trust a smile. A minute later, she heard heavy footsteps on the tile in the hallway, and two Michigan State police troopers – one man and one woman – entered the room. They were dressed in matching French-blue shirts and navy-blue pants. The man also had on a v-neck sweater with gold buttons. Both sported gold badges on their left chests. The two officers took their place at the front and surveyed the small room with 40 chairs and only six of them filled.

"Hello, everyone," the woman said in an upbeat manner. "Welcome to the State Police Cold Case Unit."

The other trooper smiled at the group.

"I'm Trooper Lyons, and this is Trooper Smith."

Lyons was petite with short gray hair but the muscular physique of a younger person.

"First of all, congratulations. This is not an easy internship to get into. We turned away a lot of good applicants. Professor Dunleavy helped us narrow it down to the six of you. That means we chose you

for a reason. After reviewing your applications and talking to your counselors, we believe you represent the best of the MSU forensics program - and we're excited to have you joining us."

The students grinned, while Cadie eyed them closely.

"And that's what we need," Trooper Smith interjected. "The best. This is real life, folks. We're here to close cases and give closure to grieving families. To begin, you will collaborate with us to re-examine three investigations. Your fellow students have already solved one cold case - a 1997 murder. It was a challenging case as the victim's head and hands were cut off."

At that, one of the students gasped and immediately seemed embarrassed, but Cadie leaned in closer. They had her full attention.

Taking a step closer to the students, Trooper Lyons said, "We clearly believe this partnership can produce results. Today, we are going to present the three cold cases we will focus on: an old murder and two missing children."

The students became even more still.

"You've been taking forensic courses for three years," Trooper Lyons continued, looking intently at each student in the room. "Lots of studying. Lots of lab work. Now, it's time to put what you know to the test."

The students shook their heads affirmatively. They were fully roused, while Cadie held back. She was used to reigning in her emotions.

"First, we'd like to go around the room and have you introduce yourselves. Tell us a bit of who you are and why you want to be in this program."

The students took turns sharing information. One woman loved biology and TV shows like *Forensic Files*. One young man was following in the footsteps of his older brother who earned a forensics degree at MSU and now worked in the FBI Laboratory Division in Washington, DC. The man sitting near Cadie that she didn't know but found annoyingly handsome seemed suddenly downturned and

mentioned attending military school in Chicago. He added something quickly about a family situation and not much more. Then, when it came Cadie's turn, the room became even more quiet. The students were fixated on the beautiful redhead. Most knew something about her background already – college gossip and online news stories– but still they wanted to know more. They wanted to hear the details of her past abduction.

Cadie cleared her throat and adjusted her blazer.

"Hello, everyone, I'm Carolyn McLeod, but you can call me Cadie. I'm assuming you all know a bit about me already, so I apologize for that."

Her classmates chuckled quietly.

"I won't go into every gory detail, and it's all online anyway. But basically, nine years ago, my parents were murdered. They were walking down M-22, just two innocent people going to get ice cream. Instead of ice cream, though, they got run down by a car. Now that's what you call a bad date."

Cadie was trying to keep it light, using humor to avoid the pain, but her voice began to break.

You've got this. Just wrap it up.

But then Trooper Lyons interjected.

"Did your parents' deaths lead you to pursue forensics?"

"Yes, that's right," Cadie replied, nodding. "For years, we didn't know who killed my mom and dad or why. But after their deaths, I vowed I would find their killer and bring them to justice. I was only 12 when they died and made that vow. That's why I wanted to become a forensic scientist. I wanted to solve their murders. But three years ago, we discovered who killed my parents. So, my focus shifted. Now, I want to help other people. Also, my father Thomas was a chemist, and I think I inherited his nerdy side," Cadie said, smiling a bit. "He was the smartest and kindest man. Both my parents were."

This was a lot for the room to take in, but Cadie's slight smile at the end lifted the mood slightly. Two students quietly thanked Cadie for sharing.

"Cadie, you're a strong person, and I believe you'll be an asset to our team," Trooper Smith said with a gentle voice.

"Hopefully, an asset and not an ass," Cadie whispered to the young man near her. He grinned back at her, thankful for her humor, and couldn't help but notice her shining green eyes.

"Quite often, people pursue forensics because of personal trauma," Trooper Smith said. "My own sister was murdered in Bay City when I was fifteen. She was pulled into a car after leaving a bar. So, I understand your desire for justice. My sister's killer has never been caught. They're still out there - somewhere. So, her death motivates me every day. That's why I get up in the morning: to help others. It keeps me going; it keeps me sane."

Hearing his painful story immediately personalized both troopers. The students, who already had respect for these individuals, now felt an emotional pull. Trooper Smith continued. "Today, we are going to share with you three cold cases. Two students will be assigned to each case. We're going to split you up, and your orientation will take place with your assigned mentor."

Cadie and the other young people glanced around the room. There were only two troopers. Where was the third officer, they wondered? Trooper Lyons, who had a folder tucked under her arm, opened it and glanced at the first page.

"Kacie Sullivan and Michele Bradkirk will be with Trooper Smith," she said. "They will be working on the case of Lawrence Collier, a young man working at a Saugatuck gas station who was murdered ten years ago.

Kayleigh and Michele looked at each other.

"The two other cases we call "Playground Girl" and "Lake Girl." Those titles might seem cold, but it does help when we're discussing the two cases. Sam Wiseman and Haley Longmire will assist me.

We will be working the case of Playground Girl - a child who went missing from a playground in Holland seven years ago. That leaves Max Clark and Cadie McLeod," Lyons said. "As you probably figured out, there's only two of us up here. That was your first test."

The students chuckled at the bit of levity, but Cadie stared straight ahead. She wondered who this third person was? For some reason, she felt a tingle go up her spine.

"Actually, we're waiting on another person to join us," Lyons said. "This person is not a Michigan State Police Officer but a retired police sergeant. She helped us solve a murder in our jurisdiction a few years back, so we're returning the favor. She has a very cold case she needs help with. A little girl who's been missing 14 years from a Lake Michigan beach."

Suddenly, the hairs on Cadie's neck stood up.

Could it be?

Chapter 7

The Man
Scars That Never Healed

Upon returning home, the man sat down in his chair only to look at his large hands and jump back up again.

“Jesus!”

He angrily marched to the kitchen sink. He raised his rough, dry hands to his face and examined them intently – studying the smudges of dirt and few unknown particles wedged beneath the nails. Observing the dirt immediately made the man feel anxious and out of control - even angry, although he was already fuming about a happy Heidi Hadley. He studied his cracked hands that were covered in numerous scabs and scars – even one raw and bleeding wound.

The man opened the plastic tub on the counter and scooped out borax. He sprinkled the white powder over his damaged hands and then, from the sink’s ledge, grabbed the worn pumice stone. He began compulsively grinding the volcanic rock into the alkaline borax on his skin, quickly dissolving his skin’s oils and protective cells. He knew it was time to add the water to make a slippery paste, but he was hesitant. He understood what the cold could do – what intrusive thoughts they might trigger. He also knew that without water, the borax would not completely cleanse his hands.

He took a moment to steel himself and then slowly lifted the faucet handle. He felt the cold metal. Water poured into the rusty sink, and he watched it circle the drain. His breathing increased, and his hands stung, but his pain barely registered.

“Do it! Just do it! What are you a fucking child?!”

The man stared at the water.

He inhaled sharply and thrust his raw and bleeding hands into the cold, rushing water. Immediately, he was transported. His mind flew to the past: his childhood. He stood at the sink mute and lost in time. He felt the cold metal of the pocket knife in his hand, and his mind began to relive that horrible moment when he heard the gunshot and clutched the double-bladed knife - prepared to slit the throats of the people he hated most.

He stood there at the sink, lost in the moment, for quite some time. Finally, his mind snapped free of the controlling memory, and he came back to the present. He methodically rinsed his raw and stinging hands under the rushing water and then turned off the faucet. He looked out the window that hung over the sink, into the dark trees swaying in the increasing winds, and his mind travelled to a new place: a tiny cabin deep in the dark woods. He knew the time had finally come. He had just one thing to do first before he travelled north and put an end to it all.

Chapter 8

Dana Bakker

Revisiting the Past

The trooper turned to Max and Cadie. “You two will be assigned to Lake Girl. I’ll let the sergeant, er retired sergeant, explain when she gets here.”

Cadie found that her heart was beating faster. She wondered about the little girl who went missing by the lake.

It has to be her. Who else could it be?

Her stomach began to churn. Then Trooper Smith walked over to a seat in the corner and sat down. “Kacie and Michele, would you join me over here?”

The students gathered their things and took their places.

“Max and Cadie, your mentor texted she’s running late but will be here any minute,” Lyons said.

While the troopers and other students assembled and began talking, Max and Cadie sat and waited. After a minute, Cadie got on her phone. She began searching for any news of Mitch Lawson.

Is he still in jail? I sure hope so.

She looked online for a few minutes, but couldn’t find any information on her past stalker. To break the silence and be polite, Cadie turned to the man sitting near her and said. “You look familiar,” turning toward the goodlooking guy seated near her. He had wavy blonde hair and bright blue eyes – a kind of a modern-day Robert Redford, Cadie thought. She wanted to size him up, see what he was about. She remembered the quote from a Nancy Drew game: "Never trust the cute ones. They know what they can get away with."

“So, you’re Max,” Cadie said.

“Last I checked,” Max grinned, drumming his pencil again.

Why does he keep doing that? Is he anxious?

"Is it just Max, or is it short for Maximus?

"Someone knows her history," Max volleyed back.

"My minor's history," Cadie replied evenly. "Ancient Mediterranean."

"Wow, impressive," Max grinned again. "But how is that minor helpful to forensics?"

"Well, by studying the ancients – their religions, their social and intellectual history – you can better understand modern social life," Cadie explained, studying his mannerisms as he watched her.

"How so?" Max pushed. He had stopped drumming his pencil.

"Well, for example, the Greeks and Romans were animistic," Cadie continued. "They viewed the landscape as sacred and alive, not just objects. Similar to Michigan's indigenous people. I'll tell you about Sleeping Bear someday," she slowly smiled. "So, now, tell me about your name."

Max leaned in a bit closer. That made Cadie somewhat anxious, and she leaned back.

"Well, you were right. My full name is Maximus - after my father - which means greatest if you're wondering."

"I'm really not," Cadie answered a bit playfully.

"So, what does Cadie stand for?" Max asked. He turned in his seat to look at Cadie.

"It stands for Carolyn."

"That's pretty. Is it a family name?"

"No, it actually stands for Carolyn Keene - the pen name for the authors of the Nancy Drew books."

"Oh, that's funny," Max exclaimed. He was grinning again.

"Why funny?" Cadie asked, perplexed.

"My mother loves Nancy Drew," Max explained.

"So did mine," Cadie smiled.

“Look at us: so much in common already,” Max joked, pushing a strong hand through his thick, blonde hair.

“On another note, I wanted to say that you look familiar, but I can’t place where I’ve seen you. Have we had a class together?”

Max shook his head.

“You really don’t recognize me?”

“No, I don’t,” Cadie replied, suddenly feeling foolish and blushing. “Should I?”

“Well, we are on the same track team. I know I’m not a record holder like you, but I thought at least you’d recognize me.”

“Oh, no! I feel terrible!” Cadie blurted. “What events do you run? I can’t believe I don’t remember you!”

“Well, to be fair, I don’t run. I just transferred to MSU in the spring. I’m your new pole vaulter,” Max laughed. “I take a pole and then vault with it – you know, hopefully, over a bar.”

“Yes, I know what pole vaulting is,” Cadie half-laughed. “So that explains it. The separation between track and field is a real thing.”

“Apparently it is,” Max replied. “But I certainly remember *you*.”

Cadie felt heat rise to her face. It made her uncomfortable, and she wasn’t sure about the meaning behind his words.

Relax, Cadie. It’s no big deal. Not every man is out for you.

Suddenly, someone entered the room. Everyone looked toward the door.

It was Dana Bakker! Cadie couldn’t believe who she was seeing. The Harbor Cove police sergeant!

When Dana saw Cadie, the two women locked eyes immediately, and both smiled broadly. Dana strode back to Cadie.

“Well, hello, Miss McLeod,” Dana responded warmly. “It’s good seeing your smiling face.”

“I get that a lot,” Cadie laughed and stood up. She walked over to Dana, and the two women hugged. In that moment, they didn’t care what anyone thought. Both had been through so much. Dana almost had a nervous breakdown searching for the vanished young woman three years ago – the stress adding to the fact that she never found the killer of Cadie’s parents. Physically and psychologically, the crimes took a toll - and added to the breakup of Dana’s marriage. The former cop carried a good deal of guilt when it came to Cadie McLeod and her parents.

Once the two women pulled back from their hug, they looked at each other and grinned. Just then, a tall Max Clark walked up and stuck out his hand.

“Glad to meet you. I’m intern number two: Max Clark - like Dr. Suess’s Thing Two. We can hug if you want,” he smiled.

What is it with this guy?

Dana shook the young man’s hand.

“Well, it looks like they gave me the best in the class and one wise guy,” she remarked. “Glad to meet you, Max or Thing Two. I’m Dana Bakker, retired Harbor Cove police sergeant. Now how ‘bout we all sit down?”

The three took their seats in the back of the room. As they settled in, Dana’s countenance changed. She grew more serious.

“I can’t tell you how pleased I am to be working with you. I have a few cases I want solved. Recently, I read a newspaper article featuring one victim’s mother I know well. I worked her daughter’s case years ago. Reading the article reminded me about all the mother suffered, and it helped me make my choice regarding which case to tackle first. We call it Lake Girl, and it’s a tough one. It’s a little girl who’s been missing for over a decade. She literally disappeared from the sand dunes while her parents slept nearby. She just walked away and was never seen again. Her body has never been found, so we don’t know if she’s dead or alive. Of course, we assume she’s dead. She’s been gone so

many years. But with no body, we can't know for sure. Our job in the next six weeks is to find out what happened to Lake Girl."

Cadie looked at Dana with a growing awareness. She felt her body tighten.

"Dana, is the missing girl Emily Hadly? The child that went missing from the same dunes as me?"

When Cadie said that, Max's eyes widened.

Dana spoke matter-of-factly.

"Yes, it is, Cadie. It's Emily Hadly. The child who disappeared from Mariner's Beach 14 years ago."

Cadie caught her breath. An intrusive vision of a dead child laying on a beach invaded her mind.

"Most likely she is dead," Dana said in a low voice. "But could she be alive? Out there waiting for us to rescue her? It's highly unlikely, of course, but still possible. Regardless, we need to solve her mystery. Her parents have suffered so much. They just want to know what happened. They need closure. And if she's dead, they want her remains, of course."

Immediately, Cadie's mind began picturing the little girl crying on the beach.

Stop it already! Get a hold of yourself.

Then Dana leaned in and looked at both Cadie and Max, her face set hard.

"Do you two think you can really handle this case? I have no idea what's ahead, what it's going to put all of us through. Maybe nothing. Maybe Emily's dead, and we never find her, and life goes on. But what if she's not dead? Then where is she? Who could possibly have her? And why? If we unlock this mystery, we have no idea what we will be dealing with. Or who. So, this case could require a lot from you – from all of us. Not just knowledge and skills, but perhaps even courage and bravery. Real-life investigations can seriously stress you."

Dana glanced at Cadie, wondering if the former kidnap victim could mentally handle this case. Dana knew all that Cadie had endured, yet she didn't know about last year's stalker.

Both Cadie and Max solemnly nodded yes; they could handle what was to come, but their minds were spinning. This is what they had been studying for - waiting for. However, now that the moment had arrived, honestly it was daunting. What might they encounter in the days or weeks to come? Cadie looked back at the woman who fought to save her life and wondered.

Can I truly repay all she did for me? Am I truly strong enough for this?

She fervently hoped her mental issues were in her past.

Cadie thought of poor Emily Hadly and how she had vanished that day like the tide going out. Never to be seen again. She deserved the best minds on her cold case. Was that her? Was she really the best? Had she mentally healed enough to place herself back in that harrowing world of sociopaths?

What would Nancy Drew do? What would Cadie do?

She was about to find out.

Chapter 9

Heidi Hadly
A Butterfly without Wings

Heidi Hadly sat on the front porch of her blue cottage sorting through the morning's mail. It was a brisk but bright morning in Harbor Cove. Sunlight dappled through purple leaves on her large dogwood trees, and two black-capped Chickadees hopped along the wood porch railing on short little legs. Sitting in gray sweatpants with a blue hoodie, Heidi watched the tiny birds with little black bibs and smiled slightly. Over the last few months, her mental health had improved, and she was doing better. She was hopeful that maybe, just maybe, with the help of her new therapist and an increased dose of Zoloft, she could attain some peace in her life.

Heidi looked down at the mostly white letters in her lap. They were the usual: a pile of bills. Two from utilities, three from the insurance company - and four pieces of advertising from local businesses. She tossed the direct mail on the table in front of her. All the other envelopes were uniform in height and width - legal size. She slowly flipped through them when she came upon an unexpected final envelope. It was orange and smaller – hiding behind the others.

Please don't let it be another one.

She turned the orange card over. There was no return address. The postal imprint said Traverse City and that the card had been mailed Wednesday. The envelope was slightly bumpy in a few places, and her address was oddly written in small block letters. But what was truly unsettling was how the envelope was addressed. She had received various letters over the years, but none like this.

To Emily's Mom.

She set the other mail down and began to open the petite envelope. For some reason, she found herself trembling. Heidi lifted the flap, and inside the envelope was a folded piece of paper. She carefully slid it out on her lap and nervously opened it.

The woman froze.

It was a dead, crumpled butterfly.

Heidi gasped.

Laying on the folded piece of paper was a large, orange butterfly with wings that were small and damaged – their tissues neatly cut where they would attach to the thorax. Little broken pieces of the butterfly's dry wings were scattered on the paper.

The woman recoiled - horrified and repulsed. The vulnerable creature looked so sad and alone – its once bright eyes now dull and cloudy. It also smelled fetid, like rotting pumpkin and almost made her gag. There was no writing on the paper. Heidi immediately wondered if the person who sent this to her had also killed the butterfly.

She began to shake harder. She had little tolerance for cruelty or violence - death or dying. Any thought of pain often triggered a breakdown of tears. The woman sat on the chair rocking herself for a long time. Seeing the dead butterfly brought it all back. That ghastly afternoon 14 years ago. The day someone stole her beautiful child off the beach.

What happened to her, to her daughter that day, was the stuff of nightmares. And to Heidi, who had just received an utterly disturbing envelope containing a dead butterfly, it was a nightmare that wouldn't seem to end. For the love of god, who would send her a mutilated butterfly? Who had sent her the other disturbing notes over the years? And why?

Sometimes she was glad her brain wouldn't let her remember everything. She put the mutilated butterfly down on the table, and stared at it for quite some time, thinking about the person who must have killed it and her poor daughter.

Who are you? Did you murder my child? What did you do to her?

Chapter 10

The Man
A Grave and a Vow

I'm coming.

The man drove his van through the black iron gates and into the small, rural cemetery that seemed more like a forgotten and overgrown forest. He was restless and irritable. The bold September sun fought to infiltrate the tall trees that swayed aggressively in the lake breeze but with little success. The cemetery north of Saugatuck and just a half mile from Lake Michigan remained overshadowed and moody. The man fought to drive slowly, the van twisting and turning down narrow dirt roads. As he steered, his scabbed and blistered hands throbbing, he looked out the van's window, studying the moss-covered tombstones crumbling to dust. They were choked by tall, reddish-brown weeds and cheap, plastic flowers.

I will never let their grave look like that.

He clutched the steering wheel harder, drove to the back corner of the cemetery, and parked.

I'm almost there. I would never forget.

The property was void of people. The only company was the disquieting sound of lake wind sweeping through graves on its way to an empty corn field. To some, the pastoral scene might seem peaceful. To the man, the scene caused turmoil. And why wouldn't it? He was visiting the grave of a person who put a bullet in their head.

Before he exited the van, he pulled the Ziploc baggy from the glove box. He shook white powder on the plastic console and used his credit card to form a line. He then leaned down and snorted the powder deeply into his nostrils and brain. He nasal passages burned, and he quickly sweated through his shirt.

Now, with his heart racing, he powerfully stepped out of the van. He tightly gripped a vase of pink carnations and strode to the grave. The tall tombstone and its surroundings were immaculate – just as he left them.

I'm here now. I will finally take care of everything.

The man quickly set down the vase. His drugged pupils dilated as he stared at the tombstone and read the words for the hundredth time. In the past, he would shake and clench, and the memory of that horrific afternoon would overtake his mind like a gruesome horror movie. For years, he had locked his feelings away, just trying to survive. Every day was a struggle, but he hid it the best he could. He knew his subpar life was his penance for not doing more that day. And for not fulfilling his vow.

Today was different, though. Much different. The stimulant that now flooded his body and brain made him feel invincible –and unstoppable! He had found something to give him the strength he needed. He stared at the name on the gray tombstone – stared at the dates. It was truly time.

Into the crisp fall air and silence of the eerie cemetery, the man shouted at the body in the grave.

I won't let them get away with it! I was never going to let them get away with it!

The only response was the eerie whisper of wind through the trees.

The man turned away from the grave, tears now pouring down his face and ran toward the van. He had things to do that couldn't wait. He had a person to kill.

Chapter 11

Harbor Cove Police Department
The Investigation Begins

On the following Monday morning, 10 am, Cadie McLeod and Max Clark wheeled into the Harbor Cove Police Department parking lot in Max's black Denali. The sky was cloudy and overcast, dampening the mood inside the truck. The trip was a long three hours with lots of twisting and dense, tree-lined backroads, but the internship was paying for their overnight stay at Harbor Cove Inn, so they didn't have to return to MSU until Wednesday. Occasionally, Cadie would look out the window, looking for Mitch Lawson following her in his car, but the roads were mostly empty. Over the weekend, she had learned the bad news that Lawson had been released from jail three weeks ago.

He's not coming for you. I'm sure he's over it. You need to get it together and focus on Emily Hadley. She's the one who needs your help.

Dana Bakker had assured Cadie and Max that some of their work could be done remotely, but today was important. Not only were they going to begin reviewing the Emily Hadly case file, but they were going to meet with her mother Heidi and tour her home and Emily's bedroom. Then, on Tuesday morning, they would meet up with Detective Jake Brennan and study the crime scene: the beach that claimed Emily's existence. Cadie was excited to see the man who had saved her life.

Of course, an extensive search of the Hadly home and Mariner's Beach was conducted 14 years ago when Emily went missing, but part of the internship was introducing students to police and cold case procedures. Today, they would review much of the investigative file on Lake Girl.

The ride over with Max was most quiet, filled at times with a crime podcast. Cadie didn't feel like sharing her life story with someone she barely knew, and Max didn't have a whole lot to say, although he did wonder why she had packed a baseball bat along with her overnight bag. When Max

did speak, it was mostly chit chat about MSU football or track. Cadie began to wonder if the person she was going to spend days and weeks with might be somewhat shallow or aloof - although admittedly handsome.

And Cadie was tired. She couldn't sleep last night thinking about Mitch Lawson and Emily Hadly. It was another one of Cadie's sleepless nights, but at least it wasn't a full-blown nightmare. As Max drove, Cadie's mind traveled to the little girl. It wasn't easy taking on a case similar to her own and revisiting the past. Emily had disappeared from the same beach as Cadie, but the dunes never gave up the secret of the little girl.

What happened to you, Emily? Did someone kill You? Or could you still be alive?

It seemed so unlikely. Cadie felt tears well up in her eyes as she imagined the little girl fighting for her life on the deserted beach. As they pulled into the police station parking lot, the morning sky became mottled, like a collection of dirty cotton balls. It made Cadie edgy. As the two walked briskly across the parking lot with a light rain falling, Cadie's eyes scanned the periphery. It was hard for her to not be on guard and anxious. Suddenly she saw something pumpkin orange laying on the ground right in front of her.

Sassafras Alibidum!

She picked up the mitten-shaped leaf and studied it. It was large – the size of her hand – with two lobes and a thumb. Cadie scratched it with her finger, and immediately smelled the sharp, sweet root beer, citrus peel, and cinnamon spice.

"What are you doing?" Max yelled. He had jogged ahead a few steps to open the heavy police department door for her, and now he waited. Cadie appreciated his gallantry.

He's polite.

“It’s a lovely Sassafras leaf! I’m just wondering where its oval and trident friend are,” Cadie laughed, twirling the leaf’s stem in her fingers. The motion provided sensory grounding for Cadie, centering her emotions and making her feeling more light-hearted.

Max just looked at her in confusion as Cadie hurried over, and the two walked in the building. As soon as they entered the reception area, Dana stood up from her leather chair. She was waiting for them and walked over.

“Good morning, my students,” she smiled. “How was the drive over?”

It was strange seeing Dana out of uniform. Instead, the former police sergeant wore black, bootcut slacks and a gray turtleneck – and her signature ponytail pulled tight as ever. She also wore black Converse tennis shoes, which made Cadie smile because her mother always wore a pair of faded blue Converse.

“It was fine,” Max said, “except for all the downed tree limbs and wild animals darting across the road. I think I ran over a few animals. How do you people live like this? It’s backwoods,” he laughed.

Max was from Chicago and seemed to be very much a city boy – and a wealthy one as evidenced by his new Denali, Cadie thought.

“That’s sounds very traumatic, Max,” Dana replied, winking at Cadie. “So, the reason we are holding our meeting here at the police station is that the new sergeant has been gracious enough to let us use their conference room. Let’s head back.”

The three walked to the room. Once inside, Dana sat down at the large mahogany table where there was a stack of folders. Cadie and Max took seats across from her. For some reason, Cadie felt a chill work its way up her spine.

Just what is she going to tell us?

From her bookbag, Cadie pulled out her detective notebook. Just like Nancy Drew, Cadie planned to write down everything in the case. Nancy was quite practical and always took notes. Cadie recalled

The Hidden Staircase in which Nancy recorded clues, names, and suspicious goings-on in her detective notebook. She was trying to solve the mystery of the haunted mansion and her father's disappearance. Cadie placed her notebook on the table while Dana spread out the folders in front of them. There were three black folders and two red folders. Outside the window, gray clouds continued to swirl. Cadie could hear wind whistling against the building.

"These are the Emily Hadly files," Dana said. "The cold case file, investigation and evidence file, evidence log, supporting documents, and the final report and findings. These files and all the remaining files are digitized. Today, we'll review important information."

Dana scanned the folders and slid out the black one that read: *Cold Case File: Missing Child Complaint: Emily Agatha Hadly.*

Seeing her full name on the file makes it all so real. Oh god, am I really ready for this?

Dana slid paperwork from the file and place it in front of her.

"This file contains a great deal of information," Dana explained, while Max drummed his pencil on the table. "First, it's got Emily's personal identifiers like full name, date of birth, even social security number. Then, it has her physical description. Emily was 49 inches tall and weighed 42 pounds. She was slightly tall for her age. Her hair color is listed as BLN, which means blonde or strawberry, but in photos her hair is bright blonde – platinum, really. Emily had blue eyes and no scars. She did have a bruise on her knee. She had Type O blood and was allergic to insect stings. Here you can see pictures of her fingerprints – most likely from a child ID kit. There's also DNA data."

Dana pulled out a photograph and placed it on the table in front of Cadie and Max.

"This is the last known photo of Emily Hadly."

Both students tightened. It was one thing to talk about a missing girl theoretically, but seeing an up-close photo of her was emotional, even terrifying. The picture was of Emily sitting on her father's lap on the front porch of their Harbor Cove home. Her cascading thin hair was a white-blonde, while her

eyes seemed to be a soft sky blue. Emily was smiling into the camera and leaning forward, exuding energy and eagerness. Her father Louis was holding her, his arms encircling Emily's tiny waist, and his hands clasped together. You could see the love Louis held for his daughter.

The photo of Emily with her father made Cadie choke up slightly.

I miss you, dad.

Dana then placed another picture on the table.

"Here is another photo – the same photo – but cropped to show only Emily."

In this version, Emily's large eyes seemed even more intense. Cadie found it unsettling. It was as if the girl was staring right at her, trying to tell her something from the grave. Cadie looked away but felt like the girl in the photo was still staring at her.

"Let's move on to disappearance details," Dana said. She was now looking at a new document and slid it in front of Cadie.

"Cadie, why don't you tell us the details?" Dana requested.

The young woman hesitated for a moment. She wondered if hearing exactly what happened to Emily would trigger her own memories. When Cadie paused, Max looked over at her, studying her.

"Well," Cadie began, "the page contains Emily's last known whereabouts: the date, time, and location she was last seen. It also contains the clothing she was wearing when she disappeared."

"I surmise she was wearing a bathing suit," Max blurted.

"There's a lot more to it than that if you'll let me continue," Cadie replied a bit annoyed. This was serious business. Dana even shot Max a look. Suddenly, a large gust of wind rattled the window, causing all three to look over, especially Cadie. The rattling reminded her of the stormy fall night when she saw Lawson peering in her window.

"Looks like a storm's heading our way," Max said.

“I think you’re right,” Dana answered, her face darkening. A storm would not be helpful. Outside the window, branches swayed, and the sky was an eerie gray-green.

“So, the day Emily disappeared, she was wearing a red, two-piece bathing suit,” Cadie continued.

“The date of Emily’s disappearance was Saturday, July 23, 2011. The approximate time of her disappearance was 1:15 PM.”

“From Mariner’s Beach,” Max interjected.

“Well, yes and no, Max,” Dana answered. “Emily’s mother and father Heidi and Louis Hadly were sleeping on a blanket on the very south end of Mariner’s Beach – the locals call it ‘The Hideaway.’”

Cadie nodded. “I’ve been there before.”

“I can’t believe they were sleeping,” Max interjected. He folded his arms over his chest and leaned back with a scowl on his handsome face.

“They were sleeping near a somewhat secluded area of the beach that is a dune slack.”

“A dune slack?” Max questioned.

“It’s a low-lying valley or depression between two dunes. It’s not easy to get to, so there’s rarely any tourists. The locals know how to reach it down a dead-end side road.”

“Are there any pictures?” Max asked.

Dana nodded, and slid a folder across the table to Max. Halfway, though, it got stuck, and Max stood up, leaned over, and grabbed the folder. He began looking through the photos. Cadie held back, not ready to look at more photos, even photos of the beach. Outside, a large gust slammed the building making the mood inside the room even more tense.

“Emily’s parents had fallen asleep on the beach in front of the slack. When they woke up, Emily was gone.”

“How long were they asleep?” Max chortled as if disgusted by the parents.

“They think they were asleep for about 15 to 20 minutes,” Dana said. “When they woke up, they couldn’t find Emily anywhere. Her toys were in the sand next to the blanket where she had been playing. They could see her footprints heading north up the beach, so they followed them, but eventually, they lost her trail. The lake winds had shifted the sand, so her footprints were covered over. Then the parents called the police on Louis’s cell phone.”

“Lucky there was service out there,” Cadie said.

“Good catch, Cadie,” Dana responded. “Actually, Louis had to walk back to the road to get service. Heidi stayed on the beach and kept looking for Emily.”

“Emily must have been terrified,” Cadie said, her voice breaking slightly.

“I’m sure she was dead pretty quickly,” Max answered and then immediately regretted it.

Suddenly, Cadie began thinking what it must’ve been like for Nick, Jake, and her loved ones when she disappeared three years ago. Her hand moved to the edge of the table and grabbed it. Both Dana and Max noticed. Max felt worried for his colleague but didn’t know what he could do. Dana began to wonder if having Cadie on this case was the best idea.

“I’m sure she was terrified,” Dana continued, watching Cadie. “Then the local police, K9 Unit, and Louis met up on the road and joined Heidi on the beach. After several hours of searching the area and nearby roads and businesses, interviewing a handful of people, and letting the dogs track, police finally found something.”

The young people both leaned closer to Dana.

“Found what?” Cadie and Max asked simultaneously.

“They found where Emily went missing, and they found bio evidence,” Dana said. “Hold on, let me find that report.”

Max twisted in his chair.

“Bio evidence?’ Max uttered. “I wonder what that could be?”

Dana looked through the folders until she found the appropriate one, while Max took a long drink of water from his personal bottle. Cadie noticed its sticker that said, “I’ll never tell.”

What does that mean?

Dana cleared her throat. She suddenly seemed uncomfortable.

“The dogs tracked Emily’s movements north up the beach and over a small dune. They followed her scent and some of her remaining footprints. Then they found something else – something concerning.”

Max shot Cadie a quick glance. Neither had any idea what Dana was about to say. What could be concerning? What Dana said next shocked them.

“There was blood at the scene. Actually, a lot of blood. Emily’s blood.”

Cadie and Max both stared. Shocked.

“There was blood?” Max asked, his eyes wide. He stood up and put his hands on the table. Cadie’s hands flew to her face. She felt lightheaded.

“Can I see the file?” Max asked, already reaching for it.

Neither student had heard there was blood. The thought of Emily’s blood smeared across the sand was sickening. Cadie began to feel anger rise up in her.

What did they do to you, Emily?

“Did they have the dogs out?” Max asked, studying the file.

“Of course they had the dog out,” Cadie snapped and then immediately felt bad.

“Sorry. This talk of blood is getting to me,” she said, while both Dana and Max nodded, aware that the blood discussion was no doubt making Cadie think about her murdered parents. Dana continued.

“Yes, the dogs tracked Emily to the bottom of a small dune where there was a car pull-off. They quickly tracked to Emily’s blood. First, they discovered where her initial injury took place. Then they tracked the blood drops to where she was taken.”

Cadie tilted back her head, thinking. Her brain was now throbbing. Max began pacing behind his chair. Emily's blood at the scene startled both of them. Shook them. They now thought for sure Emily was murdered.

Dana saw the emotions in her students but continued. They would have to repress a good deal of feelings in this line of work. "The County CSI Unit was called in. It analyzed the blood stain patterns and the size, shape, and distribution of the bloodstains."

Hearing about the young girl's blood was horrifying. Cadie looked at Emily's photo on the table, and felt a wave of nausea pass over her.

"We learned in class that blood patterns and splatter can tell the story of what happened," Cadie said, trying to quell her emotions and gain composure.

"Exactly," Dana responded. "The blood revealed the movements made by Emily after the initial bloodshed. The file contains slides and some translucent overlays of the blood as well as footprint impressions. Let me dig those out."

Max sat back down in his chair but seemed anxious. He began tapping his pencil on the table again. It was an unsettling noise in the quiet conference room. Dana looked at the folders on the desk and found the one entitled *Investigation and Evidence.* She saw the blood slides in one of the folders and stood up.

"Let's head down the hall to the light box. We'll be able to examine the images better."

Cadie and Max stood up and followed Dana down the hall to the dedicated office for handling unsolved cases. The light box was sitting on the side counter under a bulletin board pinned with various notes. Dana walked over to the light box and slid out the slides and overlays from the folder. She placed a few on the frosted glass.

"Max, will you turn off the overhead lights?"

Max shut off the fluorescent lights and immediately the room was plunged into an eerie darkness except for the high-intensity light shining from behind the glass. Their faces glowed as they crowded in to look at images.

“Here, Cadie, place this loupe on a slide.”

Cadie placed the small, round magnifying glass on the slide and pressed her eye close and began studying the image. In addition to the blood drops, Cadie noticed tiny, oval-shaped Bearberry leaves scattered across the sand.

“Testing showed these are Emily’s blood drops along the dune until they end,” Dana said. “Then, at the bottom of the dune where there was a car pull-off, there were size 12 footprints.”

The room was silent while Cadie studied the blood drops. Even covered with a spray of sand, the light box allowed them to see the crusted blood formations below.

“Now you take a look, Max,” Dana instructed.

Cadie moved aside, and Max leaned in close to the loupe, peering at the blood and footprint images.

“What do you see? Anything jump out at you?” Dana asked her students.

“Well, some of the blood drops are tear-shaped with small, forward-pointing tails. That indicates Emily was walking,” Cadie said.

“The wide, irregular spot that is saturated in her blood is where she sat down,” Max added.

“I would say Emily cut her foot,” Cadie said.

“How can you be sure she cut her foot?’ Max said, pushing his hand through his hair with confusion.

Dana just watched their intent faces while the wheels in their brains turned.

“We can’t know that. Emily could’ve been stabbed.”

“Actually, we can know what happened,” Cadie replied confidently. “A stab wound produces medium to high velocity spatter or cast off as the victim struggles. Also, blood drops falling from higher up would have burst. But a cut foot creates low velocity, passive drips. See how the blood droplets are

round at first? They dropped straight down at from a low height. And the edges are smooth, no sprayed impact mist."

Dana nodded her head approvingly, while Max looked closely through the loupe.

"Now let's look at the tire impressions," Dana said, removing the blood slides and putting different 35mm slides on the glass.

"The blood and footprints seem to lead to a larger vehicle – most likely the vehicle that abducted her. Look at the tire impressions. They're large and wide – possibly a truck or van. CSI made plaster casts of the impressions."

Cadie and Max studied the footprints and tire marks. Suddenly, as if somehow related to the discussion inside, the winds picked up outside the building, and Cadie could see leaves whipping crazily through the window. The weather added even more tension to the dark room.

"What did they find?" Cadie asked. "What did the tire impressions point to?"

"They indicate a larger vehicle with common tires. And they do reveal the depth and compression shifts. We can tell that when the vehicle left, the weight of it shifted back and to the passenger side because Emily was placed there."

"What about idle vibration?" Cadie asked.

"No, the vehicle was turned off. There were no blurred fringes along the tire imprints."

"Like maybe the person was sitting there when Emily came over the hill?" Cadie added.

Max leaned in again to study the image.

"The vehicle might have had a misalignment," he said. "One side of the tread block seems more worn down."

"Very good," Dana remarked, putting her hands on both students' shoulders. "I'm quite impressed by the two of you."

“Also, we can tell that the vehicle was a van,” Dana added. “The track width and the deep front-end weight compression point to a Dodge Caravan, Plymouth Voyager, or a Chevy Astro. Maybe even a Ford Aerostar.”

Dana suddenly began putting the slides away. Then she walked across the room to the door.

“Let’s take a break. Meet me back in the conference room in ten minutes. I have something else to share with you. Something new and quite disturbing. No one knows what to make of it.”

After Dana said that, Cadie and Max didn’t want to stop. They didn’t want to leave the room. The unfolding case file had them mesmerized. But when Dana walked out of the room, the two students followed. On her way out, Cadie thought about what happened to Emily out on the dunes.

There was a lot of blood at the scene. Did Emily really cut her foot? It would seem so, but why so much blood?

She couldn’t help but picture the little girl lying dead somewhere – her bones scattered. She shook her head to erase the image. Cadie left the room and walked back to the staff lounge. She saw a coffee pot half-filled and poured herself a small cup. The coffee was lukewarm at best. She took a seat by the row of large windows facing west and watched the trees swaying in the growing winds. Leaves swirling and dark clouds moving in. She looked down, and her hand holding the coffee was trembling. She thought about Emily’s blood. She thought about her parents’ blood splattered across M-22.

What could Dana possibly have to tell us about a girl missing 14 years? What could be worse than all that blood?

Then a vision came to Cadie, and she pictured little Emily being sex trafficked for all these years.

If that happened to her then death might be better than real-life.

She quickly took another drink of warm coffee. Suddenly, Mitch Lawson’s face intruded into her thoughts, causing her to feel anxious. She wondered where he was. Cadie channeled her literary

heroine Nancy Drew and fought off the vision. Then she stood up and headed back to the conference room, eager to find out Dana's new and disturbing information.

Chapter 12

Lena
In Shadows of the Lake

Morning sunbeams poured through the hazy window and across the young woman laying still in bed. The rising sun heated her face, so she opened her eyes, yawned, and glanced around the stuffy, claustrophobic room. Everything in the snug bedroom was in its place. Everything was the same as the day before. She lay there searching her mind, trying to remember if the day ahead held anything special as most days did not. Then she remembered. Today, she and Mother would pick apples from the McKinley orchard on Whitefish Lane. She liked Mr. McKinley with his warm eyes and white ponytail. He was a kind man. Once, he gave Lena a small wooden bear on a necklace.

"I carved this for you, Lena. Bears represent strength and courage," he told her as he placed the necklace over her head and then fluffed her blonde hair.

Ever since he met the timid, mysterious girl and her mother years ago, Edward McKinley often felt Lena might require the virtues of strength and courage more than most. Lena's mother had confided that she lived in these woods to escape an abusive husband in law enforcement. He had threatened to kill her and Lena, so she lived her life in isolation out of fear for herself and her child.

"He said he would absolutely kill me if he ever found me," she told him. "He tried to before."

So, from that moment on, Mr. McKinley did everything he could to keep their secret. He, himself, had secrets of his own. He also had a soft spot for Lena.

"Always remember that you are strong, Lena," he said. "Even a child can do great things."

Lately, though, McKinley had noticed a change in Lena. She seemed stronger – more confident, but sometimes angry. Maybe because she was growing older, he thought. She was probably tired of living her life in these woods.

Mr. McKinley was also funny. He hoped his antics provided a measure of happiness when Lena was feeling down and having visions - “dark days” as her mother called them.

“Lena, what do they call a fake noodle?” Mr. McKinley asked, his wrinkly eyes grinning, hoping to make the young woman laugh.

“An impasta!”

He would shout with laughter and slap his knee – not the one that limped, though. That particular joke always made Lena laugh, but it also made her mouth water and feel slightly sad. She wondered about pasta after learning the various types in one of Mother’s books. Lena especially liked the look of Orecchiette with its little ears or the thicker Pappardelle noodles with its meaty sauce. Lena learned a great deal about the Other World from Mother’s books, but what did it really matter? She was never going to eat curly pasta drenched in Bolognese sauce. She was never going to travel to Rome and peer up at the Sistine Chapel.

She would spend her life among the tall pines. Sometimes, she felt herself growing angry with Mother and becoming more unsettled by the man who visited the cabin from time to time. So, today she would settle for syrup – and maybe apple cider. The McKinleys owned a tree farm, and sometimes Mr. McKinley gave Lena a jug of syrup or cider to take home, maybe even some homemade lavender soap. She didn’t plan on sharing the soap with Mother, though. It would be her secret.

Usually, she and Mother just stayed home in their small cabin with Mother teaching Lena lessons. putting together puzzles, or reading books. Her favorites were *The Secret Garden* and *Anne of Green Gables*. Lena admired the spirited Anne and how she dealt with life’s challenges. She felt it gave her strength to deal with her own sorrows that would wash over her when she was alone with her thoughts and worries.

Sometimes, Lena experienced visions of other people and other places – distant images that confused her. She often felt sad in their cabin by The Big Lake. And Mother never liked talking about her visions, so they never did. *The Secret Garden* gave her hope: maybe living in the woods could, like the novel's character Mary Lennox, bring Lena back to full life.

On other days, she and Mother walked to the lighthouse and sat on the quiet, empty beach along the harbor, looking out over volcanic boulders and The Big Lake's near-freezing waters and watching powerful waves batter the shore. They'd laugh when the icy lake spray reached their faces. Amongst the large boulders, they'd hunt for colorful agates and jaspers and arrange them into shapes like hearts or smiley faces almost as if they were trying to conjure happiness. If they were lucky, the lighthouse keeper would join them. Lena called him Mr. G, but his full Ojibwe name was Giiwedin Anang Davis.

When Mother was busy in the house, Lena made her way to the circular, white lighthouse to call on Mr. G. He'd see her trudging down the remote beach, and before she even knocked at the keeper's door, he would have placed frybread slathered in butter and jam and small, red thimbleberries on a plate on the wooden kitchen table. The man with deep-set, warm brown eyes behind silver glasses and weathered skin from his years spent outdoors would bring her tea. He'd brew it from raspberry leaves or spruce tips. Mr. G seemed to sense her loneliness and tried to ease it the best he could. Sometimes, Mr. G and Lena would hike the deep, magical woods together, and the grandfatherly man would teach her all kinds of wondrous things about plants and animals. The older man delighted in finding a unique wildflower for Lena. On her dresser back home, Lena had a collection of dried Sundew, Marsh Marigold, and Dwarf Lake Iris. She used to bring flowers home to Mother but not anymore.

With Lena, Mr. G. shared native stories and nautical tales about ghost ships and shipwrecks, like the Bannockburn and Edmund Fitzgerald hit by a rogue wave and plunging to the bottom in minutes. His

stories deepened Lena's respect for the cold, volatile lake. Mr. G also shared the poetry of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft because he understood that Lena, a shy, isolated young woman, might appreciate the poetry of a female who also experienced her share of life's challenges. Jane, or Bamewawagezhikaquay ("Woman of the Sound that the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky") wrote the poem "To a Bird," and Mr. G took to calling Lena "Little Bird." He said Lena reminded him of the poem's sweet little bird because her visits made him less lonely.

To a Bird

Sweet little bird, thy notes prolong,

And ease my lonely pensive hours;

I love to list thy cheerful song,

And hear thee chirp beneath the flowers.

The time allowed for pleasures sweet,

To thee is short as it is bright,

Then sing! Rejoice! Before it fleet,

And cheer me ere you take your flight.

One day, Mr. G told Lena they should be grateful to be in the shadows of the mighty lake.

"In Ojibwe, agawaateshin means to be in the shadow - a place of rest," he explained to Lena. "Your spirit is protected here."

Lena's reply caught him by surprise.

"I don't think I'm in a place of rest or protection, Mr. G," she said a bit testily. "I sometimes feel the opposite, like the lake shadows are hiding me from the world, and I don't want to be hidden anymore."

Lena's words gave Mr. G pause. He had gathered from talking to Lena's Mother that she had isolated themselves in the woods to escape her abuser – a man in law enforcement who would exact a terrible

vengeance if they were found out. So, yes, Lena was cut off from the world – for their own good, her mother implied. But sometimes, Mr. G wondered. Was it ultimately in Lena's best interests to live her life in these woods?

Lena was thankful for Mr. G's wise and gentle ways that helped ease her own sadness. She also thought their visits helped ease his own mysterious sorrow. Once, after spending time with Mr. McKinley and Mr. G, Lena asked about her own father, but Mother told her angrily that most men are not good people. Sometimes Lena overhead Mother talking in a mean voice to someone on the phone. Mother was angry, Lena could tell, but also a bit nervous, even scared. Lena would study Mother's face, but Mother always shooed her away.

On other days, Lena and Mother visited the wildflower garden. Lena loved to watch bumblebees shake the pollen from Asters and Golden Rod and flit flower to flower, transferring their precious powder. When Lena was little, someone called her bumblebee, although she couldn't recall who. She had a vision about being at a market with fruits and vegetables when a bumblebee landed on her nose. She asked Mother about the vision, but Mother snapped at her once again.

"You have a lot of make-believe nonsense in your head," Mother groused. "Maybe you read too many books."

Occasionally, Lena and Mother canned beets and carrots. Lena didn't enjoy canned vegetables, though, because of their mushy texture. Instead, she liked when Mother roasted rutabagas with olive oil and rosemary or thyme. When they were piping hot from the oven, tender and golden brown, she and Mother feasted on the diced squares and pretended they were eating at a fancy restaurant.

"Pinkies up," Mom would laugh, extending her bony pinky fingers. "That's how fancy people eat!"

Increasingly, Lena thought about how nice it would be to eat at a restaurant or visit a city. Yet, despite all the alluring pictures in Mother's books, Lena knew the Other World was dangerous and full of

people with no souls - monsters who would hurt you, even kill you. Everyone had knives and guns. Mother taught her that.

It was only her obedience to Mother's rules that kept her safe – or so she said – and Lena was thankful. Still, Lena wondered about the Other World beyond the pines. She also wondered what would happen to her if she ever tried to leave. Sometimes, she thought she wanted to.

A week ago, Lena was reading a story when, in her mind, a vision came to her. It was a woman sitting next to her on a bed reading a book. The woman was smiling at her and pushed aside her bangs. She leaned in and kissed Lena on the cheek. But, as quick as it came, the vision was gone.

Then, a few nights ago, she had one of her recurring nightmares. These visions and nightmares were happening more and more, and they troubled Lena. She felt an impending doom, but she didn't tell Mother. She began keeping them to herself.

The young woman's belly rumbled, and she shoved aside the quilt. She swung her long legs over the Jenny Lind bed and stood up, raising her arms above her head to stretch. The pine wood floor creaked, and Lena yawned again loudly.

"I heard that, Lena! You're finally up!" Mother yelled from the bathroom. "I was just getting ready to come in there and see if you were still breathing," she laughed.

From the sound of glass clinking against the porcelain sink, Lena knew Mother was applying her creams. Lena often questioned why Mother cared about how she looked. They rarely saw other people – only their few neighbors, the lady at the store, and, of course, *him.*

He hadn't come around much in Lena's life, but when he did, he was mean – like he hated the world and everyone in it. Always wearing his silly turtleneck and scarf, even when it was warm. Wouldn't say hello. Wouldn't look at Lena – like he had no use for the girl at all.

When he stopped by, Mother would say, 'Lena, why don't you go outside and let the grownups talk? Maybe pick a bouquet of flowers from the wildflower garden?' The man would stand mute, hands

thrust deep in his pockets, and look down at his shoes. He was always unpleasant – even a bit scary with his empty eyes - and Lena began to wonder. Why was he in their lives at all? Mother didn't seem to like him, either, so why did he bother to visit? Why couldn't he just leave them alone?

"Get up and get dressed," Mother yelled playfully. "I made breakfast. And I have a question for you. Who loves you the most, darling Lena?"

"Mother does," Lena replied, answering the question that Mother posed every morning as part of their ritual. Lena loved Mother and all that she did for her, but sometimes Lena felt troubled. She was growing to resent Mother's control over her.

Lena smelled breakfast wafting up the wood stairs – crispy potato pancakes and homemade raspberry jam and whipping cream. Mother was a good cook, even though she complained about having to buy food from the little store.

As Lena threw on her robe and made her way to the stairs, she thought about Mother while descending the steps – the woman who kept her safe from all evil. Yet, deep down, Lena wondered.

Am I lucky to have Mother who protects me? Who keeps me safe in the shadow of the lake?

Yet, more and more, it just seemed like Mother was controlling her.

Chapter 13

Harbor Cove Police Department
Death in a Letter

After finishing her coffee, Cadie headed back to the conference room. She could hardly quiet her nerves over Dana's intriguing comment. She sat there for a moment, and then Max walked in followed by Dana holding her water bottle. Everyone took their seats.

There was quiet while Dana shuffled through some papers. Finally, Cadie couldn't take it.

"Dana, please tell us! What is the 'something new?' Don't leave us in suspense any longer!"

"Okay, okay," Dana replied.

Dana pulled out documents and set them on the table.

"It's a puzzling development," Dana said, for some reason lowering her voice.

"First, I need to share that Emily's mom Heidi has received a few notes over the years. Cryptic notes from crackpots who like to torment a crime victim. It happens. But Heidi received a letter in the mail Friday that was extremely strange.

Cadie and Max stared, hanging on every word.

"The envelope contained a large, dead butterfly."

The students recoiled slightly. Max scrunched his face.

"That's weird - and gross," Max said. "Why would somebody send the mom a dead butterfly?"

"That's what we're trying to figure out," Dana said. "Is it a crackpot who wants to torment the family? Sadly, there are lots of people who do that. They get their kicks out of hurting others. But it could be more. I mean, who sent it and why? So, we're looking into it, trying to figure out what it could mean, if anything. Also, the letter was addressed "To Emily's Mom," so that's concerning. And there's another thing."

“What’s that?” Max asked, leaning in.

“The butterfly was in a folded piece of paper. At first glance, the paper didn’t seem to provide any clues. But the State Police lab in Grayling took a look at the paper and found a watermark. They don’t know for certain yet,” Dana answered. “But it does seem to be a compass or some sort. If it’s a boat or ship’s emblem, it’s like looking for a needle in a haystack. There are over six hundred marinas on Lake Michigan, but who knows? It could prove useful. We’ll just have to see.”

“It kind of reminds me of how they caught BTK,” Max said.

Dana and Cadie nodded, understanding the reference.

“How Dennis Radar sent a floppy disk to a TV station, and the disk’s metadata showed who edited the disk last,” Max said.

“Yeah, the metadata had the name "Dennis” in it, and the disk was created at Radar’s church,” Cadie added.

“That’s right. Very good, you two,” Dana said.

“We studied Radar in our Forensics Psychology class,” Cadie explained. As she said it, a thought passed quickly through her brain.

Why do I have to be so taken with all these dangerous people?

Then she thought about Mitch Lawson and the night she caught him looking in her ground floor window as she undressed. The thought made her angry. She thought about the other terrible person who had figured prominently in her life.

Who do these people think they are? I’ve had enough of them.

Dana continued and broke into Cadie’s thoughts.

“Anyway, I’m hoping to get the photos of the letter and butterfly from the Grayling lab any time. They said they would email them to me.”

Just then, a twenty-something woman peeked in the door. She had long blonde hair with streaks of pink.

“Yes, Kelsey?” Dana asked.

“I was just wondering if anyone wanted coffee or some water? We also have muffins.”

“Yes, please!” Max blurted out. “I’m starving. Cadie wouldn’t let me stop for breakfast.”

“Because I wanted to be on time,” Cadie said. “Maybe next time eat breakfast before we go.”

“That sounds great, Kelsey,” Dana said, turning to the young woman. “Muffins and coffee. Water, too.”

“What happened to Debbie?” Cadie asked. “She was your receptionist for quite a while as I remember.”

Then, from down the hallway, a voice yelled out.

“Debbie’s still here!”

Everyone laughed.

“Debbie is now an officer for Harbor Cove,” Dana said. “Debbie graduated from the police academy last year.”

“Yes, I did,” Debbie yelled out again. “And they love me here,” she chuckled from down the hall.

“She’s also very nosey,” Dana added.

As everyone enjoyed a lighter moment, Kelsey returned with the coffee and muffins on a platter.

“I’ll bring you some waters, too.”

“That would be great,” Dana said. “Now, back to our case. I had wondered why someone would send a letter to Heidi now? But, of course, Heidi was on the front page of the *Harbor Cove Courant* two Sundays ago.”

“You mentioned that in our orientation. What was the article about?” Max asked.

“She was recently named Harbor Cove’s Female Volunteer of the Year,” Dana replied. “She’s the president of a non-profit called The Children’s Fund. They provide area schools with personal items and clothing. Coats, shoes, things like that. So, the newspaper featured Heidi on its front page. I read the piece. It was very nice. It touched on the family’s tragedy and all that it had been through, but it also mentioned that Heidi is doing a lot better and moving on with her life.”

“Do you think that article triggered someone to send Heidi the butterfly? Just to mess with her out of cruelty?” Cadie asked. “Maybe they don’t want to see Heidi happy for some reason.”

“Unfortunately, that could be the case,” Dana answered. “People can be terrible. Tomorrow, after we meet with Detective Brennan, we will review all the letters the family has received over the years to see if there are any similarities to this recent letter. We’ll also review the suspects. On Friday, I’ll be in East Lansing, so we can meet up at Giltner Hall at 1 PM to keep working the case. But right now, let’s discuss the butterfly. What do you think it might mean?”

Dana leaned back in her chair and watched her students.

They thought for a moment.

Max spoke first.

“Was Emily doing any kind of butterfly project at school?”

“Not that we’re aware of,” Dana said. “Emily had finished kindergarten that spring. We could reach out to the school, but it’s been 14 years ago. Hard to know if the teacher or school would remember. But maybe they keep to the same lesson plans?”

“Is the butterfly anything special? Like, did it belong to any place that’s unique?” Cadie asked.

“Not really,” Dana answered. “It’s a Monarch butterfly. In July, when Emily was kidnapped, it would have been feeding and breeding along Lake Michigan before migrating to Mexico in the fall. It’s common to the area.”

Cadie nodded.

The room became silent again. Everyone was thinking hard. Many minutes passed while all three pondered the butterfly.

Then, Cadie startled.

A thought was taking shape in her mind.

"Dana, you said they found Emily's footprints leading across the sand and down a dune, right?" Cadie asked.

"Yes, that's right," Dana replied. "Of course, by the time police got on the scene, lake winds had blown away many of the footprints. But enough were discovered to make out the direction where she went. And the dogs tracked her movements and found her blood at the bottom of the dune."

"What was Emily doing before she vanished?" Cadie asked.

"She was playing in the sand with sand toys. Her mom and dad had fallen asleep on a blanket right next to her. Then she walked away and was gone."

"Did she walk away? Or did she *run* away?"

"I don't know," Dana replied, cocking her head and looking at Cadie with curiosity. "Let me look at the file."

Dana flipped through case file papers until she came upon a document and studied it closely. Finally, she spoke.

"From the analysis of Emily's footprints, it says she was running across the sand. The footprints show increased stride length, deeper impressions, and differential sole depth."

"What does that mean?" Max asked.

"There were deeper impressions in the toes and only impressions of the forefront of the foot, indicating increased pressure at the front of the foot. Also, the report says there were more steps per minute, or a higher frequency of cadency, versus if Emily was walking. So, Emily was definitely running, which is interesting. Why was she running?"

During Dana's explanation, Cadie looked down at her lap. Now that Dana had finished, the young woman looked up at her mentor with widening eyes.

"What is it, Cadie? What are you thinking?"

Dana was now staring at a trembling Cadie.

Cadie placed her hands on the mahogany table – as if to steady herself.

"What if Emily wasn't just running, but chasing something?" Cadie responded. "What if Emily was *chasing* a butterfly across the beach? What if that's why she left her parents and ran over the dune? Because she was running after a butterfly? If she was, then her kidnapper might know that. They might have seen her chasing a butterfly. They could be who sent the letter."

Dana's mouth dropped open. She couldn't talk for a moment – just processing Cadie's words.

"My god, Cadie, you could be right! Emily might have chased a butterfly away from her parents. And if the person who kidnapped Emily did send the butterfly, then we know two things," Dana exclaimed.

"What?" Max asked, sitting on the edge of his seat and feeling the mounting excitement in the room.

"That her captor is still alive and still in the area."

Dana's eyes became brighter.

"And if that's true, we might be able to find them," she said.

"And find Emily's remains," Max said.

"Dana?"

"Yes, Cadie?"

"Would I be able to access the digital files? I want to read as much as I can about this case. To really dive deep."

Dana was impressed with Cadie – as always.

“I’ll get Debbie to give you a secure laptop before you leave,” Dana answered. “She’ll check it out and show you how to access the files.”

Cadie nodded enthusiastically, while Dana smiled to herself. After all these years, she now held a slight hope that they might finally crack this case. She was allowing herself a brief moment of positivity about the case, when Cadie turned to her and said something cryptic.

“Hey, Dana, when you have a minute, could we talk? I want to tell you something. But it has to be in private.”

Chapter 14

Ted's Restaurant
Talk of Blood

After the morning meeting, the threesome left the police station and headed to Ted's. As Max drove, Cadie was already immersed in case files on the laptop. The appointment with Heidi Hadly wasn't until 2 pm, so that gave them time to grab lunch and talk more about the butterfly and what it might mean. They wanted to go somewhere quiet, somewhere safe, where they could converse about the case without being bothered and, more importantly, overheard. Dana suggested Ted's on Crystal Lake. It had a secluded booth by the back door, and it wasn't typically crowded on Mondays. The patrons were usually cops, and they mostly kept to themselves.

Plus, Dana was in the mood for Ted's locally famous Benzie Burger. After the morning's meeting and possible discovery as well as Cadie's mysterious comment, Dana was hungry. She knew well enough that a big, fatty burger was not at all good for her stress ulcer, but she couldn't help herself. Sometimes you just need comfort food when you're stressed. She wondered what Cadie had to tell her.

In the now steady rain, both cars made their way to the old tavern down a dirt road. The restaurant – a cedar chalet - was surrounded by white birch trees and close to Cystal Lake. Dana had also chosen Ted's because of the restaurant's history and personal connection.

Harry Harper who owned the place was once a Grand Rapids police captain before he retired. After he bought Ted's, he fixed the place up and made it a sort of shrine to law enforcement. Now, every knotty pine wall was covered with aging yellow tape and newspaper articles about hero cops as well as plaques and medals. Some of the articles dated back to the fifties.

There were also articles on the wall about Dana Bakker and Jake Brennan, the twice Medal of Honor recipient who used to work for Dana before she retired. Some of the articles were about Jake rescuing children from a bus fire. Others were about the Cadie McLeod case three years ago. One was the front page of the *Harbor Cove Courant*, and it featured a large photo of Dana talking to reporters.

Dana, Cadie, and Max entered the restaurant and shook off the fall rain that was clinging to their coats. The restaurant was warm and dimly lit because of the dark weather outside, and its plank flooring had a few wet spots still drying from the shoes of earlier customers. The moody Bob Seger song "Turn the Page" played on the restaurant's blue and silver Seeburg in the corner, and the song's lonely saxophone added to the restaurant's vibe. At the long, solid wood bar, Melinda, the owner's niece, was wiping up spilled Oberon and spotted Dana as she walked in.

"Hey, Sergeant, good to see you," Melinda called out good naturedly, putting down her rag and smoothing her apron.

"Good to see you, too, Melinda. It's been a while. And it's just Dana. I'm not a sergeant anymore."

"Yeah, I know, but you'll always be sergeant to me. I could never call you Dana," Melinda laughed. "Sit anywhere you like," she said, gesturing at empty tables.

Dana saw that the secluded table in the back was available.

"Follow me," she said to Cadie and Max over her shoulder as she walked past the wall full of articles. She spied the two articles about her and Jake, and her throat caught. That was an emotional time in her life. She hoped Cadie didn't look at the wall. She didn't.

The three reached the booth and slid in, Dana on one side, and Max and Cadie on the other. Neither would have dreamt of sliding in next to Dana.

"So, I thought it was quite a meeting this morning," Dana said, taking off her rain jacket. "My head is still sort of spinning."

Melinda walked up to the booth with three waters in tall, red plastic glasses.

“Would you guys like anything else to drink?”

All three said they were fine with water.

“Okay, menus are behind the ketchup. I’ll be back in a bit to take your orders,” Melinda said and walked back over behind the bar. Dana thought she could make out Harry’s deep voice in a back room. It seemed he was talking on the phone. The room was growing even darker as the rain had now turned into a low-level storm. A couple of times, a vintage light over a nearby table flickered on and off. She looked over at Cadie, but the young woman seemed unperturbed.

“I want to talk more about the butterfly,” Dana said. “What it might mean. The psychology of it.”

“I’ve been thinking about it, too,” Cadie said. “I have some ideas.”

“Lay them on us,” Dana responded, placing her arms on the speckled, laminated table.

“Well,” Cadie began slowly, “the person who mailed the butterfly letter could be someone starting a ‘cat and mouse’ game with us. Someone who wants to play psychological games with the police. They might not be involved with the case at all but just want to enjoy the game of it. The person could have a personality disorder.”

“Very good,” Dana said. “That’s a definite possibility. Max, any thoughts?”

Max, who was studying the menu and not fully listening looked up sheepishly.

“What did you say?”

Dana repeated, ‘Do you have any thoughts about the butterfly? Who might be behind it and why?”

Max put his menu down.

“Well, in class, we learned that some criminals like to control the narrative. They’ll insert themselves into a case to try to control the investigation. They try to confuse the police and play head games. Lead the investigation where they want it to go. So, maybe the person who sent the letter did take Emily. And now he’s trying to lead or confuse police. Or maybe boast about it in this strange way.”

“Good answers,” Dana said. “I was also thinking about something on the ride over here. And if I’m right, it might spell good news for Emily.”

Both students listened intently.

“First, why do people kidnap children?” Dana asked quietly, leaning in and watching the students across the table. In the background, a Stevie Wonder song was now playing on the Seeburg, and a few cops walked in and up to the bar.

“People kidnap children for all kinds of reasons,” Cadie said. “Sex and sex trafficking mostly. For themselves or others.”

“Yes, of course,” Dana answered. “That’s kidnapping by a stranger, and sex assault is often the main motive. There are almost 60,000 child abductions every year for sex purposes. Other stranger abductions involve mental illness. What else?”

Just then, Melinda walked up with her pad and pen in hand. She had shoved her mousy brown hair into a hairnet.

“Know what you want?” she asked, smiling and looking around at the group.

“Honestly, Melinda, we haven’t even looked at the menus,” Dana said while shooting a glance at Max. “Listen, they have a great burger here. Why don’t I get us a round of burgers and fries?” Dana said.

“That sounds great,” Cadie replied.

“Sure, but can I have onion rings instead? Or maybe half and half? Half onion rings and half fries? With ranch not ketchup,” Max said and then smiled a charming smile at Melinda. Cadie glanced over at him.

“Sure, but there’s an upcharge for onion rings,” Melinda replied.

“That’s fine,” Dana said. “Bring the man some onion rings.”

Just then, a tall police officer by the front door waved at Dana. He was a detective in Grand Haven.

“Hey, how ya doin’ Sarge?” he yelled out.

“Doing good, Wayne. “Doing good. Thanks for asking.”

Dana looked back at her two students and resumed.

“What else? Why do people kidnap children?”

“Sometimes parents abduct their own children in custody cases,” Max said.

“Another good answer,” Dana replied. “Every year in the US, about 200,000 children are taken by a family member. And it’s not always custody cases. There are other reasons. Like to protect a child. Or get back at someone. And in less cases, it could be people who are in emotional distress. Maybe they lost a baby or were abused. Maybe they could never have children and saw Emily as their own child. Now, let me get back to what could be good news for Emily.”

Dana took a long drink of water and cleared her throat. A group of young police officers had entered and were talking loudly. Dana once again leaned in over the table.

“Some of these child abductors are narcissists and crave the feeling of superiority that they have outsmarted the police. It’s an ego trip and sense of power. Then there are criminals who reinsert themselves into cases for the thrills.”

Dana cleared her throat again.

“Then there is the person who kidnapped a child for some reason and kept them alive for some reason. This may be very thrilling for them. But over time, that thrill wears off. It wanes. It just isn’t there anymore. But then they see a way to feel that thrill all over again: by getting involved in the case. They can relive the crime and stir up emotional arousal. They get to experience it all over again.”

“God, people are terrible,” Max exclaimed. “Jean-Paul Sartre was right: ‘Hell is other people.’”

At that, Cadie and Dana looked at each other, surprised at his philosophical reference.

“Quite true, Max. People can be bastards.”

Then Cadie broke in.

“What if this person wants to exact pain and revenge on Heidi for some reason? If Emily did in fact chase a butterfly that led to a kidnapper, was the kidnapping a crime of opportunity? Or was it planned? If it was planned, why? Maybe it wasn’t about Emily at all but it was all about Heidi from the start.”

“Why are you thinking that?” Dana asked.

“Well, I got to wondering about how Heidi was just featured in the newspaper. It made it sound like Heidi was doing better. Getting on with her life. I started to wonder: What if the person who took Emily did it to hurt Heidi?”

Just then, Melinda walked up with a platter of steaming burgers, crispy fries, and onion rings and set them down on the table. “Hotel California” was now playing in the restaurant while a few people chatted and laughed. The trio at the back booth, however, ate in silence for a while. Then Dana broke into their thoughts.

“That is a very interesting theory, Cadie,” Dana said. “We have to consider every possibility. There’s also something else I wanted to discuss. Something I’ve been thinking about.”

Both students looked up quizzically, burgers in their hands.

“It’s the blood. That’s very concerning. With our new development - the butterfly letter - I want to remain hopeful. I really do. But I just keep thinking about Emily’s blood at the scene, imagining someone stabbing her, maybe to control her, and then it got out of hand. So, I keep asking myself, ‘Can Emily really be alive?’ It just doesn’t seem plausible.”

Max and Cadie nodded. They were all thinking the same thing: Emily Hadly was surely dead.

Lunch was now over, and Dana was paying the bill when she turned to Max.

“Hey, Cadie and I need to talk about something real quick. Could you wait for her in your car?”

“Ugh, sure,” Max stammered, wondering what was going on. In a few minutes, Max was walking out the door, and Dana turned to Cadie. “So, what’s up? You’ve got me worried.”

It was hard for Cadie to meet Dana’s eyes. She didn’t want to let her down. The young woman brushed strands of long red hair from her face and cleared her throat.

“So, I wanted to share what happened to me last year, and what is happening now.”

For the next ten minutes, Cadie told Dana about Mitch Lawson, the stalking, and that he had just been released from a county jail. Dana just sat there quietly, in complete shock actually. It was hard to form words after all she heard. She really couldn’t believe after all she’s been through Cadie had to now deal with a stalker. Life just wasn’t fair. Unfortunately, Dana knew that once people become public figures, the public can form weird obsessions. Like Heidi Hadly. Was her dead butterfly truly related to her daughter’s disappearance, or was it just some nutjob fixated on person of notoriety?

Dana gathered herself and reached across the table for Cadie’s hand.

“I’m so sorry this is happened to you, Cadie,” Dana said, her voice breaking a bit. “But let’s not get ahead of ourselves. It was a young man, and he spent a year in jail. So, more than likely, he’s learned his lesson. But let me reach out to some folks in Ingham County. I’ll find out what’s going on with him now.”

Cadie clutched Dana’s hand. She was grateful for the older woman’s concern and support.

“I appreciate that so much,” Cadie said. “And I’m sure you’re right. I’m sure Lawson has forgotten all about me.”

The two women got up and walked across the restaurant to the door leading to the parking lot. While Dana followed behind Cadie, she felt worried. She wasn’t at all sure Lawson had forgotten about Cadie. But she was going to find out.

Chapter 15

Heidi Hadly
A Mysterious Mother

The storm had taken a break, and it was now misting as the two cars crept down the maple tree-lined street looking for the Hadly house. Dana helped search the two-story, Victorian cottage years ago after Emily's disappearance, but she couldn't quite recall where on Leelanau Lane the cottage was situated. Finally, she spotted it. She remembered its pale, grayish-blue color with white wood shutters and posts and covered front porch. The same white wicker settee in which Dana sat interviewing Heidi 14 years ago was still on the porch. The front door was a different color, though. Back then, it was painted a sprightly coral. Now, the door seemed much more subdued – a deep gray. It looked dingy, like it hadn't been cleaned in a while. Like no one really cared.

Both cars turned into the short driveway, and the trio exited. They could hear the tumble of Lake Michigan waves hitting the shore down the road – and the hiss of the wind. All three looked up and marveled at the beautiful, historic home with its gabled roof shrouded in mist. They were mindful that this is where Emily Hadly had spent her quick six years of life before she crossed paths with misfortune. All three thought the home, only three blocks from Lake Michigan and Harbor Cove Beach, as well as ice cream shops and quaint coastal stores, must have provided an idyllic childhood for Emily – until it didn't.

Dana climbed the painted stairs followed by Max, and then Cadie and knocked on the front door. She could hear someone moving about inside, and a minute later Heidi Hadly opened the door and appeared in the frame.

"Hello, Dana, thank you for coming," Heidi said. "It's been a while."

Heidi looked like she had aged thirty years, Dana thought, and no wonder. Heidi's face had large, deep circles under sunken eyes, and her skin was papery thin and pale. It looked like sun hadn't shone on her face in years. Her drab, shoulder-length brown hair hung slackly. She was wearing a gray sweatshirt and jeans.

"Yes, it has," the former sergeant remarked. "I just wish sometime I could stop by with good news."

"Yeah, me, too," Heidi replied, making a weak attempt at a smile.

"These are my students, Cadie McLeod and Max Clark," Dana said. "As I mentioned on the phone, they're MSU students – part of a cold case internship to help law enforcement crack old cases. I'm their mentor."

Both students said hello, and Heidi leaned against the door frame, "So, it's Cadie McLeod, is it? Glad to see you are well. At least somebody's child made it out."

All three were a bit taken aback at Heidi's comment. They didn't know how to respond.

I can't feel bad for being alive.

"Thank you, Mrs. Hadly," Cadie said, stifling her feelings. "I'm truly thankful for everyone who helped me, including Dana. I'm just so sorry about what happened to your daughter. But if I learned anything from what happened to me, it's to be resilient. To never give up. I just hope I can apply my knowledge and experiences to helping you."

"I appreciate that," Heidi replied. "Sorry if I sounded cold. It's just hard to muster up kindness sometimes. I often feel like a robot, like there's not much left of me emotionally. Anyway, you're all here, so let's do this."

Dana, Cadie, and Max followed Heidi into the quaint front parlor with an oak hall tree and glass chandelier.

"Let's sit at the kitchen table," Heidi said.

She led them into a large room with a stone fireplace in the corner. Along the ceiling was an exposed wood beam. Cadie noticed that unlike her Aunt Marie's colorful kitchen full of trinkets and cooking items, Heidi's counters were bare and mostly devoid of spices and kitchen utensils.

She doesn't have anyone to cook for anymore.

The group took a seat around the rustic oak table with fluted legs. In front of them was a dried yellow mum that was placed strangely off center. The room was chilly, and Cadie could feel a cool breeze blowing through the kitchen from somewhere. Out of her bag, Cadie removed a detective's notebook and a pen and placed them on the table.

Heidi, pulling her wood chair closer, began the conversation abruptly.

"What do you want to know?" she asked sharply. "What haven't I told you already?"

"Well," Dana said, treading carefully, fully aware of all Heidi had endured, "I would like you to take us through that day – the day Emily disappeared. I would like Cadie and Max to hear the full story, and I also would like to be reminded of every detail you can tell us. Do you think you are up to that, Heidi? Can you tell us what happened that day?"

Heidi stared down at the table for a long time. The room was utter silence - the only sounds were winds whipping against the cottage and a light rain scattering across the windows. Finally, after several minutes, Heidi raised her head and stared into Dana's eyes.

"Okay, I'm ready, but as you know Dana, despite my therapy, I can't remember everything – but I'll try."

Chapter 16

Heidi's Harrowing Day

"It was a gorgeous morning – one of those days when you wake up instantly happy. I remember sunshine pouring in through the camper window. I could hear mourning doves cooing outside. My first thought was, 'It's a perfect day to go to the beach.' But Louis was never fond of the beach. He once said to me, 'Only bad things happen at the water.' I remember his mother telling me Louis became afraid of the water as a little boy when their neighbor drowned in Lake Superior. A riptide ensnared the neighbor boy, and it took weeks to find his body.

For years, Louis did try to overcome his fear, but it always took some convincing to get him near Lake Michigan. Even when we were dating back in high school, he never wanted to go down to the water."

Heidi paused to take a drink from her bottle on the table.

"I should have listened to him."

It was an uncomfortable moment. Dana, Cadie, and Max shifted in their wooden, Windsor chairs.

"He really didn't want to go that day, but I pushed him. He said he had a 'bad feeling,' but he got those a lot. He also reminded me it was his parents' anniversary.

"'Oh, they won't care if I'm there or not,'" I said. 'You know they don't like me.' Louis didn't say anything to that. He knew I was right."

Heidi smiled ruefully.

"He really loved me – at least he loved me back then."

Max shot Cadie a look. He wondered why Louis's parents didn't like Heidi. So far, she seemed like a perfectly nice person. Maybe they held it against her that she pushed Louis and Emily to go to the beach that day? He also thought how awful it must feel being the one who insisted they go. Imagine

how different all of their lives would be if they decided to go shopping instead? Or on a picnic? Or go to visit Louis's parents?

A strong lake wind suddenly rattled the western windows, adding even more eeriness to the dark kitchen. Heidi continued.

"Louis went to wake Emily in her bunk. She was so excited! I could hear her jumping on her bed and laughing. Then she ran into our room in her new red bathing suit. She was ready to go that minute! She loved the water - and playing in the sand. My in-laws spoiled her with beach toys, and she was playing with them the day she disappeared. That always made them feel terrible. Anyway, it was settled. We were going to spend the day at the beach; it was only a few blocks from our campsite. Louis grabbed our small cooler because we were going to get some lunch on the way from the deli."

Dana interjected.

"Delio's Deli, right?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Do you recall anyone watching you at the deli?" Dana asked. "Was there anyone strange or different? Someone watching Emily? Maybe someone said something? Was there anything out of the ordinary you remember?"

The room became quiet as Heidi tried to recall. Cadie's exposed ankles were becoming cold because of the kitchen air blowing under the table. She rubbed them together to stay warm.

"I've thought about that day so many times," Heidi responded. "I just don't recall anything out of the ordinary at the deli. We got our food and left. It was quite crowded. I wouldn't know if anyone was watching us because I was at the counter ordering. I had my back to the people."

"What did you do then?" Dana asked.

Both Max and Cadie watched her face intently. It was eerie hearing the story of a girl gone missing firsthand from her mother. Terrifying, honestly. Like a horror movie. Max began chewing on his nails, and Cadie took notice.

I wouldn't have taken him for a nail biter.

"We put our sandwiches in the cooler," Heidi said, "and we left. I was carrying the beach bag with our towels, and we had our bathing suits on under our coverups."

Then Heidi laughed.

"Emily looked so cute. She was wearing one of Louis's tee-shirts, and I swear it hung down to her ankles. But she didn't want to wear the cute coverup I bought her at the Beach Shack in Harbor Cove. She wanted to wear her daddy's shirt."

Max interjected: "So, Emily and her father were close?"

"Oh, yes. Very. Louis adored Emily. We were high school sweethearts, you know."

"Where is Louis now?" Cadie asked. Heidi hadn't mentioned him until now.

"Dana didn't tell you?" Heidi said. "Louis and I are divorced."

"Oh goodness, I'm sorry to hear that," Cadie said. Max nodded in agreement.

"Don't be. It was years ago," Heidi said. "The whole situation was hard on the both of us. So much anxiety and pain. And blaming. Louis blamed me, you know, for us going to the beach that day. We both knew that was totally unfair, but he had no place to direct his hurt and anger, so he directed it at me. We really did try to stay together, even went to therapy in town, but it was all just too much. Finally, we realized we'd be better off apart."

"Where does Louis live now?" Max asked.

“In Grand Haven,” Heidi responded. “He owns Beachside Books on Main Street. It’s a small bookstore and coffee shop. We meet up from time to time when he’s in town to talk about Emily’s case.”

Dana, who had been listening patiently, finally spoke up. “What happened after you left the deli that day?”

“We walked down Cove Avenue a few blocks toward Mariner’s Beach,” Heidi recalled. “There was lots of traffic. As I said, it was a great beach day, so everyone was out. I knew the main beach was going to be crowded, but where we were going - The Hideaway – well, it’s hidden. I grew up here, you know. Anyway, we turned right on Sandy Shore. There were a big grove of trees and a small path that led to an isolated bit of beach.”

“Do you recall anyone following you?” Dana asked. “I know it’s been a long time since you’ve thought about that day, Heidi, but really think. Take your time.”

Heidi closed her eyes. She was gently rocking back and forth in her chair, like she was trying to soothe herself. Cadie and Max tried not to watch; it seemed strangely private. Everyone waited.

“I don’t recall anyone following us. Nothing like that.”

Another minute passed.

Suddenly, Heidi looked at Dana with increased energy. “You know, I do recall something strange. I never gave it any thought. In fact, I haven’t even thought about it until now, but it’s probably nothing.”

Everyone was surprised. They leaned forward simultaneously.

“We were walking down Sandy Shore, and Emily and Louis were singing ‘Itsy Bitsy Spider.’ I was walking behind them when a towel fell out of my bag. I stopped and stooped down to pick it up, and my sunglasses fell off my head. Then I heard a laugh - just out of the blue. I looked, but there was no one around. Just a van parked across the street with tinted windows.”

“A van? You’re sure it was a van?” Dana asked.

“Oh, yes. I remember it was a van. It happened so quickly, and then it was over. Thinking back, I recall it seemed weird. Like someone was laughing at me for my sunglasses falling off.”

“Do you recall anything else about that moment,” a clearly interested Dana asked.

“I remember thinking that the laughed sounded familiar,” Heidi said. “Like a laugh I had heard somewhere before. But as I said, it was such a brief moment, and then it was over. I put the towel back in the tote bag and caught up to Louis and Emily.”

“Do you remember anything about the van?” Cadie asked.

“It was so long ago,” Heidi said. “Let me think for a moment.”

Max took a drink of water while Heidi thought about the vehicle.

“I remember that it was white. Oh, and it was like a commercial sort of van. Not the usual van.”

“Why do you say that?” Max asked.

“Because it didn’t have all its windows. And I think there was some kind of logo on it.”

“Do you remember anything about the logo?” Dana asked, suddenly quite intrigued.

“Something nautical, maybe? I really don’t remember.”

At that, Dana, Cadie, and Max froze. The news that the logo was somewhat nautical shook them. All three were thinking about the watermark in the piece of paper Heidi had just received in the mail. The watermark that was a compass and something else.

“Why is that important?” she asked.

“I can’t say right now, Heidi. But this is helpful information,” Dana replied, her head nodding quickly.

She took a notepad from her purse and wrote down the information, while Cadie continued to fill in her own detective’s notebook.

“Let’s continue, Heidi. What happened next?”

Heidi adjusted herself in her chair and closed her eyes again.

“We got to a spot where there are a lot of trees and a hidden path. It leads to a place one or two cars could park from a road that cuts in from a side street. It’s isolated. We turned on the path. I remember that a big, black squirrel ran out in front of us, and it made Louis jump. Emily and I thought that was funny,” Heidi smiled, “seeing a grown man react that way.”

Everyone smiled in return. You could tell it was a good memory for Heidi – a happy moment before their lives changed forever.

“We walked to The Hideaway. It’s a place between two small sand dunes – like a little valley, so it’s hidden. Then we kept walking closer to the lake and put down our blanket.”

“Were you still between the dunes?” Max asked.

“No. We were in front of them, closer to the water, so we could see both ways down the beach,” Heidi said. “I remember it was so hot. And humid. We were sweaty from walking.”

“What happened next?” Cadie asked.

“We got in the water,” Heidi said. “I remember it felt wonderful. I remember feeling so happy. Just being there in the water with Louis and Emily. Emily was splashing her father, and Louis was pretending to be a shark – putting his hands together over his head like a fin – and swimming after Emily. Pretty prophetic, huh? A shark chasing Emily.”

Heidi’s face darkened.

“Then we got out of the water and went to our quilt. Emily began playing with her beach bucket and toys, and Louis and I fell asleep on the blanket.”

Suddenly, Heidi shuddered.

“We fell asleep! What kind of parents fall asleep at the beach?! Oh, I’m a terrible, terrible mother, and it’s my fault she’s gone! Oh, god!”

Heidi shook and moaned. Dana stood up and went and put her hand on Heidi’s shoulder. She looked at Cadie and Max.

“Why don’t we take a break?”

Cadie and Max nodded.

Cadie continued thinking about the strange laugh and the white van. She felt sorry for Heidi.

Don’t blame yourself, Heidi. Sociopaths are everywhere. I should know.

However, Max thought to himself that maybe Heidi was a terrible mother. Mothers are supposed to watch their children. Protect them. Sometimes, things happen you can’t control. But falling asleep on the beach? While your child is playing feet away from a Great Lake? What kind of mother was Heidi, anyway?

Also, Max noticed Heidi never cried. In the entire time they discussed Emily and the horrific day she disappeared Heidi never shed a tear. Max was watching the older woman's face intently the entire time and was shocked that the grieving mother never mustered up even one teardrop. Sure, maybe Heidi had shoved her feelings deep down, so far down in fact that she was now detached and somewhat emotionless. Still, Max thought her effect was strange for all she had been through.

He thought of his own mother and all she had endured during their family tragedy. His mom had cried every night and still cried sometimes until her eyes were red and swollen. These times were tough on Max. He had to become the man of the family at a young age. Still, his mother was there for him. She always cared for him and Marty.

My mother and Heidi are nothing alike.

Max was beginning to doubt Heidi. Something about her didn't seem trustworthy, and Max wondered why that was – and what she was hiding.

Chapter 17

The Man
Women Problems

Upon arriving home, the man sunk deep into his chair - breathing heavily. He grinded his teeth as deep red veins strained against his muscular neck. His clothes reeked, and the stench of his sour body odor pervaded the outdated room. He had bandaged the wound on his hand and now sat there rubbing it - ruminating. He thought about the women who had ruined his life.

How different things would be if not for women! How better off his life would be without bitches in his life. Gold-digging bitches! Every one of them a bloodsucker. He knew women were naturally dishonest and evil, always enticing men with their sexuality, manipulating them to get what they want. It even said so in the Bible. Also, his few failed relationships had taught him much about the supposedly fairer sex. No one ever seemed to truly love him. They just wanted what he could provide.

So, looking back, the man didn't feel a bit of remorse for the things he'd done.

I'm the real victim. I've suffered more than anyone! If anyone deserves to be angry, it's me!

He glanced over at the bloody knife at the table. He knew he should have done it long ago, but she wouldn't let him. If he was honest, though, it was not only her that enjoyed their arrangement. They both did – but for different reasons.

The man crossed into the kitchen and pulled out a piece paper and grabbed a pen from the drawer. He liked to make lists and remain organized. He sat down at the table, wiped his nose, and began to write. His empty blue eyes narrowed as he wrote three questions at the top of the page.

1. *How will I do it?*
2. *What will I need?*

3. *Where will I put her?*

He grinned at the questions, relishing in the thrilling, even aggressive, feelings now surging through him as he contemplated the days to come and finally fulfilling the vow he made all those years ago.

Chapter 18

Heidi Hadly
Resurrecting Emily

Max went to the bathroom, and Cadie walked out on the front porch for some fresh air. It was now windy and raining, but the young woman didn't care. She always liked stormy weather. After several minutes, Max opened the front door.

"Dana's ready for us."

Cadie headed back in and took her place at the table. She saw that Heidi had lit a tall candle. Its light flickered in the kitchen breeze and cast shadows on the walls in the dark room.

Dana began again.

"Heidi, could you tell us more about Emily – what she was like," Dana asked. "Cadie and Max have read her case file, and I reread it - and of course I lived it – like you."

Immediately, Dana regretted saying that, but Heidi didn't respond.

"We want to get to know your daughter, to personalize her, so she's not just a cold case victim but a real person in our minds. Could you please share with us what Emily was like? What her personality was like?"

The room became still as the mother of the missing girl attempted to resurrect her daughter, a little girl who was mostly likely raped and murdered years ago.

Heidi placed her hands together on the table. She moved her thumbs across each other – back and forth, gathering her thoughts. She was quiet for a long time – like she was revisiting the past and trying to conjure her daughter.

Finally, she spoke.

“Emily is the best daughter anyone could ask for,” Heidi began. “I always call her Bumblebee because she buzzes with curiosity. She wants to know everything. When I take her to Seaside Market, she picks up every fruit and vegetable and says, ‘What’s this mom? What’s that mom?’ I say, ‘That’s an avocado,’ and she says, ‘Can we buy it?” And then I’d buy it and have to learn how to make salsa,” Heidi smiled. “Emily always keeps me on my toes.”

Talking about her daughter seemed to bring Heidi back to life. The trio noticed she referred to her daughter in the present tense, always hopeful her daughter was still alive. They wondered what pain they would bring to Heidi if they were able to locate her daughter’s remains.

“She loves kindergarten – loves to learn. Animals are her favorite - horses and dogs. But then, strangely, she loves dragons. Emily is very artistic. At school, she actually drew a dragon for each of her classmates and gave them personal characteristics. You know, like special powers or claws or extra sharp eyesight for her classmate that wore glasses. She even drew one of herself with bright yellow hair and big legs because she could run so fast. The drawings are in a scrapbook in her room.”

“Emily sounds like a special girl,” Dana remarked. “Very smart and talented at such a young age. Observant, too.”

Oh, what did you see little girl before you died?

“Oh, she really is,” Heidi exclaimed, now even more animated and gesturing with her hands. “And she’s quite athletic! Always chasing a ball and covered in bruises! And she’s funny! That’s one thing I really miss is her humor. She’s always giggling and coming up with funny one-liners to amuse us. Harbor Cove Library is her favorite. Emily loves to read. She also likes joke books, especially knock-knock jokes. Her favorite was, “Knock, knock.”

I’d respond, ‘Who's there?’

‘Leaf,’ she’d say.

‘Leaf who?’

‘Leaf me alone, I'm telling a joke!’’

Heidi crossed her arms and smiled – the memory clearly bringing her happiness.

“I think Emily has my mom’s zest for life. Me, not so much.”

“Is your mother still alive?” Max asked, trying to get a feel for who Heidi was.

“No, she passed several years ago,” Heidi said as her face darkened. “She didn’t have the easiest life. She’s probably better off dead.”

Max shot Cadie a look.

Did she just say that? What kind of person says her mother is better off dead?

Everyone nodded but thought the comment was strange. It slightly altered their view of Heidi.

“We’ve seen pictures of Emily, of course, but could you describe what she looked like – er, looks like?” Cadie asked.

Heidi looked side-eyed at Cadie. She caught Cadie’s slip and didn’t appreciate it. Her countenance altered slightly, but she continued on.

“Everyone thinks Emily is adorable,” Heidi said. “Clear, blue eyes and her beautiful hair. She always wants her hair in a ponytail,” Heidi laughed. “Just like you, Dana. She’d say, ‘I don’t like my hair in my eyes, momma. I have too much to see.’ And she tilts her head when you’re talking to her. Like she’s hanging on every word.”

“Emily seems quite sagacious,” Max remarked.

Cadie and Dana both looked at Max – somewhat impressed by his vocabulary but questioning if he applied the word correctly.

“Yes, yes. That’s true,” Heidi said. “You know, I also must add that Emily is very empathetic, very loving. One time, we were walking Harbor Cove Pier, and she spotted a Painted Turtle with a cracked shell. How it got out on the pier I’ll never know. Anyway, Emily made me take it home, and we wrapped the shell in gauze. The next day we took it to the vet. When we brought it home, Emily

made a little home for it in a box and tucked in flower petals from our garden. She would feed it pieces of kale and boiled egg. She just has an innocent heart, very loving, also very trusting. I really don't know where she got those qualities. It certainly wasn't from me or my mother. I often wonder if her soft nature was responsible for what happened to her. It doesn't pay to be too soft in this world."

Everyone nodded but again questioned Heidi's comment. Then Heidi said something even more strange, something that caught everyone off guard.

"You know, it took me a long time to love Emily," Heidi sighed, her face drawn. "Then I finally did. I really did grow to love her, but then she was gone. Life is always so cruel."

All three of them were quite shocked by Heidi's words, especially Max.

What the hell did she just say?

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that," Heidi added nervously. "I'm just tired."

Everyone nodded but inwardly wondered what in the world that meant. Most mothers wouldn't admit that it took them time to love their children. Dana and Cadie thought that maybe Heidi had postpartum depression, and it took time for Heidi to bond with her baby. Max wondered if Heidi had been abused or neglected in her childhood and therefore had a difficult time forming relationships. Or maybe she's a sociopath.

Something happened to Heidi. Something's not right about her.

Just then, the group heard a distant crack of thunder – somewhere far off over Lake Michigan – and everyone became quiet. That seemed to bring an end to the somber conversation.

"Would anyone like something else to drink," Heidi asked, standing up.

Both Dana and Cadie shook their heads no, but Max piped up. "Sure, I'll take a Coke or Pepsi if you have one."

The women grimaced.

Really, Max?

But Heidi walked over to her refrigerator and grabbed a Coke and handed it to Max.

"Do you want to see Emily's bedroom?"

Cadie and Max looked at each other – both apprehensive about seeing the missing girl's room up close and personal. It honestly seemed creepy.

"Yes, Heidi, that would be helpful," Dana answered. "Thank you. Then I'd like us to talk about the butterfly letter you received."

"Me, too," Heidi replied, her face clouding over.

Heidi moved past Dana, Cadie, and Max and began walking down the dark hallway, a heavy rain now pelting against the home's windows. Just then, the air was split by another crack of thunder. Closer this time. A seemingly bigger storm was moving inland.

Heidi looked back over her shoulder at the group. In a low voice, she said, "Follow me."

Cadie and Max exchanged pensive glances as they followed Emily's mother down the dark, narrow hallway. Heading to the bedroom of a kidnapped child – one who was most likely murdered – was unnerving. Looking at the walls, they saw pictures of Emily, Heidi, her father Louis, and what seemed to be Heidi's mother in different frames scattered about. Pictures of the family having a picnic, walking down the beach, and eating ice cream. There were also a few professional family photos. Finally, they stopped at Emily's room, and Cadie glanced inside.

This is just so sad. God, I hope we can find out what happened to her.

Cadie thought time had stood still. It didn't appear that the room had been altered in any way since that fateful July day.

"You can come in," Heidi said quietly - strangely.

Everyone entered the small room with a single bed enveloped in pink and yellow stuffed animals, a wood floor covered by a colorful braided rug, a window seat overlooking the side garden, and built-in shelves holding all the memorabilia Emily had amassed in six brief years of life.

“So, this is Emily’s room,” Heidi said. “I haven’t changed anything. I want it to be just as she left it for when she comes home.”

At that, Max and Cadie exchanged quick glances. It was highly unlikely that Emily would ever return to this room, but they hoped to at least bring closure to Heidi and her family. They hoped to find out what happened to her and possibly retrieve her remains.

“Feel free to look around the room,” Heidi said. “I’ll leave you to it.”

Heidi left the bedroom and returned to the kitchen. They could hear her walk down the wood plank hallway floor and open a drawer. In the bedroom, the window overlooking the side garden was blurry from rain sliding down the glass.

Dana, Cadie, and Max studied the room. However, there didn’t seem to be much that would help them in their investigation. Dana noticed a tiny tea set on the lower of three shelves. It contained a white, floral porcelain teapot, four cups and saucers, and a sugar bowl and cream pitcher. Looking at the set recalled special memories for Dana. Her own daughter had the same set when she was little. Dana remembered tea parties in the kitchen with Lila and Donnie and him sipping from a tiny teacup. That was one good thing about her ex: he was always a good sport when it came to their daughter. When it came to Dana, not so much.

The shelves were filled with a variety of colorful children’s books, including the joke and knock-knock books Heidi mentioned. There also were books by Shel Silverstein, including *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. Seeing the book, with children peering over the end of the sidewalk, made Cadie sad. *Emily never had much chance to live at the end of the sidewalk. Someone stole that from her.*

She also noticed two red pennants pinned to the top shelf. Both said, “Harbor Cove Field Day” in gold letters. She lifted up one pennant to look at its backside. It read, “Emily Hadly. Winner, 50 Yard Dash.” Max came up behind Cadie and read the pennant over her shoulder. Cadie lifted up the other

pennant: “Emily Hadly. Winner. 100 Yard Dash.”

“Wow, fast little girl,” Max said. “That might come in handy.”

Cadie was startled. She didn’t realize Max was standing right behind her. She felt her face flush and grow warm. That annoyed her.

“What are you talking about,” she said, turning to face him. He was very close.

“I just mean that if she’s still alive, and she’s still fast, that might be a good thing,” Max said. “She might need to put that speed to use. To escape, I mean.”

Then, under his breath, Max said, “But it didn’t help my dad.”

That’s a weird thing to say. Why did his dad need to escape?

“Yeah, I guess so,” Cadie replied, stepping out and away from his too-close presence. “It hasn’t helped her so far, though.”

Just then, Heidi entered the room. She had brushed her hair and swept some of it up into a brown, speckled clip. It looked like she applied concealer under her eyes.

“Did you find anything?” she asked.

“Not really,” Dana said. “Like I mentioned earlier, seeing Emily’s room helps make her more real to us if that makes sense.”

Heidi didn’t respond but walked past the group to the three shelves. On the lower shelf was a small, curious jewelry box. She grabbed it and walked toward the colorful bedroom door painted in wildflowers.

“Can we talk about the letter now?”

“Yes, let’s do that,” Dana said, looking at Cadie and Max. Everyone filed out, and Heidi led them back down the hallway to the dark kitchen. The candle was still throwing eerie, dancing shadows across the room.

Heidi sat down at the wood table, and everyone followed her lead. Heidi placed the pink jewelry box covered in red hearts on the table and clasped her hands.

“After we talk about the letter I received, I need to tell you all something. It’s something important. And it might change everything. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner.”

Chapter 19

Heidi Hadly
A Birthmark

Dana, Cadie, and Max were immediately intrigued by Heidi's statement, but she didn't say anything further. She just put down the mysterious jewelry box and turned to Dana.

"First, I would like to see the photos of the letter. Did you bring them?"

"I did," Dana said. She reached inside her zipped raincoat pocket and took out a manila envelope. She placed it on the table across from the jewelry box and opened it. Then she slid out four sheets of paper with photos on them.

Max and Cadie were surprised. Dana hadn't said anything about receiving the email from the Grayling lab. Maybe Dana was waiting for this moment to share the photos with Heidi first.

Everyone drew closer to see the documents. The first contained a scanned photo of the letter with a barely visible watermark. The other three documents contained scanned photos of the dead butterfly from different angles and magnifications.

Heidi drew in her breath.

"Yes, that's it," she said. "That's the letter and butterfly I received in the mail."

Everyone leaned in further and began studying the photos.

"I see the watermark," Max said. "It's so faint, but it looks like a compass. I can't make it out."

Dana turned to Heidi.

"Do you recall this logo, Heidi? Does it look like what was on the van you mentioned? The van the day Emily went missing?"

Heidi studied the faint watermark.

"I just don't know. It was so long ago," Heidi said. "Maybe."

Dana continued.

"What exactly does this logo represent? As we know, the envelope was postmarked Traverse City," Dana said. "The State Police have been talking to the marina owners in Traverse City, Leland, Suttons Bay, and Frankfort, trying to see if anyone recognizes that image from one of their customer's boats or yachts. But that's a lot of boats, and there's many more marinas up and down the west coast of Michigan. It's a big job to reach out to all of these owners. And the image might not have anything to do with a boat."

"It could be a travel company or a restaurant. Even a clothing company," Cadie said.

"Kind of a needle in a haystack situation," Max added. "But the compass definitely makes it seem more related to a boat."

"The State Police won't give up, will they?" Heidi asked. "I mean, they are going to keep investigating the logo, right?"

"Oh yes," Dana said. "They're definitely looking into it."

She thought about the new information that Heidi had shared: a laugh possibly coming from a van with a unique compass logo.

Why won't she tell us about the laugh?

"How about we talk about the butterfly," Dana pivoted. "Does anyone have thoughts?"

The room was quiet for a bit. The only sound in the kitchen was the continued rain pelting the roof and windows. The kitchen had become even darker as the storm intensified outside. Max wished Heidi would turn on a lamp. It was if she preferred being in the dark. He had noticed her bottles of pills on the counter. He wondered what medications she was taking and why.

"To me, it looks like the wings were deliberately removed," Cadie said. "Look at this one photo," she said, holding it up to the other three at the table. "Look at where the wings would attach to the thorax.

It's very clean, very straight, and precise. If the wings were damaged naturally, they would be frayed and jagged – abrupt. But the basil – the part of the wing closest to the body – is unnaturally straight."

"I agree," Max said. "There is nothing natural about how those wings look. Someone sliced them off."

Heidi dropped her head and covered her eyes.

"Are you okay, Heidi?" Dana asked quickly. "We can stop if this is bothering you too much."

"No, it's not that," she said. "It's the thing I need to tell you. It's quite disturbing."

Now everyone was on pins. They waited for her to respond.

Heidi put one trembling hand over the other, trying to calm them. Then she looked at the others.

"I've been thinking about why someone would send me a dead butterfly," she said. "And I remembered."

Heidi reached for the pink jewelry box sitting on the table. She opened the tiny box and up popped a pink ballerina that began to slowly twirl to "Swan Lake." Dana, Cadie, and Max were mesmerized by the little dancer that must have delighted the little girl all those years ago. Inside, they could see a tangle of jewelry in the box. Heidi dug around in the box for a moment and pulled out a gold charm bracelet. It looked to contain ten or so charms, everything from a plastic green frog to a gold cross.

"Look at this," Heidi said, placing the charm bracelet in the middle of the table next to the dead mum. "Tell me what you see."

The other three leaned in and peered at the bracelet. Suddenly, Max yelled out.

"There's a butterfly charm on the bracelet!"

Dana and Cadie caught their breath. It was totally unexpected. Dana looked shocked and quickly tried to compose herself.

"Why is there a butterfly charm on the necklace?" Dana asked a bit shakily.

Heidi suddenly stood up and walked down the hallway.

Dana, Cadie, and Max watched her go - confused. They waited, glancing at each other, their curiosity growing. Then they heard a noise, like a scrape on the wall. Seconds later, Heidi emerged from the hallway with a midsize frame in her hand. She sat down and placed the gold frame containing a picture of Emily on the table. It was a black and white closeup photo of Emily laughing, her head slightly turned.

"Take a look at this. What do you notice?" Heidi said mysteriously.

Everyone quickly stood up and bent forward over the table and looked closely. Suddenly, it seemed they all saw it at exactly the same time.

'It's a butterfly!" Max shouted. "It looks just like a butterfly!"

"Oh, my goodness, it does look like a butterfly," Cadie remarked loudly.

They all nodded their heads up and down dramatically. Dana just stood there, shocked, not saying a word.

There, on the lower side of Emily's neck was a small, brownish birthmark. And if you looked closely and studied it, you might just think it looked like a little butterfly.

"You never mentioned this before," Dana said, visibly shaken. "You never mentioned Emily had a butterfly birthmark."

"I haven't thought about it in a long time," Heidi replied evenly. "My daughter's been gone 14 years, Dana. I've struggled to even remember the important things about her. Like I try so hard to remember her voice – what she sounds like. And you know I have problems with my memory. So, no, I hadn't thought about that birthmark in years. And it's so small that I often didn't see it."

Max thought that was a strange comment.

If anyone, it would be a mother that would know her daughter's body forwards and backwards. Why in the world did Heidi not see it often?

"Who would know about the birthmark?" Cadie asked, still standing and staring at the photo.

“Gosh, I don’t know,” Heidi replied. “Her dad. His parents. My mother. Maybe some friends. Her kindergarten teacher, possibly. Maybe her babysitter.”

“What about her grandfather?” Cadie asked, noticing the omission.

“I never knew my dad,” Heidi replied curtly.

Everyone slowly sat down.

“Wow,” Max whistled. “This is crazy.”

“Do you really think the letter and her birthmark could be connected?” Heidi asked, looking intently at Dana, her voice rising. “Does this mean someone I just mentioned might have sent me that letter? Might have even kidnapped Emily?”

Heidi’s voice became louder.

“Does this mean she might be alive? Or is someone just trying to torture me? But why? Why would someone do that? Haven’t I suffered enough in this goddamn life?!”

The group just stared.

Heidi jumped from the table. She paced around the kitchen and ran her hands through her hair. The plastic clip fell out and clattered across the wood floor. She walked around the room and then finally slouched down in her chair.

“I just don’t understand what is going on! I don’t understand! Someone, tell me!”

Dana turned to Heidi and spoke quietly - calmly.

“Heidi, I don’t remember you ever saying anything about a babysitter. Did you tell the police about the babysitter?”

“I think so. That was a long time ago. And Barbara only babysat for a semester.”

The woman’s face began to contort.

Cadie and Max remained quiet and watched. It was odd seeing Heidi’s face twist in such a way. It was almost grotesque.

“What can you tell us about the babysitter, Heidi? What do you remember?”

“Her name was Barbara.”

“How did Barbara come to be your babysitter?” Dana asked.

“I met her where I volunteer,” Heidi explained. “She was a volunteer, too. I struck up a conversation with her one day and told her about Emily and how I wanted to take a college class, but it was on the same night Louis was in a golf league. She immediately volunteered to babysit.”

Dana’s eyebrows raised.

“Do you know where Barbara lives?” Dana asked.

“She used to live on the next street over. In the small yellow cottage at the end of the street by the park, but she doesn’t live there anymore.”

“Where did she go?”

“I don’t know. After my class ended, I didn’t need her anymore. So, we fell out of touch.”

“Did it end well? Your parting?” Dana prodded gently.

“I guess so. I mean I know she needed the money. She was a single woman. Never married. She didn’t have a lot of income. But no, everything was fine. She really loved Emily. She never had kids of her own, so Emily was special to her.”

“She did? She really loved Emily?” Dana probed.

Heidi turned to look at Dana, her eyes narrowing suspiciously.

“Do you think Barbara kidnapped Emily?”

“I don’t know, but we need to check her out. What else do you remember about her?”

Heidi stood up and paced the room again. A grim wind whistled outside the window.

“She had long, brown, braided hair. She was from up north somewhere – said she was going to move back there. Oh, and she sometimes brought her brother with her.”

“Her brother?” Dana asked, cocking her head.

“I didn’t really like him. I told her not to bring him anymore, so she stopped.”

“Why didn’t you like him?” Dana asked.

“I don’t know,” Heidi said. “He was just odd – always speaking to himself. Sometimes he would get angry at Barbara. I heard him yelling at her in their car. And something about him reminded me of someone else – someone unpleasant.”

Dana’s face registered surprise.

“Who it did it remind you of?”

“I really can’t remember,” Heidi replied flatly “It just seemed familiar.”

“It could help us find Emily if we knew,” Dana pushed.

“It really wouldn’t,” Heidi said. “So, please, drop it.”

“Okay,” Dana said, retreating and confused.

Why won’t she tell us? Max wondered. *It could help us find her daughter*.

“Do you remember Barbara’s last name?” Cadie asked.

“It was an Indian name – an Ojibwe name,” Heidi said. “It had the word cloud in it. Um, it was, uh, Whitecloud. That’s it. Barbara’s last name was Whitecloud.”

“Hmmm,” Dana replied. “When I get back to the police department, I’ll make some calls and see what I can find out about Barbara Whitecloud. Please let me know if you think of anything else, Heidi - about your babysitter or anyone who might have known about the butterfly birthmark or might have sent the letter.”

“I will,” Heidi responded, looking drained. “Can we stop for today, Dana? I need to rest.”

“Of course,” Dana said.

Dana looked over at her students and motioned with her head that it was time to leave.

The three stood up and said their goodbyes. After they made it to the front porch, Dana reminded Cadie and Max of their meeting in the morning at Mariner’s Beach with Detective Jake Brennan.

Then they ran out onto the front lawn, shielding their heads with their hands from the rain shower and jumping into their cars.

Just as Dana was about to slam her Jeep door shut, Heidi ran out the front door, through the yard, and up to Dana's SUV.

"Grand Island!" Heidi yelled as raindrops slid down her face. "It was Grand Island in the UP!"

"What?" Dana yelled back through the loud wind.

"Where Barbara was from!" Heidi said, shivering from the rain.

Max, who was just shutting his door overheard Heidi.

"Did you hear what Heidi just said to Dana?"

"No," Cadie answered. "I couldn't hear anything over the rain."

"She said Barbara Whitecloud lives in the UP."

Max shook his head, wondering about Heidi.

I don't know what it is, but something isn't right with her. And I plan to find out.

Chapter 20

Heidi Hadly
A Daughter's Pain

After they left, Heidi made her way to her back bedroom and laid down on the dark green quilt. She put her hands behind her head and stared at the ceiling. Why was it so hard for her to muster feelings for her own daughter? A mother is supposed to love their child deeply and endlessly. So, why was it so difficult to feel something? To even cry for Emily? She felt disgusted with herself.

Suddenly, the winds picked up, and Heidi heard the outside chain link gate banging against its metal frame. The banging triggered a memory that would help explain Heidi's lack of tears: first day of softball practice in the fourth grade. Heidi was hitting the aluminum bat against a metal post, feeling utterly alone. She stood there watching the constant display of happy, helpful dads attending to their daughters. It was around this age when not having a father really began to hit Heidi. Of course, throughout her early childhood, Heidi had experienced the ache of no father to read her books and tuck her in at night with a kiss, to film her opening presents Christmas morning and just generally loving her and keeping her safe. And now, out on that windy softball field, she also had to contend with the uncaring and bossy Mrs. Clark.

"Heidi, where's your father? He needs to sign up," the domineering woman commanded, scanning the field and tapping her pen on the sign-up sheet.

"Um, he's not here," Heidi stammered.

"What do you mean he's not here? You can't play if you don't sign up," Mrs. Clark said accusingly, as if Heidi and her family were trying to beat the all-important system. Of course, Agatha Hadly had simply dropped off her daughter in the parking lot and driven away.

“Every dad needs to work the concession stand,” she explained like she was a doctor giving life-saving instructions. “It’s very important that your dad signs up. No one gets out of it. So, where is your father?”

“Um, Mrs. Clark, my father is dead.”

The older woman suddenly recoiled.

“Oh, my goodness, I’m so sorry. I had no idea,” she stammered, clearly flustered, maybe even empathetic for a moment. But then Heidi watched her transform back. Mrs. Clark leaned in and whispered in Heidi’s ear: “I never had a father, either. But most fathers are assholes, so consider yourself lucky.”

The older woman walked away, and Heidi watched her go with wide eyes. She stood there in the grass, softball mitt dangling off her hand, considering Mrs. Clark’s words.

Was my father an asshole?

The memory of that day was triggering a headache, and Heidi massaged her forehead as the painful recollection continued. When practice was over, all the giggly girls hopped into warm cars and drove away with their doting dads. Heidi, however, was still waiting for her mother to show up. Mr. Kohl, the assistant coach, sat with Heidi on a bench, waiting for Agatha, the sun setting in the sky. Finally, her mom’s red Mustang raced into the dirt parking lot kicking dust. It pulled up in front of them.

“Heidi, get in the car!” Agatha yelled out the window, completely oblivious Mr. Kohl had been waiting for her to arrive for 25 minutes. She waved at the man and then yelled again at Heidi. “Come on! Get in the car!”

Now, laying on that quilt, Heidi began to feel anger at her mother who was long dead. Heidi remembered glaring at her mother as their Mustang zipped down Harbor Cove’s main street. Agatha was humming a song and tapping the wheel with manicured fingernails, oblivious to Heidi’s intense feelings. Heidi waited for the songs on the radio to end, but they never did. So finally, she cut in.

“Mother, I want to know who my father is.”

Agatha kept humming and looked straight ahead.

“Mom! Did you hear me?! I said, ‘Who is my father?!’”

Agatha’s head jerked over in surprise.

“Why the hell do you want to know who your father is?” Agatha sneered like it was a ridiculous question. Heidi didn’t understand her mother’s reaction. Heidi’s anger only increased.

“Because I want to know! You never tell me anything! But I want to know! I have a right to know! Who is my father?!”

Agatha grabbed at the wheel and jerked the Mustang into the Sunrise Groceries parking lot. She slammed on the brakes and quickly turned off the car. Agatha stared hard at her daughter.

“Your father’s name was Henrik de Lange,” she spat at Heidi. “He was older than me. I met him at work because he was my boss. He started paying attention to me – buying me things. Your father Henrik could be difficult, even cruel and selfish, but he did give us money. When your shoulder was dislocated and needed therapy, Henrik paid for that. And he moved in with us. He told me he was going to buy us a big, beautiful house in Harbor Cove, the best house in town, but of course he never did because he got sick and died.”

Agatha then casually checked her red lipstick in the rearview mirror, but Heidi could see the angry vein pulsating in her forehead.

“Are we done? Can we go now?” Agatha growled.

Heidi stared at Agatha in disbelief.

“That’s it?! That’s all you’re going to tell me?!”

“What else would you want to know, little girl?” Agatha shot back.

“How about everything! What was he like?! Did he look like me?! How did he act?! What did he do?! What was his life like?!”

Heidi was now yelling.

Agatha's body tightened, and she clenched her teeth. The vein in her forehead was clearly pulsing. Agatha's pristine fingers grabbed the wheel, and she slowly turned to face her daughter, her eyes flashing with anger.

"I am not going to answer any of those fucking questions. There are things you don't need to know, and quite frankly it's none of your goddamn business. So, don't ask me again. Your dad is dead, so shut up about it."

As Heidi recalled the conversation, she could never understand why her mother acted that way. Was she trying to protect Heidi from something? Protect Henrik? Why was she so angry? Why wouldn't Agatha tell her more?

Laying there on her bed, Heidi opened her eyes, and she knew why she couldn't cry for Emily. Heidi was a damaged, broken person, and she understood that it's almost impossible to show love for your child when you were never really loved yourself.

Heidi knew her daughter was mostly likely dead – murdered all those years ago. So, while she could shed tears for herself, she was never able to shed tears for Emily.

Chapter 21

Lena
Nightmares

It was late afternoon and time for their afternoon naps in the perfectly still cabin in the woods. The only sound was the ticking of the metal wall clock and Mother snoring loudly under her thick, cotton comforter. Down the hall, Lena was experiencing a terrifying cycle of sleep.

The young woman lay in bed, drenched in sweat, her comforter pushed to the floor. Her heart rate had increased considerably, and under her pink nightgown her chest undulated as she gasped for air. Her eyes darted under closed lids, and, feeling utterly helpless, her arms flailed in the pitch-black room. Lena's whimpers filled the air. The nightmare had begun - again.

She was slumped in the hot sand clutching at her burning, stabbing foot. A jagged piece of green glass had sliced her skin and was impaled deep in the flesh's tender arch. A slender river of deep red blood flowed from the wound, creating a rivulet in the sand. The child grabbed the thick glass that was greasy with blood and wrested it from her foot, flinging it aside.

She wailed in pain.

And that's when she saw him: the peculiar man staring at her through his van window. He smiled at her, but it was a strange, awful smile. She didn't like his little teeth. Immediately, the girl's chest tightened, and she couldn't catch her breath.

Then she saw the man get out of his van and walk around it. He was coming for her, she knew it. The man was still smiling, but the child knew the smile wasn't real. It didn't match his cold, unblinking eyes. It was like the dead-eyed stare of one of her painted-on dolls. She frantically scooted backwards, pushing her small hands into the sizzling sand, but it was no use. He was upon her. She tried to scream, but no sound came out. He grabbed her and lifted her up, and suddenly, she was held

tight in his sweaty, veiny arms, her blood dripping on his pants while he carried her to his van. She felt woozy in the hot sun.

Seconds later, they drove away, and all she could do was cry for her mother.

In her tiny bedroom, Lena continued to thrash about until her REM cycle - near its end – began to conjure a different story, one that was told to Lena by her mother.

It was a Scottish tale about a man who fell asleep deep in the forest and was taken prisoner by the Queen of the Fae. For many years, Thomas Learmont was held captive but finally the fairies let him return home. Everyone rejoiced as they knew only a few fortunate ones ever came back. But then, years later, Thomas was at home when he saw a sign – two snow-white deer in the lane - and he knew he was being summoned back. That was the man's fate for the rest of his life. He would always be at the beck-and-call of the person who stole him.

Lena tossed and turned, experiencing the man's imprisonment. It seemed, like Thomas, that Lena would be forever tortured in her dreams– and forever called back – by the man with the cold eyes on the beach.

Chapter 22

The Drive to Sleeping Bear
Following Too Close

After leaving Heidi Hadly's house, Max and Cadie began driving toward Harbor Cove Inn. Max was wondering what Dana and Cadie talked about back at the restaurant when Cadie spoke up.

"Max, do you think we could drive to Sleeping Bear Dunes? I haven't been up there in a while, and I would like to pay it a visit."

"How far is it?" Max asked, not enjoying the strong lake winds buffeting his SUV.

"It's about 40 minutes north," Cadie replied. "It would mean a lot to me."

Her mind immediately went to her childhood bedroom: Aileen reading the story the night before she was murdered.

"I guess so," Max said a little half-heartedly. "You grew up around here, right? Haven't you seen the dunes a bunch of times? Plus, honestly, is it a good idea? I mean, you were literally abducted from sand dunes. It doesn't seem like the smartest choice to visit them. And it seems sad as well."

At this point, Max had pulled into a parking lot and put his vehicle in park.

He looked over at her.

"So, is that what you want to do? Head up there? Even in this weather?"

Cadie was quiet for a moment, and the warm SUV grew still.

"Do you know the story of Sleeping Bear Dunes and the Manitou Islands?" Cadie asked.

Max shook his head.

"What do you mean by story?" he asked.

"There is an entire story, Max, passed down by the people who first lived in this area – the Anishinaabe. But it's not just that," Cadie said quietly.

“The night before my mother died - the night before she and my father were *murdered* - she read me the story of Sleeping Bear. It’s the last memory I have of my mother. And I know this probably sounds strange, but I used to think Sleeping Bear was me. I was keeping watch for my mom and dad, waiting for them to return to me, but lately I sense they are keeping watch over me.”

“That must make you feel good,” Max responded gently. “To think about your mom and dad keeping watch over you.”

“It does,” Cadie replied. “I’ve tried to take my parents’ deaths and turn it into something more meaningful in my life. Yes, they are gone, but I still feel close to them, especially at Sleeping Bear. And with this Heidi Hadly case, I’m feeling conflicted. I have another reason as well. That’s why I want to go there today.”

Max had no idea what she meant.

“Of course, we can head up there,” Max said. “I didn’t realize it meant that much.”

He put the vehicle in drive and pulled out of the parking lot.

“Can I take M-22 all the way up?” he asked.

“Yes. M-22 will take you up the coast and right to the entrance of the national park. It’s past Empire but south of Glen Lake,” Cadie explained.

“I don’t know where any of that is,” Max laughed.

“No worries,” Cadie smiled. “I’ll get us there.”

Soon, the young people were headed north. The rain had let up, and the cloud cover was breaking. Sunshine peeked through here and there and made the forests rushing by the speeding truck glisten. Just outside their windows were woodlands bursting with maple trees adorned in fiery red and orange leaves with beech trees adding radiant yellows. The drive took on a mystical, almost spiritual, nature. Neither spoke for quite a while. Cadie was intently reading the case files on the laptop, while Max was still processing what Cadie had shared. He wondered about the young woman seated next to him,

thought about all she had suffered - details of which he truly had no idea. Quite frankly, he felt awed in her presence.

Suddenly, Cadie looked out her side window. There was a car following closely behind them. At times, it seemed to speed up and almost hug their bumper.

Oh god, could it be him?

Cadie watched the car twist and turn the winding roads tightly behind them, getting uncomfortably close to Max's truck at times. He didn't seem to notice, but she was staring intently at the driver, trying to make out his face, when Max broke into her thoughts.

"Cadie."

"Yes?"

"Would you mind telling me the story of Sleeping Bear?" Max asked. "I'd really like to know."

Cadie looked back at the car, and it was now farther behind them. It didn't seem as menacing, and she breathed a quick sigh while some of her anxiety left her body. Then she glanced at Max speaking so softly and kindly. Her fast-beating heart seemed to flutter for a moment. She didn't know if it was the man in the car behind them or Max's effect on her.

Goodness, Cadie, stop it. You're not some silly schoolgirl.

Cadie's mind went to Nick. She missed him terribly. They were both just so busy. She would call him as soon as they got back to the Inn. He would calm her nerves.

"Yes, of course I'll tell you the story. I'll also share why else it means so much to me."

Beyond what she had just told him, Max wondered how else an old Indian story about sand dunes could mean that much to Cadie. Yet, he was intrigued to find out. The car following them had turned down another road, while Max continued driving up the twisting coastal highway. While he drove, Cadie shared with him the Indian legend – the heartbreaking story of Mother Bear who, to escape a fire, swam across Lake Michigan but lost her cubs along the way. Mother Bear waited in vigil for her

two drowned cubs to reach the shore. The Great Spirit was so touched by the devotion of the cubs' mother that the Spirit raised her children out of the water and they became North and South Manitou Islands. Then, in local legend, Mother Bear became Sleeping Bear Dune.

"Cadie," Max said quietly.

"Yes?"

"Do you really think Emily Hadly could be alive?" Max asked almost apologetically. "It's been 14 years. We know the majority of kidnap victims are killed within three hours. Ninety-one percent of kidnapped children are killed within 24 hours. I hate to say it, but Emily Hadly is very likely dead."

Sadly, in that moment Cadie couldn't disagree. She was conflicted. Despite wanting Emily Hadly to be alive, the more she thought about it, the more she agreed with Max. The statistics said Emily was dead. Cadie felt a wave of dread as she thought about Max Larson and the person who had killed her parents. There were so many bad or mentally ill people in the world.

"You're probably right, Max," Cadie answered. "We just have to focus on trying to find out what happened to her."

"And find her body," Max added. "The family needs to have her body back."

Cadie thought that was a curious comment, but she agreed.

"Let's just focus on what we can do."

Cadie opened the laptop to educate herself more fully on the case and then glanced at the truck's side mirror one last time. Seeing nothing, she focused on the computer. However, the car made her feel like she was being hunted, and that was one feeling she absolutely could not endure.

Chapter 23

The Man
Body Logistics

The man studied the page before him. He was going to enjoy this, and the time was drawing near. He always liked planning things, executing things - just like his dead father. He remembered as a boy watching his father at the dining room table surrounded by invoices and planning his routes for the upcoming week. His dad kept a detailed planner, and it was full of meticulous notes. The man was glad to have inherited his fastidious nature, but mostly, he was nothing like his father.

He was smarter. Stronger. In control. He knew how to handle situations and women, how not to succumb to their manipulations and seductions but instead be a man and get what you want. That's what real men do. His father was weak, giving in too easily to temptations and sweet talk.

Surprisingly, he realized, the man had learned a great many lessons from his dad's poor example.

The man dipped his finger into the small pile of powder on the desk and rubbed it over his gums. Within seconds, they were numb. As he waited for the upcoming rush of energy and euphoria to overtake him, he hunched over the paper, studying the four questions. He knew that carrying out the answers would require a detailed plan – a plan that would ensure his success – and he planned on winning. He thought about question one. He glanced over at his knife, now crusted in dried blood, and wrote down four words.

Knife, gun, rope, poison.

He stared at the words, pondering them. Then he leaned over again and wrote down one more word.

Strangulation.

He smirked. Strangling the life out of her would certainly be more personal and obviously more enjoyable. Less DNA and clean up as well.

But where will I put her? Some place no one will ever find her?

The man sat back in the chair, running his hands through his hair. His eyes were closed, but darting behind the lids; he was thinking madly. The drug was kicking in. His mind raced with possibilities but kept coming back to one: their family's property. It was an isolated tract of land deep in the northern forests.

No one will ever find her there.

The man also liked the fact that she would be buried near where he kept her imprisoned. He liked the idea of her living and dying in the same place – always under his control. And he could visit the burial site any time he wanted. He felt that was something he would like to do in the future. Just thinking about visiting her final resting place excited him. Also, the property had so many places to conceal a body. Then, of course, there was the lake. Maybe he would tie her body to a cement block and dump her off shore. Still, he fancied the idea of walking the dirt over her rotting corpse for years to come – always on top so to speak.

The gift that keeps on giving.

The man jumped from his chair. He knew what he needed to do! He needed to walk the property, and, even though just the thought of it terrified him, he would have to visit The Hole.

Chapter 24

Sleeping Bear Dune
Whispers on the Sand

Forty minutes later, as Cadie closed the laptop, Max turned his SUV north onto M-109 until he reached Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive – the 7.4-mile loop that would take him to the dune's overlook and sweeping views of the Great Lake Michigan. As he drove the gentle curves, past sandy terrain and a lush forest of birch, pine, beech, and maple, Cadie spoke up.

"From the overlook, we'll be able to see Sleeping Bear Dune," she said.

"I'm glad we came," Max smiled as he maneuvered the Denali closer to Stop #9.

"You know what else?" Cadie asked. "Sleeping Bear also makes me think of Heidi Hadly."

"Oh, yes," Max said. "Like Heidi waiting eternally for the return of Emily. The enduring love of a mother for her daughter in tragic circumstances. Love and loss intertwined forever in the shifting sands."

Cadie was immediately impressed by Max's depth of thought – and dash of poetic language.

"That's quite good, Max," Emily said. "There, up ahead, Stop #9. Pull into the parking lot."

Minutes later, the two were walking the paved path to the overlook that was 450 feet above Lake Michigan. The skies were still cloudy, and the Great Lake seemed moody and restless as they exited the vehicle. They made the short, sandy walk to the overlook with a panoramic view of the third largest Great Lake and one of the largest lakes in the world.

"Hey, I hope you're okay with what I said earlier about Emily," Max commented as the vast churning lake stretched out before him. "I just can't see how she can be alive after all this time. But I hope I didn't upset you with my honesty."

The intense winds rattled his light jacket and whipped his sandy hair. The waters below thundered and roared as strong waves crashed against the ancient shore.

"No, you didn't upset me. Honestly, I was thinking the same thing," Cadie said. "It's just unlikely she is alive at this point. But we have weeks to try and figure out what happened to her."

Max nodded.

Cadie looked out over the water, lost in her own thoughts, still a bit rattled by the car following them earlier and thoughts of a poor, dead Emily Hadly.

"Would you mind if I had a moment alone?" Cadie asked. "I'm just going to walk a bit."

"Of course. I'll be nearby."

Cadie moved closer to the dune until she was at its precipice. She stared down its steep slope that ended where a foamy surf met the shore. The Big Lake's dark waters roiled, and she stared at the powerful waves and down the rocky coastline for quite a while. A flock of squawking seagulls flew by overhead. Clouds in the distance piled up like a mountain range. Cool winds blanketed her face and enveloped her body, making her shiver. The entire scene was bursting with energy and life, and she stood on the edge in a trance thinking about the night Aileen read Cadie the profound story of Sleeping Bear and her cubs. After that night, Cadie never saw Aileen again.

Suddenly, Cadie felt a light pressure on her arm.

What was that?

It startled her. Then she felt a stroke on her hair.

What's going on?

She stepped back from the edge.

Cadie turned her head back and forth, trying to figure out who was touching her. There was no one around. She felt a growing alarm.

Am I losing my mind?

Then, an ever-so-slight whisper entered her ear.

"I am here."

Cadie began to shake. It sounded like her mother's voice, but far away – different.

"Mother, is that you?"

Now Cadie was sobbing. The idea that it could be her mother communicating from beyond was positively overwhelming.

Again, she felt a slight pressure on her arm, and the whisper continued.

"You are in danger," the faraway voice said.

Cadie was confused and now frightened.

"She is in danger. Follow the north wind," the voice breathed.

Cadie was shaking all over.

Am I losing it? Is my mind playing tricks? Surely, this is a dream.

Then, there was another seemingly distant whisper from beyond. She had to strain to hear it.

"Gie it laldy."

Is that my father's voice? It was his favorite Scottish saying.

She heard him say it a million times. Shouted it from the stands the many times she sprinted over a hurdle and rounded the turn. Her father hanging over the railing, grinning and shouting for his girl to win the race.

"Gie it laldy, Cadie! Gie it laldy!"

Give it your best.

Cadie waited on the dune for the voices to continue, but they became silent. The young woman shakily turned to walk back to the parking lot when she suddenly heard a rustling. Her eyes caught a quick movement overhead. She looked up, and there it was: a large owl in a tall cottonwood tree. It was similar in size to the one she spotted on the MSU campus just days ago, but it was less red.

It stared at her for ten seconds or so and then beat its wings and took to flight in the turbulent lake air. Suddenly, it swooped down low and flew close to Cadie's head. It circled several times above her and then descended even lower, so Cadie could see its yellow eyes. The strikingly human eyes fixed its gaze on her as it passed by, and then it let out a soft, deep 'hoo-h'HOO-hoo-hoo.' Seconds later, it was gone. The massive bird rose quickly in air and began flying north up the Michigan coastline.

Cadie suddenly felt an electrical sensation – like a spirit pouring into her.

Is that you, mom and dad?

Immediately, she experienced an overwhelming warmth and peace. She also experienced a shift in her physical energy and consciousness.

It was then she believed the voices in her ear were real. It was her mother, and it was her father. They were guiding her.

But if Emily is alive, why would she be in danger now?

Cadie spotted Max in the parking lot and walked briskly toward him.

Then, suddenly, carried on the breeze, a final whisper entered her ear, and Cadie froze.

"Follow the blood."

Cadie shivered, took one last look at Sleeping Bear, and began to run.

Chapter 25

Lena
The Storm Intensifies

Lena sat perched on the couch, worriedly darning a sock, as her mind obsessed with angry man. Nearby on the chair, Mother was reading *The Count of Monte Cristo* when they both heard the buzz in the kitchen. Lena jumped. She immediately knew who it was. Whenever the phone buzzed, both women understood it was *him.*

The sound terrified Lena. Just a few days ago, the man showed up at the cabin enraged – so angry that when he was stomping by Lena, he shoved her into a cabinet. Her head violently struck the wooden corner, and she cut her forehead. Even after he left, the cut wouldn't stop bleeding, so Mother was forced to take Lena to a clinic.

It was scary of course, but even though her head hurt, Lena couldn't help but be happy to be leaving the cabin. She had only been to a clinic a few times before and sometimes visited the midwife who lived a few miles away. Her Other World visits were mostly sitting in their car outside Dollar General when Mother went in to purchase food.

The new clinic wasn't what she expected. There were very nice women, not how Mother described people in the Other World. Yet, people lie, Lena knew. Mother had told her all about the masks people wear to hide the evil inside. So, while they treated Lena's head wound, she never said a word. Just looked down. She knew better than to cross Mother, and she knew these nice people were probably only pretending. She also was still worried about the man returning.

Mother stood up from the faded wingback chair and walked briskly to the kitchen to answer the phone.

"Lena, darling, why don't you go outside and pick me some sunflowers."

It wasn't a question, Lena knew. Mother was telling her to go outside. Whenever the man called or stopped by, Mother made Lena leave the house.

Who is this man? Why is he in our lives? Why does he seem to hate me? I think I hate him!

Lena grabbed her sweater off the hook by the back door and strode out into the cool September air. She quietly walked around to the front of the house behind the browning hydrangea bushes, so she could look through the window into the kitchen. The windows were quite thin and poorly sealed – the reason the cabin was often cold – and Lena could hear Mother talking. The older woman was seated at the linoleum table speaking loudly - her graying brows furrowed.

Now she was listening to him. Lena watched Mother's face change to fear. Her eyes widened, and she encircled her body with her thin, bony arms as if to comfort or protect herself.

"What?! Oh, no! Why would they be doing that after all these years?! It doesn't make sense! Why can't they leave well enough alone?!"

Then there was quiet as Mother listened. Lena saw her face go white.

"No! We are not doing that! There is no reason for that! We can just go somewhere else. Hide somewhere!"

Suddenly, Lena saw her mother's face change again – to anger.

"Absolutely not! We are not doing that! I won't let you!" Mother screamed into the phone. She was staring at the phone like it was evil.

Seconds passed. Lena pressed her nose against the cool glass.

Mother yelled again.

"I won't do it! I won't! She's not going in The Hole!"

Lena froze. What did Mother mean? Who was going in the hole? And what was that?

The young woman could feel her heart burning and slamming against her chest wall.

Does he want to hurt me?! Throw me in a hole?! But why?! What did I do?! I didn't do anything!

The last thing Lena heard Mother say as she slammed the phone on the table was, “Don’t come here again! You’ve already done enough. Stay away! Stay away for good, or maybe I’ll throw *you* in The Hole!”

Lena was shaking so hard her body ached. She moved away from the cabin to the dirt lane. The winds were picking up from the big lake, and the tops of massive pines swayed in unison. Dark, serious clouds were blowing in from the west, moaning as they pushed through the boughs, but Lena didn’t care that a storm was coming. She needed to think.

It seemed that the man wanted to hurt Lena, maybe even kill her. Lena’s breathing quickened to the point she felt she might pass out. Her mind fragmented as it sought to understand – to process what was happening, and then it all came to her.

I have to save myself. I’m going to need a plan for when he comes back. I can’t let him hurt me, maybe even kill me. I just hope I’m strong enough to carry it out. But what if I’m not?

Lena wiped her eyes and tried to quiet her emotions and gather herself.

She walked unsteadily down the dirt lane, while winds rattled through the massive trees. Then she had another thought.

I should keep my plan to myself.

Lena loved Mother but sometimes felt she couldn’t fully trust her. She thought about her hazy visions, the movies in her head Mother never wanted to hear or talk about. The visions and nightmares that contained people from the Other World and her bloody foot on the beach. If she was fully honest, Lena sometimes felt angry at Mother.

I don’t need to tell her everything.

Lena stopped for a moment on the dirt path and looked up. Dark clouds now pushed across the sky. Tree tops swayed and fought against the increasing winds. In that moment, nothing was right with the world. In that moment, a man she didn’t know was planning to hurt her

Chapter 26

Drive to Harbor Cove
Trust Me

As the strong lake winds pushed against her, Cadie lunged into Max's white Denali. Max immediately noticed the tears on her face - her suddenly distressed demeanor. Cadie had literally sprinted to the vehicle and quickly beckoned Max to get in. Something happened out there on the windswept dunes. Max knew it.

But what? What could have taken place to make Cadie so shaken? Does it have something to do with what Cadie and Dana talked about?

Max began driving, and he could tell her thoughts were a million miles away - like mentally she wasn't even in the car with him. Finally, Max spoke up.

"What happened out there, Cadie?" Max asked, his brows furrowed as he glanced over at her. "Why are you acting so differently?"

Cadie didn't seem to hear him. She kept staring out the window as the deep green forest rushed by.

"Earth to Cadie," Max said, only half joking. "Can you even hear me?"

Suddenly, Cadie's head turned, and she looked at Max directly.

"I think she's alive."

"What? Who's alive?" Max asked, caught off guard.

"I think Emily Hadly is alive," Cadie responded. "And in danger. We have to find her. Immediately."

Now Max was worried.

Is this some kind of mental health situation?

"What are you talking about?" he said, turning his vehicle south onto 109. He was becoming increasingly concerned about the young woman in his vehicle.

“I don’t understand. How could you possibly know that Emily Hadly is alive?”

Cadie’s mind quickly contemplated whether she could tell Max about the spiritual encounter with her parents. She decided against it.

“I can’t tell you that. I mean, I don’t want to share how I know with you – at least not right now. I’m not sure you would believe me – or understand. Please just try to trust me. But I think Emily Hadly is alive, and she’s in danger.”

Max didn’t say anything for a minute or two. He was taken aback by Cadie’s words and her conviction.

She really believes what she’s saying. But grief can make people believe funny things. I should know.

“Okay, let’s say she is alive,” Max offered. “We are already trying to find her. What more can we do?”

“I need to talk to Dana,” Cadie said. “And I need to talk to Jake and Nick. They’ll understand. I also need to read more of the case files.”

“What are you going to tell them that you can’t tell me?” Max asked, waiting for a semi-truck to pass before turning the SUV south onto M-22.

“You don’t know me well enough – know my history – to understand what just happened to me out on the dunes,” Cadie said. “But I’m beginning to believe Emily may be alive - that she needs us to find her – to save her – right away.”

“Okay, okay,” Max said confused. “Let’s get back to the inn. We can talk to Dana in the morning.”

“And Jake Brennan,” Cadie said.

“Tell me again about Jake Brennan.”

“Jake is the detective who saved my life,” Cadie said, her voice thickening with emotion. She was staring out the window, searching for glimpses of the vast, blue Lake Michigan through the trees. “I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for Jake. I didn’t know if you knew, but Jake is Nick’s father.”

Max didn't say anything for a bit. He stared at the road up ahead. Then finally he spoke,

"How did Jake save your life?"

"That's a story for another day," Cadie said, once again looking out her window.

"He's a hero, though," Max said quietly.

She closed her eyes and thought of Nick. She pictured his brown, soulful eyes and thick wavy hair. She thought of the way he understood her immediately. He knew her so well – intimately.

I really need to talk to him – not just texts. How long has it been since we talked? Thursday?

"I need to keep reading the case files," Cadie implored. "After what just happened on the dunes, I'm going to need to feel sure my instincts are correct. I need to know more."

Suddenly, a deer sprinted across the road. Max slammed on the brakes and threw his arm in front of Cadie to protect her. She jerked forward in her seat, while Max's arm pressed against her. The deer took off into the woods, and Max immediately looked over at Cadie with concern.

"Are you okay?" Max said. "Are you hurt?"

"No, I'm fine. Really," Cadie replied.

She was touched by his gesture and care.

"Okay, good. You had me worried," he smiled. "Do you mind if I turn on the radio? It might calm both our nerves."

Cadie nodded yes. She was a little on edge. She glanced out the truck window but didn't see any sign of the car.

Max put on some low John Coltrane, a complex, spiritual piece, which surprised Cadie. She didn't figure him to be someone who liked jazz. Max saw the surprised look on her face.

"My dad."

"What?"

“When I was little, my dad liked jazz. He introduced me to it,” Max explained. “It makes me feel close to him.”

Cadie wondered about his father.

“Well, I like it,” Cadie smiled. “It’s nice - soothing. I needed this.”

Then she touched his arm.

“You’re nice.”

Max wasn’t sure to make of her touch. He said nothing. For the rest of the ride to Harbor Cove, Cadie read case files while Max drove.

“We’re here,” Max said, and Cadie jolted. She was so deep in her reading that she was no longer paying attention to the outside scenery. She was learning as much as she could about the case but also thinking about that fateful night three years ago.

Her parents had loved owls. Figurines of Snowy Owls, Great Gray, and Great Horned Owls were scattered around her childhood home. Her mother, a talented artist, even painted a watercolor owl for her father. It hung behind his favorite chair. So, three years ago, when she was held captive and visited by two owls in the night who seemed to communicate with her, it cemented her view that owls are spiritual creatures. Native American cultures, like many cultures of the past, believe animals can be spiritual guides and messengers. Even provide warnings.

So, today’s encounter with a Great Horned Owl was full of personal meaning for Cadie. The whispers she heard out on the dunes might have been the imaginings of her own heart and mind, she knew. Yet, the fact that a Great Horned Owl swooped down seconds after her spiritual encounter with her ‘parents’ just couldn’t be coincidence.

She would eventually have to tell all of this to Max – and Dana Bakker, too – and let the chips fall where they may. Max and Dana might not believe her; why should they? They might even question her state of mind. Yet, she knew she had to convince them - convince herself. She had to learn more.

If she was right, though, their search for Emily couldn't drag for weeks. According to the whispers from beyond, Cadie believed Emily was in danger, and so the clock was ticking or the girl who had been missing 14 years might finally be dead.

Chapter 27

Harbor Cove Inn
Tell Me Everything

With the quaint, two-story Harbor Cove Inn steps away, Cadie and Max exited the SUV. As they did, they caught flashes of shimmering Betsie Lake down the hill. Fed by a river, Betsie Lake was a calm body of water that flowed out into the harbor and ultimately Lake Michigan. On the north side of the lake was Harbor Cove with its many quaint beach shops, restaurants, and the Breakwater Lighthouse but also Harbor Heights Marina with over 100 slips. Once a prosperous lumber port, the past was still in evidence by the harbor's historic piers.

"Would you like to get something to drink?" Max asked.

Some bourbon might settle her nerves.

"Yes," Cadie said, her face serious. "And we need to talk more about Emily Hadly."

She had texted Nick on the way home but didn't receive a reply. She desperately needed to talk to him. To tell him what had transpired and reconnect emotionally. To hear from someone who would believe her and help her calm down.

The two followed the cobblestone path around the inn - past an array of purple, yellow, and red mums expertly arranged until they reached the back patio. The rustic courtyard was surrounded by trellises and planters with even more mums. Surrounding the courtyard was a green yard. Cadie and Max took a seat at a table under a wood pergola strung with glass lights.

Behind the Harbor Cove Inn was the marina. Stretching side to side were sailboats with their tall, white masts gently rocking back and forth and stretching high into the afternoon sky. Filling the slips were large yachts with gleaming hulls and polished finishes, wooden historic vessels, and fishing

boats, some small and open, others large and robust. The marina was saturated in classic whites, deep blues, and vibrant reds.

Peaceful waves lapped against the boats and contrasted with the marina's bustling activity and Cadie's state of mind. Up and down the docks were boat owners cracking beers, repairing engines, or chatting with each other and enjoying lake life. Yet, the happy scene seemed uncaring and inappropriate as Cadie thought about Emily Hadly.

After they sat there for a moment, Cadie's phone buzzed. She looked down at the black screen. It was Nick. Finally! She jumped up.

"Hey, Max, I have to take this, okay?"

"No worries. I'll be right here," Max said, wondering if the call was from Nick and wondering what Cadie had to tell him. Her words and manner on the ride to the inn made him anxious.

Cadie quickly walked over to a nearby empty table and took Nick's call.

"Hey, babe, how are you? I've missed you so much," Cadie spoke quietly into her cell phone.

"I've missed you, too, Cadie Bug," Nick replied. "And I'm sorry we haven't talked the last few days. Professor Krehl has just kept me so busy with this research. I feel like I'm under water most days, like I haven't even had a minute to catch my breath."

"Oh, please don't worry," Cadie said. "I totally understand. I just miss you."

Then there was silence on Cadie's end.

"Is everything alright?" Nick asked. He could sense something was on Cadie's mind.

"We had an important meeting with Emily's mother, and then something happened later. Something out on Sleeping Bear," Cadie said quietly. "

In full seriousness, Nick replied, "Tell me everything."

Chapter 28

Lena
Secret in the Cabin

As an eerie, mottled sun shone down, the young woman pinned damp shirts to the wire clothesline in the back yard. A cool, gray mist was moving across the lawn. It was strange and unnerving. Suddenly, she spotted Mother in the doorway. How long had she been standing there, Lena wondered? It was odd how Mother was now just staring at her all the time – not saying anything – just looking at her weirdly. Lena would be working on a puzzle at the kitchen table and catch Mother staring. Mother would turn and walk away.

"When you're done, can you come in, please?" Mother yelled across the yard. "I need to talk to you – to tell you something. It's important."

Lena didn't think Mother looked very happy today. Even more sadness had settled in to the dark under her eyes, and her face was dull; she didn't even apply her creams this morning. And, since she received the phone call from *him*, she hadn't smiled once.

"Okay, I'll be right in," Lena answered as she watched Mother disappear into the cabin.

Lena felt uneasy being in the backyard alone. The atmosphere was disquieting – even sickly. She looked around at the thick, boreal forest of northern hardwoods and pines surrounding the cabin on all sides. Towering majestic white pines, balsam fir, and black spruce, reached skyward in every direction. The forest was so tight, so dense, that you could only see a few feet into its dark interior until it became a wall of black. There was no way to see what might be in the unforgiving woods just feet away. If the man was out there watching her, she would never know it.

Suddenly, Lena had a vision. She was walking down a wooded trail between a dark-haired man and a woman with yellow hair, somewhat like her own. The man and woman were holding Lena's small

hands and swinging her. The threesome was giggling, and then the woman started singing a song: "Itsy bitsy spider went down the water spout. Out came the rain and washed the spider out. Out came the sun and dried up all the rain. And the itsy, bitsy spider went up the spout again."

Who were these people? I've never heard Mother sing that song.

Now trembling, Lena tried to quiet the vision and stopped to listen. There was nothing but the deep, persistent roar from The Big Lake and its winds hastening through the trees. It was unrelenting.

Lena didn't hear any animals. She didn't hear a person. Didn't hear a car. And if he were truly here, he would have grabbed her by now. Maybe even killed her. Yet, she knew he was coming. Like a dark devil, the man was on his way to destroy her. And day now.

Shakily, Lena picked up the empty wicker basket and ran to the house, wondering about the vision and the people in it and what Mother had to tell her.

Chapter 29

The Man
A Deadly Hole

In the oppressive, black forest, the white van pulled up to the ancient rotted wood sign that announced his family's property. He wasn't sure if she would hear the van making its way up the winding drive, but he hoped not. He didn't have time to deal with hysterics. He needed to be left alone. He had an important decision to make.

Instead of driving all the way to the cabin and ending up in a confrontation, the man decided to maneuver the van down the slim trail that would take him to the northern end of the property. Determining a location was perhaps the most important decision of his life. If he chose poorly, her body might be discovered. Then his life would be over. For 14 years, he had his way, and he didn't plan on giving it up now. He also didn't plan on spending his remaining days in a maximum-security prison.

The man drove slowly over the dry, crackling sticks and pine needles and under the low-hanging branches that scraped and scratched at the van. Slivers of sun cut through the tightly-knit trees, but mostly it was dark and quiet. Just the way he liked it.

Finally, he reached the area. He knew it well from childhood. He had played in this neck of the forest for hours until the pitch-black of night. Then he would fight to make his way back to the little cabin in the woods.

The man drove slowly a bit more – it was hard to curb his impulse to speed down the lane – but then he saw it: the tell-tale tree. It was a deep gray, gnarled oak tree that had been split down the middle by a ferocious lightning storm. Seeing the grotesque, twisted tree told him he was there. He pulled the van to a stop and jumped out.

As he walked, he began to cough, trying to dispel the excess mucous sliding down his throat. Except for his coughs, the forest was completely still. Not a sound to be heard, just the crunching of the man's boots over the dry autumn debris blanketing the forest floor. He walked north along a slender, murmuring stream that would take him to The Hole. The property contained all manner of danger, but the holes scattered across the property were the most dangerous of all. Some holes were pits, caused when mighty trees fell and yanked up their massive root balls. Some were dug by loggers back in the day. Other holes were fissures – or cracks in the earth – of varying sizes. Most of them were filled with ice-cold ground water. When the man was a boy, a neighbor girl fell head first into a fissure and died. Her skull became wedged between two rocks, and she drowned.

Then there were the sinkholes.

On the family property were a handful of sinkholes - two that were massive - created when limestone and gypsum collapsed. They were incredibly dangerous. You might be walking along and suddenly hear a roar or a vicious cracking. Before you knew what was happening, the ground beneath your feet would burst open, hurtling you into blackness and freezing water filled with dirt, rocks, and roots. As you plunged downward, you might be assaulted by even more dirt and rocks – even trees – falling on your head. You would claw at the crumbling dirt, screaming and gasping for air. Then, suddenly, the suction would begin. The thick, sticky mix of water, mud, and sand would grab hold of your legs and torso and suck you deeper. And, as you panicked and thrashed for your life, your efforts would be futile and cause you to sink even deeper into the all-consuming quicksand.

It was an utterly horrific death. One that almost led to his own death. Now he was considering it for Lena.

Do I kill her first? Or do I bring her to the edge of the sinkhole and throw her in alive?

Killing her first would be easier, of course. But throwing her into the sinkhole and hearing her terrified screams as she clawed for her life would mean so much.

Finally, up ahead, the man saw some tilted trees. His dilated eyes narrowed, and he spotted the exposed rock. A chill passed through him as he walked closer to the sinkhole. His body suddenly flooded with feelings of anger as he remembered the night his father locked him out of the house. It was the night he almost fell into The Hole and died.

And no one cared.

Chapter 30

Harbor Cove Inn
Max and a Murder

Cadie told Nick all that had taken place at Heidi Hadly's house and then out on the dunes that afternoon. She held nothing back. Nick listened intently and registered no surprise to Cadie's retelling of her supernatural experience. Like Cadie, after all he had endured in his young life, he found himself with more questions than answers about death and the afterlife. Did a person's soul or consciousness continue to exist upon the death of their body? Did it travel to a spiritual realm? Maybe it was all around us?

Nick knew that many indigenous people who resided in these lands believed spirits inhabited everything, including animals. These people believed spirits could present themselves as guides, relatives, and even messengers from another dimension. It seemed Cadie's parents had visited her today in the form of an owl for encouragement and a warning but also mysterious clues.

If he was honest, though, he did wonder if it might be Cadie's trauma that was causing her to imagine that the owls were her parents or their representatives.

But Nick was not quick to judge because he honestly didn't know. How could he? Instead, he listened to Cadie carefully and provided affirmation. Then the two made plans to be together that weekend when they could talk in depth. Nick was going to drive up from Ann Arbor and then do some research on the case. However, Cadie wondered how the next few days might go. Would she truly find Emily Hadly? And what would that journey entail?

Cadie decided not to tell Nick about Lawson getting out of jail. She knew he would worry, and she knew she had to deal with the situation herself. If she was going to remain strong and accomplish the goals she wanted to achieve in life, she had to continue to grow in strength and resilience. She also

had Dana, Jake, and Max by her side. She hung up the phone and felt more at peace. Nick was the love of her life – her best friend who always provided comfort. However, sometimes his concern for her could be too much. It was something they would have to talk about – to work out. He needed to trust her. How was she going to reach her full potential if Nick was always worried and trying to protect her?

She stood up to join Max and watched him watch her as she walked back over to their table. His gaze made her uncomfortable.

"So that's your boyfriend, I assume," Max said, sitting up a bit straighter. "I didn't mean to eavesdrop."

"Yes, that was Nick.

"He's a lucky guy," Max quipped, immediately regretting it. His words suddenly created an uncomfortable moment.

Just then, a chatty group of older women walked by the table. Max waited until they passed and were out of ear's reach before he spoke again.

"Cadie, can I ask, 'Are you okay?'"

"What do you mean?"

"I saw the way you reacted out on the dunes today. Do you think you are still in the midst of struggling with your past trauma? I learned in psych class that being triggered by sights and sounds – even places – can mean trauma is still unresolved. I just felt bad watching your intensity today. Your emotions seemed so strong."

Again, Cadie was taken aback.

"You are quite perceptive, Max," Cadie said. "I appreciate that about you. And your honesty. To answer your question, I probably am carrying around quite a bit of unresolved trauma. Sometimes I have headaches or stomach aches. I don't always sleep well. And things trigger me like watching a

couple walking hand in hand down the road. That always makes me think of my parents and the day they were murdered. They were walking hand in hand to get ice cream when they were run down. So, yeah, I'm far from okay. But I'm trying. I have less emotional mood swings. I also confide in my friends instead of numbing out. So, basically, the way I look at it is I'm alive, and I'm fighting to be happy again."

Max just looked at the strong young woman sitting across from him and smiled.

"You really are exceptional, you know," Max said. "And I have no doubt you will be happy again."

"Well, thanks for listening to my sad story and being so good about it. I don't usually tell people what happened to my family, but for some reason I just feel comfortable talking to you. You make it easy."

Max smiled and nodded.

"Thank you. And I'm here if you want to talk about it some more."

Cadie was taken aback by his level of concern.

"Thank you, Max. Most people don't know what to say to me, so they don't say anything."

"I can just relate, that's all. The effects of loss really never go away."

Cadie wondered what Max knew about loss.

My parents were murdered. How could he possibly relate?

Then Cadie noticed something she hadn't before. Even when Max was smiling, his eyes were slightly turned down – like a perpetual unhappiness behind a mask. She wondered if he had experienced his own tragedy. Maybe that's why he was in this program.

"Now it's my turn," Cadie said. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure. Go ahead."

"Is everything alright with you? Looking at you right now, I get the sense that something bad happened to you? Am I right?"

There was silence between them. The nearest noise was the older ladies laughing at another table.

“You are,” Max replied, looking down at the table. The color of his face drained slightly.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

Max looked up at Cadie.

“I don’t mind talking about it,” he said, “but it’s depressing as hell. I’m not sure you’d really want to hear it. You’ve got enough on your plate, and my tale of woe is certain to make you feel worse.”

Now Cadie was extremely curious but also felt a desire to help him. What could his ‘tale of woe’ be?

“If you want to talk Max, go ahead. I’m listening.”

Max cleared his throat and twisted his head, trying to ease the tension in his neck.

“Well, I lost my father a long time ago.”

“Oh, no, I’m so sorry, Max! Did he have an illness?”

Max didn’t answer for a moment.

“No, it was nothing like that. My father was killed in action – in Iraq.”

Cadie simply stared. She was shocked into silence.

“He was part of special forces in Mosul. His unit was trying to locate a high-profile terrorist when it was ambushed by insurgents. My father and three other men tried to escape, but they were killed. We didn’t know for quite a while whether he was abducted or dead.”

Cadie just shook her head.

“It was terrible for my mother,” he said. “She wasn’t right for a long time, so I ended up kind of being a mom and dad to my brother. I guess you could say I didn’t have much of a childhood. But I was glad I could shield Marty from a lot of it.”

“I’m so sorry, Max. I had no idea.”

“How could you?” Max replied. “And it was years ago, so I’m doing much better. I just wanted you to know that I could relate to you in many ways.”

“Max,” Cadie said, her voice suddenly thick.

“Yes?”

“We both have endured so much trauma. That’s why I want to find Emily Hadly if she’s alive. To give her a chance at life. To spare her parents any more pain. We have to find her now and bring her home.”

Max didn’t want to go down the same line of conversation they had in the car ride back from the dunes.

“I agree. I truly hope we can locate her remains and bring them home to her family,” he said evenly.

“Max, you know what I mean. I told you: I believe Emily Hadly is alive.”

Max winced at her words. He couldn’t understand how Cadie could believe Emily Hadly was alive after all these years? The girl had been gone 14 years and not a word, not a sighting. Her blood was found at the scene of her disappearance. A lot of blood actually. That did not bode well for the missing girl.

Max took a moment then tried to speak gently.

“I know you want to find her alive,” Max began.

“Max, I believe she is alive!” Cadie jumped in. “And somehow I feel it!”

“No, we don’t know that, Cadie. We can’t possibly know that. And down deep, I think you understand she is most likely dead,” Max responded softly. “We are here to solve this mystery and bring closure to this case. And if we’re lucky, we will locate Emily’s remains and bring them home to Heidi and her family. That’s the most we can do. And please don’t be mad at me for saying this, but perhaps your past trauma is behind all this. Maybe what happened to you is responsible for these thoughts and feelings.”

Cadie listened quietly. Then she leaned over the table, and looked at him intently.

“It’s hard to explain, but I feel connection to Emily.”

Max slowly shook his head.

“What happened out on the dunes today, Cadie? What happened to make you so sure all of a sudden? It’s like you went out on the dunes and came back a different person.”

Cadie let out a deep breath. She crossed her arms, gathering her thoughts.

“Max, do you trust me?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, do you think I’m of sound mind?”

“Well, yes. Sure. I mean, yes, I think you’re of sound mind. But you’ve suffered significant trauma in your life, and that can play tricks with your mind. And you are talking about Emily Hadly being alive for fourteen years after her disappearance with some sort of certainty. How can I possibly trust that? You can’t know for sure she’s alive. That’s crazy.”

A large lake breeze suddenly rattled their table, and Cadie took it as an opportunity to stand up.

“I’m going to my room to keep reading about the case. I need to learn as much as I can and make sure my argument – not just what the voices told me on the dunes – is strong. Tomorrow morning, we’ll meet with Dana and Jake Brennan, and I’ll present my argument. So, I’ll wait until tomorrow to share my story with you - and them. I might as well deal with all of your doubts at once. But I hope you will trust me on this because I believe Emily Hadly is in danger. And if we don’t hurry, she really might be dead before the week is out.”

Max didn’t say a word. Didn’t know what to say anymore.

“I’ll see you in the morning,” Cadie said. “Get a good night’s sleep. You’re going to need it. We’re going to have to work extremely hard to find her in the next few days if we’re going to save her.”

Then Cadie turned and walked toward the back door of the inn, ready to spend the entire evening reading every bit of the case file she could.

Max’s mind spun at her words and strength of conviction.

Talking about Emily being dead suddenly brought a wave of emotions to wash over Max. He pictured his father lying dead on that street in Mosul, and felt tears in his eyes. Max picked up his cell and texted his therapist. He was due for a session.

He also realized he was thirsty. No waitress had stopped by, so they never placed an order. His emotions felt raw, and he needed a drink. Max pushed in his metal chair and headed toward the bar, wondering as he walked if the little girl who disappeared 14 years ago really could be alive.

Chapter 31

The Hideaway
Story of the Dune

At 7 am, while a few remaining aluminum boats, charter yachts, and a vintage catamaran sliced through still harbor waters headed out to Lake Michigan, a black Denali cut through the quiet streets of Harbor Cove. Its two occupants remained silent as they made their way to Mariner's Beach, specifically The Hideaway. In that early-morning hour, as the September sun rose, the two students were about to trace the events of a horrendous July day that took place 14 years ago. Max turned his vehicle into the Mariner's Beach parking lot and spotted Dana's red Jeep parked next to a Harbor Cove police vehicle. He pulled up alongside.

The morning sun was bright and the sky cloudless; yesterday's storm had taken its rain and winds and traveled northeast to Canada. The Lake Michigan waves lapping against the shore were slow and steady. As the deep blue-green waves receded, hundreds of tiny Sanderlings on black legs darted after them maniacally, poking the sand with their bills for crabs and worms.

Just up ahead, through the car window, Cadie saw the Breakwater Lighthouse with its gleaming white, pyramidal tower. Even this early, people strolled the concrete pier that jutted into the swirling Lake Michigan and led to the 67-foot-high lighthouse. Though she loved lighthouses for their majestic beauty and history, seeing the imposing Breakwater Lighthouse gave her pause.

She remembered watching the rays from another lighthouse - Point Betsie further north - the night she was abducted. At that moment in time, when she walked down Mariner's Beach alone, the flashing light from the historic lighthouse gave her comfort and security. She now believed that lighthouses symbolize even more: strength and resilience against life's storms. Both Point Betsie and the Breakwater provide lighting dusk til dawn, 365 days a year. They never cease. So, like

lighthouses, Cadie understood that it was her steadfastness that helped save her life three years ago - a quality she inherited from her parents.

Max looked over at Cadie. She looked tired. He wondered how late she stayed up reading those files. He finally spoke and broke the silence.

“Are you going to tell Dana and Detective Brennan what you told me yesterday?” Max asked. “About the voices and Emily Hadly being alive?”

“I am,” Cadie replied. “I did a ton of reading last night and learned a great deal. I believe I can make a strong case for Emily’s survival. But I don’t want to bring it up right away. I want to tour the beach first. It’s important we focus on learning all we can about Emily’s disappearance that day.”

“I agree,” Max said, nodding. “I’m guessing we will head back to the Harbor Cove Police Station after we’re done out here. Dana said we are going to talk about the suspects in the case. That might be the time to bring it up, although I am worried about how they’ll react. But I want you to know that I support you. I might not be the same page as you as believing Emily is alive, but I support your passion to find her.”

Max reached over and touched Cadie’s arm.

“I appreciate that, Max,” Cadie said. “But hear what I have to say later, okay? I’m not sure how Dana and Jake are going to take the story about my parents, but I now have other persuasive reasons to present as well. We are here to solve this case, and I believe we need to step it up if we’re going to save Emily.”

Cadie grabbed the door handle and exited the SUV with Max getting out the driver’s side. A lake gust suddenly confronted the young people as they made their way to the beach, so Cadie pulled a hair tie out of her coat pocket and quickly put her long, red hair in a ponytail. Dana Bakker and Detective Jake Brennan were walking along the water and talking. Cadie and Max entered the beach with its wet, compacted sand from yesterday’s rains and headed toward the two.

Detective Jake Brennan quickly spotted Cadie, and a huge grin spread across his face. He immediately ran over. The tall, lean detective in black uniform quickly crossed the beach and then grabbed Cadie in a bear hug, picking her up off the ground.

"Oh, Cadie, it's so good to see you," Jake said, his voice catching. He held her for a moment. He didn't want to let go of the young woman who meant so much. Sometimes, over the years, when he saw Cadie, it was almost like seeing a ghost. He remembered what she looked like that day when he found her slumped over a steering wheel: cold, pale, no movements, near death. He really didn't think the young woman would survive, which would have utterly broken his heart, but she did. And now every time Jake saw Cadie in the flesh, he couldn't help but feel emotional. He wondered if that would ever change. He hoped not.

Cadie also felt pangs of emotion in Jake's presence. He had saved her life. She owed this good, kind man everything. She didn't have any memory of the day Jake saved her, but she knew the story; it was splashed all over the local and Detroit newspapers. For his efforts that day, Jake earned his second Medal of Honor for extraordinary heroism.

I owe him so much. I hope he knows how grateful I am.

Max and Dana stood back and watched. Jake, too, had also almost died three years working that case, so Dana understood the flood of feelings between the two. She was holding back a few tears herself. Finally, Jake and Cadie broke apart.

"Oh, Jake, I've missed you," Cadie said, looking up at the detective with the same warm brown eyes as his son, Nick.

"I've missed you, too, Cadie Bug," Jake beamed. "You look great. And I know you're doing well at school. Nick's been keeping me updated. I do have to say, though, that I was surprised you wanted to be in this cold case program. I know it's an honor to be chosen, and you are more than qualified. I

just wasn't sure it was in your best interest to take on the Emily Hadly case - considering the similarities and all. I'm just concerned about you."

Dana drew closer and stepped in with an air of authority.

"I totally understand your concerns, Jake, but Cadie is doing great. She really is. She passed our psychological test. If she couldn't handle it, trust me, I'd make some changes."

"Hey, I'm right here," Cadie laughed. "Please stop worrying about me, okay? Instead, why don't we get going? Max and I want to learn all we can about the day Emily went missing. Then I need to talk to you, to share what I've been thinking and something that impacts this case."

Dana raised an eyebrow.

"Why not tell us now?"

"Let's just wait until were done out here today, okay?" Cadie responded. "Then I promise I will tell you everything."

Jake and Dana looked at Cadie in confusion.

"Okay," Dana said, "but you have me intrigued - and slightly annoyed."

"Yeah, like extremely intrigued," Jake added and side smiled at Cadie. "Don't mind her."

"Well, I've got some news of my own," Dana said.

Cadie, Jake, and Max all said "What?" in unison.

"Like Cadie, I'll tell you after we're done out here - back at the station. But I hope you all don't have any plans this week."

Now everyone was fully curious.

Max just hung back a bit, his hands in his jacket. He felt a little out of place during the reunion of Cadie and Detective Brennan and also awkward since he knew what her secret was.

"Let's get going," Dana said, zipping up her jacket against a whipping wind. "And Jake, thanks so much for joining us today. Really. It means a lot."

“Of course,” Jake smiled warmly at Dana and winked. “Oh, and I brought you some bread. Anything for you.”

At his words, Dana almost blushed. Cadie caught the reaction and was surprised. She had never known the stoic Dana Bakker to blush or show any similar reaction. Jake was now divorced, and Dana had been divorced for years. Cadie noticed their chemistry and wondered if something was transpiring between them. She actually hoped there was. They both deserved love and happiness.

“You know I love your sourdough bread,” Dana said to Jake. “Who knew you were such a good baker?”

“It’s a stress reliever mostly,” a modest Jake answered.

Jake was known for bringing his complex breads and baked goods like ciabatta, baguettes, and croissants into the police department and sharing them with the staff.

“Oh, and this is Max Clark,” Dana said to Jake. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to forget about you, Max. It’s just the three of us have a lot of history that we must dredge up every time we meet,” she laughed.

“No worries,” Max said. “I’m sure I’ll have some annoying drama of my own soon enough and will return the favor,” he grinned. “Just make me some good pizza dough, Jake, and I’ll be happy.”

“I like this guy,” Jake smiled, patting Max on the back. “Where you from?”

“Chicago.”

“Ah, home of the famous Italian Beef sandwich. Come over sometime, and I’ll make you a great one.”

“Okay, lovefest’s over. Follow me, everyone,” Dana said smiling but trying to hide it. “We’re going to retrace the Hadly family’s path to The Hideaway the day Emily disappeared, and I’m going to share with Cadie and Max the 7 S’s when dealing with crime scenes.”

As the four trudged north up the beach toward the path the Hadlys took that day, Dana schooled Cadie and Max on the systematic methodology law enforcement adheres to at a crime scene. Dana

described how all of the necessary steps were taken when police arrived at The Hideaway that fateful day.

After ten minutes of walking the rain-compacted sand and getting a mini lesson from Dana, the group reached the entranceway to a path hidden in scraggly white cedar and oak trees that lead to the street. They entered the path covered by a dark canopy of leaves and needles.

"Man, it's creepy in here," Max said – batting away large, circular cobwebs hanging between the trees. He suddenly shouted when a large brown spider landed on his arm and began crawling.

"Oh, shit!" Max yelled, wildly shaking his arm to throw the spider off.

"It's just an Orb Weaver," Cadie said gently. "It's not going to hurt you. It's just trying to catch some breakfast."

She began to realize Max's trauma over losing his father was the cause of his anxiety that sometimes peaked through.

"What? No spideys in Chicago?" Jake cracked.

"Yes," Max said, trying to regain his composure, "we have spiders in Chicago, just not oversized beasts."

Dana motioned to the group.

"As you know, this is the path to The Hideaway. We can walk out on the beach, and I'll show you where the Hadlys were sleeping when Emily walked off."

"Ran off," Cadie corrected.

"Yes, that's right." Dana nodded. "When Emily ran off."

Jake didn't recall hearing that Emily had been running that day. As the group continued walking through the trees that cast shadows on their faces, Jake said, "How do you know Emily was running?"

Dana turned to Jake.

“The lab did an analysis of her footprints at the beach that day: her stride length, impressions, and sole depth. Her strides were wider, and in the foot prints we found, there were deeper impressions in the toes, meaning more pressure, and less impression in the soles. So, the lab techs concluded Emily was running.”

“That just seems odd,” Jake said, tapping his foot like he always did when he was thinking. “Like why she was running?”

Suddenly, Dana stopped, and the group stopped. They were almost to the sand. They could see the two sloping dunes ahead covered in grasses and the great Lake Michigan stretching out between them in the distance.

“We have a theory,” Dana said. “Actually, it was Cadie who came up with it. Tell Jake your theory, Cadie.”

Just then a cool wind whistled through the cedar trees, causing some yellow-brown needles to shake loose and fall on the needle-covered ground. Everyone looked at Cadie.

“That day when Emily ran away from her parents, I think she might have been chasing a butterfly,” Cadie said. “I got the idea yesterday when we went to visit Heidi Hadly. I don’t know if Dana has told you, Jake, but Heidi received a dead butterfly in the mail last week.”

“A big, dead, orange butterfly,” Max added. “It was gross.”

Suddenly, Jake’s eyes grew wide, and his mouth dropped open. He tapped his foot harder.

“I can’t believe you just said that!” he exclaimed.

“What do you mean?” Dana asked, confused at his energy. Everyone was staring at Jake.

“That day! On the beach!” Jake said.

“What are you talking about?” Dana replied.

“Do you remember that day how after we got the call that a little girl was missing, we all searched the beach? We were trying to track down anyone who might have seen Emily?” Jake said.

“Yes, of course,” Dana said, scrunching her face in frustration.

“So, I went down the beach. I found some volleyballers who thought they saw a young girl but didn’t see where she went. Then, further down, I found some people sitting in lawn chairs. They were facing away from the lake, and nobody was wearing a bathing suit. It was very odd. Especially in July. And why were they facing away from the water? Everyone faces the lake.”

“Go on, Jake,” Cadie implored. “Tell us.”

“So, I went up to them and asked if they had seen a little girl. I told them a girl had gone missing down the beach. They all said no – nobody had seen a girl that afternoon. And that day, the south end of the beach was largely empty. So, I asked them, ‘What’s up? Why are you facing the sand dunes and not facing the water? Why aren’t you in bathing suits? It’s hot out here.’ An older lady turns to me and says, ‘Because we’re not here to sunbathe, officer – or to swim.’ Then the guy next to her says, ‘We’re with the Kalamazoo Nature Center.’”

“Oh my god, Jake, would you just cut to the chase?” Dana said. “I can’t take it anymore.”

Suddenly, Cadie interrupted.

“They were part of the Michigan Butterfly Network!”

“Yes!” Jake yelled. “That’s it! The people were in a butterfly program!”

“So, Max interjected. “They were there to watch butterflies?”

“Yes, that’s right,” Jake said, now pacing on the darkened path. “The group told me there was large cluster of Monarch butterflies roosting on milkweed. And when I looked over, I saw orange butterflies in the air.”

The significance of his story immediately became clear.

“Why did you never tell us this before?” Dana asked, her hands wide in the air and upturned with attitude. She was clearly frustrated.

“Why would I?” Jake said. “They didn’t have anything to do with Emily. And I saw their tee-shirts. They were all wearing shirts that said Michigan Butterfly Network. So, they certainly weren’t the kidnappers.”

“Do you know what this means?” Dana said slowly, her eyes looking at him and squinting.

“Yeah,” Jake said, “it means our kidnapper might be alive and well. And maybe we can solve this mystery and bring Heidi some peace.”

“That’s exactly what it means,” Dana said, now staring at Jake. “And the letter Heidi received was postmarked Traverse City. So, it seems our kidnapper may be alive and well and possibly still living in this area.”

“Holy shit,” Max said. He never really imagined Emily could be alive.

“Yes, very holy shit,” Jake added with emphasis. “It’s possible Emily’s abductor saw her chase a butterfly that day, and that damn butterfly led her straight to a monster.”

Everyone’s eyes were wide; they were shaking their heads because this revelation was honestly incredible.

“But, Jake, there’s more,” Cadie said.

Jake stopped moving and looked at Cadie.

“What else could there be?”

“Emily had a birthmark,” Cadie said.

“Okay? So?”

Max jumped in. “It’s a birthmark of a butterfly. On her neck. It’s very tiny, but it definitely looks like a butterfly. Heidi showed us a picture of Emily yesterday, and you could see the little birthmark on her neck.”

Again, Jake cupped his hands to his head – trying to process what Cadie just told him.

“I’m blown away right now.”

“After all these years, it really is incredible,” Dana said. “We might be making progress on this case.”

“But I’m wondering something,” Jake declared, his foot now tapping again.

“What?” Dana asked.

“Why now? Why would the kidnapper suddenly send Heidi this letter 14 years after taking her daughter?”

Max piped in.

“I think I know why. Heidi Hadly had just appeared on the front page of the newspaper. She won some award, and the paper ran a piece on her. The article talks about how she’s moving on with her life after Emily’s disappearance. Like how she’s doing better and feeling happier. Stuff like that.”

Cadie said, “It’s like the kidnapper doesn’t want Heidi to be happy. Like he thought he had completely ruined her life 14 years ago, and didn’t like reading that her life was improving.”

“He wanted to mess with her,” Max said. “To keep twisting the knife.”

“Yes, that is definitely a theory, but not the only one. We can’t lock in on any one theory at this point,” Dana said. “We’re going to need to talk about this in much greater detail back at the station. First, let’s head out on the beach and see where Emily went missing.”

Everyone entered the sand headed for the dune slack and trudged through the corridor of two sloping dunes covered in tall, blowing grasses that had witnessed hundreds of parties and more over the years. The grasses were anchored by a deep and substantial root system that prevented the dunes from blowing away. It was a unique spot as the beach between the dunes was hidden from view – anything could take place there – and it often did - and no one would see it.

After a few minutes, the group walked out of The Hideaway and up to the edge of Lake Michigan. At that proximity, the winds blowing off the powerful big lake ruffled everyone’s hair and whipped their jackets. Large waves pulled against the sand, exposing sparkly quartz and granite as well as brown and gray basalt stones.

“So, this is approximately where Heidi and Louis put their blanket down that day,” Dana said. “The family went for a swim. Afterwards, the parents laid down and fell asleep. Emily was right next to them in the sand playing with her sand toys. It was the last place she was seen. The parents never heard or saw anything. When they woke up, she was gone.”

Everyone became quiet. All that could be heard were waves, lake winds, and the breathy whoosh of a jet passing high overhead. It was an eerie moment. All four contemplated this exact spot where a little girl went missing and was possibly murdered hours or days later. It was a terrible thought.

“Can we see where her blood was discovered?” Max said.

“Unfortunately, no,” Dana answered. “That dune is long gone. The lake winds completely destroyed that one years ago. But we can walk over to the vicinity.”

Dana began walking, and the other three followed, taking the fateful route that Emily had taken all those years ago. Finally, they reached the area that claimed the little girl – the area where Emily spilled her blood on the sand. Everyone took time walking in the area and thinking. It was emotional for all of them. They were all thinking about a child who was happy one minute and living a wonderful life and was the next minute was in the clutches of evil. Cadie thought she saw Dana wipe away a tear.

Finally, Jake spoke, talking loudly over the wind.

“Is there anything else you guys want to see out here?” he asked. “If not, I was thinking we should head back to the police station and talk. We have a lot to discuss. And I want to hear Cadie and Dana’s big secrets.”

“Yeah, let’s head to the station,” Dana said. “This place gives me the creeps.”

Everyone walked south along the lake, heading back to the Mariner’s Beach parking lot. Cadie trailed a bit behind the group, though. She looked at Max and thought about his poor father. Dead like her own parents and also murdered.

Cadie was getting worried about Emily. She recalled her mother's words. She knew they needed to act quickly.

I know you're out there, Emily. I just need to convince the others. Please stay alive until I do.

Chapter 32

Harbor Cove Police Station
A Startling Confession

Twenty minutes later, Cadie, Max, Dana, and Jake gathered around the large mahogany table in the police station conference room. Cadie felt anxious. She needed to tell the group that Emily was alive and that they had to hurry to find her before it was too late. They were no sooner seated when Kelsey walked in with a fresh pot of steaming coffee and four mugs on a wooden tray. Her long blonde hair now contained streaks of blue.

"Oh god, thank you, Kelsey," Dana said. "I'm chilled to the bone."

Cadie, Jake, and Max said also thanked Kelsay while Dana poured the welcome black liquid into mugs. Yesterday, Kelsey had put all the Emily Hadly documents neatly back into their folders and created a pile at the end of the table.

"And thanks for putting the folders back together."

"No problem," Kelsey said, leaving the room. "Let me know you if you need anything."

Max spoke up.

"Do you have anything to eat? Almonds? A granola bar?" I'm starving."

"Sure. I'll bring you granola bars."

"Don't you ever eat, son?" Dana asked, raising her eyebrows.

"Honestly, I have to eat all the time," Max answered earnestly. "Over 4,000 calories a day."

"Max is a pole vaulter on the MSU track team," Cadie spoke up. For some reason, she felt the need to defend him. He was a good guy and wasn't silly for being constantly hungry.

"Athletes require more food than average," she said, looking over at Max.

“Pole vaulting: that’s impressive, Max,” Jake said. “I used to think it was only Cadie who was crazy - sprinting over hurdles at top speed. But now we have you –flinging yourself 15 feet in the air,” Jake remarked.

“That would be18 feet,” Max corrected. “I’m one centimeter away from setting the MSU record.”

Jake whistled.

“I mean it, Max. That’s impressive. My son Nick ran track in high school, but he had no interest in pole vaulting. I don’t think any of the guys or girls did. It’s a tough sport.”

Max didn’t like hearing about Nick for some reason and smiled uneasily. Cadie was growing more anxious. She wanted to discuss. Emily.

Turning to Dana, Jake said, “I remember when you used to bring in breakfast for us. Eggs, hash browns, sausage, even pancakes spread out on this very table. Those were the days.”

“Yeah, well I had a job back then. You’re still employed, Brennan. Why don’t you give Delio’s a ring and order us up some food?” Dana cracked.

“I second that!” Max exclaimed.

Cadie listened to the banter and felt her stomach church with anxiety.

As soon as Dana uttered the sentence about Delio’s, her mind went in another direction.

“Jake, I wanted to tell you something. Yesterday, when Heidi was recounting the day Emily went missing, she mentioned they grabbed lunch at Delio’s before they headed to the beach.”

“Yeah, I know. We’ve checked out Delio’s and the people who were there that day years ago.”

“I know, but Heidi remembered something yesterday. And it’s probably nothing, but it’s worth looking into.”

“What is it?”

“After they left Delio’s, Heidi, Louis, and Emily were walking down the little side street that leads to the path when Heidi dropped her towel.”

“Okay,” Jake said, not sure where this was heading.

“And someone laughed,” Cadie spoke up.

“What?” Jake said, looking at Cadie confused.

“When she dropped the towel and bent to pick it up, she heard someone laugh,” Cadie said.

Max jumped in.

“And there was no one around but a white van on the other side of the road. A commercial van with tinted windows. Heidi didn’t see anybody. She just remembered it yesterday. She had never given it a second thought. But she said the laugh sounded familiar.”

“And she remembered the van had some kind of nautical logo on it,” Cadie added.

“Well, that is interesting,” Jake said. “There’s only one bungalow on that street. As I recall, the single lady who lives there was out of town the weekend Emily went missing.”

“Yeah, that’s right,” Dana said. “She couldn’t offer any help in the way of being a witness, but maybe she saw that van parked there before? I know it was 14 years ago, but maybe she remembers something. Do you think she still lives there?”

“I know she’s does. Her name is Anne Breyer. She heads up the annual Harbor Cove Art Festival.”

“And there’s another thing,” Dana said. “You know how we told you Heidi got the letter with the dead butterfly? Well, the letter contained a watermark. It was a compass. So, it might be nothing, but a van having a nautical logo and a letter with a compass might be connected. We’ve got people researching businesses up and down the coast for white vans with compasses in their logos.”

“That might be a lot of businesses,” Jake said wryly.

“I know,” Dana said. “But we have to try. Could you talk to Anne Breyer and ask her about the white van?”

“Of course. I’ll head over there this afternoon. And it’s weird that Heidi said she thought the laugh was familiar. She couldn’t place it, though?”

“Not exactly. She said she didn’t want to tell us who the laugh reminded her of. Said it would have nothing to do with Emily. I didn’t want to push, but it is odd that she didn’t want to tell us.”

“Okay,” Dana said, grabbing the folders from the end of the table, “let’s dig into our persons of interest.”

She picked up a few folders and glanced at them until she found the yellow folder labeled “Narrative/Interview Log.” She opened it up and read silently to herself for a minute, and then placed it open on the table. She suddenly reached behind her head and tightened her ponytail. As she did so, Cadie unthinkingly tightened her own ponytail.

“This folder contains persons of interest, interrogation records, the case narrative, and cold case notes,” Dana said. “We’ll start with the persons of interest.”

Just then Kelsey walked in with four chocolate chip granola bars and silently laid them the edge of the table.

“Thanks,” Dana said quickly as she continued looking at the folder contents.

After Kelsey left the room, Dana leaned forward in her leather wingback chair and said, “So, at the moment, we have three main persons of interest or POIs. We have Sherman Sawhill, the convicted pedophile who was released from Newberry Correctional Facility in the spring.”

“We’ve tracked him down to Port Washington, Wisconsin,” Jake said. “He has relatives there.”

“Then there’s James Moore. He was the troubled teenager who was always inserting himself in the initial investigation. Also, he was interviewed near where Emily went missing – parked in his vehicle in a nearby parking lot. We learned his bedroom wall was covered with newspaper articles about Emily. A really weird kid. Would never look you in the eye. Had anger issues. James was charged with hitting a woman once, but the case was dropped. He lives in the West Shore Bay area,” Jake said.

“Then there’s our third person of interest,” Dana said. “So, yesterday, Heidi Hadly mentioned that she had a babysitter for Emily back in the day. Heidi was taking a night class, and a lady named Barbara Whitecloud used to come over and watch Emily. I guess she really loved Emily, and her feelings may have been stronger than typical for the little girl since Barbara never had children of her own.”

“Oh, wow,” Jake said, putting his hands behind his head. “I never heard of this Barbara before.”

“It seems Heidi never gave any thought to Barbara. She only babysat for a semester,” Dana said. “Anyway, Barbara would sometimes bring her unpleasant brother with her when she went to babysit Emily. But Heidi didn’t like the brother, so Barbara quit bringing him.”

Max, crinkling the foil wrapper while taking a big bite out of his granola bar, spoke through a mouthful of chocolate chips, grains, and nuts. “Dana, we know all this already. What’s the secret you said you were going to tell us?” Several nuts from his granola bar fell on the table, and Dana rolled her eyes.

“Do you know where Barbara is?” Cadie jumped in, her eyes widening. She leaned forward and put her hands on the table. “Is that the secret? It that what you’re going to tell us?”

“You guessed it,” Dana said. “As you guys pulled away from Heidi’s yesterday, she came running up to my Jeep. She had remembered where Barbara said she was moving to.”

“Where, Dana?” Jake said with his jaw firmly set. He wasn’t smiling anymore. He began to feel a deeper urgency to solve this mystery.

“Grand Island. Up by North Lighthouse. Heidi said she remembers Barbara saying she was moving back to Grand Island.”

“Where’s that?” Jake asked.

“It’s a small island in the UP,” Dana replied. “Near Munising. The island only has about 35 permanent residents - mostly Ojibwe.”

“We need to go there!” Cadie suddenly piped up, leaning forward and placing her hands on the table. “Right away!

Everyone’s heads turned to look at Cadie. Her emotions caught them by surprise.

“Slow down, Cadie,” Dana responded. “This program is a marathon, not a sprint. We have several weeks of class to work this case and contact our POIs. Also, you need to realize that our bad guy might not be any of these people. It could be someone else.”

Max turned to Cadie and said under his breath, “Now might be a good time to tell them your secret.”

Dana looked over and held a fixed gaze on Cadie.

“Yes, now might be a good time to explain why you are suddenly so amped up and needing to go to the UP right this very minute.”

Cadie adjusted herself in her wingback chair and cleared her throat. The time had come. She had to convince Dana and Jake – Max, too – that Emily was alive. She had read through hours of information in the case file last night and felt she had a strong argument to back up her supernatural encounter. She also believed they were running out of time. Cadie felt sure they had only days to save Emily.

Max was holding his breath. He knew what she was going to say and was worried how Dana and Detective Brennan were going to react. He began picking at his nail.

Like maybe Cadie is unwell. Like maybe she isn’t ready to be on this cold case or in this program.

Cadie slowly looked around the room at everyone.

“What I’m about to tell you might sound crazy,” Cadie said, her voice a bit shaky.

“Go on,” Jake said. “It’s okay. Just tell us.”

She took a moment to collect her thoughts and then began speaking in a lower pitch, her body rigid.

“I need to tell you that I believe Emily Hadly is not dead. She’s alive.”

Oh, please believe me.

There was silence in the room.

“Um, that would be wonderful, Cadie,” Jake said. “We all hope that could be the case.”

“Yes, in a perfect world, Emily would be alive,” Dana added. “But we have to be realistic.”

“No,” Cadie responded quickly, again in a lower pitch, “You don’t understand. I’m telling you, I strongly believe Emily Hadly is alive.”

At that, Dana shot Jake a look. There was an immediate understanding between the two that something might be amiss with Cadie mentally.

They think I’m losing it.

“Well, um, okay, Cadie,” Jake said, “but that is quite the statement. Why don’t you tell us why you think Emily is alive.”

“Yes, how could you possibly know that?” Dana asked, bringing her hands together in her lap, her concerns about Cadie increasing.

Cadie paused. Now came the hard part.

“There are several reasons I believe she’s alive and one reason that might cause you to doubt my sanity.”

Now the silence was stronger - more worrisome. A heavy air overtook the room. Dana and Jake exchanged furrowed glances.

“So, I practically stayed up all night reading the case file.”

At that, Dana shot Cadie a disapproving look.

“We have time, Cadie. I told you: we don’t need to solve this case in a day.”

“Maybe not, but maybe,” Cadie answered back. “Let me start with what we believe. First, we don’t believe Emily drowned. No body was ever recovered, and historical search and rescue data puts the recovery rate of Lake Michigan beach drownings at 90 to 95 percent. Shallow beach drowning recoveries are 80 percent or more. Also, it was July when Emily vanished, speeding decomposition

that would have produced buoyancy. With the clockwise currents and westerly winds, Emily's body would have washed up along the Benzie County shoreline, the public beach, Manistee, or even near the breakwall surrounded by rocks, which it didn't. The data suggests Emily didn't drown."

"All true," Jake answered. "But, as you said, we never believe she drowned."

"I understand that," Cadie answered, "I just want to cover all the bases."

"Okay, go on," Dana instructed, remaining patient. She already knew everything Cadie had just shared, but her mentor, she decided she was going to let the young woman present her case.

"Studies tell us there is a fifty percent chance Emily was murdered in the first hour."

Dana nodded knowingly.

"This not helping your argument," Max piped in.

"Please just listen, okay? Studies also tell us that 74 to76 percent of kidnapped children are killed within three hours, and 88 to 90 percent in 24 hours."

"Again, not helping," Max blurted.

"Make your point, Cadie," Dana said.

"My point is panic."

Everyone stared at Cadie, waiting.

"What do you mean panic?" Max asked.

"In these scenarios, in random kidnappings, people grab a child, rape them, and then kill them quickly. Often within 50 to 100 yards of the kidnapping. They then dispose of the body quickly and haphazardly. If they move the body, studies say it will most likely be within 160 feet of a road or a trail."

"All true," Dana said.

Jake nodded in agreement.

Now, Dana, Jake, and Max were listening intently to Cadie. She had done her homework.

“In a panicked situation, bodies are hastily concealed: in a ditch or ravine. Or under thick brush and branches. Maybe in a shallow one-to-two-foot-deep hole. However, eventually, wind, rain, and wildlife will unearth the body, and the bones will be revealed and possibly scattered.”

“Yes,” Dana said with a mix of pride at Cadie’s efforts but also growing restlessness. “Again, make your point.”

“As I said, I stayed up most of the night reading the case files. For 14 years, there have been exhaustive searches throughout Benzie County, nearby counties, and many communities in West Michigan. K9 units, police investigators – even community groups with their own dogs - have searched sand dunes, forests, fields, neighborhoods, golf courses, you name it, and no remains have ever been located. For 14 years, no hunter has ever stumbled across her skull or any bones. There were statewide Amber Alerts, door to door visits, and over 10,000 tips checked out. Still nothing.”

“This is all well and good, Cadie,” Jake said respectfully, already aware of Cadie’s information. He shifted in his seat, “but what if the kidnapper simply took Emily further away? All those searches wouldn’t have found her.”

“Yes, if that’s the case,” Cadie admitted. “But still, no bones, no clues, no evidence of her death for 14 years? Now let’s look at the case of Jaycee Dugard.”

Dana slightly rolled her eyes, but Max spoke up enthusiastically.

“She was gone 18 years when they found her. Our professor said there were many mistakes made in her case, like not searching Phillip Garrido’s backyard on routine parole checks. Had they done that, they would have found Jaycee earlier.”

“And we now know some things were overlooked in Emily’s case,” Cadie added.

At that statement, Jake narrowed his eyes, wondering what she meant.

“Barbara Whitecloud,” Dana spoke up. “Heidi had a babysitter with a weird brother. We missed that.”

Jake was incredulous at this news, and Max nodded his head.

“After Jaycee was discovered, police around the country changed how they respond to missing person’s cases,” Cadie continued, thoughtfully pacing the room. “They call it the “alive until proven dead” mindset. Jaycee’s discovery made police change its protocols.”

“Like thorough parole checks,” Max said.

“And more reliance on age-progressed photos,” Jake added. He was proud of Cadie’s research.

“There is also the possibility that Emily is hidden in plain sight,” Cadie added. “Think of Steven Staynor, abducted at age seven by Kenneth Parnell who used manipulation to control him. Steven was out among the public, even went to school, but Parnell’s hold on him was strong. This could be true of Emily. She could be alive in plain sight.”

“This is all true, yet anecdotal,” Dana responded. “And I agree, we should have an alive until proven dead mindset. But I still don’t understand what has you so riled up now, Cadie? You weren’t like this yesterday.”

Cadie took a moment to look around the room and collect herself.

“There are two things.”

Everyone drew closer, and Max winced. He knew what was coming.

“When I was poring over the files last night, about 3 am I read through a great deal of the phoned-in-tips. One tip intrigued me.”

The room was utterly silent, hanging on Cadie’s words.

“A guy who sounded altered called in a tip from the back of a party store in Maple City on the very day Emily went missing. He said he was drinking behind the store’s dumpster when he saw a van parked at the back edge of the parking lot. He thought it was strange, so he watched. He saw the driver slide back the van door, and a little girl popped her head out. The guy thought it was Emily Hadly.”

Dana shook her head incredulously.

“Why is that?” Jake asked, spellbound.

“Because, and I quote, the man said, ‘The little girl had white-blond hair, just like the girl on the news.’ Unfortunately, police could never locate the guy.”

“Okay, okay,” Dana said, standing up, now losing some patience. “So, part of your argument now rests on a drunk guy in a parking lot?”

“But there’s more, Dana. The man said the driver knelt down and seemed to put a Band-Aid on the little girl’s foot.”

That caused the room to go silent.

Jake rubbed his forehead, trying to process this information.

“But that’s not all, is it, Cadie?” Max said, looking over at the young woman who was now standing in the corner, facing them. “Tell them what happened on the sand dunes yesterday.”

“Yes, please tell us what happened on the sand dunes yesterday,” Dana responded forcefully, now staring hard at Cadie.

Cadie looked down and took a deep breath.

“Here goes,” she muttered under her breath.

“I believe Emily is alive, and we only have days to find her, because my parents told me so out on Sleeping Bear Dune. I was standing on the dune yesterday, looking out over Lake Michigan, when I felt a pressure on my arm and whispers in my ear.”

Suddenly, it seemed the air was sucked from the room. Everyone shifted uneasily in their chairs and exchanged glances.

“What did the whispers say?” Jake asked quietly.

“I believe one was my mother,” Cadie replied. “She said, ‘Someone is in danger.’”

Cadie didn’t mention to the others that the voice also said she was in danger.

Dana and Jake watched Cadie's face intently, searching for signs of a mental issue.

"Did the voice mention Emily by name?" Dana asked.

"No, it didn't," Cadie replied.

Max coughed nervously. Everyone continued to stare at Cadie as she continued.

"Then the voice said something strange. It said, 'Follow the north wind.'"

No one moved. They stared at Cadie, waiting for her to reveal more of this unbelievable tale.

"But what the second voice said next is what made me truly believe it was my parents speaking to me."

"What did it say?' Jake asked, now mesmerized.

Cadie looked at him.

"I think it was my father. He said, "Gie it laldy."

Jake immediately leaned back, his eyes widening. He put his hands behind his head and let out a long sigh.

Gie it laldy.

Jake was transported to that afternoon years ago when his neighbor Thomas McLeod was helping him fix his car in the driveway between their two cottages. Jake had tried several times to get the vintage Corvette to start. After tinkering under the hood, Thomas's sandy blonde head popped up, and he looked at Jake in the driver's seat.

"Try it again, Jake," Thomas said, his blue eyes grinning like always, "Gie it laldy."

Give it your all.

Cadie cut into Jake's thoughts.

"I really thought my mind was playing tricks on me, Jake, but then, when the voice went away, something else happened."

“What?” Dana asked, increasingly concerned about the young woman sitting across from her. She wondered if she was going to have to pull her off this case and get her psychiatric help. It was entirely possible that Cadie was not ready for this internship.

“To fully understand what I am about to share with you, I have to tell you what happened to me one night while I was kidnapped three years ago. I was trapped and so alone. I also was out of food and almost out of water. I thought my kidnapper was going to come back and rape me – maybe even kill me. At that moment, I really didn’t know if I wanted to live or die.”

Everyone’s faces crumpled. Dana shut her eyes.

“But then, something miraculous happened,” Cadie brightened. “Outside, I heard two owls. They were hooting - speaking to each in a duet. Suddenly, a large owl landed on the vent above my head. It stared down at me with its yellow eyes, watching me. In that moment, I knew it was my father. I felt his comfort and love – and guidance.”

Dana interrupted, trying to be gentle.

“Can I ask why you would think the owl was your father?”

Cadie smiled.

“Well, my father adored owls,” Cadie said. “He had books, figurines, and pictures of owls all over our house. My mother even painted a beautiful owl that hung over my father’s chair. He liked what owls symbolize: wisdom and intuition. They glide through the darkness and exposing hidden truths. The Greeks also believe they bring good fortune.”

Jake spoke up.

“Some Anishinaabe believe spirits present themselves as animals and guides, even messengers, from another realm. They believe that every living thing contains a spirit or a manidoo.”

“Yes, that’s right!” Cadie exclaimed.

“How do you know so much about indigenous beliefs”? Dana asked incredulous, thinking that she didn’t know Jake as well as she thought.

“My father,” Jake responded. “He knew a great deal about different peoples and the natural world. He always took me hiking to the Clay Cliffs or Pictured Rocks and talked to me the whole time. He was well read and a great teacher. We had a million books in our house growing up. So, he taught me that some Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi believe animals can be from the spiritual realm or creator, and they give guidance but also warnings and protection.”

Cadie nodded affirmatively.

“But why speak in code? Why not communicate directly?” Dana asked skeptically.

“If something outside our plane of existence communicated with Cadie, the voice and the owl may be bound by certain rules. Perhaps, they’re not allowed to interfere directly or dictate outcomes in the present time. Instead, the voices and the owl gave Cadie guidance without violating boundaries. Then, what happens is truly up to Cadie and her skill and choices. The messengers aren’t creating what happens in the future.”

Dana just stared at Jake. She didn’t know what to think. This was all too much. She felt somewhat ganged up on and didn’t like it.

“Plus, many cultures believe the natural and spiritual world provide their own signs in their own ways. We can’t always understand why.”

Cadie was thrilled that Jake was not only open minded but quite knowledgeable.

I just might be getting through to them.

“But that’s not all, Jake,” Cadie continued. “Over the past three years, I have been visited by owls whenever I was doubting myself or about to make a big decision. Last week, on the very day I began this program, I was walking into Giltner Hall on MSU’s campus, and right in front of the building, up in a tree, was a similar owl, and it looked to be the same type of owl in my mother’s painting. The

same yellow eyes. The same size. And again, he stared down at me for quite some time. I felt he was telling me something – helping me with my thoughts. I could sense it – and I understood it."

"I know what you mean, Cadie," Max suddenly added enthusiastically. "I sometimes think I hear my dad talking to me, but I don't tell people because I don't want them to think I'm crazy."

Jake and Dana glanced at Max, not knowing why Max might be having supernatural conversations with his father. Dana made a mental note to dig deeper into Max's past. She also planned to speak to Professor Dunleavy. All the program applicants were supposed to be thoroughly vetted, and Dana was never informed about Cadie's stalker situation.

"Thank you for that, Max," Cadie said gratefully.

There was an uncomfortable silence in the room as everyone tried to digest the unbelievable information that was shared. Cadie looked around the room and spoke once again.

"The voice suggested someone is in danger. And Heidi just got that letter, that dead butterfly in the mail. I believe our kidnapper is living in this area and still has Emily alive for some reason. The voice said follow the north wind. Now, I don't know that means, but I know Maple City is to the north, and Grand Island is to the north. So, I think we need to head north and locate Barbara Whitecloud as fast as we can. And while Sherman Sawhill lives to the south, James Moore also lives to the north. I truly believe we have to visit these people right now if we're going to find Emily alive. Jaycee Dugard, Elizabeth Smart, and Steven Stayner were all long-term survivors, and I believe Emily is one of them."

Cadie then cleared her throat.

"And, bear with me, there's one last thing."

Everyone stared, stunned that there could be one more thing.

"A voice also told me to 'follow the blood.'"

“What?!” Dana exclaimed loudly. “Follow the blood? Now what in the hell does that mean? I’m about at the end of my rope!”

She was trying to hold back her feelings, knowing that Cadie was surely upset with the news that Lawson got out of jail, but it was hard hearing all that Cadie had to say.

“I don’t know, Dana!” Cadie responded earnestly, “but we know Emily bled out there on that dune. Maybe somehow her blood is a clue?”

Jake joined in.

“I’m not sure how. That blood was fully analyzed.”

“There must be something,” Cadie said. “Blood tells us so much.”

“I know that, Cadie, but the report said Emily was in good health,” Jake responded.

“We need to take a closer look. I feel sure there’s a clue there.”

“Because you parents told you?” Dana said with arms crossed.

“Yes, because those voices told me to ‘follow the blood.’ I believe we need to ask the lab to dive deeper.”

“I know it was hard telling us this, Cadie,” Dana said. “And I hope we don’t appear like we don’t care about your experience yesterday. It’s just a lot to take in, and not all of us believe in an afterlife or spirits. To be honest, I’m worried about your mental health.”

Just then, police detective Debbie Brown walked in with a cup of black tea in one hand and a piece of paper in the other. She slapped the paper down on the desk.

“Here you go. Addresses for Sherman Sawhill and James Moore. I’m still working on Barbara Whitecloud. You can thank me later.”

Dana looked up at Debbie.

“I take it you were listening in,” Dana replied.

“Of course. You always said I was nosey,” Debbie laughed, “and you were right. I’m also awfully good at my job. And I agree with Cadie. You four need to find Emily Hadly pronto. My gut tells me she’s alive, and Debbie’s gut is never wrong.”

“So, now this investigation is following an owl, voices from the grave, and the instincts of Debbie’s gut,” Dana said wryly, tightening her ponytail. “You guys are going to give me a second ulcer.”

“Not just my gut,” Debbie said solemnly. “Cadie made a good argument. I think you guys need to listen. Remember: alive until proven dead.”

Cadie nodded at Debbie. Then she addressed the group one last time to make her plea.

“Even if you can’t get on board with my reasons and what happened to me yesterday out on the dune. Even if you can’t believe the spirits of my parents visited me, you know one thing to be true: we sure as heck aren’t the only people who know Emily’s case has reopened. The word will get out. It’s probably out already and will hit the papers. If our kidnapper is alive and living in this area, and they mailed a dead butterfly to taunt Heidi, then they probably know we’re searching for Emily right now. It’s crazy to think this, but if Emily is alive, it may be our investigation that finally triggers the kidnapper to kill her. I believe we have to act fast.”

Everyone watched the strong, smart, self-assured young woman before them.

“She’s not wrong,” Max said, crossing his arms in front of him in solidarity with Cadie.

“You’re pretty persuasive, Cadie,” Dana admitted. “Your parents would be proud.”

“Yes, they would,” Jake agreed.

“But let me ask,” Dana said. “Why are there voices and an owl all of a sudden, like just when you need it? It’s so far-fetched. How am I supposed to believe any of this?”

Dana was trying to get Cadie to see the unreasonableness of her experience. But then Debbie answered.

“Many cultures believe animal guides present themselves during crisis,” Debbie explained. “The appearance of Cadie’s owl could be a sort of spiritual medicine intended only for her. Pushing her to reflect and observe.”

Dana was not happy with Debbie’s intervention.

“And how do you know this? Is everyone suddenly an expert on owls and ghosts?”

“I have Native American family members,” Debbie replied, looking solemnly at Dana. “My stepfather had cancer and went on Vision Quests. He was given signs by an eagle.”

Dana didn’t know what to say to that. However, her guilt over not catching the killer of Thomas and Aileen flooded back. Of almost losing Cadie. In her mind, logic and rationality began to battle with emotion and passion. It was a mental tug of war. She didn’t want to make a rash, impulsive decision based on the intense feelings others were conveying; however, is she was honest with herself, she also was experiencing her own gut feelings. The idea that Emily Hadly could somehow be alive began to ring more true. She closed her eyes for a moment and drew in her breath.

“Alright, you guys win,” Dana sighed, tossing her arms in the air.

Dana wondered what Troopers Lyons and Smith were going to think about all this. About her pursuing a course of action based on Debbie’s gut, spirits, and a bird. She would have to tell them and take the heat if this all went sideways. They weren’t going to like it. This was far from standard police procedure. Very far.

Dana stood up and put her hands on the desk.

“Okay, people, obviously, I’m having a hard time believing any of this, but we are going to act.”

She looked hard at Cadie and Max.

“Don’t you make a fool of me.”

Cadie and Max shook their heads vigorously.

Dana headed for the door.

“Get packed. Tomorrow, we head north.”

Chapter 33

Lena
Shadow of a Mother

Lena walked into the back door of the cabin and set the empty wicker basket down on the pale-yellow washing machine. Her heart was beating hard. Mother had once promised she would buy a new clothes dryer for Lena, but she never did. Changed her mind and said they were too expensive and silly for a grownup girl.

"Why dry clothes in bought air when God's sunshine can do it better?" Mother said the last time Lena asked about it.

Lena thought Mother always brought god into the conversation when she wanted to get her way. She was finding more and more fault with Mother's logic. Now the young woman's head was hurting. She looked into the hallway mirror and parted her long, blonde hair. The skin around the stitches was red and swollen. She gently touched the wound and winced. She remembered the man's anger as he shoved her into the cabinet. He was in a rage, and Lena had no idea why. Mother, as usual, was tight-lipped, but Lena knew the man was on his way.

What am I going to do?

From the back hallway, Lena could hear Mother washing dishes in the kitchen – sounds she had heard every single day for 14 years. Cold, forceful tap water pounding a chipped porcelain basin while Mother scoured a blackened cookie sheet that would never be shiny again. It was as if she sought to expel years of repressed feelings by abusing the cabin's vulnerable pots and pans.

Lena sometimes wondered why Mother was so emotional. Happy one minute sitting on a quiet beach with her arm around Lena's waist watching the sun go down. Then crying and thrashing in her sleep

behind a bedroom door. Why was she so troubled? Lena couldn't understand the root of Mother's behaviors. Or could she?

"I'm in here, Lena dear," Mother called out. "Please join me."

Lena took small, pensive stops as she walked through the cabin's small living room, past its plaid couch and chairs Mother said her poppa bought from a Grand Rapids furniture store a long time ago. As she walked, her posture was tense. She felt a sense of foreboding. Her head was hurting worse.

What is Mother about to tell me? Is it what I think it is? Could it really be?

Lena walked into the kitchen and sat down stiffly at the linoleum table across from Mother. Wearing her faded blue housedress that hung limply on narrow shoulders, Mother had her back to Lena and dried her hands on a kitchen towel slowly and deliberately, saying nothing. Finally, Mother turned and pulled out a chrome and vinyl chair. It scraped uncomfortably across the wood floor, and Mother sat down.

"I baked you some cookies," Mother said, pointing to the plate of warm oatmeal raisin cookies in the middle of the table. "Your favorite."

Lena could tell Mother had been crying. Her gray eyes were still watery, and her wrinkled face red and puffy. She sniffled and wiped her nose with the back of her thinning hand.

"I'm not hungry," Lena replied evenly, now staring at Mother. Lena felt anger building inside her. Maybe subconsciously she always knew this day would come.

"Okay, that's fine," Mother replied. "You can have a cookie later."

"I don't think I will," Lena answered coldly.

"You're making this harder than it has to be," Mother said. "You must know that. You know I love you more than anything."

Lena was quiet for a moment, just studying Mother's face.

“Honestly, Mother, I don’t know what you’re talking about. I never know anything. You’ve made sure of that,” Lena said, twisting in her chair. “And can I still call you Mother? You are my mother, right?”

With astonishment, Mother’s eyes opened wide.

“Oh, Lena, how long have you known?” she asked weakly.

“Known what?” Lena responded icily.

“You know. What I’m trying to say to you - to tell you.”

“No, I really don’t, Mother. I think you need to say it.”

Lena leaned back in her chair, her rigid arms crossed. Years of repressed feelings were beginning to break free.

Mother remained silent. Lena could take it no more. She pounded her fist on the table.

“Tell me! Tell me now!”

Mother jumped up from the chair. She began pacing the room manically, rubbing her hands together over and her. She stopped at the window, steadying herself on the sill, and looked out.

Lena shoved her chair back and stood up. She strode with hard steps over to Mother. Mother was now sobbing, but Lena didn’t care. She grabbed Mother’s shoulder and swung her around.

“Tell me right now! Are you my mother?!”

Mother’s face contorted terribly. She let out an anguished scream.

“No, Lena! No! I’m not your mother! But your own mother didn’t want you!” Mother wailed and collapsed on the kitchen floor. She sobbed and rocked her body. “Your own mother gave you away! She didn’t love you! So, I took you in! And I have loved you like my own daughter ever since!”

Lena stared down in horror and confusion at the pitiful woman crumpled at her feet. Her mind was overwhelmed. She couldn’t process the words she just heard.

My own mother didn’t love me?! Didn’t want me?! Then who is my mother?

In that moment, Lena's entire life became a lie. She was in shock and overcome with emotion – shaking from the adrenaline and anger overtaking her.

And just who was this woman who pretended to be my mother all these years? How could my own mother not love me?! Not want me?!

Everything she had ever known was not reality. She felt deep grief.

Who am I really?

The young woman was suddenly sick. Her skin was cold and clammy. Her breaths came in short spurts. She felt dizzy and thought she might faint – or vomit.

Mother looked up at Lena, her eyes begging, and spoke while choking back tears.

"I have always loved you like my own child. You must know that. When your own mother wouldn't love you, I did. When your own mother didn't want you, I did. I took you in."

Mother took a deep breath and continued.

"And when the man comes for you, Lena, I promise I'll protect you. I swear I will."

The man. Coming for me.

Lena stared, shocked into silence. It was all too much. She couldn't stay there any longer. She ran from the kitchen to the back door, down the steps, and out into the cool September air, the door slamming behind her. Lena's world as she knew it was gone.

Her real mother didn't want her, another woman had lied to her, and a man she didn't know was coming to kill her.

Chapter 34

The Man
A Father's Cruelty

He was six years old and still wetting the bed. The boy didn't want to wet the bed. In fact, he tried very hard not to. He would pee two or three, even four, times before he went to bed. But it was no use. He would fall asleep and begin dreaming and not be aware of anything until hours later when mother entered his bedroom and began shouting, immediately smelling his salty, stale urine.

"You did it again! I can't believe you did it again!" she cried out one morning as the boy pretended to be asleep under his dirty gray pillow. Suddenly, mother was yanking the wet, cold blankets from under his slender body. Within seconds, father came marching down the hallway, his heavy footsteps shaking the thin walls.

"Don't you fucking dare tell me he's done it again!"

Father slammed open the boy's bedroom door so hard it banged against the adjacent wall and caused a picture of two smiling bunnies to fall - its glass shattering across the orange shag carpeting.

"Get up!" father yelled.

Suddenly the boy was being yanked violently out of bed by his arm. Father pulled so hard the boy thought his arm might pop out of its socket.

"I'm so, so, sorry dad," the boy stuttered. "I di, di, didn't mean to."

Father suddenly put his hand behind his son's head and shoved it violently onto the bed. He shoved the boy's face into the cold puddle of urine and ground his face into the acidic pool. The boy couldn't breathe. His nostrils sucked in the repellent residue. He thrashed and struggled and out of one burning eye looked to his mother for help, but she simply stood in the corner holding her hands in front of her apron.

Finally, just as he thought he was going to pass out, father yanked back his head. The boy fought for air. His face was now bright red and raw.

"You're sleeping in the woods tonight!" father screamed. "Don't think I don't mean it! I'm shoving your sorry ass out the front door and locking it behind you!"

The boy whimpered and hung his head. His face hurt, and he felt the urge to pee again. Suddenly, father pushed the boy, causing him to fall into the bed. Then father marched toward the doorway and stopped and turned to his wife.

"You better teach that boy how to pee in the pot," father sneered, "or you'll be joining him in the woods tonight."

Like she always did, mother just hung her head and said nothing.

Sometimes, the boy dreamt of killing his mother and father. Instead, whenever he felt bad feelings, he rode his bike around the neighborhood looking for a cat or maybe a small dog to run over. When he was especially upset, he might pull the legs off a frog in the back yard. Once, a girl at recess saw him stomp on a little bird that was struggling and she ran off crying, but the boy didn't care. He didn't care about anything, especially the feelings of a bird.

The man was bored thinking about the past and forced his mind to switch to the here and now. He had things to do. A decision to make.

That's it. The sinkhole it is. No one will ever find her there.

The man walked back through the woods. Suddenly, he saw a large toad on the path. It had hopped right in front of him and seemed to be looking up. He picked up the squirming toad, pulled off one of its legs, and threw it back on the ground.

Chapter 35

Harbor Cove Police Department
The Plan to Find Emily

As Dana sat in her office preparing to go home, she thought about their plan. In the next two days, the group of four would split up and track down and interview Sherman Sawhill, James Moore, and Barbara Whitecloud. That way, at the very least, they could rule them out as persons of interest.

Dana, Max, and Jake still weren't sure what to make of Cadie's protestations that Emily was alive, but her 'speech' about the kidnapper catching wind of their investigation and finally killing Emily made everyone sit up. It was a possibility that immediately increased the group's urgency. Also, despite misgivings, Dana made the decision to indulge Cadie.

Who am I to have all the answers? And if I'm honest, my curiosity is piqued. I have to see where this leads. Maybe it leads us to finding a missing child, even if it's not Emily.

Dana and Jake decided that Cadie, Max, and Dana would leave in the morning and make the two-hour drive to West Shore Bay, Michigan, a coastal village located on northern Leelanau Peninsula. There, they would pay a visit to the Moore's family compound that was on the border of West Shore Bay (a village at the tip of the peninsula) and a mile from Lake Michigan. Dana had reached out to a friend in West Shore Bay law enforcement to let her know they were paying the Moores a visit and to get any advice. The officer told Dana that James Moore was bad news and to be careful. She advised they seek back up immediately if the situation went sideways.

That's why Dana reached out to Detective Craig Kitchen. He would accompany them to the Moore's. Craig and Dana had worked together many years, and she trusted Craig like a brother. He was excellent in the field and strong under pressure.

Dana was hoping to get a warrant to search the Moore compound, but she knew it was a longshot. Was there probable cause to think James Moore was involved in Emily's kidnapping and had her (dead or alive) on his family's property? In the two affidavits Dana presented to Judge Maas that afternoon, she detailed Moore's proximity to the site of Emily's abduction, his over involvement with the case, the butterfly letter Heidi Hadly received last week, and the fact that the envelope was postmarked Traverse City. The second affidavit was for a warrant to search Sherman Sawhill's home. Dana's argument was even thinner on that affidavit, so she had little hope that one would be granted. Dana asked Debbie to do more research on James Moore, to try and find anything that would help bolster the case for a search warrant. The judge told Dana she would let her know her decision later that day.

Cadie and Max emailed their professors. Cadie was taking two online classes, Digital Forensic Investigations and Open Source Information Analysis, so she could work remotely on her laptop while Dana drove them north. Max was going to miss an in-person class, Forensic Anthropology, so he let his TA know.

Neither Cadie or Max had packed enough clothes for another day, possibly two. They decided to run to the store that afternoon to buy a few items of clothing and food and water for the trip. They had no idea how the next few days would play out. They could be traveling Michigan for a few days, hopefully locating Emily sooner rather than later or at least gathering information and answers.

In the morning, Jake would board the SS Badger ferry out of Ludington and take the four-hour trip across Lake Michigan to Manitowoc, Wisconsin. He then would be driven down the Door Peninsula to Port Washington, a small community, by detective Jeb Collins of the Manitowoc Police Department. Jeb was an old friend of Jake's as both men graduated the police academy together.

"Are you guys ready to go?" Dana yelled out her office door at Cadie and Max who were sitting on bench in the hallway. "We've got a lot to do to get ready for tomorrow."

“Yeah, we’re ready,” Cadie answered.

“Let’s go,” Max added.

In seconds, the threesome was headed for the door.

Chapter 36

The Man
To Kill a Cop

The man was parked at the far end of the black asphalt police lot, under the branches and shadows of a willow tree. Patchy gray clouds rolled through, darkening the parking lot and making it perfect for what he had in mind. The man knew Bakker drove a red Jeep. After researching Dana Bakker online, the man had seen a photo of Bakker sitting in her Jeep while speaking with a reporter. Now, just a few feet past his car, was that same red Jeep.

For a while, the man napped. It was warm inside his vehicle, and the Lake Michigan breeze lulled him to sleep. He had set the alarm on his phone, so he wouldn't allow himself to sleep long. Plus, he was sure he would hear her. She had to walk right past his car.

The man dreamed his favorite childhood memory: a happy, sun-filled day at Holland State Park with his family. As he sat in the sweaty car, the sleeping man smiled. His brain recalled his father and mother holding his tiny hand as they waded and splashed in the cool Lake Michigan water. But then, suddenly, the memory segue wayed to his parents fighting - his father punching the bedroom wall and storming out of their bungalow. The man's heart beat faster, and his breathing became rapid in the small sedan as he visualized his mother sobbing and hitting herself in the head. He also felt the cold knife in his hand.

Just then, something startled him, and he awoke. He straightened slightly and peered out the side window. There she was. It was Dana Bakker walking out of the police station with two young people. She was wearing a ponytail just like in the photos. The younger people split off from Bakker and got into a black Denali. Dana stopped for a moment to look at her phone, and the two drove by her. The male driver waved at Bakker as they left the parking lot.

Now Bakker was walking toward him. The man slouched down in the scratchy fabric seat. He was suddenly worried Bakker was going to see him, so he slid down the warm seat as far as he could go, even leaning to the side. He heard her footsteps approach his car and then go by.

He waited.

Her Jeep fired to life. The man cautiously peered out the window. Bakker's red Jeep was now backing out of her spot. The man waited a moment and then started his own car. He slowly eased his car out and began following Bakker at distance as she traveled down the tree-lined lane. He hoped she was driving somewhere isolated. The man glanced at the passenger seat and the knife so much bigger than the knife in his dream. He wondered how Dana Bakker would react when he slit her throat.

The sergeant turned her Jeep down several residential streets with large, full trees and neat and colorful cottages until she finally turned onto Alice Street. The man slowed and watched her Jeep pull to the curb and park. There were two cars behind hers. The man pulled up behind the second car and watched. There was no one around.

Bakker exited the Jeep and walked the stone path. She stepped up onto her front porch, put the key in blue door's lock, and disappeared into her tidy home.

The man grinned. He knew he couldn't kill her right this moment, but it didn't matter. Now he knew where she lived.

Chapter 37

Jake Brennan
Questioning a Pedophile: Sherman Sawhill

Jake was heading home, thinking about tomorrow morning. He planned to board the SS Badger ferry out of Ludington and take the four-hour trip across Lake Michigan to Manitowoc, Wisconsin. He then would be driven to the small community of Port Washington by detective Jeb Collins of the Manitowoc Police Department. Jeb was an old friend of Jake's as both men graduated the police academy together. Earlier in the day, he had reached out to the man.

"Why not bring your car on the ferry?" Jeb asked when Jake called him.

"Do you really think Harbor Cove PD is going to let me ferry one of theirs across Lake Michigan? They barely let me drive it home," Jake replied.

"Plus, you're terrible at directions," Jeb laughed.

"Then there's that," Jake said.

"Well, I'm just glad the famous hero Jake Brennan is finally taking a vacation?" Jeb joked over the phone. "After all you've done for me, I'm happy to be your tour guide and show you around."

"A vacation would be nice," Jake replied. "But actually, I'm trying to locate a missing girl. She was abducted off a Lake Michigan beach 14 years ago. I'm working the cold case."

Jeb immediately understood Jake's mission.

"What's your POI's name?"

"Sherman Sawhill. He's a convicted pedophile who got released in the spring. His last known address was his sister's place up in Port Washington," Jake said. "I need to speak to him. A jailhouse snitch said Sawhill talked about kidnapping and murdering Emily, but there was never any proof. Hard to know if it was just ego that led Sawhill to make those comments or something more."

“I’ll tell you what. I’ll do some asking around on Sawhill,” Jeb said. “Tomorrow, when your ferry gets into Manitowoc, meet me at the terminal near the waterfront at 12:15. We’ll head down to Port Washington from there and locate your Mr. Sawhill.”

“Sound great,” Jake answered.

“So how long has it been?” Jeb asked.

“What? Since we graduated academy?” Jake replied, confused.

“No, since you took a vacation?” Jeb laughed.

“Well, I took Nick and his friends to Cedar Point a few years back,” Jake remarked somewhat sheepishly.

“No, really. When was your last vacation?”

“Yeah, that was my last vacation,” Jake said. “I’m not kidding. But I like to stay home. To bake bread.”

“Jesus, I wish you were kidding,” Jeb groaned. “That’s the saddest thing I’ve ever heard. So how are you doing? I heard about the kidnapping case you worked a few years ago, how you almost died but ended up saving the girl. I’m sorry I never reached out. But that was some good police work, Jake. That alone deserves a vacation.”

“I know. I probably do need to take some time off. But now I’m on a case, and our team is really motivated to find this girl, I mean woman. She’d be 20. And now that I’m divorced, all I really do is work,” Jake said.

“Are you seeing anyone?” Jeb asked.

There was silence on the phone.

“I knew it! You are seeing someone!” Jeb laughed. “Who is it? Where’d you meet her?”

“I’m not really seeing her,” Jake laughed back. “But I like her. Besides, I don’t kiss and tell.”

“Sounds like you’re not kissing at all,” Jeb joked. “No worries, though, I’ll get it out of you. It’ll be a long drive tomorrow. Plenty of time to learn your secrets.”

“Honestly, all I want to do is focus on my missing person,” Jake said seriously. “I know you know about the bus fire. About the little girl who died.”

“Yeah, I know about that,” Jeb said quietly.

“Well, it still bothers me,” Jake explained. “That’s why I don’t take vacations. I don’t feel much like having fun when I think about that girl I let die. I’d rather stay on the job and try to make up for it.”

“Jesus, Brennan, it wasn’t your fault,” Jeb said. “You’re a goddam hero! You saved all those children. How could you have known about the little girl?”

“I could have done better, that’s what,” Jake answered. “I could’ve gone back in that bus and made sure.”

“Yeah, and you’d be dead right now,” Jeb replied. “You’ve gotta quit blaming yourself. You need to let it go. You’re a good man who does his best. Like we all do. We can’t win every time. It’s just part of the job - the way things are.”

“Maybe so, but I still need to find Emily Hadly,” Jake said. “I’m beginning to get this feeling that maybe she is alive and in danger. So, what I really need is for you to help me find her. That would be the best gift you could give me.”

“I understand, Jake,” Jeb replied solemnly. “Let me look into Sawhill. We’ll find that bastard tomorrow and pray he has your girl alive.”

Chapter 38

Drive to the North
Danger and Death Ahead

It was 9 AM, and a mellow morning sun cast rays through the crisp September air. It looked to be a good day – bright skies and little wind, but the foursome was anxious. They all wondered what the next few hours had in store. Could it be possible that Emily Hadly was alive or buried somewhere on the Moore property? As they walked to Craig's police car, the veteran cop spoke quietly to Dana.

"You're sure this is the right move?" Craig questioned. "I mean, how much is there to tie Moore to Emily Hadly? It seems pretty thin."

Dana shot Craig an exasperated look.

"Listen, Craig, we really don't have many leads at this point," Dana countered. "And that's what this student cold case program is all about. Having more resources and a fresh set of eyes. So, we need to at least cross Moore off our list."

"Okay," Craig responded, but his face showed he was not convinced.

Dana was feeling grouchy. She had received a call about Mitch Lawson. In addition to a year in the county jail, the young man had received three years of probation. That meant he had to see a probation officer, which he had not done. The officer told Dana that Lawson was supposed to visit his office last week but never showed, and he hadn't returned any of the officer's calls.

"We're looking into it, Dana. I'll get back to you with what I find out."

Dana got off the call feeling uneasy. It wasn't a good way for Lawson to begin his probation. She wondered where the young man was. She prayed he wasn't heading their way. Surely, the news was getting out about the reopening of the Emily Hadly case. It might not be too hard to learn the location of Cadie McLeod from the campus grapevine.

Dana and the other three took their places in Craig's police car. They decided his car was best as it provided resources they might need to rely on in the next two hours. Safety features, yes, but also a radio and computer workstation to control communications and access police databases. Craig's computer even had an automated license plate reader and in-car video system.

Dana laughed at the small yellow felt perch hanging from Craig's rearview mirror. It made sense, though. Craig was a huge fisherman and had won several salmon tournaments and one-day bass challenges up the coast of Lake Michigan. Craig always took his daughter Kayla with him fishing; the girl loved to fish – and play basketball and softball. Dana figured the toy perch might be a gift from Kayla. Dana was impressed by Craig's skills as a father. He was always attending one of his daughter's events. He was a good dad, just like Jake.

The morning sun poured into Craig's SUV as it approached US-31. With Craig driving, Dana in the passenger seat, and Cadie and Max in back, Craig took a big bite of his egg sandwich and turned his white Chevy Tahoe east on the coastal highway headed for M-72 that would take them north all the way to M-22. From there, they'd drive along Lake Michigan until they hit Lake Leelanau. Then they would go right and head east over The Narrows. Reaching the Grand Traverse Bay, they would turn north and head to the tranquil village of West Shore Bay - and then the Moore property.

Cadie and Nick talked on the phone for quite a while the night before, and Nick asked her to text him once they got on the road in the morning. Nick hadn't realized Cadie would actually be visiting a dangerous man as part of her internship, but Cadie assured Nick that everything would be fine. They had Dana and Craig with them. Also, Dana told them she and Max were to stay in Craig's police car while Dana and Craig spoke to Moore and any others found on the property. However, that information did little to assuage Nick's fears.

"I'm worried about this trip," Nick texted. "I don't think it's a good idea. And they say the storm system is intensifying."

“You’re going to have to understand that my work may sometimes put me in harm’s way. I don’t mean to make you worry, Nick,” Cadie texted back, “but I have to do this, and you have to trust me. I really don’t like it when you get so worried. It undermines my confidence.”

“Are we having an argument?” Nick texted with a sad face emoji.

“You know I believe Emily Hadly is alive,” Cadie continued texting. “I’m pretty sure I’m the only one who does. I tried my best to convince Dana and Jake, but I’m not sure I did. I’m just glad that they decided to at least check out our known suspects right away. So, I need you to support me and not question me. You don’t have to always agree with me, but give me some space to work this out, okay? Trust me.”

“Okay, point taken. I just worry about you, that’s all,” Nick texted, inwardly wondering if Cadie really was up to this task. “But I can see how my worrying isn’t helpful. Can I ask, though: did you bring my baseball bat with you?”

“Yes, I’ve got it right here,” Cadie texted, touching the Louisville Slugger laying on the seat next to her.

“Well, let’s hope you don’t have to use it. You really are my hero, Carolyn McLeod,” Nick texted. “If anyone is going to find that girl alive, it’s going to be you. You inherited your father’s tenacity. He would be proud of you.”

“I believe he is,” Cadie messaged back with two heart emojis.

“Did you say hi to your mom and dad for me?” Nick texted.

“No, it was a quick conversation ha ha.” Cadie replied. “Next time. But in all seriousness, I have to locate Emily. My parents told me she is in danger.”

“Okay, well, please be safe. No heroics. You’re a college student not Rambo. But I trust you. Just keep the bat with you. And text me when you get to West Shore Bay.”

“I will. I love you, Nick.”

“I love you, too, Cadie. Be safe!”

Cadie set her phone down and picked up her laptop. She was glad for the communication with Nick. She felt they had made progress in an important area. Cadie now had schoolwork to do on the ride up. Cadie looked out the window and saw no sign of Lawson. Max also was looking out the window at the passing towns of Beulah and Honor, thinking about his father, while Craig was eating his sandwich, and Dana was texting with Jake.

“Glad you have Craig with you today,” Jake texted. “Take it easy with Moore. He might be a handful. I asked around. Seems like he’s grown a temper.”

“I will,” Dana texted back. “I’m a bit concerned though if I’m doing the right thing by taking Cadie and Max up there. What if the shit goes bad with Moore?”

“You’re just headed up there to talk,” Jake responded. “Plus, I heard his mom should be up there, too.”

“Yeah, it should be fine,” Dana texted.

In spite of their reassuring words, both had a sense something bad could happen in Moore’s secluded property in the woods. Also, Dana’s phone showed bad weather might come their way.

“Hey, are you going to be able to come with us when we visit Barbara Whitecloud?” Dana asked.

“I hope so. Jeb said there’s a small airport near Port Washington. He said I should be able to get a flight to Marquette.”

“Same. I just got a text that we could get a flight out of Woolsey Airport in Northport today. It has a small airfield made out of turf, but it will do the job.”

Dana paused for a moment and then continued.

“Do you really think Emily Hadly could be alive?”

There was no response immediately. Finally, Dana received Jake’s text.

“The logical part of my brain says no. No way. But for some reason, I’m imagining Emily alive. Why, I don’t know. Is Cadie really that persuasive, or am I also sensing something? Maybe I’m just a guilty fool. But what if Emily is alive, or some other child, and we let them die? How will we live with ourselves?”

Dana chewed on her lip as she read the text.

He’s really pulling the heartstrings. But I know he couldn’t handle letting another girl die. It’s taken him this long to get his mental health on track.

Dana texted back.

“Well, I’m not sensing anything except my lower back hurting in this patrol car. But we are going to see this thing through one way or another. I might not be convinced she could be alive, but I won’t be the person that stops us from trying. It might be the end of my cold case career, though. I’ll text you later to let you know how our visit with James Moore turns out. And Jeb is driving you, right? You’re horrible at directions.”

Jake texted back a sheepish face emoji.

“Just stay safe out there!”

“Sounds good,” Jake texted back, “You, too!” with a thumbs-up emoji.

Dana was hoping he might sign off with something a bit more personal and wondered if Jake got peeved about her directions’ comments. Overall, she felt happy about their seemingly growing feelings for each other. She turned to Cadie and Max in the back seat.

“Hey, we can get a flight up to Marquette today if you guys want to go. There’s a pilot who can fly us up there.”

“Absolutely!” Cadie responded.

At that comment, Craig shot Dana a look. He really couldn’t believe that everyone was buying into the “spirits of Cadie’s parents telling her Emily was still alive” story. But Craig was a team player,

and he ultimately hoped they were right. He also wasn't someone to share his feelings. He was dealing with a serious health issue, and he hadn't let anyone know – not even his wife yet. He didn't want to scare her or his daughter. He just soldiered on in silence.

Max piped up.

"I'm game, too. Let's track down every lead while we're up here."

Dana put her phone down and looked out the window for a while. Cadie wondered if she was thinking about James Moore - what she would say to him, and what they might find today on the Moore's property. Cadie refused to let her mind think the worst. She wouldn't allow herself to worry; it was unproductive. She remembered the Nancy Drew quote from *The Hidden Staircase:* "Work is the best antidote for worry."

So, rather than let anxiety take hold, Cadie planned to work the case hard until they solved it, and that meant bringing Emily Hadly home alive. People fought to save her life three years ago, so Cadie felt she owed it to Emily to fight for her.

Cadie remembered that night when she was in captivity, and thought she was alone, that maybe everyone had given up looking for her. That's what panic and desperation do to you. But then the owls visited her. She immediately felt they were messengers for her parents, but Cadie didn't know what they wanted. Were they telling her it was okay to die? Okay to let go? To join them in eternity? Or did her parents want her to fight? To live? In the end, it was her choice to make. Cadie McLeod chose to fight and live. That experience proved to her that she was indeed a fighter. Cadie hoped Emily Hadly was also a fighter.

Three feet away, Max was lost in his own thoughts, thinking about his father. Missing him. Wondering how his life might be different if his father had lived. He glanced over at Cadie so confident in her belief that Emily was alive. He truly hoped they would find her alive on the Moore's

property, but the voices in his head were conflicted. After the death of his father, the endless nights he heard his mother's cries, and the infinite tears he shed – he felt his optimism was nearly exhausted. Still, here he was, in this internship, carrying on, fighting to solve a cold case and trying to bring a child home – in fact, heading toward the home of a criminal. In his own way, he was fighting back. This work allowed him to gain closure and justice for others, and for that he was thankful. He closed his eyes and prayed.

Dear God, please let Emily be alive. Please save her.

Then, sensing something off about the upcoming meeting with Moore, he offered up a second prayer.

Please keep us safe today. Please keep Cadie, Dana, and Craig safe.

He recalled his many Sunday mornings spent in children's liturgy at Chicago's St. Patrick's after his father's death: the prayers and the scripture that gave him comfort. His favorite was still hanging on a wooden plaque in his mother's kitchen: Matthew 19:26. "With God all things are possible."

Dear God, make it possible.

Chapter 39

Nick Brennan
A Bad Feeling

After Nick finished texting Cadie, his heart began to beat faster, and when he sat down on the edge of the bed in his dorm room, an inexplicable dread filled his mind. It was a premonition similar to the one he experienced when he approached the yacht three years ago on that fateful day. His subconscious had recognized the danger before his conscious mind did. He was fully aware that Mitch Lawson was released from jail. And now Cadie was involved in a serious cold case investigation.

Nick got up and paced the tile floor of his small room. He felt a deep unease. He never expected that a college internship would lead to his girlfriend confronting a criminal. Perhaps, he was just denying the truth. He knew that in the line of work Cadie wanted to pursue, she would find herself in danger from time to time.

He ran his hand through his wavy brown hair, trying to think. Trying to figure out what to do. He felt helpless, and this situation brought back all of his feelings from the events of the past. He still had flashes of guilt for not walking Cadie to her bike three years ago. If he had been more of a man, more like his father, none of that would have happened to her.

His mind went to those terrible days.

That Saturday morning when he learned Cadie was missing. The anguished days spent searching for her and fearing she was dead. Then, finally, the storm on Lake Michigan when all was revealed. It always bothered him that in the end, all he did was save his own life. Even though he knew it was illogical to think that way, as close friends had insisted, he couldn't shake the feeling that he wasn't there for Cadie when she needed him most. He didn't plan on letting that happen again. He would be there when she needed him.

He wiped tears on the back of his sleeve.

Now, all alone in his quiet room, he wished his mother was there. She always knew what to do, how to make things better. However, she had made her decision. Nick was thankful that his dad - the best man he knew – would never abandon him. He also knew what his dad would do in this situation.

Jake had texted Nick earlier that he was heading over to Wisconsin on the ferry. He would be there all day and might fly to the UP later. Jake texted he was heading down the Wisconsin coast to locate another person of interest.

Nick knew he couldn't just sit there, staring out the window, waiting by his phone, and experiencing this premonition that something bad was about to happen. What if Cadie needed him? What if she got into some kind of trouble? He couldn't live with himself if she got hurt – if he let her down. She had been through so much already. He knew he couldn't spend the rest of his life trying to rescue her, but today was not that day.

So, despite a major paper being due in his history class the next day, he made his decision.

Nick jumped up from his single bed and went over to his closet. He took out his blue duffle bag and stuffed some clothes in it, then took some items from the bathroom. He grabbed his phone charger off the desk and grabbed some cash out of the drawer. Then he unscrewed a plastic container and pinched some fish food between his fingers and dropped it into the tank. Nick then found a pad of paper on his desk and wrote a quick letter.

Brad, I had to drive up to Traverse City. It was an emergency. I'm not sure when I'll be back. Please feed Blake. Talk to you later. Nick.

He put his UM jacket on over his tall, lean physique and took one last look around the room. His eyes fell on the photo of his mom and dad at Torch Lake in happier times - his mom teaching him how to swim. They had visited the lake right up until the summer his mom abandoned their family and moved to Florida. Nick and his dad had to learn to navigate life without her.

The young man forced himself to look away from the photo, and he suddenly spied his laptop on the chair. Nick grabbed the computer, wiped his eyes again and then headed out, locking the door behind him.

Chapter 40

Leelanau Peninsula
Questioning a Deviant: James Moore

The group of four was now heading east on the 204 that connects Lake Michigan to Suttons Bay, driving past beautiful fruit orchards and vineyards. Yet, despite the scenery, everyone began to feel more and more tense. Dana spent the last hour conversing with Detective Kitchen about the psychology of James Moore and approaches they might use when dealing with the sociopath that Dana assumed he was. Cadie and Max listened intently.

"Let's review what I shared with you this morning," Dana said, turning her neck and looking over her seat at Cadie and Max. Her deep black hair, held tight by its ponytail, swished as her head moved back and forth.

"Good idea," Craig added. "It's a lot of information to digest and retain."

Dana shifted her body, so she was facing the back seat. Outside, the winds were strengthening. Leaves swirled and blew across the road.

"Even though you two will be waiting in the car when we're at the Moores, this is still a good learning experience. After we talk to James Moore, we can debrief, and Craig and I will share what went on in our conversation with him."

Cadie and Max nodded.

The car finally reached M-22, and Craig turned left, heading to West Shore Bay. The feeling in the care became even more tense, while occasional strong winds pushed the car. Everyone tried to hide their growing apprehension as they continued talking.

"It's situational awareness," Cadie said. "You have to be perceptive and predict what might take place based on how the person is behaving. It helps to detect threats before violence takes place."

“Exactly right,” Craig said while studying the map on his vehicle’s Mobile Data Computer.

“We’re going to be in West Shore Bay in twenty minutes or so,” Craig said. “But then it might be another fifteen minutes to the Moore’s property.”

No one said a word. The car pulsed with nervous energy. How would James Moore react even though they were only coming to talk to him?

Cadie and Max looked out the window at Grand Traverse Bay and saw a collection of cheery white sails flitting across the shimmering water. The irony struck Cadie: even in a world filled with violent predators, people are still enjoying themselves. They might be dancing joyously at a concert, and the person swaying to the music right next to them is a serial killer. That’s life, she thought. Really no way around it. Evil is everywhere. Then she thought about Mitch Lawson and the person responsible for her parents’ deaths.

I should know. I remember how both people were so nice to me and how both turned out to be anything but nice.

Cadie noticed Dana touch the Glock that was holstered on her hip – and slide her hand along the gun’s leather sheath as if to ready herself.

This is getting real.

She thought of Nick and the words he texted her: “You’re a college student, not Rambo.”

Cadie’s mind then went to her childhood hero, Nancy Drew. Nancy was calm and cool. Always prepared.

“I’m a ready for anything kind of girl,” Nancy said.

I need to be ready for anything because I have no idea what I’ll face today. But I can do this.

Yet, despite her self-affirming words, her heartbeat quickened, and her breathing became shallow. Cadie looked out the car window and saw dark clouds to the west. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply, picturing Emily Hadly and readying herself for the hour ahead.

Chapter 41

Lena
Half-hearted Answers

You need to pull yourself together.

Lena didn't know how long she had laid on the grass crying – her mind swirling with thoughts and emotions. She pushed herself up off the ground and went into the cabin. She found Mother sitting on the couch, her eyes red and swollen. For some reason, even though she still felt incredibly hurt and angry toward Mother, Lena somehow also felt a measure of sympathy and gratitude.

After all, she is the only person who has ever cared for me. Ever loved me. Where would I be without Mother?

When Lena walked in, Mother looked up with wet, pleading eyes. She looked exhausted.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

"I'm better," Lena answered. "But I'm mad at you, you know."

"I know."

The young woman walked over and sat down next to Mother on the couch. She placed her head on the older woman's shoulder. She appreciated the warmth of her skin under her corduroy dress. She was exhausted from worrying about the man.

"Thank you for telling me everything. I know it was hard for you," Lena said. "But you should have told me long ago, though."

Mother put her arm around Lena.

"You will never know how hard it was to tell you," Mother answered. "I love you with my whole heart. I was just afraid you wouldn't love me if I told you. You are my everything, Lena. I am nothing without you."

That last line bothered Lena.

"Will you tell me everything?" Lena asked, now sitting up straight. "About my birth mother? Who is she, and where is she? Why she didn't want me?"

Mother shifted uncomfortably on the couch.

"I will, but not right now, my darling. This has been so hard for me," Mother said, standing up, wiping her eyes. "Do you mind if I go on a walk to clear my head? I promise to bring some sunflowers back for you. I just need some fresh air."

Mother walked to the back door and grabbed her coat off the hook. Lena felt irritated.

Hard on you?

"I won't be long, darling," she said, turning to look back at Lena. "Who loves you?"

"Mother does," Lena replied half-heartedly. Her mind was a twirling concoction of hurt, anger, gratitude, and constant fear. She knew Mother took her in when no one else wanted her, but she also had to play a part in all of this.

She watched the older woman leave the cabin, and Lena sat on the couch for quite a while trembling with anxiety and thinking. The wind whiplashed against the tiny cabin and made screeching noises that made her think of the man yelling at Mother. Then, the most pressing of all concerns broke into her consciousness.

He's coming to kill me. I have to prepare.

The young woman quickly walked down the wooden stairs into the old Michigan basement where she found several useful items. On a table in the corner of the small, cobweb-filled stone room was a camouflage jacket and a heavy-duty backpack. She searched the rest of the basement and found binoculars and camo duct tape. She also found a tee-shirt she planned to rip into a few pieces. She put the items, including the jacket, into the backpack and carried it up to the hallway where she hid it in a

cupboard under the wash sink. She shuddered thinking about having to use these items in the hours to come.

Then she walked into the kitchen and took a pad of paper and pen out of the drawer. Sitting down at the table, she thought about her many hikes and talks with Mr. G. He was excellent at tracking and hunting, but he also knew how to keep himself alive in the wild. Before he was the lighthouse keeper, for most of his life he was a member of an Indian community that took care of its land, including a large Indian reservation. Mr. G told her he would spend weeks by himself in the forest, studying it to keep it healthy. He was an expert outdoorsman.

Lena created a list.

Stay calm. Try to breathe normally.
Don't walk on the dirt path. Walk on sticks and brush to hide your footprints. Try to zig zag.
Lead the man through the buckthorn thicket and over the fallen trees to slow him down.
Create a false trail with bits of fabric to lead him in the wrong direction. Throw down a few items.
Hide behind the big white pine trees.
Go to the willow tree and blow the whistle.
Make a brush pile to hide in. Create a hidden shelter under some brush.
Lead the man to the old pit-iron mine. Cover the shaft opening with branches and hope he falls in!
Head to lighthouse. Get help from Mr. G.

Lena looked over her list and knew she had a lot of work to do if she was going to save herself. She knew she probably couldn't implement everything on the list, but she would do her best. Lena left the kitchen and went upstairs to her quiet bedroom. The young woman put on a long-sleeved shirt and jeans and grabbed her heavy wool jacket from the closet as well as some gloves. She put her long blonde hair into a ponytail. Then she headed outside to the shed in the backyard. There she grabbed a few items and placed them in a bag hanging on a hook.

Lena knew the path Mother would be walking: the path heading east toward the wildflower garden. Lena also knew her salvation lie to the northwest - toward the lighthouse. She began walking in the opposite direction down the windy dirt path, towering white pine trees swaying above her, where she would ready her plan and hope to save her life.

Chapter 42

Gunshots and a Body

After driving through the small waterfront village of West Shore Bay, the group continued on until it reached a large forest. The eerie rural road flanked by heavy woods was just a few miles from Grand Traverse Lighthouse on the tip of the peninsula surrounded by Lake Michigan on the west coast and Grand Traverse Bay on the east. The winds were picking up, and the upper tree branches leaned back and forth. Detective Craig Kitchen drove his Tahoe slowly down the sandy road, looking for anyone watching them in the woods and a dirt road named Woodland Way. After several minutes, he found it and turned left.

The sun trickled down through fast-moving clouds and tall trees, creating uneasy shadows on the forest floor. Any other day, this drive through a tree canopy dappled in sunlight would illicit exclamations of wonder from the vehicle's four occupants. Today, however, the mood was somber and the vehicle quiet. Everyone was thinking about what might happen when they reached the Moore property.

Would they find Emily Hadly alive somewhere on the property? Or would they find her long-languishing remains? Might this simply be a futile attempt in their pursuit of the missing girl? And how would felon James Moore react to them paying a visit?

Cadie's mind suddenly traveled back to that midnight bonfire three years ago, and she shuddered.

The dirt road narrowed and finally ended at another road. Craig took a right and drove a mile until he saw a massive oak tree with a wooden sign nailed to it that read, "Martha Moore." He turned onto the even narrower path that was considerably darker due to the density of forest. Hanging from the canopy of trees, searching for sunlight, were thick, woody vines, some over 30 feet long, hanging

over the road like ghouls. High above them, tall trees and rolling hills shifted as if dancing in the strong winds.

The vines slithered across the top of the metal patrol car and added to the tension within. Branches made a harsh, grating sound as they scraped against the sides of the Tahoe. Dana looked out the window at the forest crowding up against the car and felt like she was being squeezed in a vice. In an anxious reaction, she gripped the seat and coughed to catch her breath.

“Holy guacamole, this is crazy,” Max said, making everyone in the car suddenly laugh. It was a much-needed tension breaker.

“Don’t see woods like this in Chicago, huh Max?” Cadie asked.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been to a place like this,” he exclaimed a bit nervously. “And I don’t think I ever want to come back.”

“Welcome to pure Michigan,” Dana responded with little cheer in her voice. Her eyes searched the dark woods with leaves and debris tossing about in the feisty wind. They drove a quarter of a mile, pushing through the encroaching foliage, when Craig spoke loudly.

“There is it. The Moore compound.”

Everyone scanned the dark forest until they noticed the small, odd buildings deep in the woods and scattered across the property enclosed in barb wire. Craig drove a bit further and then spotted another one-track road. He turned onto it despite the many signs nailed to trees that said “Keep Out,” “Private Property,” “Trespassers will be prosecuted,” and “Beware of Dangerous Dog.”

Max’s eyes were open about as wide as humanly possible.

“Is it too late to turn back?” he half-joked.

Then Cadie shared what was really on everyone’s minds.

“What if Emily is here? What if she’s been waiting for us all these years, and she’s here?”

The car was quiet while everyone answered the questions for themselves. Finally, Dana broke the silence.

“Then let’s go get her.”

The car shuddered and inched forward in the escalating wind as the group scanned the isolated area, looking for any signs of life or danger. They drove past a small, grey, concrete building with no windows. A little further down was a fire pit surrounded by rotted camp chairs near a pole barn. Old, broken-down ATVs and snowmobiles were strewn about as well as a heap of junk that included a rusty gas grill and rotted antique yellow couch. The car drove around a slow curve, and there it was: Martha Moore’s cabin tucked in the woods.

The dilapidated cabin was surrounded by a yard comprised of overgrown rye grass and fern. Along the yard’s perimeter were large, swaying Pokeweeds and Stinging Nettle. Martha’s home was a two-story structure of dark, weathered logs with a moss-covered roof missing several shingles. It looked straight out of a horror movie. Dark clouds up above cast a menacing shadow on the eerie structure. Craig drove up the stone driveway and parked the vehicle parallel to the cabin. The woods were eerily silent. Just the whooshing of the winds as they traveled east.

Dana grabbed something that was in the car down by her feet. They were bulletproof vests.

“Here, Craig,” she said, handing him a vest.

They quietly both pulled back the Velcro and placed the vests over their heads. Then they tightened the straps.

“Okay, so when we get out, you guys move to the front. Then lock the doors,” Dana ordered. “If anything bad happens, you both stay in the car and get down. We’re going to go to the front door and announce ourselves to Martha Moore - see how she reacts. We’re also going to walk around the property the best we can. We obviously don’t have the time or manpower to search these woods.”

Dana still hadn’t obtained the warrant and was going out on a limb searching the grounds.

“Also, if Martha reacts badly, then we’ll leave and come back another time with backup,” Craig said. “We don’t want any problems with you two here.”

“We’ll tell her we’re just here to talk to James,” Dana added. “I’d like to get a first-person read on James, see how he reacts to my questioning about Emily.”

“I showed you how to use the radio,” Craig said. “Use it if you need to.”

Just then, a large dark cloud blotted out the sun. The entire yard darkened and grew sinister.

“I’m sure everything will be fine, though. Jame’s parole agent said Martha Moore is nice,” Dana said sarcastically and rolled her eyes.

“Famous last words,” Craig added, while Dana shot him a look, “from the mother of a sociopath.”

“We’ll be fine, Dana,” Cadie said. Her green eyes searched the nearby woods for any movement. She could feel the hair on her arms standing at attention.

“I hope so,” Max laughed nervously. “I feel like I’m in the movie *Deliverance*.”

Cadie responded, “If you hear banjo music, run.”

“Oh, great. Thanks.”

“Okay, we’re doing this,” Dana said.

All four opened their doors and got out, the strong winds making the doors harder to open. Cadie got in the driver’s seat, and Max got in the passenger seat. They locked the doors; the clicks seemed extra loud in the quiet woods. Dana and Craig walked up the sidewalk to the rundown cabin and looked in the dark window. They didn’t see any movement. The two climbed the wooden porch that was beginning to collapse on its right side and took their positions on each side of the door. Craig knocked forcefully. Lake winds whistled through the tall trees. Leaves kicked up all around them.

“Hello, we’re looking for Martha Moore. I’m detective Craig Kitchen with the Harbor Cove Police Department,” he said loudly. “We just want to talk to you.”

They waited but heard nothing. Craig was just getting ready to knock again when they heard a shuffling in the house. Both instinctively put their hands on their guns. The old door with green peeling paint creaked open slowly, and an older lady peeked her head through. Craig and Dana had to look down to meet the eyes of the diminutive woman with dirty and missing teeth.

"Can I help you?" she said in a strangely squeaky voice.

"Are you Martha Moore? Mother of James Moore?" Craig asked.

"Yes," the woman answered, opening the door a bit more.

"Ma'am, we're here to talk to James," Dana said, her voice thickening. Something just felt off. "Is he here?"

Martha stared at Dana and then opened the door all the way and leaned out.

"I thought I heard his car on the property, but I'm not sure," the older woman replied. "Maybe he's huntin' – with his dad's gun."

Dana and Craig looked at each other. They didn't like the sound of that.

The woman put her hand on the rotting door frame and whispered, "What's he done now?"

"Nothing," Dana replied, faking nonchalance. "We just want to talk to him about a missing person's case. A little girl. See if he knows anything."

The woman squinted her eyes.

"You mean Emily Hadly?"

Dana and Craig were shocked.

"Yes, Emily Hadly. How do you know about her?" Dana said with increasing energy.

"Well, the cops talked to James cuz of the fact he was near the beach when she got took that day."

Dana unconsciously smoothed her ponytail.

"I heard he had newspaper articles about Emily's kidnapping taped all over his bedroom wall. Is that right?" Dana asked.

“Yeah, that’s right. He was interested in the kidnapping,” Martha said. “But not cuz he took her. He just thought the girl was pretty. James would never have stole that girl. He’s a good boy. He just thinks girls are pretty.”

Dana stared at the woman in disbelief and disgust. Emily Hadly was just six years old when she went missing. James would have been seventeen.

“But he went to prison,” Craig said, crossing his arms in front of his chest. “For pushing a woman down and stealing her underwear.”

Martha face dropped, and she didn’t say anything. She was now scowling. Just past them, the strengthening winds were kicking up dust and creating small circles out of leaves.

“He doesn’t have a bag of ladies’ underwear in there, does he?” Craig asked, pointing through the open door.

Martha glared at Craig.

“Like I said, I don’t know if he’s on the property or not. See for yourself.”

Just then, off in the distance, some type of animal howled through the woods. Both Dana and Craig jerked their heads to look.

“Just a coyote,” Martha said with an odd smile. “You’re spookin’ him.”

Dana stood up straighter.

“Thank you, Martha,” Dana said. “We appreciate your help.”

The wind was now flipping Dana’s ponytail.

It was all she could do to remain civil to the strange mother who had birthed James Moore.

Something doesn’t feel right about Martha. She knows something.

Martha closed the old, creaking front door. Seconds later, Craig saw the little woman peering at them out the front window as pieces of forest flung about on the whipping winds.

Dana glanced over at the car. Cadie and Max were watching them. Max gave a thumbs up sign.

Craig and Dana walked into the woods. The coyote howled again.

“I’ll head over here,” Dana said, her voice suddenly catching.

“Sounds good,” Craig said. “Yell if you see anything.”

Large, gray clouds masked the sun, making the woods dark and unnerving.

Craig veered left, while Dana headed right. She walked deeper into the dense woods, her jacket rattling in the rain-cooled air. She understood it was the leading edge of a gust front. As she continued walking, up ahead, she noticed a narrow wooden building with an old cast iron air compressor up against it and other rusted junk. There also was a pile of recently cut lumber alongside the building – most likely a workshop.

Dana approached the rotting building with a metal roof and was startled when a large black squirrel darted in front of her. She gasped and jumped.

Then she noticed the door had a lock on it, but the lock was hanging open. She walked up to it and removed the lock, then pulled open the heavy door. Immediately, Dana smelled it: the pungent, sweet, unmistakable combination of sulfur and rotting flesh. She gagged and coughed.

“Oh my god, what’s in here?” she shuddered. Dana saw a thin rope hanging down from a light and pulled the cord. An eerie glow quickly flooded the long building, and shadows made the space seem menacing. She turned on her cell phone’s flashlight, so she could get a closer look at items hanging on walls and laying on shelves. A hacksaw with a reddish stain suddenly caught her eye.

“Dear god,” she exclaimed, wondering what the stain was and where it came from.

She continued walking carefully toward the back of the chilling building. The sweet, sickening smell grew in intensity. She covered her nose with her arm that had begun to shake. Dana’s eyes burned from the mix of chemical fumes and wood dust. She stepped carefully around a pile of old paint cans and finally reached the back of the building. The smell was strongest here.

Dana's eyes, now watering from the dust, searched the space, and she used her flashlight to survey the tall, metal shelf filled with tools. Next to the shelf was a worn workbench. Next to that was a large, homemade, wooden toolbox. For some reason, it frightened her.

Settle down. You're fine.

She studied the spooky room intently. Then she noticed something. The toolbox was moveable; it was on rusted casters. She bent over and placed both hands on the rough, heavy toolbox and pushed. As the box moved slightly, she saw it: a cut in the wood – the outline of something. She pushed the box all the way until a trap door was fully exposed.

She sucked in her breath, bent down, and pulled open the door.

Chapter 43

Movement in the Pines

Back in the patrol car, Cadie and Max waited uncomfortably. The air was warm and stale from their breathing, and the smell of their nervous sweat began to permeate. They no longer had eyes on Dana and Craig, and that made them anxious. Every few minutes, the car would shudder because of a strong wind. Though only ten minutes had passed, it seemed like hours. They looked over and noticed Martha Moore staring at them from the window. She was squinting and scowling.

"At what point do we do something?" Max finally spoke.

"It's only been ten minutes, Max," Cadie responded.

"Yeah, but how long will we wait before we do something?"

"I don't know," Cadie replied. "I just think we'll know if we need to act. I imagine someone will yell or come running."

"Oh, that's comforting," Max laughed dryly.

"You know, if anything bad happens, I'll protect you," Max said while biting on his nails.

His genuine earnestness mixed with his nail biting made an intriguing combination, Cadie thought.

He really is a good person.

They continued to stare anxiously out the front of the patrol car toward the dense, dark woods, watching the trees whip and listening for any unusual sounds. Both wondered where Dana and Craig were and if Emily Hadly was somewhere on this property.

Meanwhile, Craig sweated profusely in his uniform from the combination of adrenaline and forest floor heat. His bald head was sweating. He pulled at his neck collar for air and decided to head back to the cabin. He had seen no evidence of James Moore, just an axe laying by a pile of wood.

The sudden thought of James Moore with an axe or gun made Craig sweat even more. He could taste the salt in his mouth. He instinctively touched his sidearm in its holster.

Craig was just turning around to head back when he saw something. It was a quick shadow or movement near a large, white pine. It was tall, like a man, not an animal.

Was that Moore?

"James, it's detective Craig Kitchen. I just want to talk to you!" Craig yelled out.

At first, he didn't see or hear anything. Then he heard twigs snap and knew someone was nearby. Adrenaline rushed through him. All his senses heightened.

"You've got a great place out here, James!" Craig yelled, attempting to build rapport. "I would love to come out here and hunt some time. I bet you're an amazing hunter."

James couldn't help himself. He took the bait, but not in the way Craig had hoped.

"Go fuck yourself!" James yelled from behind a tree. "What, we're friends now?!"

"Sorry, James! I didn't mean anything by that," Craig shouted back, his mind searching for his next approach. Dana was much better at suspect psychology, and he wondered where she was. He decided to be straightforward.

"We're here about Emily Hadly, James," Craig yelled out. "Do you have her? Is she here?"

"Oh, I would love that," James shouted back. "You know I like little girls!"

That pissed Craig off.

"That's what your mom said," Craig yelled.

"Fuck you!" My mom would never say that!"

"You're wrong, James. Your mom told us you've got a bag of girls' underwear in the cabin!" Craig shouted, baiting him further. "I guess if you can't get a girlfriend, the next best thing is her underwear!"

Suddenly, a sharp, loud crack split the air. Craig immediately dropped to the forest floor. A bullet whizzed a foot over his head and hit a tree behind him with a crack.

In the car, Cadie and Max heard the gun go off.

“Oh, my god!” Cadie yelled. “Gunshot!”

“I can’t see anything!” Max yelled back.

“I’m calling for help!” Cadie yelled and pushed the orange emergency button on the radio mounted on the console. Then she turned on the radio, grabbed the mic, and pushed in its button.

“Officers need help!” She yelled into the mic. She knew the emergency button would trigger Command Central in Suttons Bay. Someone would respond and determine their location using GPS. Craig had a repeater, so even though they were out in the boonies, the message would be boosted. Suttons Bay was about 20 miles away. Cadie knew it would take time before help arrived unless an officer was closer by.

“Now what?” Max yelled out.

“We need to stay put and watch. We’re not any help to them out there,” Cadie said, scanning the woods. “If anything, we’d cause confusion.”

A calm voice suddenly came over the radio.

“What is your location?” it asked. After Cadie replied, and the dispatcher said that help was enroute, they asked the nature of the emergency. Just as Cadie was explaining, another shot rang out.

“Oh, fuck!” Max yelled.

“That sounded closer!” Cadie yelled back. “Where are Dana and Craig?!”

Both Cadie and Max were gulping air. Now their hearts were pounding.

“We’ll get someone out there as soon as possible,” the dispatcher replied.

“We’re going to have to leave this car,” Max said, his eyes darting in every direction.

Cadie nodded.

“Dana’s going to kill us.”

Out in the woods, Craig was now hiding behind a large oak tree, its long branches rattling above him. He wondered where Dana was – why she wasn’t in the woods. He was terrified Moore had hurt his colleague and friend.

“Just tell us where Emily is,” Craig yelled. “That’s all we care about! Where is she? Is she alive somewhere on this property? Or did you kill her?!”

Craig leaned from behind the tree, and his eyes searched the thick forest for any sign of movement. Suddenly, he saw a man sprinting through the woods in the direction of the cabin. Craig’s thoughts immediately went to Cadie and Max.

Oh, shit! He’s headed right towards them!

Craig began running, darting between thick trees as fast as could. Branches slapped and scratched his face, drawing blood, but he didn’t notice. He was acting on pure adrenaline and instinct.

“James Moore, stop! I am ordering you to stop!” he screamed as he ran through the dark, windy woods. He could see the man’s form up ahead; he was running toward the cabin. Craig continued the chase but lost sight of him. Now he was worried the man might circle back and shoot at him again, and he wondered where Dana was. He was increasingly concerned for everyone’s safety.

Craig ducked behind a tree. He pushed the emergency orange button on his portable radio and then ran to the next tree. He continued to zig zag from tree to tree as he made his way to the cabin and its clearing. Finally, he could see the cabin and his patrol car. Still no sign of Dana. He was extremely worried.

Did Moore do something to her?! Where is she?!

As Craig approached the clearing, he moved stealthily from tree to tree. He didn’t see James, but he saw Cadie and Max inside the car, staring at him wide-eyed. As Craig began walking to the patrol car,

Cadie suddenly saw a movement in the car's rearview mirror. It was James Moore! He was in the woods putting another bullet in his shotgun!

He began raising the heavy gun toward Craig, who was looking the other way.

"Oh, my god! Max, look! It's Moore!" Cadie screamed.

Max looked out the back window and saw Moore raising his shotgun. He flung opened the car door and jumped out, then sprinted to Craig.

"Craig! Get down! Get down!" Max screamed.

He lunged at Craig to shove him to the ground. Just as he reached Craig to tackle him, a shot blasted through the air and hit Max in the thigh.

"Oh, fuck!" Max screeched.

Craig fell to the ground while the young man clutched his mutilated leg. He felt like he had been hit with a baseball bat. His leg buckled, and he collapsed on the ground. Blood was now spurting from wound.

Moore took off into the woods, while Cadie jumped out of the car and sprinted over to Max and Craig. She saw the blood pouring out of Max's leg and quickly pulled her belt from her jeans. Max writhed in pain, while Craig held his hand over the injury.

"Craig, help me take off his pants," Cadie yelled. "We're going to need to apply a tourniquet close to his skin."

"You could at least take me to dinner first," Max wisecracked through heaving breaths and extreme pain. He was quickly turning pale. Craig and Cadie pulled off Max's pants, and she studied his muscular thigh: where the bullet had entered and exited and the amount of blood flowing from the wound.

“You’re going to be alright,” she said, trying to remain as calm as possible for Max. “The bullet went through your lateral quadriceps and out. It didn’t hit anything major as far as I can see. The bullet went through well away from your femoral artery.”

“You’re a doctor now?” Max tried to laugh while writhing in pain as Cadie tightened her belt around his thigh near his groin and three inches above the bullet’s point of entry.

“She’s right, Max,” Craig shouted. “I don’t think it’s that bad.”

“Craig, hand me your flashlight,” Cadie yelled.

Craig grabbed the flashlight from his belt and handed it to Cadie.

With the belt, she made a knot around the flashlight and twisted the belt tighter around Max’s thigh.

“Oh shit, that hurts,” he said through gritted teeth. He was drenched in sweat.

“Do you need to me to twist it?” Craig yelled.

“No, look, the bleeding is already stopping,” Cadie shouted back.

Max seemed to relax slightly. Still, he was fighting for air and turning paler.

“I used the car radio to call for backup,” Cadie cried out.

“I did, too,” Craig responded.

The three of them were jacked on adrenaline, breathing hard, and their senses heightened. They scanned the woods for James Moore.

All of a sudden, the realization hit them simultaneously.

“Where’s Dana?!” they screamed almost in unison.

“Oh man, where could she be?” Craig yelled, frantically searching the woods. “If she heard the shots, she would’ve come running. Can you guys start yelling for her? I’m going after Moore. He might have done something to Dana.”

He was also thinking about Emily Hadly. Was she dead in these woods? Was Dana now hurt? Or worse? It was all too terrible to contemplate.

Craig jumped up. The fall had hurt his shoulder, but the adrenaline masked the pain.

“Are you guys going to be alright?”

“Yes, Craig. Go. I’ve got this,” Cadie answered. “And help is on the way.”

Craig nodded and then took off in the direction from where Moore had fired the gun just a minute before. Cadie and Max yelled for Dana, and Martha, Jame’s mother, opened the front door and leaned out.

“Martha,” Cadie yelled. “We can’t find Dana Bakker, the officer who came to the front door. Can you look for her? We’re afraid James hurt her.”

Martha looked to be in shock. She didn’t say anything, but walked out on the porch, down the steps and into the woods.

Meanwhile, Craig sprinted through the trees for several minutes but did not see James. All he saw was an endless cathedral of swaying maple and beech trees on rolling hills. The forest floor was a thick layer of moss, sticks, and leaves - damp and decomposing. The forest was so dense, he almost felt like he was fighting his way through a jungle. Cold winds whipped across his body, chilling the sweat on his skin.

Craig decided to stop running. He ducked behind a large beech tree. He fought to slow his breathing and still himself. He then focused on listening to even the barest of sounds, but the forest was silent except for the sound of the wind. He remained there for several minutes, listening intently, biding his time and scanning the moving trees. Still no sign of James. He was getting ready to leave his vantage point when he heard something.

What is that? It sounds like humming. What the hell?

Craig slowly eased his head out from behind the tree to look in the direction of the sound. There he was, James Moore, stepping through the forest and humming like a sociopath who didn’t have a care in the world.

From behind the tree, Craig yelled, “James, stop! I have a gun! Stop where you are!”

Max heard twigs breaking. He looked out from behind the tree and saw James running in the opposite direction. He was headed north toward the edge of the Moore’s property: an old logging camp. Craig darted out from behind the tree and chased after him.

“James, stop!” Craig yelled at the fleeing man, but James never slowed. He darted back and forth through the maze of trees in the thick forest, sometimes looking over his shoulder at Craig chasing him.

“James, you need to stop! We’re going to get you! Turn yourself in!”

“Never!” James screamed.

Craig stumbled for a moment in a dip but regained his footing. He was suddenly aware of pain shooting through his shoulder. A large pine bough swiped at his face, cutting it, but he shoved it away. Craig chased James for several minutes, but the younger man was quick and running on both adrenaline and fear, so he never slowed. Suddenly, Craig heard a cry.

Where did he go?!

James had disappeared. Craig’s eyes darted wildly, trying to locate the man in the dark woods. Then Craig heard Moore screaming. The man’s voice sounded panicked and far away.

“Help me! Please help me!”

The voice seemed odd, like it was in a tunnel – deep and distant – almost hollow.

What’s going on? Is this a trap?

Craig stopped and looked around the forest in every direction but didn’t see Moore.

“Oh fuck, man! Please! You’ve gotta help me! Oh, shit, it hurts!” Moore screamed. “Please!”

Craig walked carefully toward the sound. He was worried it might be an ambush. He still didn’t see Moore.

“Where are you?” Craig yelled. “You’d better not be fucking with me!”

“I’m down here! Look down! I fell in a well! Help me! I’m in water! It’s fucking cold, and I hit my head! And I think I broke my leg! It hurts so fucking bad! Help me, man!”

Craig cautiously made his way toward Moore’s voice. He still didn’t see where the man fell in. He inched forward slowly. Suddenly he saw a scattered ring of fieldstones. As he drew closer, he realized the stones were surrounding a pit some six feet across. There were rotted boards and a chunk of vegetation covering one side of the opening. Craig carefully walked up to the edge and peered down. There was Moore at the bottom of a narrow well. It was constructed of stacked stones and some 50 feet deep. The man was fully immersed in the cold water and bleeding from his head. His eyes bulged in fear.

“You’re gonna help me, right?” Moore screamed up. “You gotta help me!”

“I’ll help you,” Craig yelled down, “but first you answer me.”

“What?” What do you want to know?” Moore, becoming hysterical, shouted up from the deep well. “I’ll tell you anything!”

“Where’s my partner?” Craig shouted down the hole.

“I don’t know!”

“I’m not going to help you unless you tell me the truth,” Craig shouted back.

“I swear, man, I don’t know! I didn’t do nothing to her! Now please help me!”

“What about Emily Hadly?! Where is she, James?! What did you do to her?!”

James was shivering and gasping. Craig already knew he would not be able to save the man. The water in the well was probably 40-50 degrees, and Moore was likely 50 feet down the well. By the time Craig ran back for help and returned, James would be near death or dead from hypothermia. Also, Craig knew he couldn’t pull him out. He and Cadie together would not be able to pull out the dead weight of a 200-pound man. He also knew Martha would be of no use.

“Are you going to get help?” James screamed up the well. “I need help, man!”

As conflicted as he felt, Craig realized the finality of Moore's predicament. He also understood that this would be his only opportunity to question the man.

"I will," Craig lied, "but you need to tell me what you did with Dana and Emily."

"I neverr touched themmm, I swear!" James screamed, now slurring his words a bit. "I didn't have anythingg to do with them!"

"But you were found near where Emily went missing, James! And your bedroom walls were covered with articles about her - about her going missing!" Craig yelled. "Why, James?! Why is that?"

"I don't know! I'm a sick fucker! I like little girls. I'm sorry! Just please help me! I'm not going to last down here," James pleaded.

"Is Emily on this property?" Craig yelled down. He could tell James was weakening.

"No! I told yyyou! I didn't hurttt Emily!" James slurred. Then he said something Craig couldn't understand.

"What did you say?!" Craig yelled.

"If I tell yyyou, will you helpp me?" James moaned.

"Yes, tell me!"

"Okay, there is a girl!" James cried out. He was now convulsing.

"What did you do to this girl, James?! Where is she? Is she dead?"

James, beginning to mumble and become confused, yelled weakly, "Yeah, she's dead! She in the workshop! With your officer! In the pit. So, are you gonna helppp me? I'm dying, man!"

Immediately, Craig darted from the hole and sprinted through the woods, dodging trees while branches tore at his face, racing toward Moore's workshop. He could hear James's screams, but he didn't care. He needed to find Dana. And the little girl.

Chapter 44

A Body in the Pit

Craig made it to the clearing, and Cadie and Max were still lying on the blood-soaked ground. The winds whipped Cadie's hair all around her head, so Craig could barely make out her face. The tourniquet had worked; Max was not bleeding. Cadie was sitting adjacent to him and had his leg elevated on a bunched jacket and her coat over him to keep him warm. Still, he was shivering profusely, so Cadie was transferring her body heat to him the best she could. When she saw Craig, she shouted.

"Where's Dana?!"

"I think I know," Craig yelled. "I'm going to go get her. How's Max doing?"

"He's going to be okay," Cadie shouted.

Craig ran up. He bent over to get close to Max.

"Thanks for saving my life, buddy."

Max tried to smile weakly.

"You're welcome," Max whispered. "But enough about me. Go find Dana."

"Please, Craig, find Dana," Cadie begged, her eyes tearing up.

They heard sirens in the distance.

"I will!"

Craig took off running toward the direction he last saw Dana. After a few minutes, he spied the workshop surrounded by wood and clutter. He pulled open the heavy door and was immediately assaulted by the smell of death. Over his career, Craig had smelled decomposing remains, and it was a pungent stench you never forgot. Sweet and sickly. He gagged as he entered the long, narrow building.

“Dana! Dana! Are you in here?” he screamed.

At first, nothing. He yelled again.

Then Craig heard a noise at the back. There was a dull, single light on overhead, and its rays allowed him to make his way back through the labyrinth of dirty tools and rusty paint cans.

“Dana, I’m coming!”

The noise in the back grew louder. But where was it coming from? He heard pounding. Finally, he reached the back and heard Dana’s screams.

“I’m down here, Craig,” she yelled. “Under the door. That bastard locked me in!”

Craig looked down and saw the wooden door in the floor with a lock attached.

“I’ll get you out, Dana,” Craig yelled. “I’ve got to find a hammer to break the lock.”

“Please hurry!” Dana yelled. “There’s something dead down here!”

Craig quickly rummaged through the tools on an old shelf until he found a small sledgehammer. He returned to the door, knelt down, and hammered the rusted lock. After a few minutes, it broke open.

Craig quickly lifted up the wood door and immediately saw Dana’s dusty face staring up at him. She was balanced on an old wooden ladder.

“Oh, thank god!” Dana yelled, coughing and shaking. “I was about to lose it! Something is down there, Craig. It must be a body.”

“Oh, yeah, it definitely smells that way,” Craig said. “You don’t have a flashlight on you?”

“No, it’s in the car. You don’t have yours?”

“It’s being used right now,” Craig said. “I’ll explain later. Just get out of there,” Craig said, offering Dana his hand. “We’ll get the State Police to bring in a response team for the body.”

“Do you think it’s Emily?” Dana asked, stepping gingerly out of the pit.

“I’m not sure. Moore was hard to understand. First, he said he didn’t hurt Emily. Then he said there was a dead girl on the property,” Craig replied. “So, it’s hard to know.”

“It’s also hard to believe a sociopath,” Dana replied, coughing once again.

“True enough,” Craig added.

Dana stood up and wiped dirt from her face with her sleeve. She noticed Craig’s face was all scratched and bleeding.

“Where’s Moore? I heard gunshots. I’m so sorry I wasn’t able to back you up.”

“Moore’s dead. Well, almost dead. He’s in the bottom of a well,” Craig answered matter-of-factly. “I was chasing him, then all of a sudden, he was gone. He fell into an old logging camp well, and there’s no way to get him out. Oh, and Max got shot.”

“What?!” Dana screamed. “Max got shot?!” She began running toward the front of the building, pushing tools aside as she ran.

“He’s okay, Dana! He got shot in the leg! Cadie is with him!”

As Dana neared the door, she heard the sirens in the distance.

“I can’t believe he got shot! Oh my god, what did I do, bringing those two out here?!”

“Dana, they’re fine. Max is going to be okay,” Craig assured, catching up to her. “We’ll get Max to Munson, and they’ll stitch him up good as new.”

“Oh, thank god,” Dana answered, breathing hard and exhausted from being trapped in the dark with a decomposing body.

“Are we all heading to Munson? Is that the plan?” Craig asked as they ran through the woods toward the clearing. He was now fully aware he had injured his shoulder. He was having a tough time lifting his arm.

Dana noticed him running funny.

“You and Max need to go to the hospital!” Dana yelled. “I still want to fly up to Grand Island, Craig. I have to talk to Barbara Whitecloud. We’re so close.”

“Okay, I wasn’t sure if you would still want to head up there,” Craig replied. “The weather seems to be getting worse. But I can follow the ambulance and make sure Max makes it safely to Munson. I’m sure you can get one of the officers to take you to the West Shore Bay airfield. Do you think Cadie is still going to want to head up there?”

“Knowing Cadie, that would be a yes, but I probably should put my foot down and say no after what’s gone on today,” Dana answered. “I just feel like shit. I never should’ve brought Cadie and Max out with us.”

“Dana, they’re adults studying criminal science,” Craig said. “They’re going to be in harm’s way. That’s part of the job, and you know it. You can’t protect them. They’re not kids anymore. And Cadie is too stubborn for both of us.”

The two continued running through the woods. They could hear the sirens and see vehicle lights filtering through the blowing trees. The air was now cold, almost crisp.

“I know, Craig, but we lost Cadie’s parents, and we almost lost Cadie. If we were to lose Max, then I would just be done.”

“Well, you didn’t lose anybody today. In fact, you discovered a body, and that’s going to bring peace to some grieving family.”

“Who is it, Craig? Whose body is down there?” Dana yelled as they continued running toward the cabin, her heart breaking for another murdered child. She prayed it wasn’t Emily Hadly but immediately felt guilty for wanting it to be someone else. A child was dead down there, and it didn’t matter who it was. No one deserved to die like that.

Cadie was insistent that her parents inferred Emily was alive, and who was Dana to doubt it? A retired police sergeant certainly didn’t have all the answers to what happens after we die. She was simply a public servant trying to do some good in this world. She didn’t pretend to have cosmic knowledge. She could only pray that Cadie and her parents were right.

And, wrong as it might be, she still prayed the dead body didn't belong to Emily Hadly.

Chapter 45

Flight to Marquette
Questioning the Babysitter

The plane shuddered, and Cadie looked anxiously out the small window of the twin-engine Cessna. She was thinking about Emily Hadly and the body in the pit on Moore's property. Would it turn out to be Emily? Through the window, she saw dark clouds and the deep, dark waters of Lake Michigan below. Purple-gray clouds twisted above them. She could make out the Manitou Islands covered in red and orange leaves as the small, trembling aircraft climbed to a cruising altitude of 8,000 feet. The blue lake looked more like an endless ocean as it stretched to the horizon.

The flight to Marquette was roughly 160 miles, and the local pilot, Karen Copeman, told Dana and Cadie the trip to Michigan's Upper Peninsula would take about 60 minutes. It was another 50-minute drive from Marquette to Munising. From there, the ferry ride to the island was just 10 minutes. So, in over two hours, Cadie and Dana would hopefully meet with Barbara Whitecloud on Grand Island. The island was 13,000 acres with impressive 300-foot sandstone cliffs. There were no cars, so most of the year-round residents lived in Williams Landing to the south. Barbara lived in a cabin in North Point. They would hopefully find out one way or another if Barbara's brother had anything to do with Emily's disappearance. Both women still wondered, though, about James Moore and Sherman Sawhill.

An injured Craig Kitchen had accompanied Max Clark to Munson Hospital in Traverse City. Dana had already received a text from Craig that Max was "in great hands and doing great. The shot went completely through his outer thigh and missed anything major."

Craig also texted, "They're caring for the wound right now. Max is sedated and holding his own."

Dana felt terrible about what had happened to Max. He was a good and brave young man. She hoped he would heal quickly and be able to return to the track team. She could tell how much the team meant to him. Dana worried how he would be impacted if he was unable to continue?

She also worried she had made an error in judgement bringing Cadie and Max along with her, but Craig made a good point. They were adults, not children. And they had chosen a field that sometimes involves danger. She just hadn't planned on someone getting shot today, let alone Max. Yet, no one ever does. She also didn't know if she was going to tell Cadie about Lawson, about his missing his probation meeting. She decided to keep that to herself for a while. Her thoughts then turned to the body in the pit.

Is the little girl Emily Hadly? If not, who is it?

Just then, Dana's phone buzzed. It was a call from Jake. Finally! She was getting concerned about his visit with Sawhill.

"Hey, Karen, can I take this call?" Dana asked the pilot up front.

"Yeah, just make it quick. In these conditions, you don't want me relying on just my instrument panel," Karen said loudly.

Dana answered the phone.

"Hey there, I was getting worried about you. How did it go with Sawhill?"

"I wish I had better news. Sawhill got away."

Dana put the call on speakerphone.

"What? How?"

"Well, we located him at his mom's house, but he wouldn't come out. Just kept yelling at us through the window. He even fired a gun at us."

"Oh my god!" Dana yelled out. "What's with the gunfire today?! Are you hurt? Is Jeb hurt?"

“No, nothing like that. We’re not hurt,” Jake replied almost ruefully, “but we let the bastard slip. He got out through a crawlspace hatch. It was only Jeb and me at the time, and we had eyeballs on the place, but he outsmarted us.”

“So, what now? Where do you think he is?”

“He’s somewhere in the woods behind his house,” Jake answered. “Jeb called the local cops, and they’re hunting him right now. I sure hope they find him because, quite frankly, I think he could be our guy.”

“Why do you say that?” Dana almost yelled into the phone. Her fingers were turning white from gripping the cellphone so hard.

Cadie stared at her mentor, listening to every word.

“Well, when we searched his house, we found some things. We found kiddie porn.”

“Well, all these creeps have kiddie porn,” Dana responded. “That doesn’t mean much.”

Suddenly, she could feel a sharp pain. Her stress ulcer was acting up.

“Yeah, but we also found a rape kit in his garage. And little girl’s clothing.”

Dana gasped.

“Oh, shit.”

“Sawhill had a cellar in his garage that was covered with a tarp. That’s where the rape kit and clothing were found. The locals are still searching it. It was actually quite large with a lot of junk in it.”

“Oh, man,” Dana exhaled. “This does not sound good. I was really hoping to cross him off our list.”

“Yeah, and there’s one more thing. One of the cops found a girl’s ponytail holder in the cellar. It was red.”

Cadie, who could hear everything, locked eyes with Dana.

“Emily was wearing a red bathing suit when she went missing,” Cadie whispered to Dana.

Dana nodded at Cadie silently and spoke to Jake.

“Let me know if they find anything else,” Dana said. “And when they grab Sawhill and bring him in.”

“I will,” Jake answered. “Jeb already sent the ponytail holder to the Wisconsin State Crime Laboratory. Hopefully, there’s some DNA on it. How did it go with Moore?”

Just then, the plane banked hard. Cadie and Dana grabbed onto their armrests.

“Hold on, ladies!” Karen yelled from the front. The plane shuddered, and Cadie closed her eyes. Dana gripped the seat tightly with her left hand.

After a scary minute, the plane settled down.

“Dana! Are you there?! What’s going on?!” Jake yelled in the phone.

“Nothing. Just turbulence.”

“God, you scared me,” Jake laughed nervously. “I hate small planes.”

“I’m not a fan at the moment myself.”

“Okay, you’re were about to tell me what went on at Moore’s place. So, what happened?”

“Well, let’s just say it was interesting.”

Dana shared what happened on Moore’s property, although she didn’t mention being imprisoned in a pit with a corpse. She didn’t feel the need to make Jake worry, and she knew he would. Then she told him what happened to Max. Jake, of course, was immediately concerned, but Dana explained Max was okay. Craig had given her the good news.

“I also wanted to tell you something disturbing. We found the remains of a body on Moore’s property. One of the officers texted me and said they found some teeth in the remains, so we may have an ID on the body sooner rather than later,” Dana said, her voice catching.

“Was it a child?” Jake asked seriously.

“Yes, it was,” Dana replied. “It was stabbed to death. Some bones showed cut marks.”

“Oh, god, that’s terrible,” Jake replied.

Dana glanced at Cadie, and the young woman’s head was bowed. Cadie was praying that the remains didn’t belong to Emily Hadly. The mention of cut marks reminded her of the bones on the metal tray.

“Of course, I’ll let you know as soon as I hear more,” Dana said.

Dana then asked Jake if he was still planning to fly to Marquette to join them.

“I’m having a hard time finding a plane. The one I was supposed to fly up in developed a fuel flow issue, so it’s grounded for now. I’m going to try and find another flight, though. Nick wants to fly up with me.”

Dana could hear the tension in Jake’s voice. She knew he really wanted to be there with them and was also concerned about Nick. Both Jake and Dana worried about the headstrong Cadie and Nick, too, who sadly carried guilt that wasn’t his to carry.

“We’ll be alright,” Dana told him. “We’re going to have a friendly chat with Barbara and get a feel if she knows anything. Then we’ll head home. Text me later about Sawhill.”

Dana didn’t want to tell Jake what she had on Barbara to make her talk. She knew it would worry him.

“I’ll definitely text you later. Be careful up there, okay? I think the weather is getting worse. Oh, and you mentioned Barbara had a brother that Heidi didn’t like. Are you going to visit the brother?”

“I’m going to try,” Dana answered. “Heidi called the brother ‘surly.’ Said he reminded her of someone. I asked her who, but she wouldn’t tell me.”

“Heidi seems to be keeping a few secrets,” Jake said. “I’m really starting to wonder why.”

“I agree,” Dana replied. “She didn’t want to tell us who the laugh reminded her of the day Emily went missing, and she didn’t want to tell us about Barbara’s brother. Hopefully, we can talk to both today. My contact in Munising did some poking around and said Barbara was at her cabin.”

“What about the brother?”

“I think the brother lives farther up the coast near North Point Lighthouse, so we’ll head up there after we’re done with Barbara if we have time. My contact has a buddy who’ll meet us at the ferry terminal and drive us to Barbara’s,” Dana said.

“Well, keep me posted. I also wanted to tell you something,” Jake said.

Just then, the plane shook hard again. Cadie shot Dana a look. She had never flown in such a small plane. The clouds outside the window were thicker now, dense like dark blue fabric.

“It’s okay,” Dana said to Cadie. “We’re going to be fine.”

“Oh, I know,” Cadie answered, “it’s just lake wind forcing air up into the stable air. But tell that to my brain and nervous system. They have a mind of their own!”

Dana grinned.

“You guys doing alright back there?” Karen asked.

“We’re okay,” Dana replied. “A little turbulence won’t kill us.”

“You might want to wrap up that phone call,” Karen said. “I’m going to climb higher and see if I can get above this.”

Dana returned to Jake.

“So, what is it?” Dana asked. “I need to hurry and get off this call. What did you forget to tell me?”

“I heard back from Anne Breyer. She does remember a white van parking on that street occasionally and around the time Emily was kidnapped.”

“Oh my god! Really?” Dana said enthusiastically, sitting up in her seat a bit higher. Finally, some good news.

Cadie heard and watched Dana intently in the trembling Cessna.

“Does she remember anything about the van?”

“Unfortunately, no.”

“Did she see the driver?” Dana asked.

“Well, sort of,” Jake replied. “She said she would see the van parked there from time to time and wondered why. So, one day she walked down the street. She saw that the guy was just eating lunch, so she didn’t think much about it.”

“Did she recognize him?”

“Anne said her eyesight hasn’t been good for a long time, so no, she couldn’t tell who it was. This was all in a voicemail she left me. I’ll give her a call to see if she can remember anything else.”

“Good work,” Dana answered.

Jake could hear the warmth in her voice. He was thankful and wondered if it meant more. When this investigation was over, he wanted to ask Dana out for dinner. He wondered if she would say yes. If she felt the same way he did.

“You, too, Sarge,” Jake smiled back. “You know, we might just solve this thing.”

“We just might,” Dana answered.

“Stay safe.”

“You, too.”

After they hung up, Dana looked over at Cadie who was looking out the window. She recalled what the young woman shared with her - the words of her father: “Follow the north wind. Follow the blood.” Well, they were certainly heading north, even flying on the north wind, but what did “follow the blood” mean?

Those words made her pause. Was the girl in the pit Emily? Or, would they discover Emily Hadly in their investigation? Dana hoped that they weren’t going to find Emily’s bones or the 20-year-old woman covered in blood. Cadie said her parents told her that Emily was in danger.

Dana tried to hold onto Cadie’s belief that Emily was alive, just waiting for them to rescue her, but it was hard to believe. Dana looked out the window and saw Michigan’s Upper Peninsula growing closer.

“Gie it laldy” was what Cadie’s father supposedly whispered in his daughter’s ear. Dana’s thoughts turned to Thomas, Cadie’s kind-hearted father who loved his only child so much.

I am going to give it my best, Thomas McLeod, I promise you. I’m going to gie it laldy. If that girl is still out there, we’re going to find her.

Chapter 46

The Man
Betrayed by Family

The man walked the family property until he reached The Big Lake. He looked out over the deep, dark lake that seemed to mirror his very soul. The waves that crashed against the rugged shore matched the tempestuous feelings of his own damaged heart. Perhaps in some small measure he dreaded what he was about to do, but none of this was his fault. He was foolish to think killing Dana Bakker would put an end to the investigation. Plus, he knew what he had to do – and why.

It has to be tomorrow.

He left the shore of The Big Lake and walked into his shed. As he knew this day would come, over the years he had amassed a variety of necessary tools that were now spread out on a table before him. A gleaming Ka-bar knife, taser, large lawn bags, zip ties, duct tape, rope, heavy-duty gloves, a jug and spray bottle of bleach, change of clothes, chloroform, and a mask (he knew enough not to purchase these items at the last minute, all at once, and be caught on camera). The man was able to procure chloroform through his business, a small coastal supply company that his asshole of a father passed down to him like an ever-tightening noose.

At least the fucker gave me something.

Unlike the movies, the man knew he would have to press the rag drenched in chloroform on Lena's nose and mouth for up to five minutes. She would struggle, but he knew he could do it. His entire life was fueled by victimhood, envy, hatred, and a need to win. He still wasn't sure if he would kill her first or throw her into the sinkhole alive.

I'll enjoy shoving that rag into Lena's face. Watching her fight for her life.

On the edge of the property along the lake was a small cabin. The man went inside and poured himself a whiskey in his father's hand-cut Baccarat tumbler, and his eye traveled to an old family photo. It was in a genuine gold and velvet frame looking out from a costly Italian curio cabinet with carvings and gold leaf.

Dad always had nice things. But where were our nice things, dad?

The man remembered the day the photo was taken – a sweltering June day when his seemingly perfect family climbed up and posed on a picnic table on a Lake Michigan beach. The boy thought, "I have the best family ever!" He was clearly naïve about the goings on between his mother and father and his father and other women. How could he know, though? He was just a child and loved his parents. But, as time wore on, he saw his father for who he really was. And, of course, his mother left them.

They betrayed us.

Tears welled in his eyes.

He spied his father's red leather Bible in the cabinet, the book his dad loved to quote at dinnertime but didn't like to live by. Exodus 20 and 34 came to mind: "the sins of the father." The Bible says a parent's wrongdoings are inflicted upon his children and his children's children. Even Shakespeare knew this truth. "The sins of the father are to be laid upon the children."

So, what choice did the man truly have?

My father's sins were laid upon me. None of this is my doing.

The man went back into the shed and loaded the items into an army green duffle bag. He threw in a few granola bars and a plastic bottle of water. Then he took the duffle bag outside and put it in the back of his van. Finally, he grabbed the old shovel. It had been his father's shovel. He remembered the times he watched his father bury chipmunks he had killed in their backyard. The man studied the instrument and recalled the dripping blood and tiny, dead animals piled one on top of each other. The man was horrified, but his father didn't seem to care about the little lives he snuffed out.

Now, all these years later, he considered the irony of using his father's shovel to bury Lena. The man threw the blood-stained tool in the van and slammed the door.

Chapter 47

Grand Island
Barbara and the Brother

After their Cessna made a shaky landing at the Marquette Sawyer Regional Airport, Dana and Cadie picked up their rental car and made the 50-minute lakeside drive to Munising. On any other day, the breathtaking views of crashing waves would be the center of attention. However, both women were preoccupied with finding Emily Hadly and hardly noticed the vast and churning Great Lake Superior and the strong winds that buffeted the car. Cadie had a growing premonition that whatever situation Emily Hadly was in, it was growing worse and becoming more dangerous. They needed to find Emily and fast. Cadie also asked Dana if she had heard anything about Lawson. Dana said no – she hated to lie – but she thought that this was not the right time to bring more stress to the situation. Dana and Cadie reached the Grand Island Landing Dock and took the five-minute ferry ride across the choppy Munising Harbor to Grand Island. The small, open-air pontoon tossed in the deep, dark unstable waves. However, the bumpy ride did allow for views of the Upper Peninsula coastline and beaches, lush forests and bluffs, massive sandstone cliffs, and even some small sea caves with carved chambers and jagged walls. A few daring kayakers sliced through the rough, blackish waves by the wooden East Channel Lighthouse, drawing the women's eye towards the area in which Barbara Whitecloud lived.

Once they reached the island and disembarked onto the rustic dock, the ten passengers dispersed on foot or mountain bikes toward their intended destinations. Dana paced the wooden dock and looked up at the darkening sky with fast-moving clouds. She brushed bangs from her face, while Cadie watched a family of loons with their black heads and red eyes paddle in the choppy water close to the sandstone bluffs. It might have seemed Cadie was enjoying the natural beauty, but inside she was increasingly anxious about the fate of Emily Hadly.

Did Sherman Sawhill kill her? Did Moore? What about Barbara's brother? Are we going to find Emily on this island? Are you here, Emily? Did Barbara or her brother hurt you? Murder you?

Cadie tried to hold fast to her parents' whispers, that Emily was alive, but sometimes doubts crept in. And if Emily was alive, Cadie wondered about her mental or physical condition. She hadn't given much thought to that. Her goal these last days was simply to locate the young woman - to bring her home to Heidi and Louis. Now, reality was setting in. Emily might be so horribly damaged that a happy life was no longer possible. Cadie thought about her own life, about all she had to endure after her own ordeal three years ago. To say that recovery was tough – if recovery was even possible - was a huge understatement.

Do you ever recover from a kidnapping?

Cadie thought that no one could truly understand, that no one could relate to the battle that takes place after someone is abducted and fights for their life. And Emily had been missing 14 years. That's a long time to live at the hands of an abductor. She thought about Elizabeth Smart. Elizabeth had been with her captors in and out of public but was too traumatized to seek help, and she was only gone from her family for nine months. So, after 14 years, what state would Emily be in?

Suddenly, the women heard a high-pitched hum. A pale, mint-green side-by-side with a vinyl decal of an evergreen pine tree quickly emerged from the forest, its driver enclosed in a fiberglass cab. It pulled up beside Dana on the dock. The driver, Zeba Madosh, stepped out.

"At your service," the man exclaimed brightly. "Let's hurry. The winds are picking up."

He quickly ushered the women to the Polaris Ranger with his hand. He was dressed in dark, green work pants and a light tan shirt with a shoulder patch and nameplate above the right breast pocket. Dana studied the man with dark hair and one long braid made of three, intertwined strands. Dana had learned from a colleague in Munising that Madosh worked for the US Forest Service as a Heritage &

Archaeology Specialist. She was impressed by his work protecting Grand Island's historical and Ojibwe sites like burial grounds and cultural artifacts.

Cousins politely opened the doors, and the two women got situated in his four-seater, with Dana sitting shotgun and Cadie in the back. Minutes later, the agile vehicle was navigating rocks and the twisting, turning, and uneven trails with ease, heading toward North Point and Barbara Whitecloud's cabin. Above them, trees swayed in the growing winds, while their leaves took flight and churned in the air. It seemed clear a storm was on its way.

After visiting Moore's property and hearing about Jake's afternoon with Sawhill, Dana now turned to Barbara Whitecloud and her surly brother. Did they have something to do with Emily's disappearance? In minutes, she planned to find out.

Chapter 48

Nick Brennan
Trust Me

On the way to Munising, Cadie had called Nick. He had already spoken to his father, so he knew about the flight situation. His dad was able to secure a flight to Traverse City, though and would be heading back to Michigan.

Cadie told Nick everything that had transpired in West Shore Bay. She detailed the death of James Moore at the bottom of a well and the shooting of her colleague Max Clark – also how she used the expensive leather belt Nick gave her for Christmas to apply a tourniquet to the man's upper thigh. Although Nick was thankful for Cadie's quick thinking, if he was honest, it bothered him thinking about his girlfriend's hand on this guy's muscular thigh, especially since a few of his buddies had told him Max Clark was quite the stud. Nick, though, felt guilty for having such a jealous reaction.

Jesus, knock it off, will you? You're reacting like a child. That guy is a goddamn hero.

As Cadie relayed the events, Nick was driving and had Cadie on speakerphone. It was a good thing he did because he was not reacting well to the news of Cadie being mere feet away from a shooting. His hands were shaking on the wheel, and he felt sick to his stomach – like he might have to pull over to puke. But he knew better than to say anything. Cadie had chosen this internship and this line of work. If anything, Nick knew he had to toughen up and support Cadie and be strong for her. God only knew what the future might hold and the situations his girlfriend might find herself in.

Now that Cadie was in the UP, Nick changed his plans.

"I'm driving up there, Cadie," he told her. "I don't know why, but I'm having some strange feelings."

"About what exactly?" Cadie asked.

“I don’t know. Something is weighing on my mind, but I’m not sure what. I just feel I should be up there. I feel you are going to need my help. I also brought my laptop – to do research on the case tonight.”

“Oh, that sounds good. But you know I don’t expect you to save me, right? I get it that you want to be my knight in shining armor. You want to protect me. But I’m going to be fine. I’m a pretty tough girl, you know.

“Of course I do,” Nick replied. “I know that better than anyone.”

“Then you just have to trust me when I say I can take care of myself. Dana is with me, and you know Dana is a total badass.”

“I absolutely do know that,” Nick laughed. “She may be more of a badass than my dad. And I do know you can take care of yourself. I just have this gut feeling, and I want to help in any way I can.”

“Are you going to have gut feelings every time I’m out somewhere on a case?” Cadie asked.

“No,” Nick responded. “I promise I’ll do better in the future.”

“I do love you so much, Nick,” Cadie said quietly, turning her head and phone away from Dana. “I’ve really miss you.”

“I miss you, too, Cadie Bug. So much,” Nick said. “Maybe our time apart is also responsible for the way I’m feeling today. Maybe I just miss you a lot and want to be with you. So, where are you going to be next? I’ll meet you there.”

“We’re headed to Grand Island to visit Barbara Whitecloud,” Cadie replied. “If nothing pans out there, I honestly don’t know what we’ll do next. I still believe Emily is alive and in danger. We had three persons of interest: James Moore, Sherman Sawhill, and Barbara Whitecloud. So far, there’s nothing to tie Moore and Sawhill to Emily’s disappearance, although the remains found in Moore’s workshop are being analyzed, and they’re still searching Sawhill’s place. He’s somewhere on his

property, and they're searching for him. Jake found a rape kit and some little girl clothing as well as a red ponytail holder in Sawhill's garage."

"That's disgusting," Nick muttered.

"Yeah, it is. I'm hopeful they'll find something more to tie them to Emily, but of course I want them to find Emily alive. But if those two didn't take Emily, and Barbara Whitecloud isn't involved in any way, I fear we're back to square one. In that case, we'll just drive home. In fact, I might be headed back to Harbor Cove tonight. Yet, I'm starting to think Barbara Whitecloud and her brother had something to do with Emily's abduction."

"Okay, let me know," Nick said. "I'm still headed up 75. I'll stop and get a bite to eat. Call me after you've met with Barbara Whitecloud."

"Okay, that sounds good," Cadie said. "Wish us luck today that we find good news about Emily."

Cadie was quiet for a moment. Nick almost thought the call had cut out, but then she spoke.

"Can I tell you something without you freaking out?"

"Okay, what?" Nick replied a bit anxiously.

"I'm also having a bad feeling. My gut is also telling me something's wrong. I truly feel Emily is in imminent danger. It's weird, but it's like I'm channeling her."

"Channeling her? What do you mean?" Nick asked in confusion.

"It's like the things we have suffered have made us kindred spirits," Cadie explained. "And her spirit as well as my parents' spirits are guiding me right now."

"That's a lot of spirits," Nick replied half-jokingly. "Maybe I'm channeling her, too. I keep thinking about her. I feel like there is something gnawing at my brain, but I don't know what. Listen, I'm pulling off the highway now. Call me after you meet with Whitecloud. And please stay safe in the meantime, okay? You're not John McClane."

"I thought you said I wasn't Rambo," Cadie laughed.

“Okay, okay, you got me,” Nick laughed. “Call me later, okay?”

“You know I will.”

Chapter 49

Grand Island
A Secret from the Past

After 15 minutes of driving through thick forest, winds pushing against their small vehicle, the side-by-by entered a narrow dirt lane encased in towering red oak trees. The 90-foot trees with their large spreads created a considerable canopy that made the dark lane seem strange and haunting. In a small clearing up ahead was Barbara's home with a car parked out front. Zeba pulled up to the small, knotty pine cabin, and the women got out.

"I'll be right here waiting for you," Zeba said. "I haven't heard great things about the lady you're about to see. Or her brother."

Dana looked at Zeba. She wondered if he knew what she knew.

"Well, I really appreciate you waiting for us," Dana said.

The last thing Dana wanted was to be abandoned in this creepy place. She thought about Emily being imprisoned here by Barbara's brother, and that made the place even more menacing. She felt much better knowing Zeba would be waiting outside for them the entire time.

Dana and Cadie surveyed the cabin and its property. It was completely isolated - surrounded by thick forest on every side. The sky was dark and cloudy, making the interior of the dense Grand Island woods more unwelcoming.

Both women thought how terrifying life would've been for Emily if she were imprisoned here by Barbara and her brother for 14 years. They walked up the yellowish, knotty pine steps, and Dana stepped up to the oversized door and knocked hard. Both women began to feel that the answers they sought were only feet away.

After what Heidi told us, that Barbara never had children of her own and had a special bond with Emily, well, it makes sense that Barbara took her. Desperate women commit desperate acts.

Suddenly, Cadie felt a rush of air from overhead and looked up. There it was: an owl right above her. Its coloring was different, but its bright yellow eyes locked with Cadie's. It vigorously flapped its wings against the wind gusts, struggling to fly in a straight line. Cadie sensed the owl was here for her – to give her another message; somehow, she felt its urgency.

She watched the raptor fly away into a nearby oak tree, spread its broad wings, and land on a branch. From its swaying perch, it stared at Cadie, and they locked eyes. The young woman immediately had an epiphany: they might be on the wrong path – that Barbara and her brother had nothing to do with Emily's disappearance. That something else was going on – something just out of mind's reach. But they were here now, standing on the porch, so they would see it through. Yet, Cadie couldn't shake the feeling that there was someone else responsible for taking Emily – not Barbara Whitecloud or her brother.

But what if I'm wrong?

She looked over, and the owl was still watching her intently. She felt a strange shift in the energy surrounding her.

He's sending me this message.

The spell was broken when Cadie and Dana heard someone on the other side of the door. It slowly opened, and an unusually tall woman in long, dark braids and a tank top answered the door. She had dark eyes and high cheekbones, and the tendrils of hair framing her face were white and gray. The deep wrinkles in her bronze face suggested a life of hardship - mental if not physical. Her crossed arms suggested she was not happy to have visitors.

"Barbara Whitecloud?" Dana said, eyeing the woman.

"Who wants to know?" she asked.

“My name is Dana Bakker. I’m assisting the state police on the Emily Hadly case.”

As soon as Dana spoke Emily’s name, Barbara’s shoulders dropped. Cadie noticed the woman’s hands shaking.

“What does this have to do with me?” Barbara asked nervously.

“Can we come in?” Dana asked. “We just want to ask you some questions.”

Barbara was silent for a moment, thinking about her response. Cadie noticed there was no ring on Barbara’s left hand.

Does she live here alone? Without her brother?

Cadie turned and took one last look at the owl, and then it flew away. She turned and peered into the cabin past the woman in the doorway. She didn’t notice any movement. Finally, Barbara answered.

“Okay, come in. But I don’t know what I can tell you. It was a long time ago that I knew the Hadlys.”

Barbara walked quickly through the small, sparsely decorated living room and showed them to her kitchen table. She motioned for them to sit down. As they walked through, Dana saw a gun resting on a side table. Her level of anxiety immediately shot up. Dana and Cadie took a seat while Barbara stood between them and the gun.

“What do you want to know?” the woman asked brusquely. Her confidence had reasserted itself.

“Like I said, it’s been a long time since I was around the Hadlys. I don’t see how I can help you.”

Dana cleared her throat in the dark, humid room. The dust in the cabin scratched her vocal cords. The clock on the kitchen wall made an annoying rhythmic ticking. Nothing about the home filled with stale air was inviting.

“We want to know about your brother,” Dana said brusquely.

“My brother?” Barbara exclaimed, her eyes scrunching. “Why in the hell would you want to know about Myeengun?”

The woman's scowl became more pronounced. She was getting angry. Just then a strong wind pushed against the home, making the cheap windows rattle against their wooden beading. Dana wondered if Emily was dead or imprisoned somewhere on this unsettling property.

"We want to know about your brother because Heidi Hadly didn't like him," Cadie asserted.

There was a moment of silence while Barbara gathered her thoughts. She glared at the women.

"You know, I'm like a mother to Myeengun," Barbara said. "He doesn't have anyone else. And I get that people don't like him. He's diagnosed schizophrenic, and he doesn't take his meds, so, yeah, he scares people, and he can get a little out of hand at times. That's why we moved up here."

Cadie was beginning to doubt the owl. Maybe Myeengun was their bad guy.

"Where is Myeengun now?" Dana asked.

There was another moment of silence. Finally, in a gravely smoker's voice, Barbara said,

"I don't know."

Dana and Cadie looked at each other. They didn't believe her.

"If you're like a mother to him, how do you not know where he is?" Dana scoffed. "I thought he lived north of here?"

Barbara's eyes narrowed.

"Why do you want to know? Do you really think he had something to do with Emily going missing? Because if you do, that's ridiculous. Myeengun didn't do anything."

"Myeengun means wolf, doesn't it?" Cadie asked.

"Yeah, so?"

"Do you think your brother is a wolf, Barbara?" Cadie said. "A big, bad wolf that carries off little girls?"

Barbara scowled at Cadie who was glad that Dana was there with her. In that moment, Barbara seemed quite imposing, and Cadie noticed her strong, ripped arms. Barbara walked into the kitchen and fumbled through the clutter on the counter for her cigarettes.

“Myeengun would never kill anyone,” Barbara growled, her backed turned to the women.

Both Dana and Cadie were taken aback. No one had used the word kill. Barbara was silent for a moment - thinking. Finally, she turned around, relenting.

“Myeengun lives about 20 minutes to the north. He lives in my cabin along the lake.”

“Is he there now?” Dana said.

“I don’t know.”

Cadie looked over at Dana. Neither woman believed Barbara.

“Do you give us permission to search his house and property?” Dana said.

“Really?” Barbara answered, exasperated. “You really need to do that?”

“Yeah, we really do,” Cadie said.

“Jesus, okay,” Barbara said. “But you’re not going to find anything. Yeah, Myeengun can act strangely due to his illness, but he’s no killer.”

“We’ll see about that,” Cadie said under her breath.

“You were a babysitter for the Hadlys, correct?” Dana asked, shifting in her chair.

“Yes, that’s right,” Barbara replied cooly. “But only for a few months.”

“But in the months before Emily disappeared?”

“Yeah,” Barbara said. “That’s right.”

She was now glowering at the women.

“And you never had children of your own?” Cadie piped in.

Barbara shot Cadie a nasty look.

“No, I never had children. That doesn’t mean I took Emily if that’s what you’re thinking,” Barbara hissed.

“I didn’t say that you did,” Cadie replied evenly. “It’s just sometimes women who don’t have children of their own become overly attached to someone else’s children. Sometimes, they even abduct them. Did you become overly attached to Emily?”

“No. Of course not. I was just her babysitter, plain and simple.”

“But Heidi told us you loved Emily. That she was very special to you,” Dana interjected, studying the older woman’s face for signs of lying.

“Sure, I guess. I mean, someone had to take care of Emily and think the girl was special,” Barbara answered mysteriously.

The energy in the room suddenly shifted.

“What do you mean?” Cadie questioned. “That someone had to think Emily was special?”

Just then, the cuckoo clock sounded its gong, and a tiny wooden bird popped out from the door to announce the time. Its abrasive “cuck-oo” cut loudly through the small room. As if on cue, a strong gust of wind rattled the kitchen windows, and the light flickered. Barbara leaned against the wall. Everyone waited until the bird finished and the wind subsided. Then Barbara explained.

“Heidi was very involved in charity work and her class. She was gone a lot. And when she was home, she was distant. She and Emily didn’t seem that close, not the way you expect a mother to act with her child. Also, Emily was a very rambunctious girl and loved to run and play. Whenever she had a cut or a bruise, who do you think took care of it? It certainly wasn’t Heidi. I was more like the mom than Heidi ever was.”

Dana and Cadie looked at each other in surprise, yet Cadie recalled Max’s misgivings about Emily’s mom.

“I believe Heidi loves Emily very much,” Dana said. “So, it’s strange you would say that.”

“Oh, I’m sure she loved her – in her own way,” Barbara said, now hunting for her pack of cigarettes on the cluttered counter. “Heidi was just detached. Like she was in her own world. I got the feeling there was a lot going on in Heidi’s head.”

Barbara turned to the counter and finally located the package. She extracted a cigarette.

“Do you mind if I smoke?”

“It’s your house,” Dana replied without emotion.

“Yes, it is,” Barbara answered, eyes flashing and lighting her cigarette with a lighter and taking a long drag. She pulled out a chair and sat down.

“What about Louis, Emily’s dad?” Cadie asked, leaning forward slightly to study Barbara.

“What about him?” Barbara asked, swatting smoke at Dana.

“How did you notice he and Emily getting along?” Cadie said.

“Good. Well, good at first,” Barbara replied. Then she grimaced. She hadn’t meant to say that. It just slipped out.

“What does that mean?” Dana said. “Good at first?”

Barbara took a quick, nervous drag of cigarette. She had said too much. The woman looked up at the ceiling, thinking. Trying to formulate a response that wouldn’t elicit more questions.

“Don’t get me wrong. Louis loved Emily. He really did. But then something happened. Something terrible.”

Barbara then stood up and began pacing the kitchen.

Dana and Cadie glanced at each other and then watched Barbara intently.

“What happened, Barbara?” Cadie asked, using the woman’s first name to build rapport.

Barbara looked out the window over the sink for several moments. It was silent in the cabin except for the ticking of the clock.

“It’s not my story to tell,” she said. “You need to talk to Heidi.”

“Listen, Barbara,” Dana cut in forcefully, her voice becoming louder and stronger. “We have reason to believe Emily is still alive and may be in danger. We need to know what you know right now. This isn’t the time to keep old secrets.”

Barbara’s shoulders jerked back, and she turned to look at the women. Her brown eyes widened. “What?! You think Emily is alive?” How could that possibly be?!”

“I can’t tell you that,” Dana said. “But if you truly care for Emily, you’ll tell us what you know. Right now!”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t help you.”

Barbara crossed her arms and looked to the right.

Dana was tired of playing games.

“I know about the bar fight, Barbara,” Dana said cooly. “I know about the felony you received for helping Myeengun and the year you spent in prison. And if you don’t tell me what you know right now, I’ll make sure you go back.”

At that, both Barbara’s and Cadie’s eyes opened wide.

Suddenly, Barbara surprised both women by bursting out crying. The older woman presented a tough exterior, but now she was crying and moaning.

“Oh my god,” she cried, grabbing onto the kitchen sink to steady herself. “I can’t go back to prison. Please don’t make me go back.”

“Then tell us what you know.”

Barbara continued to cry for a moment and fought to control herself.

Through tears, she said, “Okay, I’ll tell you. But I’m breaking a vow I made to Heidi,” Barbara sniffled. “I promised her I would never tell her secret – that I would never tell another soul. Heidi carries so much shame and guilt.”

The older woman turned and leaned against the sink. She took a moment to compose herself before beginning.

“So, one night, Louis was there when I came over to babysit; he was in the basement doing something. He was usually gone to golf by then. Anyway, I was sitting on the living room floor playing with Emily when Louis came up the basement stairs and walked by us. We were playing with her dolls. He never looked at us. Didn’t say a word to us, not even Emily. I saw his face, and he looked so angry. Heidi was in her bedroom getting ready for her class, and Louis walked back there. Pretty quickly, I could hear them arguing. Then Louis began yelling loudly at Heidi.”

“Did Louis yell at Heidi a lot?” Cadie asked.

“No. Never. Louis adored Heidi,” Barbara responded. “He absolutely worshipped her. I never heard him raise his voice at her. I never even heard him say a cross word to her, which is unbelievable. I mean, don’t most married people bicker at times?”

“Yes, that is unusual,” Cadie said. “So, what happened next?”

Barbara paused. You could tell she didn’t want to continue. This was hard for her. She rubbed her temples and looked down.

“Louis began screaming. I mean, really screaming. I couldn’t believe it. I was so shocked. It got so bad, I was worried the neighbors might call the cops. Then Emily started crying,” Barbara said, shaking her head at the memory. “I was beginning to think I might need to go back there to check on them.”

“What was Louis saying?” Dana asked. “What was he yelling?”

Barbara suddenly put her face in her hands.

“Oh god. I’m sorry, Heidi. I’m so sorry. Please forgive me.”

“What, Barbara? What is it?” Cadie asked, staring at the distraught woman.

Barbara lifted her tear-stained face to look at the women.

“Louis hollered, ‘I found your old diary in the basement! I know Emily isn’t mine! She isn’t my daughter, you fucking bitch! How could you lie to me, Heidi?! How could you lie to me all these years?! How could you?! How could you make me think Emily was my own flesh and blood?!’”

Dana and Cadie sat there completely shocked and numb. It was as if all the air was suddenly sucked out of the room.

Louis wasn’t Emily’s father? Heidi had never said a word. Nothing. Never told police in all these years. This news was a lot to take in and process.

“Barbara, do you know who Emily’s biological father is?” Dana asked.

This news tossed the case completely upside down.

“No, I don’t,” Barbara responded matter-of-factly, still wiping away tears, sniffling, and attempting to regain her composure.

There was a moment of silence in the warm kitchen. Then Barbara continued.

“But neither does Heidi.”

Both women stared. Their mouths literally dropped open.

“What do you mean Heidi doesn’t know who Emily’s father is?” Cadie cried out, incredulous. “How could she not know the father of her own child?”

“She doesn’t know who Emily’s father is,” Barbara answered slowly, “because in high school Heidi Hadly was raped. And the man wore a mask.”

Chapter 50

Harbor Cove 20 Years Ago
The Rape

It was a balmy Friday in September when 15-year-old Heidi Hadly awoke with excitement. Thick, warm air filled the teenager's bedroom that was awash in pinks and purples. Everything in the room spoke of transition – of that in-between time when a girl becomes a teenager. Scattered over the bed was Heidi's childhood collection of worn stuffed animals. In the corner was a red pogo stick. On a nearby shelf was a basket containing colorful Holiday Barbies.

On the other hand, the walls of her small cottage room were adorned with posters of sexy teenage singers and boy bands. A pile of *Tiger Beat* magazines lay scattered on the floor, and steamy romance novels hid under her bed. The books weren't just about sex, though; Heidi Hadly was often lonely and alone. Of course, the books were arousing, but mostly they kept her company and provided a dream. She dreamt that someday, like the novels, she would have a man who loved her and kissed her and held her close.

Heidi threw off her purple comforter and bounded out of bed. It was going to be the best day ever. That Friday was predicted to be an unusually warm 80-degrees, so Heidi's first goal of the morning was choosing her outfit. The students at Harbor Cove High were already talking about a beach party and bonfire - even swimming in Lake Michigan later that night.

Heidi was delighted by the day ahead. Yes, she was cheerful about the party, but more exciting – even thrilling – was a secret rendezvous planned for 9 pm that night. Over the past several weeks, a mystery man had left notes in Heidi's locker. Yesterday, she received a note that said the mystery man would reveal his identity if Heidi would meet him tonight at the alcove at Mariner's Beach. Last night, Heidi was so keyed up she hardly slept a wink.

The young woman did feel guilty, though. She and Louis had been boyfriend and girlfriend for eight months, and Heidi knew how much Louis cared for her. Two weeks ago, as they sat outside Scoops with ice cream dripping down their cones, Louis actually said the 'L' word. Heidi didn't say it back, though. She just took another lick of her mint chip ice cream and stayed silent.

She definitely had strong feelings for the shy young man with dark hair and piercing eyes who was serious and intense but also kind and loyal. Heidi was thankful to have such a person in her life – someone who cared for her and took care of her. Louis even brought groceries over to her house because he knew the Hadly household was often lacking in food. He knew this because he would come over after school, look in the cupboard, and find only pop-tarts and expired cans of soup. Heidi's mother was not about to win mother of the year any time soon.

Over the years, her mother injected a number of questionable men into their lives to solve her problems - mostly financial. Not one of the men

stayed. Agatha Hadly was definitely not known to have good taste in men. And, if a good one did come along, odds are she couldn't keep him.

So, even though Heidi had an adoring boyfriend who stuck to her side like a dryer sheet, she couldn't help but feel a thrill when she found the first note passed through the vent of her green school locker. She remembered that Monday morning when she opened the locker door and saw the tiny envelope resting awkwardly in front of her biology book. Handwritten on the front was a breathtaking salutation: *To the most beautiful girl in Harbor Cove*.

She couldn't believe what she was reading! She looked up and down the hallway – scanning the jostling students for any signs of someone laughing. Was this a joke? A senior prank? She gently slid the note out of the envelope, and what she read on that page would change her life forever.

Hey, beautiful. I've been watching you. You don't know me, but I know you.
I think about you all the time, and I can't wait until we meet.
I think about your gorgeous face and body. Please don't be mad

that I think about your body. I just can't help it. I'm obsessed.

Her hand trembled and her face flushed with giddiness as she folded the note and put it in her jeans pocket. This was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to her!

Over the next two weeks, every morning Heidi raced to her locker and was overjoyed to receive more notes. They were always sweet but becoming more and more sexual - something her boyfriend Louis was not. For all his shining qualities, Louis was reserved and possibly scared of intimacy. His own mother was strange – quiet and standoffish.

Heidi's friends said she would need to take the lead with Louis if she ever wanted more than a peck on the cheek or an arm around her shoulder at football games. And she did want more than that. She craved physical affection and intimacy. Maybe they were right: she did need to take control. Was she even ready for sex? Sometimes, she thought she was. All her friends were doing it – or so they said. But more than anything, she just wanted love.

So, this Friday morning, her thoughts were on her mystery man. Louis had to work until 11 pm at Sunrise Groceries, so Heidi was electrified at having the evening to herself. It didn't happen often. When she wasn't with Louis, she was usually at home bored or at her friend Sara's house. However, tonight, she was on her own, and she could do whatever she wanted! And that included meeting her mystery man! She felt a flicker of arousal as she recalled his words about caressing her breasts.

I need to look my best today. I know he'll be watching.

Emily chose a snug fitting pair of cut-off jean shorts and a low-cut pink top with little hearts that showcased her curvy figure. Mystery man wrote that he loved her curves, and she didn't want to disappoint him. She dabbed fruity apple perfume behind her ears and slid a friendship charm bracelet over her slender wrist.

Her mother was still in bed, swaddled in an oversized comforter with her computer perched on her lap. Agatha didn't care how Heidi looked or dressed. Truth be told, she didn't really care much about

Heidi's life at all. Instead, Agatha was razor focused on internet dating apps and local bars, searching endlessly for the perfect man to solve all her problems.

"Goodbye, mom. I'm going," Heidi called from the kitchen. She heard her mother's manicured nails clicking on computer keys. They suddenly stopped.

"Okay, Heidi Girl, have a good day," Agatha yelled back.

"I will. I'll see you later," Heidi replied.

"Hey, I just wanted to let you know I'm going to the Elks Club tonight with Susi. I'll probably be home late."

When aren't you?

"So, I'll probably see you in the morning," the self-absorbed Agatha yelled, her fingernails once again clicking on computer keys.

"Okay, mom, have fun. Say hi to Susi."

Heidi walked out the side door of their light blue bungalow into the warm, moist air. She tugged at her creeping jean shorts and then walked quickly toward the high school that was only three blocks away. All she could think about was tonight and the magic that would happen out on that beach.

As the day went on, Heidi had a hard time concentrating. How could she be expected to focus on the *Scarlet Letter* or isosceles triangles when she was going to meet the possible love of her life at 9 pm?!

Finally, school was over, and Heidi fiddled around at home until evening. The sun was setting, and the Golden Hour drew near. It was time to go to the party. Because of the warm weather, there was palpable excitement in Harbor Cove. People drove convertibles up and down Main Street with their tops down, young people playfully packed the downtown sidewalks, couples sat outside trendy bars sipping cocktails, and the beaches were full of young partygoers and crackling bonfires that reached high into the night sky.

Heidi had plans to hang out with Sarah at the bonfire beginning at 8 pm, but then she would sneak away to the alcove just before 9. She was so nervous her stomach hurt. Sometimes, she got a belly ache when she was overwhelmed. Heidi left her house and walked the few blocks to Mariner's Beach. Lights twinkled along the shore, and she noticed the Breakwater Lighthouse casting a warm glow on the dark Lake Michigan waves.

She reached the beach and saw numerous flickering bonfires and shadows of people talking, dancing, and drinking beer. She wondered how she was going to find Sarah and the rest of her classmates. She removed her sandals and plodded through the thick sand. Heidi was thankful for the moon overhead. It allowed her to make out some faces and figures as she walked the nighttime beach. The mood was magical. Just happy, laughing people along a shimmering lake under a glowing moon. The thought of meeting a wonderful man in this perfect setting made her heart feel so light she thought it might float away.

Suddenly, she heard someone yell her name.

"Heidi, over here! Hey, Heidi, it's Sarah!"

Her best friend Sarah appeared from the shadows and took Heidi's hand.

"Oh my god, everyone's here," Sarah gushed. "Carl Richards, Scott McCormick, the Matney twins. It's a smorgasbord of hot men! We've got to get over there. Even Ben Seeger is here!"

Ben Seeger was the most popular guy at Harbor Cove High School, and every girl wanted to catch his eye. But not Heidi Hadly. Her man was much more special. She had read so many romance novels in which women meet their soulmates at breezy cafés or sparkling rooftop bars - even at the beach. She had already pictured the rendezvous in her head: the mystery man walking up, taking her face in his gentle hands, and kissing her deeply and passionately. It was hard to focus on the Ben Seegers of the world when she had the interest of a real man.

Sarah handed Heidi a cold Oberon, and the two girls drew close to the blazing fire. Soon, a few other girls joined in, and everyone chatted and swirled around and got a little drunk as they watched the immense fire touch the sky. In the firelight, Heidi looked down at her watch. It was now 8:45.

"Hey, Sarah, I need to go to the bathroom," Heidi lied to her friend who was chatting with the dreamy CJ Patterson. "I'll be back soon."

"And I'll be right here," Sarah smiled tipsily at CJ, the flames casting soft shadows on her shining face.

She really was a good friend. Heidi wished she could tell Sarah what was transpiring, but she didn't dare. She couldn't risk it getting back to Louis. It would absolutely break his heart. She just couldn't do that to him. He didn't deserve it.

Heidi left the party and walked along the empty beach heading north to the alcove. The alcove was a sandy area hidden by large boulders just off the lake. It was a place known to lovers young and old as it provided everything people seeking a romantic moment could asked for.

Heidi looked around but didn't see anyone. She entered the alcove and took a seat on a large, flat rock. The moon overhead provided faint light. Her heart pounded against her chest. She could hardly breathe. She felt strangely buzzed, but the time had come! What would her mystery man look like? What would he say? Would they kiss? Heidi could hardly wait.

She sat there for five minutes when she heard a noise.

Suddenly, there he was! Standing right in front of her! He was wearing some sort of mask, but Heidi didn't mind. She actually kind of liked it. It reminded her of the novel *When the Lights Went Out.* It was all so mysterious and exciting.

"Hello, there. We finally meet," Heidi stammered nervously.

The mystery man didn't say a word. He walked up to Heidi and took her hands. He pulled her up and pulled her close, and they began to dance ever so slowly - sensually. Heidi's heart seemed to skip

beats! It was all so thrilling! They danced for several minutes. Heidi waited for his kiss, but instead he placed his hand on the small of her back, guiding her, and then he gently laid her down on the beach. Heidi saw the stars and moon up above. It was so romantic. She looked up at the man.

"Are you going to remove your mask?" she asked playfully. "I want to see you."

The man shook his head no. He then slid his hands under Heidi's shirt. At first, the young woman was shocked. She hadn't expected this so quickly. But she recalled the words he had written about her breasts. Now he was fondling them, and Heidi felt pleasure pulsate between her legs. She closed her eyes. He caressed her breasts for several minutes.

Suddenly, the man was tugging on her shorts. He quickly yanked them down to Heidi's knees. The young woman was shocked. She was not expecting this. She felt a wave a fear, and her breathing quickened.

"No," she whispered. "I'm not ready for this."

The man gently touched his finger to her lips to quiet her, and then he forcefully held her down and went about raping the shocked and scared young woman.

When he was done, he shoved his left hand down more forcefully on her mouth, and brought the index finger of his right hand to his mouth signaling her once again not to speak. He pushed up off her and stood up, pulling up his shorts. Then she heard the words that would haunt her for decades.

"If you tell anyone, I will kill you. I will kill your entire family."

Heidi was too stunned to speak. To do anything. She just lay there in the sand unmoving. Then the man did something strange and horrifying. He let out a loud, mocking laugh. It was a sneering, derisive laugh full of contempt. The man stared down at Heidi for a moment without pity or concern – just radiating hatred and disgust. Then he turned and walked away. He left the young woman crying - in pain and naked from the waist down - alone and bleeding on the beach.

Chapter 51

Barbara Whitecloud
Two Men, One Father

After Barbara recounted the tragic story of Heidi Hadly's rape, all three women sat quietly in the kitchen. It was a disgusting story - a terrible thing to have happened to Heidi. It took Dana and Cadie several minutes to process this information. Even Barbara, who had known the dark secret for years, was visibly upset. Tears ran down her face, and she sniffled loudly. Both Dana and Cadie also had tears in their eyes.

"So, what happened after that?" Dana asked. "What happened after the rape?"

"Nothing," Barbara answered, her voice fraught with emotion. "Heidi never told a soul. Not even her mother. She just walked home and cleaned up the blood herself."

The women were confused.

"Jesus, how much blood was there?" Dana asked.

"I have no idea," Barbara answered. "Heidi just said there was a lot of blood."

"That must have been an incredibly violent rape," Dana said, revulsed. "What an absolute bastard."

Cadie and Barbara nodded in agreement.

"And Heidi never went to the police?" Cadie asked.

"Oh, no. Heidi felt terribly guilty. She felt the rape was her fault, and couldn't bear to tell anyone about it," Barbara said. "And she didn't want to lose Louis. He was the only person who truly loved her. She just bottled everything up inside her."

"Why do you think Heidi never told us any of this?" Dana asked. "It might've helped us find Emily."

“For one, she was in fear for her life – and her family’s life,” Barbara responded. “I also know she felt terrible guilt. And maybe Heidi somehow felt complicit. Like this was all her fault and didn’t want anyone to know. Or, maybe she didn’t really love Emily as much as you think.”

At that, Dana and Cadie exchanged hard glances.

“And Heidi didn’t know who raped her?” Cadie continued.

“She had no idea,” Barbara answered.

Dana cleared her throat. The next question was uncomfortable.

“And why did you never come forward? Never share what you knew?” Dana probed.

At that question, Barbara’s face darkened.

“How was I supposed to know what Heidi told the police? And now suddenly it’s my fault? Did you know that native Americans are more likely to be injured by police than any other racial group?”

“No, I didn’t realize that,” Dana answered quietly.

“Well, it’s true. Indigenous people don’t often trust the police. They haven’t always been too kind to us in the past.”

“We’re sorry,” Cadie interjected.

“Yes,” Dana added. “Let’s move on. So how was it Louis came to believe he was Emily’s father?”

“Do I really have to say?” Barbara asked. “I don’t want this held against me somehow.”

“It won’t. We just need to know the truth,” Dana replied. “Anything you tell us might help find Emily.”

“Jesus, alright,” Barbara answered, massaging her temples.

“Heidi was afraid. Terrified. Who can blame her? She didn’t want Louis to find out she was raped, or she feared she would lose him. And she needed people to believe it was Louis’s baby. If they didn’t, she would have to reveal what happened. Then she would certainly lose Louis, and she felt people would brand her as a whore and a slut.”

“But you didn’t answer my question,” Cadie interjected.

Barbara glared at Cadie.

“Well, duh. Heidi had sex with Louis and then claimed he was the father.”

“Oh, boy,” Dana replied, leaning back.

“So, the baby really could belong to Louis,” Cadie said.

“Yes, that’s true,” Barbara responded. “Heidi said she never knew for sure. But anyone looking at Louis can tell Emily doesn’t look like him.”

“What happened next?” Dana asked.

“Well, Agatha Hadly finally stepped up. She helped raise Emily while Heidi and Louis finished high school. And Louis moved in with them. He had his own bedroom, and Agatha set down strict rules. She didn’t want to raise any more babies, and Heidi certainly didn’t want another baby. Then, after high school, Heidi and Louis got married. Heidi said they actually had a great marriage, although it always bothered him that Heidi kept her maiden name. But Heidi said she had her reasons and was often secretive, and Louis loved her, and he loved Emily. So, really, in the end, it all worked out. Until, you know, Emily was kidnapped.”

Barbara who hadn’t smoked for several minutes took a long drag of her cigarette. Her eyes were red and swollen, and her shoulders drooped. Telling the terribly sad story seemed to sap all her energy.

“And Heidi could never remember anything about her rapist?” Cadie leaned in, probing for more answers.

“No. Nothing. The guy wore a mask the whole time, and it was dark. The only thing Heidi really remembered was his laugh. She said it was a deep, cruel laugh. Hollow with no feeling. It certainly wasn’t a funny laugh.”

Cadie looked over at Dana. They were both thinking the same thing: Heidi said she recalled hearing that laugh again from whomever was parked in the van the day Emily went missing. No wonder

Heidi didn't want to share who the laugh reminded her of. Heidi told them it didn't matter, but it did. She lived with a severe trauma that affected every part of her life.

Who was this man that raped Heidi Hadly? Why did he do it? Was it just for sex, or was there more to the story? Both Dana and Cadie felt the two incidents might be connected.

"Is that it?" Barbara said, standing up. "I'm beat. I need to lay down."

"Yes, we're done," Dana said. "But officers are going to visit you to get Myeengun's address. They're going to search his house and land."

Barbara sighed.

"Fine. But you're not going to find Emily there. My brother did not take Emily. He's not keeping her hostage."

As Barbara walked them to the front door, Cadie saw a frame containing a picture of Barbara and what was presumably her brother on a table.

"Can I take a picture of Myeengun?" Cadie asked, already taking out her phone.

"I guess so," a defeated Barbara said. "You're going to do what you want anyways."

Cadie took a quick picture.

"We'll be in touch if we have more questions," Dana said.

"I sure hope not," Barbara answered, walking them to the front door. "Nothing personal, but I hope I never lay eyes on you two again."

Chapter 52

Nick Brennan
The Mighty Mac

"Wow, it's even larger than I remember!" Nick exclaimed in his empty car. He'd been driving all afternoon, and something was swirling around his brain, just out of reach, but it wouldn't come to him.

His wide eyes gaped through the window up at the massive ivory towers as he drove slowly over the miles-long Mackinac Bridge. He'd only been to the iconic bridge once: on a camping trip to the UP with his mom and dad when he was six. Now, here he was driving over the Mighty Mac again, in strong winds, but for an entirely different reason.

The car's tires shook on the open-steel grating, and Nick remembered the panic he felt as a child when he looked down out the car window and saw Lake Michigan churning 200 feet below through the metal grid. He recalled feeling nauseous and on the verge of tears.

"It's okay, Nick," his mother comforted from the front seat, her warm, sympathetic eyes watching him. "Just look up. The bridge is strong. And it's beautiful and peaceful. It's in the clouds."

Nick smiled at the memory. It was nice to picture his radiant young mother with her cheerful hazel eyes and playful pigtails. It was a happy time when his parents were still together and enjoyed each other's company. Sadly, though, ever since that little girl died in the bus fire, his father was changed. Quieter. More to himself. His behavior – surely PTSD - affected their marriage – to the point his mother finally left Jake and Nick and moved to Florida. With Jake's friend.

Nick was angry at Laura for years, but he was learning to forgive her.

What do they say? It's her first time going through life as well.

Also, Nick knew he had not been a perfect boyfriend to Cadie. That night three years ago was clear evidence. Instead of taking his beloved Cadie home safely to Aunt Marie's cottage, he sat drunk on the beach while his girlfriend was kidnapped. So, he knew he was in no position to judge.

The enormous suspension bridge suddenly shifted in the strong westerly winds. Its green cables twisted slightly, and the pulsating bridge once again made Nick nauseous. Suddenly, the sick feeling triggered another memory of his family camping.

Once over the bridge, his father had pulled their SUV and glossy white pop-up camper into Moo Moo's Ice Cream Parlor. Out front was a life-sized, black and white Holstein on its hind legs holding an ice cream cone. It sported a red ribbon and long, black eyelashes: it was Moo Moo the Cow under a bright neon sign. The threesome entered the vintage shop with a checkboard floor and red vinyl barstools. They walked up to the glass case and studied the flavors.

"Are you having the usual?" Jake asked, looking down at his son who was intently studying the tubs of ice cream. "Strawberry with red sprinkles?"

While Jake watched, Nick's face suddenly dropped and twisted. Jake quickly kneeled down next to him, shocked. He had no idea what was going on. But, in that very moment, when Nick looked at the red strawberry ice cream, he was picturing blood.

Only the day before, Laura and Nick had popped into the local clinic. Laura was due for a vaccine. While his mom went to check in at the counter, a crying girl and her mother took the seats across from the young Nick. The girl's tiny arm was swathed in blood. Some dripped on the short carpet.

"Mama, it won't stop," the little girl cried.

"Not to worry. Nurse Debra will fix you."

Nick stared at the girl with white-blond hair and her arm covered in wet, red blood. It sickened him. So, ever since that afternoon, Nick never ordered strawberry ice cream again. He could barely look at it.

Now, as Nick slowed to exit the bridge and pull into St. Ignace, that long-buried memory of the bloody girl agitated him.

Why am I thinking about this? After all these years?

Then, the memory of the little girl activated an old neural pathway. An image popped into Nick's mind. His mother was reading the front page of the newspaper at the kitchen table and talking to Jake about a little girl who had gone missing from the sand dunes. Supposedly, her parents were sleeping on the beach, and the girl just vanished. Nick walked over and looked at the picture of the blonde-haired girl in the newspaper. The photo surprised him because the girl's hair was almost white – like an old lady's hair, the little boy thought.

Now, as his mind turned this memory over and over, it suddenly it came to him. The connection. The realization. The girl in the newspaper was the girl with the bloody arm. Emily Hadly.

Chapter 53

Munising
A Break in the Case

Cadie and Dana left Barbara Whitecloud's cabin shell-shocked. Learning that Heidi Hadly was raped at fifteen turned the case upside down. And she was raped by someone in a mask no less. Both women wondered about the scenario in which a young man secretly woos a fellow student for several weeks only to rape her behind a mask. None of it made sense. They had to wonder: Was Louis Emily's father? Maybe Louis was the rapist? If not, who was it? And did this man from the past somehow figure into their cold case?

Just as they were walking to Zeba's four-wheeler, a huge gust of wind blew through, and there was a large crack. Suddenly, a large tree branch overhead broke off and landed right in front of them.

"Oh, shit!" Dana screamed, almost falling over.

Cadie jumped to the side as the massive branch splintered.

"Are you okay?!" Zeba yelled, running over.

"Yeah, I'm good," Dana said.

"Me, too," Cadie added.

"Let's get going," Zeba said. "The weather is getting worse. There are branches down all around. I'm not sure you two should be traveling the island right now. Why don't I take you back to the ferry?"

"Crap," Dana said. "I wanted to pay Barbara's brother a visit."

Cadie had conflicted feelings. She remembered what the owl made her think, but she also recalled what Barbara had said about her brother being a schizophrenic and getting out of hand.

"Should we wait a bit and then head up?" Cadie asked.

She really wanted to talk to Myeengun.

“It’s not going to get better,” Zeba remarked.

To underscore his statement, another strong gust blew through, tossing leaves and debris up into the air.

“Okay, let’s go,” Dana said. “I’ll have some local cops visit Myeengun when the weather settles down. Let’s get back to the ferry.”

After driving back to the landing and crossing the choppy, wind-tossed harbor, the women were soon driving south in their rental car. As the car struggled to stay on the road, Dana said, “Let’s head over to Munising Police Department. My friend is there. And we’ll need officers to head up to Barbara’s brother’s house to check him out. I’m thinking he might be our guy.”

“Dana.”

“Yes?”

“I want to tell you something. I want to share what I’ve been thinking since we got to Barabara Whitecloud’s house today,” Cadie said.

“Okay,” Dana said tentatively, looking over at the young woman in the passenger seat. “I mean, I already know that you believe Emily is alive and in danger – you said your parents told you so, or should I say alluded to, at Sleeping Bear.”

Caddie nodded.

“But there’s something else. You know when we first arrived at Barbara’s cabin today?” Cadie asked.

“Sure,” Dana replied.

“Well, the owl was there. When we were on the front porch, I heard something. I looked up, and there he was. Circling just feet above my head. Then he flew to a nearby branch to watch us. Dana, owls rarely circle above people’s heads, especially during the day. They are highly timid. Then he stared right at me. I believe the owl was there to give me another message.”

Dana, who lived her life as an expressed skeptic of most everything, tried to keep an open mind while Cadie was sharing her story, but it was hard. She wasn't religious and believed that when people died, they died. They didn't get wings and white fluffy pajamas and fly around with golden harps whispering in people's ears. They certainly didn't turn into owls. And, she worried, that this owl business might be Cadie's past, some type of mental issue, that was affecting her now. Of course, she didn't say any of that to Cadie.

"Okay, so let's say your owl is mom and dad – or their messenger. What's the message?"

"The message is Barbara and her brother have nothing to do with this case. That's the thought that came into my head when I looked at that owl. I think something more is going on. We heard that Heidi Hadly was raped by someone wearing a mask. Then, years later, she hears his laugh. Next, her daughter goes missing. I think things are more complicated, and it has nothing to do with the Whiteclouds."

Dana stared straight ahead, saying nothing for several minutes.

"I'm not sure I can take the word of an owl, but I do believe this case is getting more unusual and complex."

Dana pulled the car into the Munising Police Department. It was a long red, blue, and brick building surrounded by rolling hills with thick trees that were swaying in the strong winds. Up above, angry, fast-moving clouds raced across the sky.

"We need to get a hold of Heidi Hadly, don't you think?" Cadie said. "We need to hear her tell us the rape story. We can't just take Barbara's word."

"Excellent instincts," Dana replied. "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear."

"Tao, right?" Cadie smiled.

"Very good," Dana said, gathering up her briefcase and a few items. "MSU is teaching you well."

The two women made their way inside the police station. A female officer sitting behind a mahogany pedestal desk stood up.

“Can I help you?”

“I hope so. I’m Dana Bakker, a retired police sergeant from Harbor Cove. I’m here for Meng Corbin.”

Dana crossed her arms and glanced around the bare reception area.

“Sure, let me go get her.”

A minute later, a tall, thin woman with two long braids appeared. She was wearing a dark, navy-blue police uniform.

“Dana, it’s great to see you,” Meng replied, walking past the reception desk and giving Dana a half hug. “It’s been a while. Still wearing the ponytail, I see.”

“And you still have your braids,” Dana smiled.

“Why change something that’s working?” Meng grinned.

Cadie walked up and put out her hand.

“Hello, Meng. I’m Cadie McLeod. Dana’s intern. I have to say you have an interesting name.”

“Yes, I do,” the woman replied. “It’s actually Memengwaa. It’s Ojibwe for butterfly.”

As soon as she said the word butterfly, Dana and Cadie turned and stared at each other dumbfounded. What was it with butterflies?

Meng noticed their shocked response.

“What?” Meng asked, confused.

“I’ll tell you all about it, but you won’t believe it,” Dana said. “We have a case that involves butterflies. Maybe I’m the one who’s now believing in the supernatural.”

Meng ushered them back to a large beige room with a video wall and monitor, workstations with multi-screen computers and beige ergonomic task chairs, and a collaborative space for strategizing

that included a modern oval wood table with more ergonomic chairs. An officer was working at a station near the window and nodded at the women.

“This is our Intelligence Center,” Meng said.

Turning to Cadie, she explained: “This is where we conduct our research and analyze data. We also use this room to make calls to our field officers. Feel free to use any of the equipment. It’s at your disposal.”

“Thanks, Meng,” Dana said. “Can we step out? I want to talk to you about getting some officers to pay a visit to some property up on the island.”

The two women went into another room, and Cadie took a seat at a workstation. It had a pad of paper and pen. Something had been swirling around in her brain, just out of reach, and she couldn’t put her finger on it. Cadie knew her occipital lobe was working with her parietal and temporal lobes to create coherence, but their efforts had still not produced an image. It would just be a matter of time.

Perhaps, she was missing critical information? Like Nancy Drew, Cadie knew that solving mysteries used a combination of keen observation and deductive reasoning.

She thought about what her parents had whispered to her out on Sleeping Bear Dune.

Follow the north wind.

Her parents were pointing them in a direction. But now what? Where was the north where they would find Emily Hadly?

Just then, Dana walked in.

“Well, that’s taken care of. Meng has two officers on their way up to visit Barbara’s brother,” she said.

“Good news,” Cadie replied. “Hopefully, Myeengun’s there.”

“If he is, they’ll interview him and get a good feel if he’s involved or not,” Dana said. “Now I’m going to call Heidi Hadly to ask about the rape,” Dana said. “This isn’t going to be an easy conversation.”

“No, it’s not,” Cadie agreed.

Dana walked over to the other side of the room, took a seat at the conference table, and pulled out her phone. She called Heidi Hadley. The phone rang and rang. Finally, it went to voicemail, but the mailbox was full. Dana decided to send Heidi a text.

Heidi, please call me.

It’s important.

Then Cadie said loudly, “Can we call Craig? I want to check on Max. I hope he’s still doing okay. We also need to find out about the remains found in James Moore’s workshop.”

“Yes, we need to do that. I also want to reach out to Jake. We need to hear if there’s any news about Sherman Sawhill’s properties – if the officers found anything.”

“I’m going to call Nick if that’s okay,” Cadie said.

“Of course,” Dana said. “Say hi to the lucky guy,” Dana grinned.

“He’s also lucky to have a great dad,” Cadie winked at Dana.

It was then Dana realized Cadie was aware of the feelings Dana and Jake had for each other. She hated that. She liked to keep her private life private.

“Just make your call, intern,” Dana said, pretending to be serious but smiling a bit inside. She really was growing fond of Jake. He was a great man. She wondered what he thought about her. Was it all one-sided? Was she a fool to think this exceptional man could actually like her? A hardened and skeptical ex-cop with a permanent ponytail and stress ulcer? She hoped he could. Dana walked away, and Cadie made her call, but Nick didn’t pick up. He didn’t always like talking on the phone while he

drove. His dad shared many accident stories about distracted drivers. So she sat and waited, and then Dana returned.

“So, in these last 10 minutes, I’ve learned a lot,” Dana said. “I’m going to need to sit down. It’s been a long day.”

“Yes, it has,” Cadie answered.

Dana pulled out a chair and took a seat. She pulled down and straightened her shirt.

“First, they haven’t found anything on Sherman Sawhill’s property or his mom’s property that implicates him in Emily’s disappearance,” Dana said. “They’re still looking around his rental property, though. So, it looks like either the snitch was lying, or it was Sawhill’s jailhouse ego that led him to say he took Emily. But who knows? They could still find something. Yet, it’s seeming less and less likely Sawhill’s involved.”

“What about James Moore?” Cadie asked. “What about the remains you found in his workshop?”

Dana shifted in her seat. A look washed over her face that could be described as disgust.

“Get ready,” Dana said, her eyes widening with the shock of what she was about to say. “Yes, the remains in Moore’s workshop are those of a little girl. But it’s not a girl he personally killed. James Moore actually dug up the body of a child buried in a Traverse City cemetery. She died of a brain tumor. Cemetery caretakers found the grave dug up and the body missing, but there were no clues as to who took it. Well, now we know. That sicko Moore dug her up. What Moore was doing with her remains in that pit I absolutely do not want to know.”

Cadie didn’t respond for minute. She was aghast. She had never heard anything so vile in all her life. She just leaned back in her chair and looked up at the ceiling, trying to process.

“My god,” Cadie said. “That is absolutely horrifying.”

“It certainly is,” Dana replied. “You see a lot in this job, and you think you’ve seen it all, and then something like this comes along. And you realize there’s even more sick shit out there than you could ever imagine.”

The two women both shook their heads in wonderment.

“Okay, now on to the next bit of news,” Dana said, sitting up a bit straighter.

“I’m all ears.”

“So, Craig told me something unexpected,” Dana said. “His niece works as volunteer at Harbor Cove General. She knew Craig was working the Emily Hadly case from her mother, Craig’s sister. Anyway, the niece told Craig that Heidi Hadly is in the hospital.”

“Oh, no!” Cadie cried out. “What happened?”

“Well, I guess she fell and cut herself,” Dana answered, her face pinching as she pondered this.

“She fell and cut herself?” Cadie said, perplexed. “Cut herself where? That must be a pretty bad cut to end up in the hospital.”

“That’s what I thought,” Dana said. “It’s just weird.”

“Do you think she cut herself?” Cadie asked. “On purpose?”

“I wondered that, too,” Dana responded, “but the niece told Craig that it wasn’t a suicide attempt or self-harm. It’s actually a cut on her leg. She really did fall down and cut herself.”

Just then, as if on some sort of cosmic cue, the phone rang. Cadie looked at her phone. It was Nick.

“Mind if I take this?”

“Sure.”

Cadie answered, and when Nick said hi, he seemed strangely out of breath.

“Oh, thank god you answered!” he exclaimed into the phone.

“What is it? What’s wrong?”

“I just remembered something!”

“Okay. Well, what? You sound upset.”

“I was just driving over the Mackinac Bridge when I remembered something crazy from my childhood!”

“Mackinac Bridge? You’re in the UP?”

“Please just listen. I remembered something from when I was a kid. I went to the doctor with my mom. There was a little girl. She had cut herself, and her arm was all bloody.”

“Um, okay. I don’t understand.”

“It was Emily Hadly!”

“What?! How do you know it was Emily Hadly?”

“When I was little, I saw a picture of her in the newspaper. I just now realized who that little girl was.”

“You’re sure it was her?”

“Yes! She had the same white-blonde hair.”

“Wow, that is crazy. I can’t believe you actually saw her all those years ago. And now here we are looking for her.”

“Yes, but it’s more than that. I think I’m on to something.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Her cut. It wouldn’t stop bleeding.”

All of a sudden, the fireworks went off in Cadie’s brain.

“I have to let you go, Nick! I’ll call you back!”

She hung up the phone and immediately thought about the second command her parents whispered on the dune.

Follow the blood.

From her bookbag, Cadie grabbed her detective notebook. She quickly scribbled a list about anything that had to do with blood.

1. Emily Hadly left blood stains on the dune. Her blood was tested, and no alcohol or drugs were present in her system, and no other substances were detected.
2. The lab tested the blood for 50 common drugs and found nothing.
3. The blood revealed she was in good health.
4. She had Type O blood.
5. There was a great deal of blood at the scene of the abduction. We don't know what weapon was used.
6. Her mother was violently raped and bled on the beach.
7. Heidi and Barbara both mentioned the word bruising.
8. According to Barbara, Louis used the phrase 'flesh and blood.'
9. Sherman Sawhill allegedly wiped blood on his neighbor's house.

Then she added numbers 10 and 11.

10. Heidi cut herself so badly, she had to go to the hospital.

11. As a child, Emily had a bad cut, and it wouldn't stop bleeding.

Cadie stared straight ahead, thinking.

"You know how I told you that my parents whispered, 'Follow the blood' out on Sleeping Bear? Of course, I had no idea what that meant," Cadie said. "So, I decided to make a list of everything that had to do with blood in our case."

"What are you thinking?" Dana asked, studying her student. She could almost see the gears in the brilliant woman's brain turning.

Cadie closed her eyes but spoke out loud.

"After Emily disappeared, a great deal of her blood was found in the sand. So much blood that I wondered if she was stabbed or bludgeoned. Heidi was raped on the beach and bled "profusely" according to Barbara – so much so that Heidi had to 'clean up.' When a woman loses her virginity, and her hymen stretches or tears, there is still little to no blood. Now, Heidi goes to the hospital for a cut that won't stop bleeding. And there's more."

"Okay," Dana said, staring intently at Cadie.

“When Heidi was talking about Emily, she mentioned bruises. Then today, Barbara Whitecloud also mentioned bruises.

Her brain was firing. Her occipital, parietal, and temporal lobes suddenly transformed all the chaotic bits of information into something coherent. Specialized pathways linking these lobes integrated, and their convergence created meaning.

Cadie slowly opened her eyes. A chill ran through her body, and she trembled.

“I know what it is,” Cadie said quietly.

“What is it?”

“Hemophilia.”

Dana stared.

“I think Heidi and Emily both have hemophilia,” Cadie said. “Their blood doesn’t clot.”

“Oh, wow,” Dana said. “But why wouldn’t that be in Heidi’s medical records? Or in Emily’s file? Why are we just finding this out?”

“Some people have a milder form of hemophilia,” Cadie explained. “Their bodies can manage day to day clotting, but a more severe injury will alert them to the disorder.”

Cadie stood up and began pacing. Then Dana stood up and began walking the room. Adrenaline immediately coursed through their veins. Glen, the young male officer sitting by the window had been listening. He stood up and walked over. He, too, had increased energy.

“What does it mean?” he asked. “How is this going to help?”

Both women stopped pacing, looked at each other, and smiled.

“Because if Emily is alive, she may have visited a hospital or treatment center for hemophilia sometime in the past 14 years,” Cadie said.

“Yeah, but the people who took her wouldn’t use her real name,” Glen said, shaking his head.

“Of course, you’re right,” Cadie answered. “But there’s much more to it. Hospitals and treatment centers keep blood tissue records and hemophiliac records for a variety of reasons. They provide data for blood disorder research. It’s also a legal requirement. And the records can help with patient safety and determine if treatments are working - even monitor pathogens.”

“I didn’t realize all that,” Dana said. “Where did you learn it?”

“My Aunt Marie has a blood disorder, so I’ve read a lot of her literature and also accompanied her to her doctor visits.” Cadie explained. “In this case, if I’m right, and the mother and daughter share this blood disorder, we can contact Michigan hospitals and treatment centers for records. We have Heidi’s and Emily’s DNA on file.”

Dana nodded excitedly.

“This might be our big break, Cadie,” Dana said. “Still, that’s a lot of hospitals and clinics to contact. You’re talking all of Michigan.”

“It is,” Cadie answered, “but remember what my parents said: “Follow the north wind.’ I think we need to start with hospitals and clinics in the UP. Are we going to need a warrant, Dana? To get information from the hospitals and clinics?”

“No,” Dana replied. “It’s called a HIPPA Missing Person Exception. We can get a name and address for a missing person without needing a warrant.”

Suddenly, Glen piped in.

“I’ll help you make calls,” Glen offered. The man looked excited.

Dana nodded.

“After I talk to Craig, I’ll talk to Meng,” Dana said. “We’re going to need more bodies on this. We’re going to need to make a shit ton of calls.”

“I need to call Nick back,” Cadie added.

Dana shot her a confused look that asked the question, ‘Why now?’

“He brought his laptop. He told me he planned on researching the case tonight in his motel room. We’ll get him researching. See what he comes up with.”

“Well, we can use all the help we can get.”

Cadie dialed Nick, picturing his soulful brown eyes and wavy hair. He was so tall and handsome; he still gave her goosebumps. After one ring, Nick answered the phone. His voice was deep and rich.

“Hey, you hung up on me. What’s going on?”

Cadie shared her belief that Heidi and Emily were hemophiliacs.

“Oh, wow. That’s crazy, yet it makes sense. But now what?”

“We’re going make calls this evening,” Cadie said. “And we need you to do your computer magic. See if you can determine if Emily Hadly and whoever has her visited hemophiliac centers or hospitals over the last 14 years. We also need to talk to Craig and your dad. We need to hear back about a few other things. Local officers are investigating some property right now. It could lead to another suspect.”

“That would awesome. Let me know. And, as soon as I get a room, I’ll start researching.”

“Thank you, Nick. Dana and I decided we’ll stay the night in Marquette. How about we touch base first thing in the morning?”

“That sounds good. Hey, can I tell you something? I’m just so proud of you, Cadie. I don’t ever want to hold you back. I get fearful for you at times because I don’t want to lose you. On the way up here, I thought a lot about my mom. How she took off and left us. I understand why she did what she did, but I’m realizing that may be why I cling to you so tightly at times. But I’m going to work on that. I really am. I understand that you have to do this work. You’re going to spend your life helping other people by solving crimes. I want to support you.”

As Cadie listened to the man she loved, the man who fought to find her and save her life three years ago, her eyes filled with tears.

“Thank you for saying that, Nick,” Cadie replied in a soft, slow voice. “For understanding. I need to do what I’m doing. You know I want to do work that honors my parents and helps other victims. But I always want you by my side. I’m so grateful for you. I really love you.”

“I love you, too, Cadie,” Nick replied, his deep voice thickening. “More than you could ever know. And I won’t let you down. I’ll be there for you.”

Cadie got off the phone, and Dana walked over. Her face looked serious, and it was clear she had things to say.

Chapter 54

Lena
Time to Fight, to Live

The young woman spent the day in the woods focused on one singular goal: staying alive.

First, she went to the lighthouse, but Mr. G wasn't there. She knew Mr. G took care of other lighthouses in the area, so she didn't know where he would be today - or when he would return. She hoped it would be soon. She had written him a note back at the cabin. It wasn't easy explaining that a man she barely knew was planning to kill her any time now and politely asking Mr. G if he would help save her life.

Yet, what choice did she have? Besides the McKinleys, who did she know? Lena didn't have anyone else - just Mother who was back at the cabin crying and pacing the worn kitchen floor. Lena didn't want to involve Mr. and Mrs. McKinley. She could sense they had suffered enough in their lives.

Lena put the letter to Mr. G detailing her precarious, life-and-death situation in the keeper's quarters mailbox and then turned away. It was now misting, making her blonde hair damp and press against her head. She looked west down the beach and saw a dark line of clouds advancing. Steel-gray waves on The Big Lake were crashing onto the rocky beach, sending up sprays of ice cold, fresh water. She knew a storm was coming, but she wasn't sure if it would help or hurt her chances of survival.

It's no matter. I don't have control over the weather. In fact, I don't have control over much of anything.

She began walking the beach. Now, a light rain was falling and a gray mist wafting over the sand. Lena lifted her raincoat's hood up over her head. Then she pulled out her folded "I Can Do Great Things" list from her jacket pocket. The name was corny, Lena knew, but somehow it strengthened her. Perhaps it was because it was Mr. McKinley who told her she could do great things. Lena

touched her bear necklace, and it made her feel a bit better. She reviewed the list and wondered if anything on it could really save her life.

Stay calm. Try to breathe normally.
Don't walk on the dirt path. Walk on sticks and brush to hide your footprints. Try to zig zag.
Lead the man through the buckthorn thicket and over the fallen trees to slow him down.

The winds were picking up. Lena pulled her jacket close to her neck and cut into the woods where the trail met the beach. She thought about the other items on the list.

Create a false trail with bits of fabric to lead him in the wrong direction.
Hide behind the big white pine trees.
Go to the willow tree and blow the whistle.
Make a brush pile to hide in. Create a hidden shelter under some brush.
Lead the man to the old pit-iron mine. Cover the shaft opening with branches and hope he falls in!

Lena knew she had done the best she could. There was no more to be done. When she went to the pit-iron mine, it had been covered over with wooden two by fours. They were nailed firmly in place. Just as well, Lena thought. She wasn't sure she could lead a person to his death, even if that person *was* trying to kill *her*.

She was able to make a brush pile to hide in, and she did create a hidden shelter. She found a spot under some low hanging branches. There was a small depression, and she dug out a larger pit. Then she gathered branches, pine needles, leaves, and moss to hide the pit and make it look like it was just a pile of debris. She kept it small. It was only big enough for her to lie down in and stay warm. Mr. G had taught her his ways.

She also made a false trail with torn fabric to lead the man in the opposite direction, away from the shore and the lighthouse. Ultimately, that's what Lena was counting on: the lighthouse. She prayed Mr. G would return in time and read the note. She prayed he'd be willing to help her.

Lena even thought about spending the night in the woods along The Big Lake, but the temperature at night had dropped a few times into the thirties. Now, with a possible storm rolling in, the temperature could drop even lower. In the hope of saving herself, Lena didn't want to die of hypothermia.

The young woman sat down on a large, wet tree stump, and contemplated her situation.

Am I really going to survive this? What if this is my destiny? To be killed by a man I don't know for reasons I don't know – reasons I may never know. I clearly mean nothing to him. He actually seems to hate me, but why? What have I done? Then there's my biological mother who didn't want me and this woman I call Mother. She says she loves me, but for everything she's done for me, she's also kept me locked away in these woods my entire life, telling me the world outside is an evil, violent place. Is that true? Is there no place for me out there? No one who could love me in the Other World? Who am I really? I so badly want to live – to have a life. To be free."

Out in those lonely woods, Lena put her head in her hands and sobbed. It was a deep, wrenching cry that poured out 14 years of hurt, sadness, loneliness, and rejection. All the suffering she had endured, feelings she had never even expressed to herself, raged like a river as they streamed from her soul. She had no friends. No family. No experiences. No real life. Nothing. Just a decade and more spent in these woods with troubling visions and nightmares she couldn't explain. Lena finally exhausted herself from crying.

She sat there for quite a while, wet hair hanging down, sniffling, feeling very sorry for herself. Then she heard something.

The noise sounded like the gentle flutter of wings. She looked up, and what she saw stole the breath from her body. It was a massive owl. Its four-foot wings were fully expanded. The owl glided down from the towering pine trees right above Lena's head. It glided down like a ghost, like a mystical apparition in front of her face. Then its legs extended, and its claws scraped the wood of the tree stump directly in front of her. It stopped abruptly, perched on the stump, and looked straight at Lena. She was now face to face with a gigantic owl.

The owl fixed its yellow eyes on her and stared with intensity – never blinking. It was completely silent and still, just looking deeply into Lena's eyes. The young woman was bewitched. She felt spellbound - like she was in a trance. She couldn't move.

As the two locked eyes, thoughts and feelings suddenly surged into Lena. She began to feel energized and uplifted. She began to feel hopeful and alive. Her dark thoughts seemed to lift and were replaced by positive images of her escaping. She pictured herself safe in the lighthouse.

What is happening?

The bird perched for a few moments more, and then it blinked, seeming to end their connection. Suddenly, the mysterious creature flew upward from the stump in a swift, vertical ascent into the thick trees above. Then it was gone.

Lena sat on the stump in a daze. She was too numb to move.

Was that some sort of dream? Did I just imagine that?

Lena stood up. Suddenly, she was feeling much more optimistic – even powerful. There was an energy pulsating through her body. She knew she wasn't going to take this situation laying down. She was going to fight with all she had. And once it was all over, regardless of the outcome, Lena would know that she tried her best and somehow her life would surely change, and for that she was grateful. Now, with the cold rain pelting her jacket, under darkening skies Lena walked the claustrophobic trail to the cabin, the only home she had ever known, the only home she could truly remember. And there she would wait for the angry, hateful, and mysterious man who just might end her life.

Chapter 55

Munising
Follow the Blood

Cadie awoke in the dark motel room at 5 am and grabbed at her phone on the nightstand. It lit up. She glanced and saw it was full of notifications: voicemails from hospitals, clinics, treatment centers, and urgent cares. They were all responding to the voicemail she left the night before.

Hello, my name is Cadie McLeod with the Michigan State University Cold Case Unit. I am in Marquette with Dana Bakker, a retired Harbor Cove police sergeant. We are trying to locate a 20-year-old woman who was abducted at age six from Harbor Cove and has been missing for 14 years. We have reason to believe she is a hemophiliac. Could you help us locate her? If you have treated a young woman who may have acted strangely and was brought in by people who acted strangely, please let us know. The missing person's real name is Emily Hadly, and we have her DNA to compare against your records. She has blue eyes and blonde hair, which may have been in a ponytail. Thank you for any information you can provide.

The light from Cadie's phone awakened Dana who was sleeping in the motel's other queen bed. She squinted in the dark and looked over at Cadie who was glowing from the light of her phone.

"What is it?" Dana asked in a sleepy, raspy voice.

"Tons of messages from hospitals and clinics," Cadie replied excitedly. "I'm listening to the voicemails one by one. Someone out there has treated Emily Hadly, I just know it, Dana."

In the dark, Dana looked up at the ceiling. She wondered if she was doing the right thing, allowing this young woman to feel so much hope, allowing this quest to consume the time of so many people. Last night, with the help of Meng, Officer Glen Mayhew, two other officers, and Cadie and Dana, the group made over 200 calls to 25 hospitals in the UP and northern Michigan, some 40 urgent cares,

over 50 medical clinics, and numerous blood disorder/hematology treatment centers. It was a long night.

Dana grabbed her phone, propped herself up on her pillow, and began listening to her own voicemails. The two women sat in their beds in the dark listening to the voicemails for the next two hours until the sun began to rise at 7:10 AM. Sunlight peeked in around the plaid curtains, and Dana yawned loudly and stretched her arms.

"I'm going to make us some coffee," she said.

Dana got out of bed and put on her red robe. She went to the walnut dresser but didn't find any sign of a coffee pot, Keurig machine, or instant coffee.

"You've got to be kidding me? No coffee? I guess that's what you get when you pay $59 a night for a room," she muttered.

"The front desk has a coffee pot," Cadie said, listening to another voicemail.

"Is that a hint?" Dana said.

"Take it any way you want," Cadie smiled.

Dana could make out Cadie's grin in the cell phone light.

"Fine, I'm going to get us some coffee."

Dana quickly brushed her hair and walked out the door, while Cadie listened to another voicemail.

Hi, Ms. McLeod, this is Amy Johnson from Alpine Medical Clinic in Newberry. I got your voicemail. Unfortunately, nobody that fits your description has been to our clinic. I asked around, but no one has seen your missing person. I'm sorry I couldn't be of help. Best of luck to you.

Cadie read another four emails – all the same. Everyone was sorry, but no one knew anything.

I was so sure we would find Emily this way. I hope someone from last night is getting a good response.

Cadie had a glass of water on the vintage rattan nightstand. She took a large drink. Suddenly, there was a text from Nick.

"So, last night, I researched a mother and daughter with possible hemophilia or blood disorder in northern Michigan in search of treatment. I aggregated information from Open Source Intelligence, the Hemophiliac Foundation of Michigan, regional and national chapters, and the CDC. I also used Forum Scout, Social Search, and Pullpushreddit, and a few other tools to comb through online conversations, posts, and comments. It led me to a mother inquiring about her daughter and the services of the Blood Treatment Center in Vermilac. I emailed the center last night. Here is the message I got back. Nick had screenshotted a message.

Hello, this is Carla from the Vermilac Blood Treatment Center. I got your message this morning. I have to say I was more than surprised. We just had a mother and daughter come into our treatment center last week. They both acting strangely.

Cadie immediately sat up straighter.

Oh my god! Nick did it!

The hairs on her neck electrified.

The daughter, who looked to be in her twenties, acted almost like a child. She looked down at her feet the whole time. Never said a word. Never even looked at us. The mother did all the talking. We even tried to get the mother out of the room, so we could talk to the daughter alone, but the mother wasn't having it. She was very nervous. There was nothing we do could. The daughter was an adult. We just tended to the cut on her forehead. It wouldn't stop bleeding, so we administered a clotting factor and put an ice pack on her head as well as a Fibrin sealant. Once the blood clotted, the mother and daughter left. Honestly, we all thought it was weird – the way they acted. Now we're shocked to think that could have been the girl that went missing all those years ago. We feel terrible we didn't do more. Oh, and the daughter had blonde hair. Please call us. Thank you.

Cadie threw the phone down, flung the quilt on the floor, and jumped out of bed. She started walking in circles briskly around the room, over and over, a huge grin on her face. Dopamine was flooding her brain. Her heart pounded, and she experienced a huge rush of energy as adrenaline coursed through her bloodstream. Finally, she couldn't take it anymore. In her pajamas, Cadie rushed out of the motel room headed to the front desk to find Dana.

Dana was mixing creamer into her coffee at the counter when Cadie rushed in. She looked up and saw the young women run into the small room in nothing but short shorts and a tank top. The guy at the front desk just stared at the beautiful woman, half-dressed, with wild red hair cascading around her shoulders.

Dana was just about to yell over at the scantily clad Cadie when she suddenly caught the look on the young woman's face. Her eyes were opened wide. She was smiling from ear to ear. It was pure euphoria – pure jubilation.

Dana knew in an instant it was Emily Hadly.

Chapter 56

Blood Treatment Center
A Strange Pair

Cadie and Dana hurriedly showered and dressed. Soon, through the falling rain, they were driving north to the Vermilac Blood Treatment Center. Dana had also called Meng who was going to meet them there. Then the conversation turned to Nick.

"Cadie, I'm so proud of Nick for finding the information for us. That was some good work. He might've cracked the case."

Cadie just beamed.

"But he can't follow us on this case. I can't just allow anyone – even Jake Brennan's son – to take part in this program. Everyone in the internship was chosen for a reason and vetted. My job would be in jeopardy if I let him, or anyone, join in with us."

"But he drove all this way."

"I know. But we can meet up with him later. I hope you understand. Tell him that we are thankful for his help of course, but, between you and me, we need to continue on our own."

Cadie didn't say anything for a moment, but she knew Dana was right.

"Okay, I'll text Nick, but he will want to help us."

"You just have to explain to him what I said. His dad's a cop. He'll understand."

So, Cadie texted Nick. As the women drove, both were now strangely silent - lost in their own thoughts as rain pelted the car.

Were they really about to gain information that would lead them to Emily Hadly?

As Dana drove north along the gusty Marquette Bay, with waves crashing against the shore until they reached 41, she decided she had to tell Cadie about Mitch Lawson.

“Hey, so I got a call from Mitch Lawson’s probation officer,” Dana said out of the blue. The statement caught Cadie off guard.

“Oh, really? I didn’t realize he had to see a probation officer,” Cadie replied, turning to look at Dana.

“Yeah, Lawson got three years’ probation, so he has to meet with the officer regularly,” Dana explained.

“Well, that’s good news,” Cadie responded cheerfully. “That makes me feel a lot better. I’ve been trying to quiet my mind, but it’s hard to keep myself from looking out the rearview window to see if he’s following us,” Cadie half laughed.

“Yeah, about that,” Dana hesitated. “I guess Lawson didn’t show up for his first meeting. They don’t know where he is, but they’re looking for him.”

Cadie’s smile immediately turned into a frown. She stayed silent for a moment. Then, what she said next didn’t surprise Dana at all.

“I’m not going to let that guy get the best of me. I’m tired of looking over my shoulder,” Cadie said forcefully. “If I’m going to spend my career trying to catch bad guys, I have to toughen up even more. So, no, I’m not going to worry about Lawson. Besides, I have Nick’s baseball bat in the back seat,” Cadie grinned. “If Lawson wants a piece of that, bring it on.”

At that, Dana laughed loudly. Cadie McLeod really was one of the most resilient people she had ever met. After all she endured, here she was fighting to help another victim. Dana thought she would be damned if she was going to let Mitch Lawson or any other asshole hurt Cadie again. She instinctively patted her Glock.

Bring it on, Lawson. I’ll be ready.

Dana turned the car west headed to Vermilac. Finally, they reached the small town and the Center. Dana pulled the rental car into the small parking lot. The two women exited the car and jogged to the

building - their hands covering their heads to protect them from the rain. Once they were inside the building, a petite woman with gray hair and flashing brown eyes rushed up to them.

“Oh, my goodness, I can’t believe this,” she said breathlessly before even introducing herself. “None of us can believe this!”

As she spoke, three other women in matching blue smocks and pants emerged from the back and stood by the reception desk. Everyone looked a bit shocked.

“Oh, geez, I didn’t introduce myself. I’m Carla Lipka. I’m the director. Please come in.”

Carla showed Dana and Cadie to a back conference room with walls filled with red and white posters aimed at educating patients and making them more aware of bleeding disorders. The three women sat down at a small table while the other women crowded in the doorway to listen.

“Carla, I’m Dana Bakker. I’m a retired police sergeant from Harbor Cove.”

“Yes, I know all about you,” Carla beamed. “I was reading news articles about you and Emily all night. The articles are right. You’re wearing your ponytail.”

Dana cleared her throat, a bit surprised.

“Uh, okay. Well, then you know why we’re here. Can you tell us what happened that day? The day the young and older woman came in? Please tell us everything you remember.”

Carla smoothed back her hair, attempting to recall that busy Friday afternoon when the two strange women entered the center, the young woman pressing a bloody kitchen towel to her forehead.

“The young woman was bleeding profusely from the forehead, while the older lady led her through the front door. She said it was her daughter Steffi. The daughter really never said anything to us the entire time. We would ask her questions, like how did it happen, has she been being treated for hemophilia somewhere else, but the mother always answered for her. The daughter was like deer-in-headlights. She was extremely shy. We thought the younger woman may have been abused or trafficked. But when we would ask her directly if she would talk to us in private, she’d say no. There

was really nothing we could do. My assistant Beth gave the young woman some pamphlets, but she left them in the treatment room."

"Were they treated somewhere else?" Cadie asked. "Another center in the past?"

"The mother said they'd gone to another treatment center closer to their home over the years, but it closed."

Cadie and Dana nodded.

"Did the mother give you their names and an address?" Cadie asked.

"Yes, she did," Carla answered.

Just then, Meng Corbin walked up behind the women crowded in the doorway. She was wearing her police uniform.

"Can I get by please," she asked. The women parted for her and let her in the small room. Meng then shut the door behind her.

"Hey, Meng, thanks for joining us," Dana said.

"Of course," Meng answered. "Bring me up to speed."

Dana relayed what Carla had just told her and the fact that she had a name and address.

"Can you give me those? Phone number, too?" Meng asked Carla. "It would be a miracle, though, if any of that information is real."

"We asked a lot of questions, including contact information. We also wondered where the daughter was receiving treatment for her disorder before and what type of medications had been prescribed. The mother said they used to visit a center to the south, but it closed. They did give us their names, though: Steffi and Linda Bryant. Linda said they lived in Negaunee, west of Marquette.

Carla gave Meng the address and phone number that Linda Bryant gave them and then stepped out of the room for a moment.

“Okay, I’m going to my car to input this information,” Meng said. “I’ll be back. Oh, but first let me tell you about Barbara’s brother. My guys went up to his cabin, but he wasn’t there.”

Cadie was crestfallen. They had to find out quickly if Myeengun was involved.

“Were your people able to look around?” Dana asked.

“Yeah, but they didn’t have a search warrant. I know Barbara said we could look around, but that’s not the same thing. Anyway, we have to be careful. But my guys did find some concerning items.”

“What?!” Cadie shouted. She was becoming impatient. They needed to find Emily.

“Myeengun had a small pole barn, and in it were a large knife, a tarp, bleach, zip-ties – and a few other worrisome things.”

“Oh, shit,” Dana muttered.

“I’m going to have my people head back up there tomorrow morning. In the meanwhile, I’ve reached out to some colleagues on Grand Island to keep an eye out for Myeengun. I texted them the picture you sent me, but they said they already knew about him.”

“Good work,” Dana remarked.

Meng left the room, and, in exasperation, Cadie exclaimed, “This is taking forever!”

“Yes,” Dana nodded understandingly, “but that is part of forensics – part of police work. It’s called patience and precision. And sometimes, you have very little patience, Cadie. Of course, your passion is so powerful. But impatience is not a virtue. We investigators have to be extremely thorough and run down every tip, every lead, every piece of forensics until we can prove in court that our POI is guilty. There are no shortcuts, Cadie. And, in the end, we did gain valuable information from Barbara, not only valuable but crucial, really. It may be what cracks the case. So, being patient is something I’d like you to work on.”

“Of course, you’re right,” Cadie answered solemnly. “I know I’m too impatient for my own good. I think I inherited that from my father. And that can lead to mistakes and rushing to judgment. Thank you for being honest with me. I still have so much to learn. You’re a good mentor, Dana.”

“Well, I’m fortunate to have a good student, Miss McLeod.”

Carla walked through the door.

“Sorry about that. So, do you want me to keep going?”

Cadie and Dana nodded yes, and Carla continued describing the shy, downcast woman with a strange, anxious mother. Carla explained that they had samples of Steffi’s blood and tissue in their biobank to evaluate the seriousness of the young woman’s disorder, among other reasons.

“Can we get some of the blood and tissue?” Cadie asked anxiously.

“Yes,” Carla answered. “We can run the woman’s samples over to the State Police forensic science lab in Marquette at District Headquarters. Their lab can do DNA analysis.”

“Great,” Dana answered.

“We’ve worked with the State Police lab many times. I’ll have our medical courier take the samples over,” Carla explained.

Just then Meng walked in with a sour look on her face.

“As I figured, there’s no Steffi and Linda Bryant at that address in Negaunee. It’s a made-up address and phone number. And there’s no one by those names living in Marquette County. But I contacted LEIN. It’s a database we can use to get real-time information. I also contacted the National Crime Information Center and Nlets that shares interstate data.”

“Thank you, Meng,” Dana said.

“Yes, thank you,” Cadie added.

“Hey, let me get you all a coffee,” Carla said. “I bet everyone could use a ‘perk-me-up.’”

“That would be wonderful,” Meng replied, and the other women nodded.

Dana, Meng, and Cadie got on their phones and scrolled through their messages. Cadie had received a text message from Max Clark. She was happy to see his name.

Hey, Cadie, I just wanted to let you know I'm still alive in case you were wondering lol. The docs in TC patched me up pretty good. Said I should be able to return to the track team at some point. I'm just not sure how long it will take, though. Maybe I'll be even better than before lol! And now that you know who I am we can talk at practices ha ha. Anyway, I've been thinking about you and the case. Call me when you can. I really hope you can find Emily. It would such a blessing for her family. The not knowing is the worst part. Okay, well stay safe up there! Maximus. :)

Cadie winced at the "not knowing." She knew it must have been unbearable for Max and his mother as they waited to hear what happened to Max's father in Iraq. Such a terrible thing. She was thankful for the breezy nature of his message, though, and the playful way he signed his name – their private joke. It seemed Max was going to be okay. His injury made the gravity of the career she was choosing sink in.

Just then, Carla walked in with the coffees.

"I had a thought," she said. "The camera."

"What?" Dana answered.

"I have a camera trained on our parking lot. Maybe it captured Linda Bryant's car and plates."

"Fantastic, Carla," Meng exclaimed.

"Let me go take a look. I'll be right back," Carla said, leaving the room.

Cadie turned to Meng.

"How long do you think it will take to get information from the databases?" Cadie asked.

"It's hard to say," Meng replied. "Unfortunately, your case is by no means top of the list. All around the country and Michigan are hot cases that are priorities. So, and I hate to say it, it could be a couple of days, maybe more."

By the look on Cadie's face, Meng could tell the young woman was crushed.

"Meng, that will be too late!" Cadie said loudly. "Emily will be dead by then!"

Meng immediately looked over at Dana with a shocked, questioning look. It seemed to say, 'Uh, what's going on? Is your intern okay?'"

Dana shifted uncomfortably.

"Meng, listen. There is an aspect to this case that I really don't want to go into right now," Dana said, wondering how her long-time colleague would react to their owl and whispering dead parents. "How do I say this? There is, uh, a supernatural element to the case. A speaking owl and some voices from the dead."

Immediately, Meng's ears perked up. Her eyes became animated, and she leaned in.

"Now you must tell me."

"Are you sure you really want to hear this?" Dana asked. "You might think we're crazy."

"Why would I think that?" Meng said with one brow furrowed. "You must know my people are Potawatomi. We believe in Manitou, the all-encompassing spirit. We also believe in manitous in plants and animals and nature. Dana, you're talking to the right girl," she laughed.

Dana and Cadie appreciated the moment of levity. It was actually a relief to talk to someone who might not think their trek to find Emily Hadly alive was utter madness. Cadie shared with Meng what happened to her out on Sleeping Bear Dune: her parents' whispers and the owl that had been stalking her but in a good way.

"Wow," Meng replied, "that's quite a story. You're being visited by a guardian manitou. I'm also especially intrigued by your spirits' use of the phrase 'north wind.'"

"Why is that?" Cadie asked.

Both Dana and Cadie stared at the woman who was now stroking her right braid thoughtfully.

“I think your voices are using a Native American phrase,” Meng explained. “For example, in Potawatomi, north winds are expressed as Kiiwedin, which also means spirit of the north. The Anishinaabe people, which are the Ottawa and Ojibwe, call the north wind Giiwedin. The word Giiwedin has many meanings to Indigenous peoples, like a powerful wind or a home wind like in Longfellow’s “Hiawatha.” Some people even name their boys Giiwedin because it can represent strength and spirit.”

As soon as Meng spoke the last sentence, her energy changed. Her wide eyes and the overall excited look on her face surprised Cadie and Dana.

“What is it, Meng? Dana asked, confused by her colleague’s sudden enthusiasm.

“This is crazy. It’s just that I actually know a Giiwedin,” Meng gushed. “He’s a man who lives around here. He could be your North Wind!”

Dana and Cadie stayed silent, waiting for Meng to continue. Cadie couldn’t take it anymore.

“Who is he?” Cadie said loudly, almost yelling.

“His full name is Giiwedin Davis. He’s a lighthouse keeper. I worked with him recently because someone broke into Marquette’s lighthouse.”

“Which lighthouses does he keep?” Cadie asked with energy.

“Well, several. He keeps lighthouses throughout Keweenaw Peninsula: Mendota, Portage River, Eagle Harbor, and Gull Rock.”

Suddenly, Meng jumped up from the table.

“Oh my god,” she cried, “Copper Harbor! Giiwedin Davis takes care of the Copper Harbor Lighthouse!”

The other women were trying to follow.

“Ladies, don’t you see?” Meng said, willing them to understand. “Copper Harbor is as far north as it gets! And the Copper Harbor Lighthouse is kept by none other than Giiwedin Davis - the North Wind. Do you know what this means? It means we might have found your missing person!”

Cadie and Dana turned and looked at each other. Could this really be happening? Both women felt a chill pass through them. They really couldn’t believe this could be true. Dana’s skepticism reared up.

“So, what now?” Dana asked incredulously. “We just head to this lighthouse and hope your friend is there and knows Emily Hadly and where she lives?”

Meng shot her a look. She understood Dana’s skepticism, yet something told her this was worth pursuing.

“Unfortunately, I don’t think Gii has a cell phone. He’s old school,” Meng said. “And I know he doesn’t have voicemail. I can call his house phone, though, and hope that he’s there, but he’s always on the road.”

Suddenly, Carla strode into the room. She was smiling broadly.

“I found their car! Follow me!”

Everyone excitedly followed Carla down the hall into a utility room where the camera was located. The woman watched as Carla backed up the video. In it, they could see a mother and daughter walking from their car into the Center and then walking out of the Center and driving away in a dark car.

“Can I have the memory card?” Meng asked.

“Absolutely,” Carla said excitedly. “The footage of the mother and daughter is about 12 minutes in. Do you really think this will help?”

“I do,” Dana said.

“Absolutely,” Meng added.

Cadie just nodded her head with enthusiasm.

“Let’s head back to my office with the card so we can analyze the footage,” Meng said.

A minute later, the three women were running across the parking lot in the heavy downpour under a dark sky and whipping winds. They quickly jumped into Meng’s patrol car and sped back to the Munising Police Department.

Once they got to the station, they raced into the Intelligence Center. Meng put Carla’s memory card into the computer and large wall monitor and moved the video ahead 12 minutes. After a few seconds of scrolling, she found it. There it was! The mother and daughter entering their car and driving away. The large monitor increased the images.

“It’s a dark blue Chevy Impala,” Dana said.

“Yes, that’s right,” Meng answered as she studied the tape. “I can make out three numbers on the license plate.”

“Me, too,” added Cadie.

“I’m going to run the images through Amped Five,” Meng said. “It will clarify and enhance the video.”

Meng sat down at the computer for several minutes. Then an enlarged and clarified image of the license plate loomed on the video screen.

“We’ve got it!” Cadie yelled!

“Yes, we do,” Meng added.

Dana just shook her head.

“Nice work, Meng. As always.”

Meng ran the license plate number through their database connected to the DMW.

“We have an address! 12 Kuparisaari Ridge, Copper Harbor, Michigan!” Meng yelled. “Oh boy!”

“Let’s go!” Cadie yelled.

Dana sat there for a second, dumbfounded. She couldn’t believe this might really be happening.

The women ran outside and jumped in Meng's car. Meng gunned it, and the threesome tore out of the parking lot. Within minutes, they were speeding north up Highway-41 - headed to Copper Harbor and hopefully Emily Hadly.

Meng, who believed that animals communicate with people at the behest of Kitchi-Manitou – the Great Spirit – fully believed that Cadie's owl might be sending her messages. In the Potawatomie culture, they believe everything shares the same life force and is connected. So, people can shift into an animal for various reasons.

Dana, on the other hand, the confirmed skeptic in the car, wondered what she was doing racing up to Copper Harbor on the whims of a brown owl and two dead, whispering parents. The former police sergeant retired with honors, and she was proud of that. Having worked for the Harbor Cove Police Department for over 25 years in various roles, Dana earned a retirement badge and an identification card. A formal recognition ceremony with over 100 people was held in her honor at the historic Hotel Harbor Cove – complete with bacon-wrapped scallops and tuna tartare.

It was a great night with people appreciating my service. I don't want to let everyone down by now playing the fool.

She wondered if she might be too emotionally invested in Cadie McLeod. That their closeness might cause her to lose perspective – and rationality. She didn't share with anyone that Trooper Smith was totally against them heading north to check out the POIs. He caught wind of Cadie's supernatural encounter and vehemently disagreed with Dana's plan.

"What are you teaching your students, Dana?" Smith said in their phone conversation. "To follow whims and not true investigative methods?"

Dana couldn't totally disagree with Smith. Yet, she felt she had to trust Cadie. She really was an exceptional person with a very high IQ. Perhaps she was more attuned to spirituality and more open minded whereas others close themselves off? Dana struggled but chose to follow Cadie.

I hope I'm not on a fool's errand. I hope I'm not making poor judgements to placate Cadie and make up for the fact that I couldn't find her parents' killer?

However, as Dana looked over at Meng driving the patrol car with enthusiasm and Cadie in the back seat, her eager face looking out at the dark forest rushing by, Dana felt that she was doing the right thing. How was she to know that Cadie wasn't experiencing the supernatural? Who was she to think she had all the answers? Being a former police sergeant certainly didn't make her an expert on spirits, manitous, and what lies beyond.

And isn't that what good leaders do? Make tough decisions not based on pleasing others or hiding from judgement, but striking out in the hopes of doing good? And what if all this turns out to be nothing? Well, at least I tried. I've never worried about what others think, and I'm not going to start now. I'm going to see this thing through – all the way. But before I call for backup today, I do need concrete proof that Emily Hadly is alive. At some point, this needs to seem real to me.

As the patrol car sped north with Meng at the wheel, Cadie finally had a moment to stop and think. It gave her a chance to process all that had gone on. Then her mind travelled to the past. Cadie's therapist said she suffered from survivor's guilt, and that was largely responsible for her current choices. Even though Cadie was only 12 when her parents were run down by a car, she sometimes still blamed herself, and that guilt impacted her.

What if I had gone with them? What if they didn't have to drop me off at track practice that day? Would things have turned out differently? Would they still be alive? And why did they have to die, but I got to live?

This was a well-worn discussion between Cadie and Dr. Leigh including Cadie's need to lead a good life to justify being alive. Yet, even though Cadie knew all of this, it didn't necessarily rid her of troubling feelings. So, she understood that her quest to help others – to find Emily Hadly – was

largely born out of her past traumas. She also secretly wondered if these deep-seated needs were causing her to believe an owl was guiding her - that her parents had whispered in her ear.

Sometimes it's hard to know what's real.

Yet, Cadie was not a quitter. She was going to go to Copper Harbor and face whatever may be – even if it was another dead end. She understood the consequences. When the word got out about her supernatural experiences, some people in the program might think she was unwell. That she hadn't healed from her past experiences. That maybe she wasn't fit to be in the internship. But none of that mattered right now. If there was a chance that Emily Hadly was alive, and Cadie could do something about it, then she was going to do everything in her power to save that girl's life.

Chapter 57

The Man
Anniversary of a Bullet

The waves of Lake Superior threw themselves upon the jagged coastline, crashing and thrashing in agony just outside his door. Up above, rain assaulted the roof, while the storm's winds roared, making the house shudder. The noise was deafening, and its fury matched the emotions whipping wildly in the man's troubled soul. The Big Lake's storm seemed to mirror the storm roaring within.

Today was the day he would finally murder Emily Hadly - the girl he had abducted 14 years ago.

And yes, he had to kill her. He had made a vow, and now the anniversary was here. Also, it was her or them. Granted, none of this was her fault per se, but is it really ever the victim's fault? Sometimes, people just have to pay for their family's sins. Her family gutted his family. Someone has to account for that.

It was Agatha Hadly who set this tragic outcome in motion all those years ago when she set her sights on their father. She could have had her pick of any man in Saugatuck. Yet, she chose to seduce Henrik de Lange, a married man, stealing him away from his fragile wife and children. Because of Agatha's selfish actions, a son and daughter were forever destroyed. Not only did they have to witness their depressed mother crying endlessly and hitting herself in the head, but on a Friday afternoon many years ago Luke and Lydia de Lange raced into their parents' bedroom and discovered their mother Helena, the only person to ever love them, dead of a gunshot wound to her head.

Where was their father during all this? Fucking that cunt Agatha Hadly.

Suffice to say, Luke and Lydia were damaged goods. Neither could build friendships or form healthy relationships. Neither could give or receive real love. Following the death of Helena, Lydia de Lange

turned inward like her frail mother. She became withdrawn and isolated, suffering endlessly from low self-esteem and anxiety – even depression at times.

Conversely, the DNA of her fraternal twin Luke de Lange more closely matched his father Henrik's, and his genetics brought forth sociopathy and narcissism. Luke grew into a manipulative, arrogant, and egotistical man with a lack of empathy for other people and an inflated sense of self. He was forever the victim and forever justified in his actions – sometimes violent - because he was always the one who was wronged. To be fair, though, it probably is a goal beyond reason to fix a man who saw his mother's brains strewn across a room.

After Helena's suicide and the death of their cold, neglectful, and philandering father Henrik, the de Lange family was no more. Luke and Lydia were sent to Harbor Cove to live with their grandmother, a reclusive woman who suffered from the same mental ailments as her daughter.

Now, all these years later, here sat the man in his kitchen, anger boiling over, while he twisted a large, gleaming knife into the table until it created a deep, splintered hole. His brain ached as he thought about Emily – whom his sick sister named Lena after their mother – and his father screwing Agatha Hadly while his own mother lay bleeding. It made his head pound so hard he felt it might split in two.

He pulled the baggie from his pants' pocket and emptied the white drug on table. He didn't even bother to make a line. Instead, he leaned forward and sucked in the entire pile.

Cocaine and adrenaline coursed through the man's raging veins, and cortisol flooded his body. Decades of intense hate and anger for the Hadly family overwhelmed him, and all his hurt and betrayal – his deep trauma – engulfed his psyche. He imagined stabbing Emily Hadly in the heart over and over and over again and avenging the injustice done to his family – to his mother and his sister and him.

It was finally time to make things right.

Realizing he would soon carry out this act of retribution lit a flaming fire in his chest. He began panting heavily. The muscles in his jaw and mouth constricted. Hot sweat poured down his face, pricking and

stinging his dark eyes. Saliva mixed with the burning drug slid down his raw throat. Finally, a red mist burst forth behind his eyes, and he became a charging bull.

Now, after all these years, Luke de Lange would finally have justice and restore his family's honor!

He tore the knife from the table. He walked quickly out the front door and into the intensifying storm, gale-force winds and rain blowing sideways - his black jacket billowing behind him like the coat of the devil. He jumped in his van and took off for Copper Harbor - the jagged piece of green beach glass still enshrined on his console. He glanced down at the glass dried in blood and drove faster.

Chapter 58

Mr. G
The Terrifying Letter

"I can't see a lick," Giiwedin Davis grumbled as he drove north through the unrelenting rain. "This storm is a bad one, alright."

A powerful wind gust pushed his front right tire off the road. Davis struggled to get the truck back on the slick pavement.

"Please look out for me, Gizhe-Manidoo," Davis prayed to the Great Spirit as he clenched the wheel.

Davis had spent the last several days visiting lighthouses throughout the 70-mile-long Keweenaw Peninsula that juts into Lake Superior. Yesterday, the older man paid a call on the Eagle Harbor Lighthouse on the northern shores of the peninsula - just doing some general maintenance. He assisted the Keweenaw County Historical Society by cleaning a few ground floor windows. He also swept the spiral steps and dusted the lantern room.

He didn't want to admit it, but the job was starting to get the best of him. Taking care of lighthouse properties - even pulling weeds and picking up trash – as well as tending to the interiors of the peninsula lighthouses were causing aches and pains up and down his aging body. He thought he might retire in the next year. Plus, he was lonely. It was now 20 years since Wenonah left him for the Land of Souls. He thought it might be time for a new chapter in his life.

He was driving up Bay Front Drive when he saw a white van in front of him driving erratically. It quickly turned left on the isolated Miikana Trail.

That's odd. I never see any cars drive down the Trail.

It was the trail that led to Kuparisaari Ridge, and the only home miles down that remote, secluded road was Little Bird's cabin. Seeing the van bothered Giiwedin. He had planned on visiting the

lighthouse in the morning after spending the night nearby at a friend's house, but began to think otherwise.

Maybe I should check on the lighthouse today and then head over to Lena's?

Giiwedin drove for a while until he reached his friend Matthew's farm. He stopped in and dropped off some items. Giiwedin explained to Matthew that he wasn't going to be able to help him with a project after all; he needed to get to the lighthouse today. Unfortunately, the rain was now coming down in buckets.

"You can't head over there in this rain," Matthew counseled. "At least wait until it calms down."

Giiwedin didn't want to wait, but he realized his friend was right. It would be hard to drive in this downpour. The men went inside, and Matthew made Giiwedin a sandwich. After eating and talking for a bit, Giiwedin realized the storm wasn't subsiding. He felt compelled to leave; he was increasingly bothered by the van he saw enter the trail leading to Lena's cabin.

Giiwedin left his friend's house and drove several miles until he encountered an accident up ahead. He could see the police lights flickering, and traffic slowed to a stop.

"C'mon, c'mon," Giiwedin said anxiously, tapping his wheel. Finally, the police allowed traffic to continue, and he drove for another two miles and then turned off the paved road. He entered the narrow dirt drive that led to the small parking lot for the Copper Harbor Lighthouse. The rain and wind pounded his Chevy Colorado as it maneuvered its way around fallen branches and large pools of water. His windshield wipers were on high, but the intensity of the falling rain made it difficult to see. The defrost was on full blast, but still the windshield was blurry.

Finally, the man reached the parking lot. He put on his heavy, hard-shell jacket and wide-brimmed hat and began walking through the raging storm to the lighthouse. After many minutes of fighting the wind and traversing the saturated, uneven terrain, Giiwedin's legs were soaked and hurt more than ever. His jacket wasn't long enough to protect his legs from the strong winds and straight-line rain.

After a few more turns, he reached the yellow and orange-brick keeper's quarters that was adjacent to the Copper Harbor Lighthouse.

As always, the first thing he did was check the mailbox. He lifted the wet, cold metal lid and fished his hand around. It landed on a piece of paper, and he pulled out a letter. The man unfolded it while leaning under the roof's overhang to protect the letter. Then he read its contents.

His face immediately grew grim as he grasped the situation. Little Bird!

The white van.

Leaning his head into the fierce winds, Giiwedin began to make his way along the keeper's quarters, heading to the front door, when suddenly his boot caught on something. He looked down, and in the rain and mist he saw shattered glass. He immediately looked at the window and saw that all the glass was gone.

Is this situation happening now?!

Giiwedin quickly made his way to the front door and removed the key from his pocket. Mr. G was a gentle man but a strong man – physically tough but perhaps even sharper mentally. Many times throughout his life, he had lived alone in Michigan's unforgiving woods for weeks on end. He had tracked and killed his own food. He had endured horrific storms. He had fought off predators.

The man knew what he needed to do. He would not let Little Bird be harmed. He turned the key in the lock and stealthily entered the keeper's quarters.

PART III

DEAD RECKONING

"Hell is empty, and all the devils are here." – William Shakespeare

Chapter 59

Luke and Lydia
Terrible Twins

The two women spotted the man's headlights through the cabin window – sharp, ominous lights that pierced the storm's dark sky and the property's thick tangle of pines. Lena jumped up from the worn dinette table while mother dropped her teacup, shattering it.

"He's here! Hide! Hurry! In the closet!" Mother screamed.

Lena raced across the small room to the broom closet. She could hear the terrifying crunch of his tires on crushed stones and car door slamming into its metal frame. He would enter the house in seconds. She swiftly opened the knotty pine door and pushed aside the skinny vacuum. She squeezed her tall, lithe body into the small, musty space, and hit her head which caused her to bite the side of her mouth. It was just in time. The heavy front door flung open, and the solid wood banged hard against the interior pine wall.

"Where is she?" he howled, his blue eyes darting madly.

"She's went for a walk," Mother replied, smoothing her coarse hair and trying to appear calm. "To the wildflower garden."

"Like hell, she did," the man snarled, eyeing the shards of teacup strewn about, and liquid dripping down the table. "You always lie! And it's storming outside!"

From the closet, Lena heard car keys slam on the table and the sound of a kitchen chair being shoved across the floor.

"See for yourself. She's not here," Mother said, trying to quiet her growing fear.

Lena, quivering, peeked through the sliver of an opening at the enraged man. Just a handful of days ago, he burst into their home and shoved Lena into a kitchen cabinet, cutting her forehead and

causing it to bleed profusely. Then Mother stepped between Lena and the man and stopped him from hurting her further. Now, Lena knew he was here to kill her.

The terrible man circled the table to reach Mother. Her faded blue house dress drooped on her thinning body. Her dull flaxen hair hung flat to her scalp. She looked so fragile and beat down versus his menacing build, yet her blue eyes revealed a growing strength.

“I told you not to come,” Mother hissed through gritted teeth.

“And then what? We both go to jail for the rest of our lives?”

Mother took a step toward him.

“There must be another way.”

The man slammed his fist on the table.

“There isn’t another way! This is the way! Now go fucking get her!”

Suddenly, a shocked Lena saw Mother grab his car keys off the linoleum table and run into the living room!

“You’re not taking her!” she screamed over her shoulder.

Through the crack, Lena saw the man stomp into the living room.

“Do you really think you are going to stop me? Give me the keys!”

He looked like the devil in his big, black rain coat. He walked right up to her. Mother was standing in front of the basement steps, shaking and now crying.

“She has to die! It’s the least we can do!”

I grabbed the vacuum to steady myself as my head felt light. Then I remembered my bear necklace. My neighbor Mr. McKinley called it a talisman. I grasped the tiny brown bear.

Give me strength.

My teeth chattered so hard I thought the man might hear. The man stepped closer to Mother.

“I have to do this! For both of us! Now give me the keys!”

Mother clutched them tighter.

“No, no, no!” she screamed. “I won’t give them to you! I won’t! I’m not letting you kill her!”

The man took two large steps, put his hands on Mother’s shoulders, and with all his strength shoved her down the stairs! Her anguished screams engulfed the cabin. I heard her falling, bones cracking on every concrete step. Then she hit the basement floor with a sickening thud. The man immediately tore down the stairs.

Move! Go now!

In the basement, the man hissed, “Lydia, give them to me! You always knew it would come to this!”

Luke spit the commands into his twin sister’s face.

“She’s my child!” his sister cried out. “She belongs to me! You can’t take her from me! She’s all I have! Please don’t take her!”

Lydia began to wail. Luke grabbed at the now bloody keys.

“Killing her isn’t going to take your pain away, Luke!” Lydia yelled. “And you know it was never her fault. It was always father’s fault! It was always Henrik! He’s the bastard! And mother, too! For leaving us!”

“Do you not remember what today is?” Luke spat with disdain at Lydia. “What happened on this very day?”

“Of course I do.”

“Then you know why I have to kill her today.”

Luke stared at his sister as his tortured mind recalled that life-altering day. A lifetime of pain and anger swelled up inside of him until he felt he would burst into a million, tiny, worthless pieces. Tears streamed down his face as he remembered the afternoon that destroyed his family, broke his spirit, and ignited a hatred – and a vow - that would span decades.

Chapter 60

A Deadly Day for the DeLanges

Luke de Lange was perched on his father's worn lazy boy playing a video game, and his twin sister Lydia was sprawled on the couch reading a comic book when Henrik de Lange barged into the living room. He was being chased by their mother, a red-faced Helena de Lange who was screaming and crying hysterically and trying to hit her husband with a rolling pin.

"I can't believe you're doing this!" Helena shouted as Henrik tried to shield himself from his wife. "I have given you everything! I have cooked for you, I have cleaned for you, I even let you fuck me when I knew you were cheating on me, and this is how you repay me? By leaving me for that slut?! You're a bastard, Henrik de Lange! Just like your father!"

Helena took another swing and hit Henrik square on his elbow. He cried out in pain and grabbed hold of the pin and wrenched it from his wife's hands.

Lydia immediately sprang from the couch and ran to her brother. He had saved her so many times from her father's blows. He would save her now. She squeezed in next to him, and the two huddled together. Lydia was wide-eyed, but Luke stared at his father with a burning intensity. Many times, they had witnessed their parents' fights, but today was different. The de Lange children had never seen their mother strike their father.

"Don't you ever hit me again, you bitch, or it will be the last thing you do!" Henrik shouted, now holding the rolling pin over his diminutive wife's head. "What did you expect? That I would stay in this shitty marriage forever?!"

Luke's hand went to the Swiss army knife in his pocket. He had thoughts of stabbing his father in the heart.

“Everything is always the same!” Henrik de Lange continued to rant. “Same dinner! Same sex over and over! Agatha is good in bed, and she cares about me! She thinks I’m handsome! She even looks up to me! Not like you ever did, you old cow!”

Suddenly, the 5’2” Helena collapsed on the living room floor in a heap.

“Why now, Henrik? You’ve been cheating on me with Agatha for months. Why are you leaving me now?”

While Lydia whimpered, Luke glared at his devil of a father who dared to hurt the best mother in the world. As he watched his father tower over his mother, he began to inwardly rage, and his young, narcissistic mind swirled wildly with thoughts of murdering his father and his mistress.

Helena was now sobbing in her hands, while the acrid smell of dinner burning permeated the room.

“Because,” Henrik replied cooly, crossing the room to get to his cigarettes, “she gave me an ultimatum. She said if I didn’t leave you, then we were through. And I don’t want to be through. Simple as that.”

Henrik lit his cigarette and took a long drag.

“Listen, Helena, Agatha is younger than you. She’s prettier than you. She’s better in bed. And she thinks I’m great. I’d be a fool not to be with her. But don’t worry, I’ll still give you money. I’ll still take care of everything.”

Helena, defeated, looked over at Henrik.

“Since when have you taken care of everything? You’ve been cheating on me for as long as I can remember.”

Henrik walked to the closet and took out his coat. He turned and paused for a moment while he put one arm in a sleeve.

“Well, I did the right thing by you, didn’t I? When you got pregnant on purpose, which I know you did because Marianne told me, I married you, didn’t I? I didn’t want to marry you, though, but your

father promised me the business. Everyone said I could do better, and now I am doing better. I'm going to be with a beautiful, younger woman who adores me. I don't need your father's money anymore."

Helena stood up shakily. Luke also was now standing. He tightly gripped the small, cold knife in his right hand. Lydia's back was to her children as she addressed Henrik.

"And Agatha doesn't care that she's breaking up our family? She doesn't care that she's hurting Luke and Lydia? Taking their father away from his children? This slut of yours doesn't care about any of that?"

Henrik began to laugh loudly as he made his way to the bedroom to pick up his suitcase.

"No. Why should she? You're of no concern to her. It's not her fault that you've lost your looks and become boring. That's on you, my dear. Honestly, all of this is your fault. If you had been a better wife, maybe none of this would have happened."

Luke, who adored his mother, stood mute, glaring at his father across the room, while all manner of violence exploded in his brain.

I'll kill him! Then I'll kill her! Maybe I'll stab them both – in the eye! Maybe I'll shoot them in the head and cut up their bodies! I'll stomp on their brains!

While Henrik rummaged in the front hallway, and Helena ran off, supposedly to the kitchen to tend to her burnt roast, Lydia cried and rocked herself in the chair. Through her tears, she looked up at her trembling brother. She noticed a purplish vein pulsating in his forehead. She saw the knife in his hand. He was mumbling something under his breath.

Then the children heard the front door open and close. Lydia jumped up and ran to the window. In anguish, she saw her father get in his car, back out of the driveway, and roar away. Not one word of goodbye to his wife and children.

Just gone.

The smell of roast beef burning in the stove was now even stronger. Fumes from the charred meat and greasy fat poured into the room. Suddenly, the piercing sound of the smoke alarm rang out.

“Dinner is burning, Luke! Where is mother?!” Lydia cried, her wet eyes darting crazily as she covered her ears from the alarm.

Then came the sounds they would never forget.

There was a sharp, ear-piercing crack followed by a heavy thud in their parents’ bedroom. It was the sound of gunshot followed by a petite body hitting a wooden floor. Helena de Lange was dead. In a matter of minutes, the de Lange children had lost both their mother and their father. In those minutes, not only was the trajectory of Luke and Lydia’s lives altered forever, but those of a great many others were impacted for years to come.

Chapter 61

Lena
Escape to Copper Harbor

Luke wrenched the keys out of Lydia's hand, twisting her broken arm, and his sister shrieked. It was a terrifying yelp of pain and sadness that reverberated through the cabin. He had never hit his sister before, but Luke now reared back his fist and punched his sister hard in the head. Lydia immediately fell unconscious.

Lena, hiding upstairs, couldn't hear what was being said, but she knew it was now or never. She slowly opened the broom closet door and quietly but quickly walked down the narrow hallway that led to the cabin's back door – completely unaware of the blood drops that were now falling from her reopened head wound.

Just before she unlatched the metal door that led to the back yard, she stooped down. She slipped open the small drawer in the side table next to the washing machine. She grabbed Mr. G's whistle and shoved it in her jeans' pocket. Then she opened the door to the cupboard under the wash sink and removed the backpack.

Lena eased open the door and ran down the steps.

Suddenly, the most horrendous noise exploded from inside the cabin: it was the man screaming her name.

"Leeeeeena!!!"

The young woman rushed out into the storm's powerful wind and rain. She ran down the muddy path that led into the thick, Michigan woods and ultimately the deep, dark waters of The Big Lake and Copper Harbor Lighthouse. She was thankful she still possessed the same speed she had as a child.

As Lena ran, she felt the bear necklace bob on her neck. She grabbed hold of it and prayed that Mr.

McKinley was right, that she did indeed possess strength and courage - and in this moment was fully endowed with the power to do great things.

In the dark, murky woods, Lena dashed down the rain-drenched path. Thick sheets of water saturated the ground beneath her feet, creating holes and puddles – dangerous conditions for outrunning a sociopath. In the gusty winds, Lena tried to remain calm, but it was difficult to do so as she sucked in icy breaths that constricted her chest. She figured the temperature was in the thirties, and she knew the wind and cold would strip away her heat. She prayed she didn't succumb to hypothermia, but she wondered if that death might be preferable to whatever the man chasing her had in mind.

Lena took a quick look over her shoulder but didn't see him - not yet anyways. She wiped rain from her face, but in the dark woods didn't realize the rain was mixed with her blood.

Her original plan was to veer off the main path and run down a smaller, narrower trail to her debris pile. However, when she got to the trailhead, she could see large branches and tree limbs blocking it. They had cracked off the red oak tree in the storm.

Now what?!

Breathing hard and shivering, Lena continued rushing down the path, dodging wet, overhanging branches. As she ran, she attempted to skirt around the potholes filling with cold water. Her tennis shoes were completely soaked. Initially, her thought was to run a zig-zag in the debris alongside the path to mask her footsteps, just like Mr. G had advised, but in the pouring rain, hiding her footprints didn't matter anymore. Plus, the nearby leaves and moss were sopping wet and slippery. So, Lena made a decision.

I'm heading to the lighthouse. There, I'll be warm and dry, and hopefully Mr. G will be there. If not, I'll just have to find a place to hide. But it's either that or die out here in the cold.

Up ahead, she could barely make out where the trail turned north toward Lake Superior. The branches at the front of the trail were hanging low with the weight of the water. Just as she turned into the northern trail, she heard the cabin's back door slam. Lena tried to run faster, but it was difficult on the slippery path. Suddenly, her pounding heart felt as if it would explode as she heard the man yelling.

"Lena! Lena! Where are you?"

Now panicked, the young woman ran frantically, slipping and sliding in puddles, her pants covered in splattered mud, down the dark path. Her soaked blonde hair was plastered to her head. Her cold hands were becoming numb. She didn't dare slow down, though. Slowing down meant death. She believed that with her entire being.

He's absolutely going to kill me.

In the near distance, the man continued to scream, but Lena couldn't make out what he was saying. She could only sense the hatred and violence in his voice.

Chapter 62

In the Shadow of Superior
Lydia's Sorrow

Cadie, Dana, and Meng pulled into the stone driveway at 12 Kuparisaari Ridge. They could see there was a light on in the cabin. There also was a car parked next to the small, knotty pine home and a white van parked in the driveway. Dana and Cadie immediately took notice. This might be the long-rumored van. Dana saw that it was a Ford Aerostar.

As they sat in the car, rain pouring down the windows, Dana turned to Cadie and Meng. All three women were breathing fast and shallow - their hearts racing. Dana could feel the acid burning in her stomach, flaring her ulcer. The reality was setting in. They might encounter Emily Hadly and the person or persons who kidnapped her within minutes.

"Are you ready, ladies? Dana asked, her eyes darting.

"Yes, Dana," Cadie said strongly, "Let's go find her."

"I'm ready," Meng replied, adjusting the Smith and Wesson on her hip.

In the pouring rain, the women exited Meng's patrol car. Dana and Cadie ran up to the side of the white van. There it was! The blue and gold compass logo! In the rain, Cadie and Dana locked eyes. This had to be the van! Suddenly, Cadie turned and ran back to the car. Dana watched her go – confused.

"What are you doing?" Dana yelled over the loud winds, but Cadie didn't hear her. Cadie opened the car door and emerged seconds later with Nick's Louisville Slugger in her right hand. She ran to catch up. Dana saw the bat and nodded approvingly, and both women walked quickly to the cabin's front

door with Meng a few steps behind. Dana was just getting ready to knock on the wooden front door when she saw that it was open a crack. Her right hand resting on her Glock, with her left hand, Dana slowly pushed open the large, wooden door, and the women entered the quiet cabin.

The first thing they noticed was a tea cup shattered across the table and pooled liquid on the kitchen floor. Other than that, everything seemed normal. They left the kitchen and headed into the small living room. Suddenly, Cadie yelled out.

“Did you hear that?!”

“What was that?!” Meng said, her eyes surveying the room.

“It’s coming from over there!” Dana yelled, pointing at the entrance to the basement stairs.

With Dana walking first, the group headed to the door. Just then, a small cry wafted up the basement steps.

“Did you hear it?” Cadie said excitedly.

Dana reached into the darkened doorway and moved her hand along the knotty pine wall looking for a light switch. She found it, and turned it on.

“Oh my god!” she yelled.

Crumpled and broken at the bottom of the basement stairs was a person covered in blood. They were barely conscious, just moaning and whimpering. Dirty blonde hair mixed with blood concealed their face.

“I’m calling for help,” Meng yelled, pulling out her cell phone.

Dana ran down the cement stairs to the injured person.

“Hello, can you hear me?” Dana asked, kneeling down on the cold, bloody concrete. She leaned in and gently wiped the hair from the person’s face. She saw it was a woman.

“Can you hear me? Can you talk?” Dana said. She observed the woman’s contorted body.

The woman tried to answer, but her voice was a raspy whisper. Her eyes were glassy and held a blank stare. Dana leaned in until she was right in front of the woman’s face. Cadie was now a few steps above her. Meng was up in the living room calling for an ambulance.

“What is your name?” Dana asked.

Ever so quietly, the woman responded, “Lydia.”

“What is your last name, Lydia?”

“de Lange. My name is Lydia de Lange.”

“What happened to you Lydia?” Dana asked while Cadie looked on a few steps above her - staring at the bloody, older woman in a heap at the bottom of the stairs.

“My brother.”

“Your brother? Did your brother hurt you?” Dana asked.

“Yes, he pushed me. He hit me,” the woman whispered through the blood gurgling in her mouth. Cadie noticed swelling on the side of her head.

“Dana, look,” Cadie said. “She’s got a big bruise on her head.”

“Where is your brother now?”

“I don’t know,” the woman said quietly, slightly shaking her head. She was clearly confused and barely conscious. Suddenly, she tried to lift her shoulders.

“You have to save her. Please save her.”

Dana and Cadie stared at each other.

“Save who?” Dana asked. “Who do we need to save?”

“My daughter Lena,” the woman cried and whimpered. “My brother is going to kill my daughter Lena.”

The woman began moaning. All of a sudden, she was speaking incoherently – gibberish the women couldn’t understand. She mumbled something about her mother and Agatha and a gunshot.

“I think she might be having a psychological break,” Dana said.

Cadie advanced to the last stair.

There was an oppressive silence in the basement as Cadie spoke.

“Lydia, can you hear me? Lydia! Listen to me!”

Finally, the older woman looked at Cadie. Then Cadie asked the most important question.

“Lydia, is Lena Emily Hadly?’

The lady, though barely cognitive, opened her bloodshot eyes wider and looked at Cadie. She acted as if she didn’t know the name.

“Who?” she whispered in a higher pitch and looked away.

“Emily Hadly,” Cadie said more forcefully. She felt the woman was lying. “We want to help you, Lydia. We want to help her. But you must tell us. Is the person your brother wants to kill Emily Hadly?”

The woman didn't say anything for a minute or two. Cadie and Dana were riveted, their eyes fixed on Lydia. Finally, the older woman seemed to shake her head yes.

"Was that a yes?" Cadie said, her body shaking. "Is Lena Emily Hadly?"

Then the woman whispered so quietly that Cadie had to lean in, her right ear almost touching the woman's bloody lips.

"Yes. Lena is Emily Hadly."

A chill blasted through both women. They couldn't believe it. They stared, utterly and profoundly stunned. Neither could say a word. Their mouths weren't working, just gaping, and their brains couldn't comprehend what they had just heard. Finally, Dana broke the spell.

"Are you saying that your daughter is Emily Hadly, and your brother is now going to kill her?"

Again, the older woman faintly nodded yes.

"Oh, my god, Dana! Oh, my god!" Cadie screamed and suddenly collapsed on the steps. She broke into heart wrenching sobs that racked her entire body. She cried, and she couldn't stop.

Dana knew Cadie's reaction was tied to her own past trauma: her own abduction.

"It's okay, Cadie," Dana said gently, rubbing Cadie's knee.

"I'm sorry for acting like this, Dana," Cadie said through her sobs. "I'm just so happy Emily is alive. It's a miracle, honestly."

Cadie felt she could throw up, but she willed herself to fight her emotions – to push them down. Now was not the time to cry. She wiped her teary face with her shirt sleeve and stood up. She shakily grabbed onto the wooden railing with her left hand to keep her balance. In her right hand, she still grasped the Louisville Slugger.

Dana turned back to Lydia.

“Where is she, Lydia?” Dana commanded, eyeing the woman suspiciously. “Where is Emily?”

“Please find her,” the woman whispered. “I love her.”

The women recoiled. Lydia’s words disgusted them. Here was someone who abducted Emily Hadly 14 years ago and was now talking about how she loved her. It was revolting.

“Where is she, Lydia?!” Cadie yelled, her voice reverberating through the stone Michigan basement. “Where is Emily?! Tell us! Tell us right now!”

Lydia slowly turned her head. Cadie could see through the woman’s tears the anguish on her face.

“She went to the lighthouse,” Lydia whispered. “Go to the lighthouse.”

Suddenly, Lydia began speaking gibberish again. She was thrashing her head side to side - clearly having some type of mental or physical health episode.

Just then, upstairs, Meng screamed.

“Get up here! I found something!”

“We’ll be back,” Cadie yelled to the woman as she moved up the stairs followed by Dana.

They saw Meng standing in the back hallway. She was pointing at the floor.

“Look! It’s blood!” Meng shouted.

Dana and Cadie ran over and saw blood drops leading to the cabin’s back door.

“Oh, shit!” Dana yelled. “He hurt her! I’ve got to go!”

“I’m going, too!” Cadie shouted.

Meng yelled out, “I’ll take care of the lady! You guys go get Emily! I’ve called for backup and an ambulance!”

“You’re not going!” Dana yelled at Cadie. “It’s too dangerous! You’re staying here!”

“I’m going, and you can’t stop me!” Cadie shouted back. As she began to head out the back door, baseball bat in hand, something caught her eye. On the window sill was a little bowl with two Bearberry leaves. Cadie stared hard at the tiny oval leaves, remembering them alongside the blood in the photos of the beach, and immediately understood their significance. More determined than ever, Cadie raced out the back door of the cabin.

Dana watched Cadie run out and yelled to Meng, “See what I have to put up with?!”

Then the veteran cop turned and ran after the young woman - out into the dark, unforgiving woods and raging storm – hoping to save Emily Hadly before she was dead.

Chapter 63

Lena
No Choice but Up

Lena could feel her muscles tightening in the icy rain. Her shivering had increased, and she was fatigued as she ran down the trail toward the Lake Superior Beach. But she could now see the light from the lighthouse flashing and flickering through the mist and trees and immediately felt more hopeful.

I just need to make it there! Mr. G please be there. Please help me.

Suddenly, she could hear the man screaming again. She heard him call out her name but couldn't make out any other words. Lena wondered if he had found the trail that cut to the beach. It would be almost impossible to get to the beach if he tried to navigate the dense, overgrown woods. She prayed he couldn't find the trail under the dark canopy of trees beneath the murky sky.

After running over and around countless branches, limbs, sticks, holes, and puddles, Lena's feet finally landed on the gritty sand. She had made it to the rocky coast of Lake Superior – The Big Lake - with its enormous waves crashing against boulders just feet away. She looked east and saw the white, 44-foot-tall Copper Harbor Lighthouse shrouded in gray mist. Next to it, jutting high into the swirling clouds was a 62-foot steel tower. Built in 1933 to provide automated light, its beacon flashed and cast rays over the dark, frothing water in every direction.

Do I dare blow Mr. G's whistle? If I do, the man will know where I am. But if I don't, Mr. G may never know I'm here.

He told her to only to use the whistle in an extreme emergency because it was so loud and could hurt her. He told her to cover her ears and only blow the whistle once and quickly. Lena put the storm safety whistle to her lips and blew. The ear-splitting shriek suddenly filled every inch of air, and Lena immediately dropped the whistle into the sand and grabbed at her ringing ears.

She tried to run, but it was almost impossible. Her legs felt like tree stumps, heavy and sluggish. Cold rain continued to drench her hair and clothes, while she struggled to lift one leaden foot after another. Her adrenaline was long gone, replaced by exhaustion.

I won't give up! I am not letting that man take away my life!

After what seemed like an eternity, Lena finally reached the lighthouse and the story and a half keeper's quarters. She tried the metal door handle, but it was locked. She went around the side of the brick building. Just as she was peering in, she heard the man off it in the distance screaming. He was getting closer! Through the hammering rain, Lena looked back down the beach toward the trail but didn't see him. Yet, she knew he was closing in. She raced over to the garden and grabbed a large rock. Then she peeled off her jacket and bookbag, and wrapped her coat around her hand. That's when she noticed the blood.

"Oh no!"

Lena wiped her forehead and saw the mix of blood, sweat, and rainwater dripping down her hand. She felt woozy. She wanted to sit down but knew she couldn't. She had to keep going. Lena reared back her arm and slammed the rock into the cast iron window, instantly shattering the thick historic glass into large, jagged pieces. With her jacket wrapped around her hand, she pushed at the pieces until they broke free and fell into the dwelling. Again, she heard the man's screams.

Lena quickly climbed through the window, blood dripping, and was now in the warm, dark living room. She had been there many times before. It was a small living quarters with six rooms: a kitchen and living area, small bedroom, bathroom, and exhibit rooms. The second floor acted as a museum.

The young woman looked around frantically, wondering where she would hide. Lena had considered all this beforehand, but now, cold, tired, and in shock, her brain wouldn't work. She ran to the bedroom, but it only contained a white Jenny Lind bed and metal fireplace. If she hid under the bed, it was the first place the man would look. She glanced around the living room. There was a closet full of towels and linens. Was there any room to hide? She opened the door. It was too small to fit her body.

From the closet, she grabbed a pillowcase and pushed it into the cut on her forehead, stopping a blood trail that would give her away. She went into the kitchen, but its rustic cabinets were also too small, and she knew if she hid in the bathroom shower, the man would find her instantly. The upstairs exhibit room was completely open.

There was only one place to go.

Lena walked over to the tower and looked up. Above her was the narrow, cast iron, spiral staircase. She didn't know for sure, but she thought she remembered Mr. G saying it was 72 twisting steps to the top. Gripping the railing, Lena began climbing the bold red steps that led to the glass and iron-framed lantern room. Her only hope was to hide behind the massive glass lens and pray he didn't see her. Lena's brain body were tiring, and she had run out of ideas.

Chapter 64

Copper Harbor
In Pursuit of Evil

In the icy rain, Dana and Cadie sprinted down the cold, dark path, searching the woods for any signs of Emily Hadly or the person chasing her. They didn't dare yell out Emily's name and tip off their bad guy. They just ran on and on, their eyes constantly scanning the thick, gloomy woods as the wind howled through the trees. They rounded a bend in the path when suddenly they heard an ear-piercing whistle. Both women grabbed at their ears.

"Oh my god?" Dana cried out. "That was so loud!"

"It came from that way," Cadie pointed.

"C'mon," Dana yelled. The women took off running. Suddenly, they heard something else. It was a man screaming.

"Did you hear that?" Cadie said between breaths that were creating mist in the cold air.

"He's up ahead," Dana said, panting from exertion in the biting winds. "C'mon!"

The two women continued on, running fast through the unfavorable conditions of a near freezing temperature, heavy rains, blustery winds, and a water-soaked trail covered in debris. It was the worst-case scenario.

Suddenly, they heard the man screaming again, but now, it seemed like he was behind them.

"Where is he?" Dana asked, surveying the dense woods.

"We must've missed a cut off," Cadie said. "Let's backtrack."

The two women turned around and began walking east, carefully searching for a trail that would take them north to the beach and lighthouse. Cadie took out her cell phone and turned on its flashlight. The light made eerie shadows on the swaying trees, while rain water peppered the phone.

“There it is!” Cadie said.

Both women saw the narrow trail that headed north toward Lake Superior. They turned onto the trail and began running again, mustering up renewed energy in the unrelenting storm. They could now hear the man screaming again.

“Oh, shit,” Dana said. “Listen to that guy. He’s fucking nuts. We have to catch him!”

The women continued to run, seeing the lighthouse’s tower light flashing through the trees.

“We’re getting close.” Cadie said. “I can hear the water.”

Minutes later, Cadie and Dana were on the beach, the churning dark gray Lake Superior just feet away. Massive waves crashed against boulders. Icy rain saturated the sand. They looked east and saw the man; he was gaining on the lighthouse.

“There he is! Let’s go!” Cadie yelled.

Dana stopped abruptly.

“I’m going, but you’re staying! It’s too dangerous!” Dana yelled at her young counterpart. Her ankle was suddenly throbbing, and she felt she might’ve twisted it on the trail, but she didn’t want any more harm to come to her interns. She would go on ahead without Cadie. Yet, the frigid gusts were making it difficult to stay upright.

“What?! No! I’m going with you!” Cadie stubbornly yelled back, her head shaking forcefully.

Dana took a step closer. They were now inches apart. Rain covered both their faces.

“Cadie, you have to listen me! I have already lost one intern! I’m not losing you, too!”

In the pouring rain, Cadie just stared at Dana, her mentor – her friend. She always knew how much Dana cared about her, but in this moment, the depth of their connection became even more clear.

Cadie put her hand on Dana’s shoulder.

“I have to do this. I was led here to save Emily. My mother and father brought me to this moment for a reason, Dana. You have to trust me.”

The two women locked eyes, wind tossing debris all around them, and Dana knew Cadie was right. Dana had trusted the young woman this far. It was time to trust her all the way.

“Alright! Go, then! Save Emily! I’ll be right behind you! Use that speed of yours!”

Cadie nodded solemnly and took off running. It wasn’t easy in the wet sand with the wind pushing her sideways. Yet, her many years of sprinting, of running hurdles - all the falls, bruises, cuts, and scrapes – now made sense. She was strong and in the best shape of her life, and she was going to run down this creep if it was the last thing she did. She grasped the bat even harder and raced toward the lighthouse.

Chapter 65

Lena
Malevolent Memories

As the lighthouse shook and deafening winds roared, Lena reached the iron staircase's last step. She was exhausted. She slowly moved into the lighthouse's small, ten-sided lantern room surrounded by glass and metal. Every tendon and muscle in her body was raw and throbbed. Icy spray from the 30-foot waves below slammed against the room's windows. Lena looked out through a window covered in freezing slush and foam at the gray, churning Big Lake that Mr. G called the "Graveyard of the Great Lakes."

Lena was terrified. Lake Superior's wild waves raged and crashed against the rocky coastline down below. The entire lighthouse vibrated from the unrelenting winds pummeling the rock and mortar structure. She felt more alone than ever. The storm's intensity escalated Lena's emotions, and she prayed fervently the man wouldn't look for her up here. She had been careful to keep the pillowcase pressed tightly against her head wound, so no blood dripped on the circular steps as she ascended the stairs. Now the pillowcase was drenched in blood, so she threw it aside.

In the middle of the lantern room was a massive, bee hived-shaped glass lens sitting atop a tall iron pedestal. Whenever Mr. G let her go up here, Lena marveled at the lens that contained cut-glass prisms in a brass framework. The beautiful glass reflected and refracted light from the lamp, and she often wondered how many sailors had been saved by its light shining across Copper Harbor and beyond.

However, in this moment, nothing was beautiful. It was a horror story. Lena was trapped - imprisoned in a swaying, isolated lighthouse that was making her stomach nauseous. Her head ached from its open wound. There was no one to help her now.

What is going to happen to me?

She carefully stepped around the massive glass lens and over the well containing the cable and weights that made the lens rotate. When she reached the back of the lens, she sat down on the shaking floor. The winds outside whistled and shrieked. She purposely sat with her back up against the iron door that led to the catwalk, or, as Mother called it, the 'Widow's Walk.' In this violent storm, venturing out on the catwalk was pure suicide. Yet, Lena wondered if it could come to that.

Would I honestly throw myself to my death rather than be murdered by this monster? I just might. At least I'd die on my own terms.

The young woman curled herself into a tight ball and waited. Blood slid down her forehead. Several minutes went by while she strained to listen. It was hard to hear anything over the horrific winds. At first, she didn't make out any unusual sounds. She began to feel slightly hopeful that the man went somewhere else.

Maybe my scraps of fabric fooled him, and he took another trail? Maybe he went back to the cabin? Maybe he's lost in the woods or fell into a pit? Maybe, maybe, maybe.

Then, suddenly, she heard something.

What was that?

It sounded like someone opening doors and drawers in the keeper's quarters down below.

He's here!

Lena trembled so hard her teeth chattered.

YOU NEED TO KEEP IT TOGETHER! DO YOU WANT TO LIVE OR NOT?!

She fought to still herself, but then he began shouting.

"Where are you?! Where the fuck are you?! I'm done playing at this shit! Come out where I can see you! I know you're here!"

The man slammed cupboards – cursing and screaming the entire time.

If he comes up here, what am I going to do?

She looked up at the door behind her head, the door that led to the outside catwalk, and she knew the answer.

Either he's going to kill me here in this room, or I go outside and take my chances. Either way, my odds aren't good.

She stayed as still as possible, all balled up, hiding behind the huge glass lens. Suddenly, she heard what sounded like boots clanking on the iron stairs.

Oh my god, he's coming up!

Lena's eyes darted wildly around the tiny room, but there was nowhere to go. Only up or down or outside. She knew she had to get up if she was forced to go outside. Yet, by standing up, he would see her immediately when he crested the stairs.

One footstep after another. The man was growing closer.

"Why don't you make this easy on yourself! Just come out and get this over with! I promise to make it quick!"

Finally, the young woman could take no more. She had had enough. Isolation, despair, and loneliness for fourteen years! And now this! Who did this person think he was tormenting her this way?! She was done! If she was going to die, she would at least die fighting.

Lena stood up.

"I'm up here, you bastard!" she shouted.

The man began laughing – his response reverberating up and down the narrow lighthouse tower. His gleeful, completely unfeeling reaction caught Lena off guard.

He's mad! He's absolutely insane!

"Oh, that's funny coming from you!" the man yelled up the stairs.

Lena had no idea what he meant.

“Why are you doing this?!” Lena shouted. “At least tell me that! If you’re going to kill me, then tell me why?! You owe me that!”

“Owe you?!” the man howled. “I don’t owe you anything! But you and your family owe us everything!”

My family?

Lena could hear his footsteps on the iron stairs growing closer. For some reason, she wasn’t as scared anymore. In fact, she wasn’t as much scared as angry.

“What family? Mother is the only family I have! I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

“You know what I mean! Your other family!”

“I told you I don’t have any family! I don’t understand!”

Outside the winds howled and shook the lighthouse.

“I’ll make this simple for you, Lena!” the man screamed up the stairs. “My mother is dead. She shot herself in the head because of Agathy Hadly! And today is the anniversary of my mother’s death!”

Agatha Hadly?

Lena fought to think.

That name sounded so familiar.

While she struggled, her brain suddenly reactivated the neural path to the name she had known long ago.

Agatha Hadly: my grandmother.

“I don’t understand! What did my grandmother do to your mother?”

“Let’s just say she fucked my dad and then she fucked over my family! She gave my father an ultimatum: her or us! And he chose your cunt of a grandmother! My mother was the best mother in the world! She was the only person in this world who loved me, and she’s dead! Your grandmother killed her!”

Lena was stunned.

“Oh my god, I’m so sorry!” she screamed. “But how could I know?! This has nothing to do with me!”

Lena’s mind was firing on every cylinder as she attempted to make sense of what was going on.

Where is my grandmother? Why haven’t I seen her?

The man wasn’t listening. He continued yelling, clearly enraged beyond any sort of reason.

“On the day my father left us, I made a vow. I vowed that I would destroy your family just like the Hadlys destroyed ours! Agatha killed my mother! She took her from me! And now I’m going to kill you. Destroying the Hadly family is the only way I have to make this right!”

Lena stood there in the swaying lighthouse. She still couldn’t comprehend.

Hadly family?

“I still don’t know what you mean!” Lena shouted. “Who is the Hadly family?!”

She shook her head back and forth, trying to will her brain to understand. Then a vision came to her. It was a vision she had experienced several times of a man at a beach. She could hear his voice.

“Hello, it looks like you hurt yourself. Are you okay?”

The man went to his van and got her Band-Aids.

Suddenly, she understood. The man coming up the stairs to kill her was the man on the beach. She remembered the fear when he picked her up. The tears she shed as they drove away. Her terror of the woods. The nights in a new bed. The woman who began bathing her, combing her hair, and reading her stories: Mother.

She was beginning to understand.

“It was you, wasn’t it?!” Lena cried out. “You’re the man who took me!”

Now, time stood still. There was no rain. No wind. No waves. No storm. No lighthouse. Just darkness. Lena was numb. She couldn’t think clearly. She felt as if she were floating away. But then

her mind began to reactivate neural pathways that were long closed due to trauma. Bits and pieces of memory – faces, names, places – began to populate her mind. Then a reel began to play in her head. She was no longer in the lighthouse. She was chasing a butterfly.

The sun shone brightly on her six-year-old face. Crystal blue waves lapped at the shore, and the fresh water smelled so good! She was playing in the sand when a bright orange butterfly landed on her cheek. She laughed because she could feel it dancing on her skin. Suddenly, the wind carried the butterfly up and away. She wanted to chase it – to play with it. She looked over at her parents, but they were still asleep.

I'll only be gone for a little while. You won't even know I'm gone.

She chased the beautiful butterfly down the beach. She felt happy and free. Suddenly, the butterfly flew over a sand dune, and she couldn't see it anymore.

Oh, no! Where did you go, little butterfly? Oh, I see you! There you are!

Warm sand squished between her toes as she excitedly ran down the dune after the butterfly. Suddenly, she fell into the sand.

"Oh, no! My foot!"

She was rocking back and forth in the sand, crying, grabbing her foot. It hurt so bad! There was blood everywhere! Suddenly, there was a man. He was talking to her from inside his van. She hadn't seen him. He surprised her and scared her.

He held something up in the window.

"Look, I've got Band-Aids. I'll bring you some."

He got out of this van and walked over to her.

Lena didn't want him coming too close.

"Wow, that looks like a bad cut. I think you need to go to a doctor. I don't think my Band-Aids are going to be enough to stop the bleeding. How about I drive you over to your parents?"

Lena was afraid. She began to shake and scoot backwards in the sand.

My parents are just over the hill. I can walk back.

But the man followed her and picked her up and put her in the back seat of his van, and they drove away. And that was the last time Lena saw her mom and dad – her real mom and dad – or anyone else she knew for that matter for the rest of her life.

Lena trembled harder. Even more adrenaline and cortisol flooded her body, turning a lock in her traumatized mind. Long blocked pathways opened, and she finally remembered.

I had a mom and dad: Heidi and Louis.

Suddenly, the man on the stairs screamed. He sounded completely unhinged.

"Are you still up there? I'm coming!"

His screams jolted Lena from her thoughts.

Lena yelled down the stairs.

"I didn't do anything! Why do you have to kill *me*?! I don't understand!"

"Because I made a vow!"

Then all the dots finally connected. Mother wasn't her mother. She was this man's sister: Lydia.

The advancing man screamed, "Now is the time for me to take control! And when I kill you, everything will be right again!"

His words were absolutely terrifying.

The young woman could hear the man's footsteps just a few feet below. He was very close now, and she was trapped in the tiny room. She realized what she had to do. She had no choice but to leave the lantern room and flee out onto the catwalk – into the storm. Her only hope was the man falling over the railing.

Or would I push him?

She shoved open the heavy iron door, ready to walk into the thunderous storm. Then she heard the man scream with all the pain and hatred in the world, “I’m coming! I coming to kill you, Emily Hadly!”

The young woman was now fully engulfed with emotions. Her years of ‘visions,’ of strange, fragmented memories of other people and places suddenly rushed forward. Long-closed neural pathways opened as the overwhelming stress and terror suddenly unblocked memories repressed for her survival. Everything that was once locked was now unlocked, and in that moment her survival depended on her remembering. As all the survival chemicals flooded her brain, she finally remembered.

She wasn’t Lena. She was never Lena. She was Emily.

The woman squared her shoulders and walked out on the catwalk.

Chapter 66

A Man with No Soul

Cadie was almost to the lighthouse when she looked up into the pelting rain and suddenly saw a figure emerge high above on the catwalk.

Who is that?! Is that Emily?!

She then watched in horror as a second, larger figure appeared on the catwalk and advanced on the smaller person.

Oh god! He's up there. Now what? What can I do?

Cadie ran to the front door of the keeper's quarters, but it was locked tight. Then, to her left, she noticed the iron maintenance ladder running up the side of the lighthouse all the way to the walkway above. Her brain contemplated climbing to the top, but frigid, gale-force winds, possibly 30 mph or more, shoved against her and made it difficult to stand, let alone climb. The Big Lake's roiling, twenty-five-foot waves clawed and slashed maniacally, drowning the lighthouse in icy lake water. Stinging rain lashed her head and arms. The conditions were beyond perilous.

In that moment, Cadie thought about her parents' brutal murders. She thought about her own terrifying abduction and the anxiety caused by Mitch Lawson. She thought about all the many women who were victims and never had a chance.

If I do go up there, I might die. But if I don't, Emily will die. I'm not willing to let that happen. What would Nancy Drew do? What will I do?

She made her decision.

Still holding the wooden Louisville Slugger in her right hand, Cadie grabbed the rusted metal rung with her left and began to climb. The freezing winds whipped her clothing and the rungs vibrated

under her feet. She looked up at the towering structure cloaked in mist, and, step by step, she fought her way to the top.

Up above on the swaying, rain-drenched catwalk, the man was several feet away from Emily Hadly. His black rain coat caught the wind and billowed out behind him, the fabric snapping and whipping. Emily had only seen the man a handful of times in her life, and Mother always made her go outside when he would visit. Therefore, she really didn't know what he looked like.

Now, she was looking straight at him and saw nothing but a soulless stare, empty of any feelings except hatred and contempt. His drenched, flaxen hair hung drably about his head. His blue eyes were eerily translucent and stared at Emily.

"You don't have to do this! You can stop!" Emily cried, backing up and around the lighthouse catwalk. Her eyes searched the rain-drenched platform, but there was nowhere to go. The man didn't say a word but kept slowly advancing. Both held tightly to the cold, wet iron rail as the buffeting winds fought to push them over.

"Please, stop!"

Emily looked down, her eyes searching for a tool of any kind, even a broken piece of railing, but saw nothing useful. She continued to back up. The iron catwalk was shaking and slick with freezing water and foam. Down below, monstrous waves crashed violently upon the shore, creating thunderous booms. Emily's blonde hair whipped around her head and into her eyes, making it almost impossible to see. She wiped wet strands from her face that were drenched in blood.

Then, if possible, the situation worsened. From a sheath on his belt, the man pulled a huge knife and held it up for Emily to see.

Chapter 67

The North Wind

After Mr. G entered the keeper's quarters, he moved quietly in the shadows of the house that was shaking in the storm, but he didn't see anything. And he couldn't hear anything. The screeching winds were so loud - like the roar of airplane – or a speeding train.

Then, suddenly, he heard screams! They were coming from the lighthouse staircase. He ran over and looked up, but he couldn't see in the dark. All he could make out was screaming. He couldn't tell if it was Little Bird and the man she wrote about in the letter, but he believed it must be so.

What do I do?!

Mr. G began to climb the staircase, his sore legs burning, in almost complete darkness. He grabbed tightly to the railing and climbed step after step up the narrow stairs. It was 72 to the top. He could still hear the people up above yelling. Then he thought he heard the metal door to the catwalk opening.

Oh, no! I'm coming, Little Bird!

The older man tried to hurry the best he could. He wasn't exactly sure what he was going to do when he reached the top, but he knew he would do something.

Chapter 68

An Unspeakable Truth

The man gripped the large, gleaming knife. He took another slow, deliberate step forward as he continued to close the gap. Emily inched backward, her eyes fixed on the knife and heartless man. Suddenly, a violent gust of wind tore through the catwalk and ripped the man's scarf and raincoat from his back. His face showed surprise, and he looked up. The black coat and scarf blew up and away like a coven of ravens swooping in the wind.

Emily watched them go. When she looked back at the man, she could now see his full face and neck. Something was different. Something she had never seen before.

What is that?

In the unrelenting cold, her body and brain had become sluggish, so it was hard to make sense, but her eyes studied the mark on the man's neck.

What am I seeing?

The universe seemed to stop as the man and woman locked together in an essential moment. It was finally time for the truth to be told. For a long-held secret to be revealed.

Ever so slowly, the horrific realization dawned upon her. The birthmark on the man's neck was a butterfly.

Emily's hand flew to the butterfly birthmark on her own neck. Her breathing slowed. She couldn't hear. She felt thrust into a silent tunnel. All was dark as the horrific realization overwhelmed her psyche.

The man noticed her reaction.

"So, you saw it," he said coldly.

"Who, who are you?" Emily stammered, her mind pounding with the insanity of it all.

"I think you know who I am," the man replied with a slight smile.

Emily's brain fought to understand, but it was all too unimaginable. Too horrifying to grasp. But somewhere down deep she knew. And the answer sickened her beyond understanding.

"Are you my father?!" she screamed over the gale.

The man's head leaned back, and he let out a hearty laugh. Then he looked down at Emily, smiling. He took steps forward. They were now so close they didn't need to yell anymore.

"Yes, Emily, I'm your father."

Emily stared, wide-eyed.

"How? I don't understand. Louis is my father."

Her fevered brain raced. It tried anything to comprehend.

"No, Louis is not your father. I am."

The man's face continued to exhibit a slight, sly smile.

Emily violently shook her head.

"No! No! How can this be? I never met you before that day on the beach! I'm sure of it!"

"You're right. I never met you before that day."

"So - how?"

The man's pitted face then broke open wide in jubilation. He was ecstatic.

"Didn't your mom tell you?!

There was a pause while Emily's mind frantically searched her past, but she could think of nothing. Finally, she erupted.

"Tell me what?!"

Emily was utterly confused as the man leaned in, both grinning and glaring at her.

"About being raped?!"

At the word rape, Emily's knees buckled. It took every ounce of strength and determination for her to remain standing on that rain-slickened catwalk. She felt the breath go out of her.

“I raped her. I raped your mother, Emily. So, yes, I am your father.”

Emily just stood there in shock, freezing rain pouring down her face. There were no words.

“What do you have to say to that?! Pretty clever, right?!”

The man was happy. So incredibly happy. He smiled broadly and wiped at his nose.

He wasn’t advancing on her anymore, though. He was simply enjoying the moment: torturing his biological daughter.

Revenge.

“I raped your mother, Emily. Then, years later, I kidnapped you.”

Emily stood there, aghast. It was hard to form a thought. To form words.

But then it came to her.

“Did you always plan to kidnap me?”

The man’s face fell a bit. He was enjoying his so-called cleverness. His superiority. He liked that she thought he had a grand master plan which he executed perfectly. Emily watched his expression become disgruntled.

“You didn’t, did you? You didn’t plan it. So, how did you end up on the beach that day?”

The man stayed quiet for a moment. He thought about lying, but finally he just came out with it.

“No, I didn’t plan it. I just happened to be in Harbor Cove that day. I was sitting in my van eating lunch when I saw your happy fucking family walk by. I thought I had destroyed your mother’s life when I raped her. But there she was, married and smiling, laughing with Louis without a care in the world. They had everything! And I had nothing! But it’s all okay now because I’m going to kill you and make it right. And now Heidi really will be tortured for life. So, in the end, I will have fulfilled my vow – to my mother. So, I win.”

Emily stared at her father. She wasn’t afraid of him anymore. He seemed small and pathetic.

Disgusting.

She cocked her head.

“You didn’t win.”

“Yes, I did. I’m going to kill you.”

“It doesn’t matter whether you kill me or not. You didn’t win.”

“Oh, and why is that?”

“Because I’m a good person, and you’re not. A terrible thing happened to me, but I never acted like you. Your sister betrayed me in every possible way, but I still chose to love her. But look at you. You have nothing because you have chosen to hate me, to be cruel. Would your mother be proud of the evil man you’ve become? I don’t think so. You’re not a winner. You’re just pathetic.”

The man’s eyes suddenly grew huge with rage. His left hand became a pulsating fist, and his right hand gripped the knife even harder. He took a step forward. He was ready to kill.

Suddenly, there was movement on the catwalk. A person was climbing over the railing! Luke and Emily both looked over in shock.

“Emily!” Cadie screamed. “I’m here to help you!”

Cadie advanced with the Louisville Slugger raised high above her head, and Luke began to move toward her, his knife also raised. That split second was all it took to give Emily an advantage.

Luke had all eyes on Cadie when Emily shoved her father. He didn’t realize that he had moved in front of the open door to the lantern room. Emily shoved him as hard as she could, and he fell backwards into the lighthouse.

The man stumbled but quickly picked himself up off the floor. A purple vein bulged in his forehead.

“I AM GOING TO FUCKING MURDER YOU, YOU FUCKING BITCH!”

As he went to take a step forward toward his daughter, Emily caught a glimpse of someone standing behind her father.

She knew immediately who it was. It was Giiwedin Davis, Mr. G – the North Wind.

Mr. G grabbed Luke and yanked him into the lantern room. The two men struggled ferociously. Luke raised up his knife, prepared to bring it down on Mr. G, when Emily rushed forward and again pushed her father. He grabbed for her wrist.

Just then, Mr. G intervened. He shouted, "Gizhe-manidoo, mashkawiziiwin miishin" and seized Luke's shirt. With all his might, Mr. G flung the larger man off to the side.

It was in that moment Emily saw it. Cadie, too.

The lighthouse's large glass lens was rotating. The gears of the lens were turning.

Luke was now teetering on the edge of the lantern room floor, fighting to stay upright – the massive gears churning below him. He let out a raw, animalistic scream, raised his knife in the air once again, and tried to move at Emily, but he lost his balance.

Screaming and arms flailing, Luke fell backward off the platform. He landed on the enormous metal gear. He immediately scrambled to his knees and attempted to stand up, but his shirt got caught in the gear. Without ceasing, it sucked in his shirt's tail. Luke immediately realized what was happening and frantically yanked his shirt, but it was no use.

The gears were turning under hundreds of pounds of heavy weights. The fabric inched forward, grinding into the metal teeth. At the last second, Luke wildly tried to rip off his shirt, but it was too late. His arms were pinned in the taut sleeves as the gear consumed the shirt. Now his body was only inches from metal.

"Lena, look away!" Mr. G shouted. "Look away, Little Bird!"

Dana suddenly appeared at the top of the lighthouse stairs just as Luke let out a high-pitched squeal. In a second, the entire right side of his body was sucked into the teeth as it ground and pulverized his flesh and bone.

"Help me! Help me!" Luke screeched in visceral agony, while Cadie, Emily, and Dana also screamed in horror. Then, in seconds, the man stopped screaming. The gear had devoured his face. All that

could be heard now was gurgling and wet wheezes of blood, bone, and tissue grinding against the gear.

In seconds, he was gone.

Chapter 69

A Good Day

Upon the death of Luke de Lange, the world changed for the better. Emily Hadly was finally free, and Lydia de Lange was in custody. After a mandatory psychiatric and medical evaluation. Lydia was transferred to the Keweenaw County Sheriff's Office for booking. Her days playing Mother were over.

Sherman Sawhill was finally apprehended in upstate Wisconsin and placed in the high-security section of a county jail. He was charged with assault to commit murder among other crimes. It was also reported to law enforcement that Sawhill was sexually abusing an underage female relative. Police are investigating. Across the lake, in Michigan's Leelanau Peninsula, James Moore died at the bottom of a well. The remains of the little girl he killed were returned to her family. No other remains were found on the Moore property. However, three bags of women's underwear were retrieved from his mother's cabin. Sadly, the broken body of Barbara's brother Myeengun was found floating by kayakers in the waters directly below the island's steep western cliffs in the Mather Lodge area. It had suffered severe trauma from striking rugged rocks on its way down. There was no way to tell Myeengun slipped or took his own life. However, his sister Barbara reported her brother was off his medication. Mitch Lawson was finally located. He claimed he got his days mixed up. According to his probation officer, Lawson seemed to have given up his obsession with Cadie.

To the south, Emily Hadly was reunited with her real mother: Heidi Hadly. Dana and Cadie had driven the young woman to Heidi's home in Harbor Cove. It was clear from their conversation in the jeep ride home that Emily had many psychological issues that would require serious therapy, probably for the rest of her life. Cadie fervently hoped that Emily could have a good life. She knew firsthand the devastating effects of trauma.

When Dana pulled up to Heidi's house in her red jeep, she immediately noticed the front door was now painted a cheery yellow. Sitting in the white wicker settee on the Victorian front porch were Heidi and Louis. They anxiously awaited their daughter whom they had not laid eyes on for 14 years. They quickly ran down the front steps. Emily exited the passenger side of Dana's jeep and nervously walked around to her parents. At first, all three stood in the driveway uneasily - looking at each other, not knowing what to say or do. Finally, Heidi spoke.

"Is it okay if I give you a hug?"

Emily slowly nodded yes, and Heidi reached in and gave her daughter a gentle hug. Louis gave Emily a soft pat on the back.

Dana and Cadie had exited the jeep and watched the interaction from the yard. Cadie recalled Heidi's words, that it had taken her a long time to love Emily. With Heidi's traumatic rape, Cadie now understood. She watched the two women hug and hoped it was the first step in healing a terribly broken family. Then Heidi, Louis, and Emily headed toward the house, and Heidi put out her hand for Emily to hold. Emily took her mother's hand, and the Hadly family walked up the stairs and went inside.

Neighbors caught wind that Emily was now home and formed a group on Leelanau Lane outside Heidi's house. The entire gathering cheered and clapped for the return of Emily Hadly and her reunited family. Delio's sent over several of its best pizzas. It quickly became a block party.

Then Jake and Nick pulled up to the curb in Jake's truck. The two men got out and ran over to Dana and Cadie who were chatting with neighbors in the yard. At first, Dana and Jake grinned awkwardly at each other. Then Jake stepped forward and pulled Dana into a hug. When he did, the button on his black work sleeve accidentally pulled off Dana's signature ponytail and flung it into the grass.

"I see you're finally letting your hair down, Sergeant Bakker," Jake laughed.

"I was waiting for just the right moment," Dana grinned.

Then Jake whispered in her ear.

“Very good work, Sergeant. I’m just glad you’re back.”

Nick ran up to Cadie, and she immediately poured herself into his arms.

Neither said anything for several minutes. They were overcome. Then Cadie looked up into Nick’s wet eyes.

“I love you, Nick. I’m so glad to be home.”

“I love you, too, Cadie Bug.”

After hugging for a minute, Cadie pulled back.

“Hey, I’ve got something for you. Something I am grateful for but should return.”

She ran back to Dana’s jeep, while Nick watched her go - confused. Dana and Jake also looked on.

Then Cadie stood up with something in her hand. It was Nick’s Louisville Slugger.

“This belongs to you, Nick,” Cadie shouted, running back over with the bat. “I think I’m done with it. At least I hope I’m done with it.”

“Oh, no, you need to keep it,” Nick said earnestly. “Seriously. I mean it.”

“You definitely need to keep it,” Jake added, nodding.

“As your program instructor, I’m ordering you to keep it,” Dana joined in.

“Okay, okay. Geez. I’ll keep it if will make you all happy,” Cadie chuckled.

As if on cue, all three simultaneously shouted, “It will!”

They fully believed that in the future Cadie McLeod was absolutely going to need that bat.

Jake and Nick suddenly grinned at each other.

“What?” Cadie asked, eyeing the two men suspiciously.

“We’re taking you to Ted’s,” Nick beamed. “Harry’s saving the best table for you – the one with the perfect view.”

“But Delio’s just brought over pizza,” Cadie said.

Jake turned to Cadie and replied in mock anger, “Dana Bakker needs her Benzie Burger.”

“Oh, my god, thank you!” Dana laughed out loud. “I really do!”

“What about her stress ulcer?” Cadie retorted – giggling.

Dana shot Cadie a look that basically said, “Zip it.”

“It’s feeling much better,” Dana answered. “Especially since I’m done hunting sociopaths – at least for today!”

“I think Dana has earned it,” Jake said.

“I think you’ve both earned it,” Nick added, pulling Cadie close.

“Okay, it looks like we’re going to Ted’s,” Cadie laughed. “But I want a strawberry shake!”

“Anything you want,” Nick beamed at his beautiful girlfriend. “Anything at all.”

The four piled into Jake’s truck. Minutes later, they were headed north up Michigan’s stunning coastal highway M-22, windows down, laughing, chatting, and taking in the lush hardwood and pine forests, windswept dunes, and glimpses of Lake Michigan shimmering in shades of turquoise in the late afternoon sun. Cadie looked over at her handsome Nick, his brown hair blowing in the lake breeze, seemingly at peace. Then she thought about Emily Hadly – the young woman who was finally free – and finally home.

Yes, today the world was infinitely better.

It was a good day.

EPILOGUE

East Lansing

Final Words, A Final Visit

On a balmy Sunday in June, while friends and colleagues chatted and sipped margaritas under red umbrellas, Cadie observed the people gathered on her and Max's behalf. Only an hour earlier, at the Student Achievement Gala in the MSU Union Ballroom, Cadie and Max Clark were awarded the College of Social Science's Humanitarian Award for courageous actions designed to save a life. Now, in celebration, the two MSU students were seated on a colorful outdoor patio surrounded by people who loved and supported them.

At her table along East Lansing's Grand River were Nick and Jake Brennan, Aunt Marie, Dana Bakker, Max Clark, and his mother Sharon and younger brother Marty who had flown in from Chicago. At the table next to them were Craig Kitchen, Meng Corbin, and State Police Troopers Kit Lyons and Derrick Smith. At another table were high school friends Tori and Julie as well as Professor Dunleavy and colleagues in the cold case program. A final table contained Max's family and friends from Illinois.

Happy Latin music flowed through the patio, while pitchers of margaritas and baskets of crunchy chips and salsa made for a lively party. However, Cadie had serious sentiments she wanted to express. So, after everyone had time to snack and talk, the young woman in a white sheath dress and hair coiffed in a chic chignon pushed back her chair and stood up.

"Everyone, could I have your attention please? I'd like to say a few words."

The group settled down and turned to face Cadie.

"First, I'd like to thank you all for coming. I can't express how much you mean to me – and Max. Many of you traveled across Michigan and even Illinois to be here today, so thank you."

Cadie paused for a moment, collecting herself.

“After the death of my parents and all I endured in my past, I sometimes wondered who I would turn out to be. I had a lot of dark times in my life - times that almost broke me. So, to be here today, celebrating this successful cold case – the return of Emily Hadly after 14 years - well, it’s shown me I am strong, and I can use my strength to help others – just like my parents taught me.”

Cadie’s voice caught, and she struggled to continue.

“Wherever you are, mom and dad, I love you.”

“We love you Thomas and Aileen!” Aunt Marie yelled out.

“To TJ and Aileen!” Jake shouted, lifting his beer high. Dana leaned into him and touched his hand gently under the table. Cadie noticed Dana wasn’t wearing her tight ponytail, but instead her hair was down and draped softly around her face.

Cadie smiled and smoothed her own stray hair in the warm breeze. She continued.

“I’d like to take this time to honor Max Clark who is beyond deserving of the Humanitarian Award. As you know, Max Clark saved the life of Detective Craig Kitchen. I won’t repeat everything they shared at the awards’ ceremony today, but I want to say that watching Max push Detective Kitchen out of harm’s way and take that bullet himself was one of the bravest things I’ve ever witnessed. With all of the selfishness in this world, to know there are people like Max Clark gives me hope and inspiration.”

Everyone broke into cheers and clapping. Max couldn’t contain his huge grin. He stood up, and leaning on a crutch, gave an awkward bow. Then Sharon, who was wearing the Gold Star in remembrance of her late husband, stood up and gave her son a huge hug. Marty, who had his

brother's sandy blonde hair and same good looks, also walked over and gave Max a bear hug. When Sharon and Marty sat back down, Max turned to Cadie and said, "Thanks, Cadie. That was really sweet."

"You're very welcome, Maximus," Cadie winked.

Then Craig Kitchen pushed back his chair and stood and faced Max, his green eyes flashing.

"Max, you know how I feel about you. You're a great young man – a brave man, and I might not be here today if it wasn't for you. Also, you taking the bullet for me that day allowed me to win the BAM Classic that weekend; I caught two massive bass. So, big thanks for that."

Everyone chuckled at Craig's inevitable fishing reference. Then Craig got to the point.

"In all seriousness, everyone, I'd like to take this time to announce that Max will be receiving Michigan's Citizen's Medal of Valor Award."

Max's mother gasped, and Craig's voice began to fill with emotion.

"This award is given to citizens who risk their lives coming to the aid of a law enforcement officer. Thank you for saving me that day, Max. In my book, no one deserves this award more than you. You are just like your father: a true hero."

Craig walked across the patio and embraced the teary Max in a hug, careful not to knock over his crutch.

"You're the brave one, Craig," Max replied. "You're helping people every day."

The entire patio simultaneously stood up and clapped and cheered enthusiastically for the grinning young man wrapped up in Craig's big arms. Then, as Max went to sit down, Nick stood up. He walked over to Max and stuck out his hand.

“Thanks for your bravery, Max,” Nick said, now shaking Max’s hand. “You’re a great guy in my book.”

Max didn’t say anything. He couldn’t get words to form. Instead, he just smiled broadly and pumped Nick’s hand. It was a moment that brought tears to several people. Then Nick, Max, and Craig took their seats, with Cadie nodded appreciatively at the men. She knew she was fortunate to have so many great men in her life. After several minutes, everyone was settled down, and Cadie continued.

“I also want to thank Dana Bakker. Without her, there would be no Emily Hadly cold case. Even though Dana had her doubts, she was willing to trust me. She never gave up. She’s honestly the toughest lady I know. Maybe not the fastest, but definitely the toughest,” Cadie chuckled.

Several people in the crowd “whoop whooped” for Dana.

“Oh, you had to go there!” Dana cried out, laughing while putting her hand to her temple and shaking her head. “I can’t help it! I twisted my ankle! And I’m old!”

“But you look great,” Cadie grinned.

“Yes, I do,” Dana said, flashing a smile.

“I agree,” Jake winked.

“Also, big thanks to Craig Kitchen, Meng Corbin, and Troopers Lyons and Smith for all their help on this case. Jake’s friend Jeb Collins, too. They all played a part in helping us locate the missing woman. Besides almost getting himself killed in the line of duty, Craig is someone you always want on your team. He’s honestly the best. We truly appreciate you, Craig.”

The guests clapped vigorously.

“What can I say about Meng Corbin? Cadie said. “It was her knowledge - her expertise - that helped lead us to Emily Hadly. And she believed in me. That helped me believe in myself. Thank you, Memengwaa, our favorite butterfly!”

Meng grinned widely, quickly stood up, and did a half bow.

Cadie took a moment to catch her breath for her next acknowledgement.

“Then there’s Mr. G – Giiwedin Davis. For those of you who know the story, he was my North Wind. And when I made it to the top of the lighthouse and found Emily face to face with her kidnapper, the next person I saw was Mr. G. Without his actions, Emily might be dead. I might be dead. Mr. G doesn’t like attention and accolades, so he’s not here today. He’s up in a lighthouse somewhere, saving sailors,” Cadie smiled. “Let’s raise a toast to the strength and bravery of Giiwedin Davis.”

Again, the crowd stood simultaneously and raised their glasses to another hero in the story.

“Now, on a personal note, I always thank Jake Brennan, well, for everything,” Cadie said, choking up, while the guests took their seats. “Without Jake, I know I wouldn’t be here. He saved my life three years ago and continues to be my guardian angel. Plus, besides my dear Aunt Marie and her cinnamon rolls, Jake bakes me the most amazing bread. So, thank you, Jake, for helping on this case, and for all you have done for me my entire life. I can never repay you. You mean the world.”

Jake, his eyes wet with tears, mouthed the words, “Love you, Cadie Bug.”

Cadie wiped the tears from her own eyes. “Sorry for the waterworks, everyone. I’m almost done. Last but not least, I want to thank Nick Brennan. Having someone in your corner, someone you can count on every day, is a big deal. It’s everything. I don’t know if you all know this, but the day we found Emily Hadly up in Copper Harbor, Nick was trying to meet us there. He was racing through the UP trying to find me. But I had to make a decision. Could I put another loved one in harm’s way? I just

couldn't do it. So, I told him I had to go it alone. But Nick gets huge props for helping solve this case. His research helped lead us to Emily, Thank you so much, Nick."

Nick looked adoringly at the strong, beautiful woman before him and nodded.

"I'm also hugely thankful for the baseball bat Nick gave me," Cadie grinned. "It definitely came in handy. I tried to give it back to Nick, but he wouldn't let me."

Nick suddenly stood up. He had a long package in colorful wrapping paper.

"Funny you should bring that up," he smiled, handing Cadie the gift. She quickly pulled off the paper. It was Nick's Louisville Slugger.

"We all signed it for you."

Cadie looked at all the many signatures. Then she saw that under the original carving "from dad", Nick had carved, "from Nick." She also noticed there was a large notch chiseled into the top of the bat under its handle.

"What's this cut for?" Cadie asked.

"It's for your first case. Someday, that Louisville Slugger's going to be full of cuts for all the cases you'll solve. You're going to help a lot of people, I know it."

Cadie just smiled and nodded. It was hard for her to speak. It took a few moments for her to regain her voice. Then she turned serious again.

"I have a final acknowledgement. While Max and I are truly appreciative and humbled by the attention we've received today, I want to focus on Emily Hadly. She is the true hero of this story. For 14 years, Emily persevered. She was the victim of hate and revenge, isolated her entire childhood, but in the end, she chose to remain positive and hopeful, and she took back her own life. That day at the

lighthouse, I encountered the strongest person. She was fighting back against evil, against the terrible man who assaulted her mother Heidi and was now trying to murder his own biological daughter. And in that moment, I didn't see a victim, I saw a warrior. I'm truly thankful Emily is safe and back home with her mother in Harbor Cove. I have faith that Emily is going to continue persevering. So, everyone, please raise your glasses for Emily Hadly!"

Everyone stood up one last time. Other customers who had been listening joined in, even the wait staff, people walking by on the sidewalk, and the entire patio erupted in cheers for Emily Hadly – a girl gone 14 years but now with a lifetime ahead of her.

Later that afternoon, when the party ended and guests were on their way home, it was just Cadie and Nick on the patio. They were tidying up a few things, when Nick pulled Cadie close.

"I love you, Cadie Bug," Nick said, staring down at his captivating girlfriend. He pulled the young woman even closer. "I'm so thankful for you. For your courage. For your strength. For your conviction. This case wouldn't have been solved without you. So, here's me promising to never be overprotective again."

Cadie smiled and looked up into his velvety brown eyes.

"Hmmm," Cadie grinned. "We'll see."

"I promise, I'll try," he replied with a gentle smile.

Then Nick began fumbling with something on the back of Cadie's head.

"Can I remove this thing?" Nick asked.

"The chignon pin?"

"Yes, that," Nick laughed, still fumbling.

“I wish you would.”

Nick removed the pin, and suddenly Cadie’s long and lustrous red hair cascaded around her tanned and bare shoulders. To him, in that moment, she never looked more beautiful. He took her radiant face in his hands and gave her a deep, soulful kiss that continued for some time until a truck driving down Grand River honked its horn at them.

The young people laughed and pulled apart.

“Hey, I might meet you back at Landon Hall. I just want a few minutes to myself. It’s been quite a day. I’d like to walk and take in the beautiful campus. Just clear my head and do some reflecting.”

“Sure thing, beautiful,” Nick replied. “I’ll see you back at the dorm.”

Nick jumped in his vintage Corvette and drove off. Cadie then crossed Grand River and began walking through the majestic, towering trees on the sumptuous MSU campus alive with fall colors. She quickly found herself walking upon a sea of bright yellow Ginkgo leaves and smiled. She felt light and confident and full of purpose.

Suddenly, she heard a noise. She looked up, and there it was. A Great Horned Owl. It circled above her head for a moment and then gracefully landed on a low-hanging tree branch in front of her.

She studied it for a moment.

“Hello, mom and dad,” Cadie said softly, while the brown owl stared at her intently. “Thank you for helping me find Emily – for everything. I hope you’re proud of me – of who I’ve become.”

The owl purred. It stared at Cadie for a moment longer, cocked its head, and let out a low-pitched hoot. Then, in total silence, it took to the air and glided away. It circled above her one last time and suddenly gave a deep, booming hoot and was gone.

Cadie watched the big bird go and felt once again it was giving her a message. She thought about Emily Hadly, about all she had endured. She thought about her parents and her own abduction - Mitch Lawson, too. She thought about all the women who have been raped, kidnapped, and murdered - and she understood. Her mom and dad wanted her to keep fighting for victims, and Cadie was ready to do just that.

She looked down at the Louisville Slugger in her hand. She studied the notch carved into the wooden bat – signifying her first cold case – and understood that there would be many more cases to come. People needed her help. They deserved justice. That's what Nancy Drew did; that's what Cadie would do. She grasped the bat tighter and was quickening her stride when her dad's voice suddenly entered her mind.

Gie it laldy. Cadie Bug. Gie it laldy.

I will dad. I promise.