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# South Road

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

SOUTH ROAD

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

CREATIVE WRITING

by

Sarah E. Pearsall

2013

To: Dean Kenneth Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Sarah E. Pearsall, and entitled South Road, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Kimberly Harrison

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John Dufresne

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Debra Dean, Major Professor

Date of Defense: February 28, 2013

The Thesis of Sarah E. Pearsall is approved.

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Dean Kenneth Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

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Dean Lakshmi N. Reddi  
University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2013

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## DEDECATION

I dedicate this thesis to Mike and Randy. If we are never sure of anything else, know this to be true; in the kingdom of childhood, where summer is eternal, love never dies. That is where we live, always.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank all of my professors for their overwhelming support, encouragement, and guidance during my years at FIU. I would not be the writer I am today without you. Thank you for never allowing me to give up. I thank my thesis advisor, Debra Dean, for helping me see the true story within my many drafts and helping me get it down on paper. I want to give a special thank you to Lynne Barrett for always being the firm hand steering me down the right path. Finally, I would like to thank Les Standiford for his unwavering confidence in my writing and teaching abilities and all the wisdom he shared.

My life has been shaped so profoundly by my time spent in the creative writing program. All that you have taught me, I will carry with me. I can only hope to be as great a teacher, writer, and friend as all of you have been to me.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

SOUTH ROAD

by

Sarah E. Pearsall

Florida International University, 2013

Miami, Florida

Professor Debra Dean, Major Professor

SOUTH ROAD, a novel told in third-person limited, follows Adrienne Harris as she navigates the trials of her coming-of-age summer and then must deal with the aftermath. 1997: seventeen-year-old Adrienne Harris wants nothing more than to flee her eccentric grandmother's rule and leave Harbor Point and never look back. When she meets her new neighbors, Adrienne knows her life will never be the same. Adrienne quickly falls in love with the charismatic Quinn Merritt. They decide to keep their relationship a secret since both families disapprove. This secret starts a chain reaction that seemingly leads to the suicide of the troubled and poetic Lucas Merritt. The summer culminates with Adrienne running away, pregnant and heartbroken. 2011: thirty-one-year-old Adrienne is an out of work line cook and single mother. The story opens as Adrienne reluctantly returns home to Harbor Point to care for her ailing grandmother. Once home, Adrienne has to confront the things that haunt her—the summer she met and lost both Merritt brothers, and also her dysfunctional relationship with her grandmother—in order to heal and repair her own life and her relationship with her daughter.

In the end, Adrienne discovers many truths that alter her perception of her past in Harbor Point. Adrienne is finally able to move forward and start to build a life for her and her daughter. Harbor Point, the last place in the world Adrienne Harris wanted to be, turns out to be the only place she wants to call home.

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## Chapter One ~ June 2010

*The end of the world is a place called Harbor Point...*

It was all just a terrible dream, Adrienne Harris thought as she entered the small town of Harbor Point, Florida. She had vowed to never step foot within its city limits. Now, nearly fourteen years later, there she was, driving once again on the road of her childhood. She and her daughter, Kali, passed the “Welcome to Harbor Point” sign that stood at the edge of town, marking where the rest of the world stopped and Harbor Point began. Made out of coquina rock, the welcome sign had stood since the late 1800’s. Adrienne’s great-grandfather had helped erect the sign. It looked the same as it had the last time she’d seen it out her rearview mirror as she drove out of town.

As they entered Harbor Point, what seemed to Adrienne as an alternate reality, the welcome sign turned out to be one of the only things still familiar. The town had changed since she left. Growing up in Harbor Point, nothing ever seemed to change. That was one of the reasons she’d dreamt of leaving when she was young. She should have expected change after being away for so long, but that was the funny thing about memories, they were liked fixed stars in your mind. A part of Adrienne was still seventeen, and stuck in the 1997 version of the town. It made her uneasy to see the differences all around her. It was as if she had only blinked and transformation had occurred in the momentary lapse of darkness.

The old familiar false front stores were almost all gone, replaced by newer stucco strips of small shops that ran along A1A. Twyla Pushcart’s, Flower

Heaven, with its tropical plant mural painted on the side of the building, was gone. All that remained was an empty lot guarded by a chain link fence. A ragged piece of the concrete mural wall jutted up, like a torn page out of a child's coloring book, from the middle of the empty lot. The Sunshine Self-Serve car wash, where Adrienne had spent hours each week helping the locals wash their boats, was now a luxury motors dealership. All the shiny expensive cars glimmered in the June heat as Adrienne drove by. The few people out on the sidewalks were well-dressed, and wearing designer sunglasses. She passed by two women wearing Lily Pulitzer dresses. They walked dogs, the size of large rats, on rhinestone crusted fuchsia dog leashes. It looked like Palm Beach had seeped its way south along the coast, like some kind of slow-growing fungus, and now their little town was infected.

She looked over at Kali who was typing furiously on the keypad of her cell phone. Probably complaining to her friends back home in Grayton Beach how awful her new home was turning out to be, how she wished she was back up in the panhandle where things made sense, how she wished she wasn't being forced to move, to a place she didn't know, live with a great grandmother she'd never met, and start her freshman year of high school in a place where she had no friends.

Adrienne had to agree with her on all counts. Adrienne felt flashes of heat rise through her body simultaneously with chills when she thought of the move she was making for them. It felt like a giant invisible hand pushed her car along the street towards her grandmother's little beach house. The itch to turn the car

around was overwhelming. She found her hand ever so slightly jerking the car towards every turn lane she passed. What was she doing here? Yes, the fire; that was why she was home. In the whole world, there was no one left but Adrienne to care for her aging grandmother, who had almost, accidentally, burnt the family home to the ground. Adrienne likened this particular call of duty to a child being forced to do chores they hated doing, like washing the dishes or cleaning the kitty litter pan. She felt the obstinate, begrudging little girl inside her, dragging her feet the whole way.

The whole scene was surreal, like she was merely a bystander to the event instead of an actual participant. The scene that rolled by outside her window could have easily been a television show she was watching. Where was the button to change the channel? To rewind? Grayton Beach was nearly ten hours behind them now. There was no going back today. They would have to at least spend the night at Gran's house. Adrienne had fifty dollars in cash in her purse; not even enough for a motel room for the night. Who was she kidding? There was no going back. She couldn't afford to go back now.

It didn't take long to get to the center of town. Harbor Point was just a small seaside blip on the map of Southeast Florida. Four street lights and you were already out of the limits and onto another town. Most people passed right by it without much thought, racing along I-95 from Palm Beach to Miami. Harbor Point had no claim to fame except for the few great fishing spots along its coast. Most tourists opted to stay elsewhere when visiting the area. Harbor Point's only motel, The Wishing Well, had been around since the forties. It was a strip of

fifteen musty rooms circled around an old red wooden well that had never held any water; just dirt and weeds and a million cigarette butts. As a young girl, Adrienne would sit on its edge. She would watch the desolate street, with the occasional car whizzing by, and ache to run until she was past the welcome sign, and officially out of Harbor Point.

Lost in the thoughts of her childhood, Adrienne didn't see the light ahead change to red. She slammed on the breaks to avoid hitting the car in front of her.

"Mom," Kali said, looking up from her phone. Her tone was exasperated and impatient—as it always was—with any upset to her little world. "I'd like to live a little longer. You know, get to high school at least."

"Sorry, I didn't see the light change." Adrienne shrugged her shoulders as she peered out her window, looking up at the two huge towering condo buildings that cast the whole car in shadow. The new condo towers looked like some kind of alien monoliths jutting up from out of the mangrove swamp that ran along the Back Bay. They stood where the Yachtsman's Plaza once housed McCormick's Save A Lot for almost half a century. The other shops of her childhood—Banjo's 5 & Dime, Margie's Diner, and the local pub, The Hideaway—were all gone too. The condos had devoured the entire heart of the town. There were little empty spaces for businesses on the first level of the high rises, ready for new, more expensive and modern stores to open up.

Right next door, The Two Tom's Marina was almost unrecognizable. All the old beat-up weathered docks had been replaced with new concrete ones. The rows of shabby open fisherman's were gone and only huge sleek power boats

remained. Adrienne and her grandfather, who she lovingly called, Gramps, spent almost every day of their lives at the marina, bringing in the fresh caught fish, shrimp, and crabs for the Hook & Cook, the fish market Gramps's owned. When Adrienne closed her eyes, she could still see the fish scales glittering on the wood docks, blazing like jewels in the sun.

"I want you to show me the house my dad stayed in that summer. Maybe whoever lives there has some kind of information that will help me find him. You said he left right after you got pregnant, right?" Kali had put down her cell phone, and was now eyeing Adrienne suspiciously.

"Sure, I'll show you just after we get all settled at Gran's." Adrienne pulled her hand through her thick tangle of dark hair. "You're going to like living right on the beach. We could never afford to up in Grayton. Now you can just roll out of bed and fall into the ocean."

"You always do that, you know. Change the subject when I talk about my dad." Kali shook her head and picked up the cell phone in her lap. "I know you're embarrassed that you got knocked up so young and weren't married, but come on. Maybe he'd want to know me now that I'm older. It's not like he has to get up at night and feed me or change me. Guys like older kids, right? I think they get scared of being responsible for such a tiny helpless baby."

"Kali," Adrienne said, putting her hand on her daughter's knee. There was a terrible knot forming in her throat. "I don't want you to get your hopes up that you'll find him and everything will be okay."

“I’m smart. And mom, there is this magical thing called the internet. All I need is an address where they lived. It would be easier if you would tell me more.”

“I’ve told you all that I know. I hardly knew him, I’m sorry. He was just a kid here for the summer. His parents rented the house for only a month.”

Lies. All lies. Adrienne knew how wrong it was to lie straight to Kali’s face, but she had been lying for so long. It was too late to go back and tell the truth. It was true that Adrienne had met Kali’s father in Harbor Point, but after that fact, everything else was fiction.

“I wish I had his last name. I would feel closer to him if I had his last name. Morgan is a much better last name than Harris.”

“You’ll change it when you get married someday, anyway. He wasn’t there when you were born so I gave you my last name.” Adrienne gripped the steering wheel tighter.

The light turned green. Adrienne raced through the intersection. She found she was anxious to get to Gramps’s fish market. It was the only place she had missed all these years.

“Look, there’s your great-grandfather’s fish Market.” Adrienne pointed out the window as they got closer. “I used to work there in the summers with him.”

“Yeah, great,” Kali said, not even looking up from her phone.

Adrienne didn’t let Kali’s attitude get to her. She felt relief when she saw The Hook ‘N’ Cook: Fish Market & Bait Shop remained just as she had left it.

The outside was painted a lively light blue. There was a little watch tower you could climb to through the studio apartment on the second floor. From up there, you could see the ocean. The only difference was the newly painted sign hanging above the entrance. It was enough of a change to make her almost turn into the small gravel parking lot and pop in for a visit.

Would Christopher Crane be there working the counter as he had over a decade ago, she wondered. Of course, she knew that he was still around, still keeping an eye on Gran. He had called her to tell her about the fire. In a way, it was all Christopher Crane's doing she was back in town.

Christopher had been a background fixture in her life since she was ten years old. She hardly knew him though. He was ten years older than her. He had taken the part-time job working at Gramps's market to pay the bills while he struggled to write his first book. He always seemed to be there though, in the peripheral vision of the vivid childhood memories she had of Harbor Point.

Adrienne shook off the desire to stop at the market, not sure what she would do with herself once inside. The familiar smell of the dead fish and the cold of the ice alone would be enough to break her thin veil of composure. Though she was curious to see if Christopher had eventually married that snobby fiancé he had dragged with him from England to Harbor Point. She knew there was time to visit and check things out later. All the time in the world, it seemed, now she was home.

There was just a short way left till the turn off the highway. Adrienne's heart began to thud as they got closer and closer to Gran's house. Of course, she

knew that they would end up at Gran's, but a small part of her was still in disbelief that she was actually going home to live with Gran once again.

Adrienne drove over the bridge that traversed the Back Bay and onto the small peninsula where Gran had lived almost her whole life. South Road was just a thumb of land that jetted out into the Atlantic Ocean. There had been no other name given to the small community, only the name of the road. The only way to get to the houses was to cross the bridge or walk all the way down the shore from the public beach. It was a lonely little patch of land. To Adrienne, it was the exact edge of the world from which there was no return.

Adrienne noticed that change had apparently seeped into all corners of Harbor Point. The small strip of road where she had lived for seventeen years of her life with Gran and Gramps looked much different from the way she remembered. Adrienne coasted to a stop and parked her old white Chevy Malibu at the end of Gran's drive way, which was the first house on the road. She got out and walked into the street. It was quiet. The air was thick with humidity and salt. She felt Kali come up behind her. The two of them stood there.

Once there had been ten small beach-front cottages lining South Road. Now, there were five large estate homes in their place. Each compound was hidden behind a thick white-washed stucco wall. The walls of each property connected together and ran the whole length of the beach of South Road, only stopping at the black and white barricade, with the two dim flashing yellow lights, where the road ended.

Beyond the blockade, there was only sand, and then the sea. Adrienne used to stand out at the tip of the point and blur her vision so all she could see was water. Then, the overwhelming fear that she might tip over, and fall into that deep blue, disappearing forever, would wash over her. No escape.

Gran owned the only original cottage left on South Road. From the street where Adrienne stood, she could make out the tip of the rusted tin roof of the house. The rest was cloaked in a dense mini tropical rainforest of plants Gran had cultivated over the decades. This fortress of foliage was Gran's answer to the stucco walls of her neighbors. Adrienne could hardly bring herself to move forward towards the house she knew lie hidden amongst the jungle.

The last time Adrienne spoke to Gran had been the day Gran kicked her out of the house. All the years since then, they had lived in the same state and hadn't spoken to each other. Not once. The only news Adrienne ever got was the occasional telegram or phone call she received from her mother, Diana Harris. Diana called Gran once or twice a year out of some sort of daughterly obligation she appeared to harbor. And, in turn, Adrienne got the twice yearly obligatory motherly call from Diana. It was from this odd game of "Telephone" Adrienne got her only information about Gran's status. This was how Diana and Adrienne had existed as mother and daughter for all of Adrienne's life.

"Mom, we look dumb standing out here looking at these trees." Kali jabbed her elbow into her Adrienne's side but kept focused on her cell phone screen.

“There’s no one out here so how could we look dumb?” Adrienne spanned her hands out across the empty landscape to highlight they were alone.

“Whatever. I’m hot,” Kali said.

She looked over at Kali, ready to lay into her for being a whinny smart mouth, but a chill went through Adrienne’s body. Kali stood there watching her mother with contempt, her long dark hair falling over her shoulders. Adrienne felt as if she had stepped into another dimension as she looked into Kali’s clear blue eyes. How could she have never noticed? Kali had exactly the same color as Lucas’s eyes. They were a clear, pale blue, like that of a fall sky. They were beautiful.

The hurt she had not allowed her body to feel in years overruled her demands to stay at bay. Instead of yelling at her daughter, she reached out and pushed a thick band of hair away from Kali’s eyes, letting the dappled sun through the trees reach those pale blue irises, bringing them to life. Kali flinched as Adrienne touched the skin of her cheek. Adrienne quickly dropped her hand.

On the west side of the road, a field of thigh-high grass ran along the street. Beyond the grass, a wall of mangroves and sea grapes hid the Back Bay, and the small docks where the residence kept their boats. It was a place Adrienne wished to avoid at all cost. But it was unavoidable. Her body would not allow her to ignore it. She turned and could just see the faint trace of the foot-worn path through the field that led to Gran’s dock. It looked like no one had used it in a long time. The vines of the scrub daises were creeping back over the exposed sand.

Adrienne tried to keep from peering through the mangroves, knowing the murky water ebbed and flowed just beyond the tangle of trees. It was low tide, as it had been the day she ran away, pregnant with Kali, and heartbroken. She could smell the stew of rotting sea life steaming up from the exposed mucky shore. It had never been an unpleasant smell for her. At one time, when she was young, she had loved the smell. It was home. But now, the scent brought only aching.

A Great Blue Heron startled in the thick of the mangroves and rose to flight, honking, making a fuss. Adrienne let out a surprised yelp. She looked wide-eyed at Kali, realizing how silly it was to scream over a bird. Kali rolled her eyes and returned her gaze to the newest text she had received. Adrienne's heart thumped in her chest.

Lucas Merritt, Adrienne's best friend, had been dead for almost fourteen years. She had been home a total of five minutes, and already she felt like she was losing her mind. The mangroves of the Back Bay felt like a thousand eyes fixed on her. A haunting cool breeze blew from the west, stirring the scent of low-tide. Was Harbor Point her own personal Bermuda Triangle? Would she ever be able to live in Gran's house, knowing he had died just beyond the wall of trees that hid the dark currents from her sight? How could she coexist side by side with those troubled waters when she could not even bring herself to look their way.

"Okay, let's do this," Adrienne finally said, pushing away the things trying to get back into her mind. "Brace yourself. Remember what I told you, Gran can be a handful."

“I’m not a scaredy cat like you.” Kali poked her in the shoulder, a cocky grin on her face as she turned around to Adrienne.

“You should be.” Adrienne raised her eyebrows back at Kali.

Kali rolled her eyes and started for the house, disappearing under the natural arched opening made out of two pink oleanders. Adrienne could do nothing but follow her.

They made their way on the narrow shell rock path through an untamed mosaic of fruit trees that grew into one another. There were grapefruit, lemon, tangerine, and key limes. In their glory days, the trees had all been meticulously manicured, and bursting with perfect juicy globes. The smells of rotting fruit and fallen flowers released into the air with their footsteps. Adrienne put her hands on branches for support. The terrain was littered with coconuts, and ancient sea shells that looked like tiny bones.

The house sat in a small clearing. A thin line of overgrown grass kept the trees and vines from invading the cottage. They walked up the steps to the porch that wrapped around three sides of the house. It was shady on the large veranda. Two canvas paddle fans hung from the bead board ceiling, lazily rotating above them, but bringing no relief from the heat. Adrienne could hear the waves breaking on the shore now.

A curious collection of old coffee cans and ceramic vases, filled with bits of sea glass and driftwood, sat lining the railing. Clippings from various plants around the property rooted in water-filled mason jars on the old wicker table by the front door. It looked like some mad botanist’s laboratory. Through the clear

jars, Adrienne could see mosquito larva wiggling around the sheer hair-like roots in the water. The old wicker daybed was still out on the porch. The armrests were covered in mildew from their years out in the humid salt air. She had spent so much of her childhood sitting there on the daybed day-dreaming of places beyond the reaches of Harbor Point, and Gran. Her heart felt like it might hammer its way right out of her chest.

“Mom, knock already,” Kali said, pushing her from behind.

“Can you ease up on the pressure,” Adrienne turned to her daughter, “please?”

“I got to pee, okay?” Kali’s head was turned to the congested landscape of plants. “It smells funky out here too. Like dead bodies.”

She hardly ever looks me in the eye anymore, Adrienne thought to herself.

“Nice thought,” Adrienne said to Kali. She turned and faced the front door and inhaled deeply, holding the air tight in her lungs. She let it out slowly through pursed lips and then she knocked.

They stood silent as the minutes passed by. Adrienne was starting to wonder if Gran might have actually croaked overnight, but then she finally heard the dead bolt grind, making a dry screech. The door cracked open. Gran peered out from the dark slit. She made no move to open the door wide enough to allow them entrance. To Adrienne, it was like Gran was waiting for some secret password to be said that would give them entrance into the tomb.

“Well, it’s about time you showed up,” Gran’s voice rattled, laced with mucus, making her have to clear her throat after each few words spoken.

“Traffic was really bad on 95,” Adrienne lied. She tried to sound cheerful. She was determined to try to keep the mood light for Kali’s sake.

“I thought maybe you were taking your good old time. Hope that maybe I’d die and save you some trouble, eh?”

“We all know you’ll out live all of us,” Adrienne said, smiling, hoping Gran got the joke.

“Wouldn’t that be something, eh?” Gran said back, a strange cough-laugh coming out of her mouth. “Maybe I’d finally get some peace.”

Adrienne turned to look back at the pathway that lead to the road, and also back to her car.

“No, Gran,” Adrienne said as she turned back to the door.

Gran finally allowed the door swing open, letting Adrienne and Kali gain passage in to the dark hall. Adrienne noticed that Gran wore an old pink terry cloth bathrobe. There were some dark stains down the front. Adrienne wondered how long she had been wearing it. Gran looked shorter. She had never been a tall woman, but now, she looked like some kind of miniature figurine of an old lady you might put on a bookcase. Her face was still smooth, and had hardly any wrinkles, but looked more worn. Haggard, was a good word. The most startling difference, was that her once jet black coif of hair was now just a grey wispy halo around her face. Gran had never gone more than six weeks without a dye job. It was unsettling to see her look elderly. She had been seventy seven when Adrienne left town, but she hadn’t looked a day over sixty. Now, at ninety years old, time was catching up with her.

“I told Christopher not to call you. I don’t need any help, you know. I don’t need anything. But, I know you are out of work. So, I said, okay, you can come and stay here with your little girl.”

“I am not a little girl,” Kali protested, obviously shocked to be called such when she was starting high school a year early.

Gran stopped and sized Kali up as they all stood in the gloomy hallway. “You know nothing of this world. You are a child.”

“Whatever,” Kali said, rolling her eyes again.

Gran looked to Adrienne. There was an amused smirk on her lips, and her eyebrows were raised in an inquisitive way. “She has quite a mouth on her, eh? She seems to have inherited the Harris tongue.”

“She is something, alright. Kali, this is your great grandmother. I call her Gran. I guess you can call her that too.” Adrienne put a tentative hand on Kali’s shoulder. “Gran, this is Kali, my daughter.”

“Well, I know who she is. I didn’t expect you to bring in some stranger with you, now.” Gran gave Kali a second glance-over. Adrienne could already see the gears turning in Gran’s head. She worried what Gran might say in front of Kali.

“Your house smells like old peanut butter.” Kali rolled her eyes once again.

“I guess I shouldn’t be surprised you are a brat,” Gran said, the words coming out more like a growl.

“How did you know I don’t have a job?” Adrienne said, trying to change the subject.

“I know what I need to know.” Gran put her hands up in the air as if the information had fallen like manna from the sky. Then, she shuffled past the two girls and into the kitchen.

Adrienne was relieved to have the mini stand-off between Kali and Gran dissipate. Even though she had been inside the house for only a few minutes, she was sure Gran had covertly orchestrated the whole reasons she was moving back to Harbor Point. Adrienne suspected that Diana must have informed Gran about selling the condo Grayton Beach. Diana probably also mentioned how Adrienne was jobless. All Gran had to do was throw a dish towel on an open flame. Christopher Crane was just a pawn in the whole thing. Adrienne didn’t feel the scenario was all that wild or far from the truth. All these years, and Adrienne still felt like she had no control over her own life.

“This place is freaky. You grew up here?” Kali said rather loudly behind Adrienne as she poked at a spider web that had formed in the crook of the hall mirror.

Adrienne took a moment to let her eyes adjust in the dim foyer. The heavy curtains were all closed in the living room. The only light came from the kitchen window. It smelled like mildew, smoke, and mothballs in the humid air.

“It wasn’t like this,” Adrienne said.

“This is going to suck,” Kali said as she headed for the dark living room.

“Where’s my room?”

Adrienne stuck her head into the kitchen. Gran was in there busy at the counter as if no one had just moved into the house with her. Adrienne could see where the flames had licked up the wall over the stove, taking out two of the cabinets. A strong smell of smoke hung in the kitchen air. Gran's dish towel on the hot burner had done more damage than Adrienne had expected.

Christopher has apparently already replaced the damaged stove with a new one. It was a stainless steel number that gave Adrienne a small bit of comfort knowing she'd have a nice range to cook on. It looked out of place in the outdated kitchen, but convenience would outweigh congruity in the situation. Since Gran seemed eager to be alone, Adrienne followed Kali into the gloom of the living room.

"I guess you will sleep in my old room. It's downstairs and has its own bathroom. It gets good light in the mornings, it's good for painting. I'll take the guest room upstairs next to Gran." Adrienne flipped the switch on the wall, and the living room sprang into life.

White sheets draped all the furniture. Even the pictures on the walls were covered with the same linens. A large bouquet of petrified flowers sat in a dry vase on the center table. The old wood plank floor creaked under their weight. Kali moved around the room. She stopped at the back door and pulled the shutter open on the door-window. A fat shaft of light came bursting in, making a square of sunshine on the dark wood floor.

"I feel like some guy's going to jump out and kill me in this place," Kali said.

“I guess Gran hasn’t used many of the rooms in a long time. It really is a great house. Gran just can’t keep it up anymore by herself. If we clean it up, open the curtains, polish the wood, it will look better,” Adrienne said. “It will feel like home, I promise.”

“Yeah, right,” Kali stared out the window. “This place will never feel like home.”

Adrienne’s old room was at the other end of the house by the foot of the stairs that led to the second floor. The first floor bedroom was originally the master, but Gran was paranoid that a peeping-tom might see her undressing so she chose to live in a smaller room upstairs. This left Adrienne with the big room and the private bathroom. It had always been a great advantage. It was easy to sneak out of the house with Gran sleeping up stairs. It was also easy to sneak people in through her large bedroom windows.

Adrienne had to push hard on the old door. She wondered if Gran had even gone in since she had left. Inside, she found her answer. The room looked just as it did the last day she spent in it. The windows were closed, and the drapes drawn as they were in the rest of the house. Her shirt still lay on the wood floor in the exact spot she had dropped it while packing up her things. There were all the same photos still stuck to the dresser mirror. A puka shell necklace hung on the knob of her head board. A palm hat, once green and now brown, sat on top of the lamp shade.

Kali seemed to be drawn to the photos in the mirror. Adrienne watched her pluck one of them out from the collection.

“Who is this?” Kali turned to Adrienne, holding the picture up.

Adrienne felt things breaking inside of her as she gazed at the photo.

Quinton Merritt’s face looked back at her, his carefree smile frozen on the paper. He stood on the deck of his father’s boat, holding onto the outrigger, and looking out to sea. He wore no shirt, exposing his lean, tan chest to the sun. His hair was brilliant blond from a summer’s worth of sunny days. Adrienne automatically reached out to touch the image as if its gravity were undeniable.

“Just a boy I used to know.” Adrienne tried to keep her voice from failing. She pulled back her hand as though she had just touched a flame.

But, it wasn’t just a boy. It was Kali’s father. Adrienne watched Kali put the photo back up on the mirror. There was some kind of unseen force that kept her from telling Kali that Quinn was the father she was hoping to find. That the boy in the picture was not just here for the summer, he had lived right over the wall, in the house next door. Now back in Harbor Point, the lies would turn against Adrienne all too quickly.

Kali was a smart girl. She was good at finding things out. Though she was thirteen, she had been bumped a grade, and would start high school in the fall. Gran was wrong. Kali was more adult than most adults. It would take no time for her to discover that Adrienne’s story about Quinn was all just a fabrication—even the last name she had given Kali was false—then, Kali would hate her for the lies.

The only reason Adrienne finally relented, and agreed to return was because Christopher had told her the Merritt house was empty. The Merritt’s were gone. That fact gave Adrienne some peace. Knowing she wouldn’t bump into Mr.

Merritt was a relief. She wasn't sure how she felt about the big white house being vacant. The Merritt's were all gone, erased like the outgoing tide cleans the shore.

Adrienne hadn't seen any of the Merritts since Lucas had died. She didn't even know where Quinn might be in the world now. The only thing she knew was, that they had lived in Ohio before moving onto South Road, and Quinn was going to go to Yale that fall she got pregnant. She had told Kali a false last name because the Merritt name would be easy to track.

"I'm going to take a shower," Kali said with a finality that meant she wanted to be alone.

"I'll get you some towels."

Adrienne left the room. When she returned, the door was shut and locked. Adrienne put the clean towels on the floor, and knocked, before leaving them be. She had told herself every day since Kali was born, that being a mother so close in age to her daughter was a good thing. It helped her to understand Kali's moodiness, and know when to leave her daughter alone. Lately, Adrienne had begun to feel that maybe she was really in denial. Maybe she had left Kali alone too much.

Adrienne moved carefully through the living room. She found she didn't want to touch the furniture still draped with cloth. They were like billowy apparitions, libel to reach out, and make her face her past, by their mere touch. When she made it to the kitchen, successfully escaping the dark living room, she found Gran was right where she had left her. Gran sat at the long kitchen table Adrienne's grandfather had made, out of slabs of driftwood he collected from the

shore. It had been the only wedding gift he could afford to give to Gran. Gramps had spent hours honing the rough boards flat and smooth. It was one of Adrienne's most favorite stories Gramps used to tell her. She watched without uttering a word as Gran drank a steaming cup of coffee under the small bare bulb screwed into a reading lamp that sat on the counter. The coffee was a deep black brew that Gran's father had concocted in his youth from several store bought brands to resemble the drink he enjoyed back in Hungary as a young boy. It almost hurt the back of your throat just to breathe it in. Adrienne could smell the bitterness from the other end of the kitchen.

Adrienne flipped on the chandelier that hung over the table and the kitchen focused. Gran looked up and scoffed at the excessive illumination, but Adrienne watched her physically choose not to make a comment about it. Adrienne sat at the opposite end of the table. Gran didn't even look her way. Instead, she turned her gaze to the big picture window that looked out onto the wraparound porch. Adrienne took the quiet moment to look around the kitchen. The kitchen had always been the heart of the house. It was a place where Gran and Adrienne had spent most of their time together cooking for parties, luncheons, holidays, and even the simple weekday dinner.

Nothing had changed since Adrienne had last been there. The gold linoleum, the gold Formica countertops, the dark wood cabinets, the avocado color of the appliances— a perfectly preserved snapshot of the American dream, circa 1970—were all the same. The only changes came from the remnants of the fire and the new shiny stove. Bright bursts of memories slapped against the backs

of her eyes. She knew if she took her shoes off she would feel the grit that can never quite be erased in a house by the ocean. Adrienne wished to fling open the windows and let the brisk wind cleanse the claustrophobia and lingering smoky smell out. But the windows hadn't been opened in years, and Adrienne knew that it would be a fight to do it now.

"Thank you for allowing us to stay here with you," Adrienne let the words come out measured, calculated.

"That child has Lucas's eyes. You never said who her father was, but I knew, always, it was Quinton Merritt's," Gran spoke with a rasp in her voice. "Or maybe it *was* Lucas. Maybe that is why you ran away after you got knocked up, eh? What a terrible love triangle you and those two brothers made."

"Despite what you may think, I wasn't a whore." Adrienne rang her hands together under the table where Gran couldn't see the stress. "She is Quinn's. I never slept with Lucas. She just happens to have her uncle's eyes."

The old bat was observant, painfully so. It seemed time had not broken Gran's strange ability to notice the most minute things, while totally unaware of big, everyday things like, not to put a towel on a hot stove burner.

"All I know is that I told you to stay away from the Merritt's. I told you that those boys would bring you nothing but heartache." Gran shook her head, and took a long drink. "Of all the people you could have gotten mixed up with, you had to mess around with Bob Merritt's kids. Bob Merritt! The man breezes into our town, thinks he can build that gaudy house of his, cut down any tree he wants, like he is king. Well, I'll tell you, he was no king. I don't care if he had money

coming out of his asshole. I knew he was no good the day he showed up, and no good came from all of them living here.”

Adrienne played with the salt shaker, not knowing what to say to Gran. A sudden summer storm had snuck up on the house, and the rain began to fall outside, beating a metallic thrum against the tin roof. She sighed as she watched out the window. She wouldn't be able to busy herself with unpacking the car until the storm blew through. She felt that old familiar tightness in her throat as Gran lectured her about the mistakes she made long ago.

“Poor child,” Gran said, “she has to be related to that family and that father of hers has vanished. I think it's a curse in this family, to be without fathers. Look at your own father. Disappeared as soon as he found out your mother was pregnant. Jumped on some sailing ship. And what does your own mother do? She spends her life trying to chase him down instead of being here, taking care of you.”

“Kali doesn't know anything about what happened. I have only told her a little about her father,” Adrienne said. “She doesn't know about Lucas.”

“I knew you wouldn't. You have a great talent for running away from anything hard or difficult to face. I know this about you, I do.” Gran continued to look out the window at the steady rain slapping against the porch steps. “Quinn runs away from you, you run away from this town, your mother runs, and runs, and never stops. And look at me. I am the one stuck here. I never ran away.”

The heat of anger welled up inside Adrienne. Gran was always so good at making her feel like she did nothing right. That she was worthless, and that old familiar twinge of doubt in her abilities, took its place inside Adrienne.

“I’m going to tell her,” Adrienne said, her voice broken and faltering.

“Well, you better. And you better do it soon. Roaming around here for any amount of time she’s going to hear things, especially since she looks enough like *them* to make anyone wonder.” Gran buttered a piece of toast violently as she prattled on. “You know Harbor Point. Your past is still fresh in this town’s history even though it’s been years. A suicide is juicy enough to stick to this town’s ribs for decades, I tell you. There’s a newer, younger batch of gossips—the offspring of the old-timer’s. I think they like to prattle on about everyone’s business even more than we all did back in the day.”

“It’s not like the whole town knew why he did it. He never left a note, you know.” Adrienne felt a bubble of pain rise in her.

“Do you think that makes it any better? The fact he left no note just gives room for crazy theories. And you running away right after it happened only fueled the fire. The whole town, including me, saw you running around with both brothers all summer. I forbade you to fraternize with those boys. I knew what would come of it. One dies, the other disappears, you run away. Now, you come back with a child who looks like those boys and is just the right age.” Gran shook her head, the distaste in her voice a powerful weapon against Adrienne’s fragile psych. “They all think the child is Lucas’s. They all think there was some horrid love triangle going on.”

Adrienne felt her stomach quiver as she thought of telling Kali the whole sordid mess. It had been the source of all of Adrienne and Kali's tension over the past few years. Adrienne knew skirting the issue was more a selfish act than a way to protect Kali from her sorrow-filled origins. Adrienne could not bring herself to remember, to talk about what had happened. The few times she had tried to sit and reflect on Lucas's death, the memories had wracked her body with pain acute enough to bring her to her knees.

"I'm going to talk to her." Adrienne stood up from the table. "Just promise me, you won't say anything to her about it. Let me do it in my own way."

Instead of answering her, Gran stuffed half of the piece of toast in her mouth and chewed it noisily.

"Why is the Merritt house empty? What happened to Mr. Merritt?" Adrienne asked as casually as she could manage, trying keep her voice from wavering as she busied herself at the sink. "I asked Christopher on the phone, but he changed the subject."

"If you had been around, you would've known Bob kicked the bucket a few years ago. I won't speak ill of the dead, but thank the good lord!" Gran gave a laugh which was a mixture between a groan and a cough. "It was a diving accident. Shot himself right through the heart with a spear. He was a stupid old man. Must have got confused down there. Said he had the beginning of the bends, made him all disoriented. He was too old to be doing such things like fussing around in the ocean. He was still looking for that ridiculous treasure he was so sure was out there lying on the bottom of the seafloor. All these years and he

never found a lick of gold, not even one coin. Not even one old cracked teapot. I think he realized that the world was just better off without him. But, I won't speak ill of the dead."

Adrienne was shocked to hear the news. Bob had been a skilled diver. His whole life revolved around diving. She found it hard to believe that he would die like that. She felt sad to hear he was gone. He had always gone out of his way to be nice to her, even though Gran had made his life miserable. But, Mr. Merritt's death did solidify some assurance they would not run into any Merritt in Harbor Point.

"It's been dark since his funeral. The grass is growing high. No cars go in, no cars come out." Gran shrugged her shoulders, returning to her toast.

Adrienne felt tired. She had no energy left to stay and work at making conversation with Gran. There was an endless string of days ahead for talking. She quickly heated up an instant soup for Kali. She added to the plate a small package of saltine crackers, taken from the diner they ate lunch at. Then, Adrienne wandered out of the kitchen with the sad little meal, leaving Gran there with her mouth full of toast, nosily chewing.

She passed by her old room as she made her way to bed. The towels were gone from the floor, but the door was still locked when she tried it. She pressed her ear to the door and could hear Kali humming softly, probably listening to her MP3 player. The familiar faint scratch of her brush against a canvas was hard to detect, but Adrienne was so used to the sound she could tell Kali had unpacked her easel, and was taking her frustrations out on a new painting. Good, Adrienne

thought. Painting was always a good thing for Kali. The ability to draw and paint was something Kali had inherited from her late Uncle. Adrienne closed her eyes, and put her forehead to Kali's door. She could see Lucas with his head buried in a sketch pad, furiously outlining a new picture.

Adrienne left the soup and crackers in the same place the towels had been. She lightly rapped on the door, calling softly to Kali that dinner was outside the door waiting for her. After a minute, the door did not open so Adrienne went up the stairs to her own room.

The loft walls were lined with book-choked shelves. Adrienne ran her finger through the thick layer of dust that had accumulated on them. She could see Gramps reading quietly into the late evening under the brass gooseneck lamp in the corner. He always waited up for Gran to come home from one of her various club meetings. How he had loved his books! She had tried to love them too, but she always got distracted or restless when she tried to get through a novel. She usually ended up at his feet with her head in his lap, and he would stroke her long black hair, humming some top forty hit as he flipped through the yellowed pages of his latest story. Sometimes he would lay his warm, wrinkled hand on her cheek. She would breathe in the faint smell of dead fish he could never rid his hands of, and she would be satisfied with that small moment of happiness.

Luckily, Kali had inherited Gramps's love of reading. Adrienne hoped Kali would find some solace that summer in going through Gramps's collection of classics. There were months of reading on the shelves for her. The ocean was right outside the back door for her to swim in. She had her paints and brushes to

create with. Adrienne tried to assure herself it would be enough, and Kali would adapt to their new life in Harbor Point.

She slipped into her new room, the upstairs vacant bedroom that was always kept for visiting family or friends. She went to the window, without turning on the light. Her room was right over Kali's room, and so it looked out over the ocean on one side and the side of the house on the other. There was a double bed, a small dresser with a mirror hanging over it, and a nightstand.

Adrienne opened the window. The storm had ended, and a hot, humid sea breeze blasted in. It was seven o'clock, and Adrienne could see the sun slowly making its way to the horizon. She wasn't sure what she would do with herself until it was late enough to go to sleep. She could empty the car, but the last thing she wanted was to see Gran again even if it meant sleeping in her clothes.

She leaned her body out the window and gazed at the world so familiar yet removed, distant. The view had been her whole world for the first seventeen years of her life, but now it seemed like an image she viewed in a photo. She could see the great Banyacado tree was thriving, though still only half its former glory. The summer crop of avocados was peaking. The ground below her was littered with the huge green orbs; some newly fallen, some half rotting. She had spent a good chunk of her childhood up in that tree sitting amongst the fat shiny green leaves daydreaming or hiding from Gran. Sometimes she would climb to where the braches became thin and trembled under the weight of her body.

From way up at the top, Adrienne could see all of South Road right to the point where the Back Bay let out into the Atlantic. She would try to go higher up,

to try and see what came after the inlet, but she could never get high enough to see anything but the dark swirling blue of the ocean.

The only time she'd ever broke any bone was falling out of the tree. The little branch had snapped. All she could remember was wildly sifting through the branches like a grain of sand through fingers, till she landed on the spongy ground of dead leaves and rotting avocados. Gran had yelled at her the whole way to the emergency room, scolding her for being such a stupid tomboy, climbing trees. Adrienne could have died falling from the height had it not been for the branches to slow her fall. She ended up with a broken leg and cracked collarbone. Only Gramps had comforted her, sitting next to her in the waiting room, stroking her hair.

Adrienne stood up on her tip toes, leaning out of the side window, to see the brilliant white main house next door. She could see half of the north wing between the branches of the tree. She didn't need to see the entire estate. All she had to do was close her eyes, and the house was there in perfect detail. She could see Quinn's bedroom window. She thought about that summer day when she first saw them, Quinn and Lucas Merritt. It could have been yesterday. The memories were still so clear and vivid. Adrienne felt as if she could reach out the window, and touch that day that changed her life forever.

Yes, the grounds were overgrown instead of the polished landscape she was used to seeing. The windows of the house were dark. A long shadow began to grow along the front foyer in the fading sun from the west. A sliver of moon crept up out of the ocean. She leaned on the sill, resting her chin in her hands, listening

to the cicadas chant their final cries of the day. Everything smelled fresh from the rain. It was a green, crisp, vegetal scent that came out only after a storm had cooled the heated fauna. Adrienne felt like thin, invisible strings spanned from the big white house, through the dark, to her body, gently tugging her to come, to return to the house that once held her whole world. It least, what she had once thought would be her whole world.

Now, that dream-like realm of a house, that was full of summer and desire, was crumbling at the hands of the caustic salt atmosphere. She could see shingles missing from the roof. There was a broken window in the upstairs bathroom. Vines had begun to creep up the stucco by the front entryway. A stack of rusted patio chairs were piled up next to the side door of the house. She leaned out further, trying to see more of the decaying mansion. It never took long for the sea to consume a house if no one took care of it. She wished she could see through the panes of glass and peer into Quinn's old room. How many nights had she spent waiting to see his light turn on? Or waiting for the light finally to turn off? A whole summer's worth of nights revolved around that light going on or off.

She jerked up, pulling herself out of her daze and felt a chill even though the wind was warm. It was getting dark. She wondered how much actual time had passed since she had been standing there. Her back was sore from leaning against the sill. She yawned, and stood back from the window, but her eyes never left the dark of Quinn's room. There were many more nights ahead to moon and pine at the window. She couldn't allow herself to get swept back up in the past. She wasn't that girl anymore. She hadn't been in a long time.

As she went to pull down the shade, a light went on in Quinn's bedroom. It was a warm, yellow, flickering glow that seemed to throw its heat across the distance, and onto her face. She waited, blinking, the only movement she could manage, to see the light evaporate and return the window to sensible darkness. But the light persisted, insisted she watch it. Maybe time travel was possible, and she was experiencing it right at that moment.

Then, she swore she saw a grey shape moved across the pulled shade, as if a body had walked between the light and the window, casting a shadow against the. Was it possible Gran was wrong? Maybe someone was living there? Whatever it was, Adrienne stood there watching that one point of brightness in the gloom until the light finally went out.

## Chapter Two

Adrienne was up early the next morning. She hadn't slept well. The house was a stranger to her, after being away for so long. The drone of the waves, a sound that used to lull her to sleep, was now a constant bee buzzing in her ear all night. The old house shifted and groaned in familiar but forgotten ways. She found herself constantly at the landing, craning her neck down the stairs, trying to assure herself that Kali was safe and asleep. The few times she did finally doze, she dreamt about the light turning on, flooding Quinn's bedroom window with a pale glow. The dream was enough to make her bolt up in her bed, drenched in sweat.

Adrienne was surprised to find Gran up early. She was already sipping coffee from a cracked mug. Gran only raised an eyebrow in acknowledgement of Adrienne's presence in the kitchen. Adrienne went to the cabinet and rummaged for a tea bag. She hated coffee. She couldn't get over the bitter taste that no amount of sugar or cream could hide. But, there was no tea to be found. In fact, there was hardly any food in the pantry or the fridge. She would have to go shopping, she thought as she took out two rotten bananas and a jar of blue mayo from the fridge, and threw them into the garbage can. In the pantry, there was a box of egg noodles with an actual spider web inside the cellophane packaging.

"Don't throw out good food," Gran said as she got up from her chair.

"Those noodles haven't even been opened yet."

"They're bad, Gran." Adrienne shook her head. "You can't eat food like this. It will make you sick."

“Why are you dressed already?” Gran bent over the trash, retrieving the bag of cobwebbed noodles. She put them back on the shelf in the large walk-in pantry. “It’s a bit early to go looking for a man.”

Adrienne watched Gran dig through the trash. She would have to get rid of the tainted food after Gran was asleep to make sure the crazy old woman didn’t sneak the stuff back. It was against Gran’s nature to throw anything out. That included food that had the potential to kill. Adrienne had either forgotten about or repressed Gran’s penchant for extreme frugality.

“No, Gran.” Adrienne left her in the pantry, and went back to the kitchen to try and find something to leave out for Kali’s breakfast. “I took a shower. I’m planning to go out and do some food shopping.”

Gran loomed behind her like a shadow, making sure—Adrienne knew—she wasn’t trying to covertly throw out any more stuff from the kitchen. Adrienne made two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches out of the remaining food she had brought with her from Grayton Beach. She wrapped them in parchment paper and wrote Kali’s name on them before putting them on the top shelf of the fridge. She left the last green apple next to them, and a small carton of milk. Not the best breakfast, but it would do till she got home from the store.

Adrienne got Gran a new cup of coffee, and maneuvered her back to her seat at the table. Adrienne sat across from her. She readied herself for the big talk she had planned out last night while trying to fall asleep. Now that she was back, and virtually trapped once again in Harbor Point, Adrienne had cooked up a plan to make the best of the situation.

“Gran, I want to take over the fish market and turn it into a café.”

Adrienne felt her voice quiver as the words came out. “Gramps’s always wanted me to have the market and make it my own after he passed away.”

As the idea grew and came into focus the night before, Adrienne became more and more excited at the prospect of having her own little restaurant where there would be no one to tell her what to cook. She would be free to make what she wanted to make. Kali could come in and help out. They would be together after school.

“I thought your job was to take care of me, eh?” Gran had a strange amused smile on her face.

“I will make sure you have meals, the house is clean, and you are keeping out of trouble. But, it won’t do either of us any good if we are together all day long, and you know it.” Adrienne fidgeted in her seat. For the first time in what seemed ages, she wanted something, wanted something so much it threatened to overwhelm her balance.

“People want to go to a restaurant and have a fancy chef that went to a fancy school cook them a meal.” Gran tapped the wood table with her fingernail. It was driving Adrienne nuts. “If you hadn’t gotten knocked up, you could’ve gone to that cooking school. You had a scholarship. It was all there for you. Maybe you’d have a shot now if you had gone to school, and made something out of yourself, but you sure blew that. Why would anyone want to come to eat your food?”

“I’ve done okay without a diploma from a fancy culinary school. I’ve worked at some nice places up in the panhandle.” Adrienne got up, unable to face Gran any longer. She grabbed the dish sponge, and scrubbed the Formica counter violently. “I’m a pretty good cook, Gran. You taught me, remember? And weren’t you the best cook in town? Word will spread once people try the food. I’m sure the place would do well. ”

Adrienne put a slice of toast down in front of Gran and a tub of butter with just enough for the one piece of toast. Her hand trembled as she put a knife next to the plate, but she willed the angry tremor to stop.

“Well, it really isn’t up to me anymore. You will have to go up to the market and talk with Christopher about your plans of grandeur.” Gran stuffed the toast eagerly into her mouth. “I’d wear something a bit more professional than what you have on. He always has a horde of women circling around him.”

“Why would I have to ask Christopher permission?” Adrienne felt the cool hand of dread creep in.

“I sold that rotten little market to him about a year ago. He was always so in love with it. I hated that stupid store since the day your grandfather bought it. We were supposed to retire and travel the world. We weren’t supposed to buy a fish market in the first place.” Gran put on her best innocent face for Adrienne as if she had done no wrong. “I made a good deal of money off of it too.”

“How could you sell it without talking to me first?” Adrienne tried to hold back, but the emotional damn she had built threatened to break.

“I had every right to sell the place. It was mine. You have no say in what I do. You left, remember?” Gran wrestled the last glob of peach preserves out of the jar and onto her last bite of toast.

“Gramps was going to give me the market. You were the one to talk him out of putting it in the will before he died.” Adrienne stood, towering over Gran. “He wanted me to have the market, to take it over.”

“You were just a stupid kid when he died. You got pregnant and ran away from your troubles instead of facing them. I had every right to do away with that market as I saw fit. It was mine.”

“You kicked me out!” Adrienne ran her hand through her hair, yanking out a dozen strands.

“I was mad at you. I was heartbroken you went and ruined your life after all I sacrificed to give you a life in the first place. If your mother had done the honorable thing and raised you, your grandfather would have never had to keep working. He’d never bought that Godforsaken shop. We would have had the money to travel and relax in our final years. I sacrificed everything for you, and you leave me here with the scandal, the embarrassment.” Gran squinted at Adrienne, shaking a long crooked finger at her.

Adrienne didn’t respond. She had nothing left to say. It was the same old fight. She walked out of the kitchen, and went up to her room. She pulled her clothes off, and put on the only outfit she had that resembled business attire. She rummaged through Gran’s horde of ancient makeup in their shared bathroom, and

applied the least amount possible to her face. Then, she pulled her hair back, smoothing it into a tight bun.

Twenty minutes later she reemerged in the kitchen, clutching a handful of year-old resumes.

“Now where are you going?” Gran said, giving off a little laugh.

“I’m going to look for a job. If I’m in this house with you every second, I’ll go postal.” Adrienne took a long drink of water, trying to get her anger and heart rate under control.

“What do I do with the girl?” Gran looked up at Adrienne with her watery brown eyes.

“You don’t have to do anything. She’s old enough to take care of herself for a few hours. I told her to help you if you need it.”

“She’s an unhappy little thing, isn’t she? But, I guess that is to be expected.” Gran didn’t really say it to Adrienne, but out the window, and in a soft tone that was unusual for her.

Adrienne chose not to respond to Gran’s last remarks. She left Gran there to look out the window. As she went through the living room, she saw Kali through the bay window, standing in the back yard. She went out the back door, and stood at the top of the stoop. Kali was looking at the Merritt house and the big tree.

“I’m leaving for a while,” Adrienne called to her, but Kali did not turn towards her mother.

“That is a big house,” Kali said, shielding the sun from her eyes with her hand.

“Don’t go over there.”

Her remark made Kali turn around. “Why?”

“It’s abandoned. Who knows what shape it might be in? There could be homeless people living there, or crackheads, or worse. I don’t want you over there.” Adrienne thought of the light in the window again. Her skin prickled. “I’m going to call the police and have them make sure it’s locked up and safe.”

“You are supposed to show me the house my dad stayed in.” Kali folded her arms across her chest and gave Adrienne a scowl.

“We can do it tomorrow.” Adrienne watched the big white house.

“Whatever. I’m going to the library.” Kali turned towards the beach.

“Okay, but don’t stay too long. I want you to stay close in case Gran needs you.” Adrienne watched the big white house gleaming under the sun, Kali’s shape moving out of the corner of her eye.

“Yeah, yeah.” Kali raised her hand in a half waving, half shooing motion as she walked away.

Adrienne sighed deeply and went back in the house. She worried about Kali going to the Merritt’s. Usually, as with all young and angst-ridden preteens, Kali did everything Adrienne told her not to.

Five hours later, Adrienne stood at the door of the fish market. She had been standing there for over ten minutes, but had made no attempt to go in yet.

The job hunt had been an epic failure. It was summer, and it was a recession. No one was hiring line cooks. She had been to ten places, starting at the best places in Palm Beach and working her way down in graduating degrees of reputation and formality. She couldn't bring herself to go inside the McDonalds. That was rock bottom. She was not ready for that. Somehow, without conscious thought, she had landed at the fish market before returning home.

A few customers had come and gone as she stood outside. Her gaze was fixed on the old wood sign her gramps had carved. It said, "Open", on one side and, "Closed", on the other. A few roughly carved fish swam with the grain of the wood. She reached out and touched it for a moment. His hands had touched it. She remembered watching him carve the sign one day when business was slow. She could still hear him humming a tune that mingled with the low murmur of the live well pumps at the back of the store.

The bell above the door rang as a customer came out holding a white paper bag with the Hook N Cook logo on the side. The bright clamor of the bell snapped her out of her momentary paralysis. She caught the door before it slammed shut, and went inside.

There was a small group of women crowded around the high counter. Each one was well dressed and groomed. She saw Christopher standing on the other side of the counter smiling at the cluster of ladies. They all seemed to be talking at once to Christopher.

"No, you want to take the bones out before you cook the fish, Ms. Mallory," Adrienne heard Christopher say.

“Oh, yes, now I remember, you told me that before, didn’t you, Christopher?” the woman Adrienne assumed was Ms. Mallory said, laughing a bit as she spoke.

They all looked up at him with their eyes wide and shining. Adrienne even caught one of the older-looking ladies lick her lips as Christopher recited the best method for poaching salmon. And then it hit her, these women were Christopher’s groupies. They were all there, not because they needed fish or shrimp, but for Christopher.

It made sense. Christopher Crane was good looking, and the decade that had passed since she last saw him had been very kind to him. If it was possible, he looked better than she remembered. He had a sharp, strong jaw. Now into his forties, his thick black hair had just a splatter of grey. He wore black rimmed eye glasses, which only magnified his deep green eyes. His bottom lip was a bit fatter than his top. It made him look like he was always thinking really hard about something, and that you might want to bite it. He was tan from the long days out on the water catching fish. He looked like he was in the wrong place, standing behind a counter full of glistening dead fish laid out on beds of ice. He would have looked more at home behind a podium, giving a college lecture.

Of course, she knew what he looked like, she had seen him almost every day for a good part of ten years, but it was as if she had never really looked at him. She felt a twinge in her abdomen as she watched him flirt shamelessly with the tiny ban of women who blatantly worshipped at his feet.

He pulled his focus from the women when she came in. The smile he had for them morphed into a new smile that she knew was only for her. He knew exactly who she was. Then, anger flared violently inside her as she thought of him owning the market now. It was not hers anymore. She wanted to turn and run, but the group of ladies had turned to see who had taken Christopher's attention away from them. She was now the center of attention. Their faces looked anything but amused as they sized Adrienne up.

Adrienne was half way between bursting into tears and breaking out in laughter as she peered at the chorus of desperate housewives through the fringe of her long bangs. She realized she knew some of them.

"Adrienne Harris? Is that you?" Tessa Parker squinted back at Adrienne as if she were standing in direct sunlight. "Oh, we heard you were coming back to town."

Tessa had gone to school with Adrienne. They were the same age, and had been in the same grade. Though never close friends, Tessa's mother had been the co-chair for the junior league when Gran ran the society, so both girls had been forced together at many functions. Tessa was tall, blonde, and beautiful, just as Adrienne expected her to be.

"You absolutely look the same." Janet Miller put her hand on her cheeks as her voice rose in exclamation. "I would know you anywhere. It must be something to be back in Harbor point after all these years."

Janet was one of the two older ladies Adrienne recognized. She was another one of the group of housewives that seemed to be involved in every club and organization in that golden era that Gran had reined over.

“Yes, it’s something alright.” Adrienne managed to smile as her eyes darted back and forth between the women and Christopher, who leaned too easily against the counter and looked rather amused.

“How is your Grandmother? We haven’t seen her in a quite a while.” Tessa’s voice was constrained. Adrienne knew immediately that Gran had done something to alienate herself from these women. “We all heard about the fire.”

“She is doing okay. The fire was no match for Gran.”

“Well, at least the house is still standing.” Janet touched Adrienne’s arm. “It’s good you’ve come back to take care of things. I know it must be *hard* for you to be here, Dear.”

The knot started to tighten once again in the pit of her stomach. Sure, they all knew just how *hard* it was for her to be here, and she was so happy they had pointed it out in front of Christopher.

“Yes, we never thought you’d actually come back here. I should round up all our old classmates. We can all catch up.” Tessa had a vicious smile on her face. “I swear you were all we talked about our senior year.”

Adrienne was ready to run. She no longer cared what the women would think.

“I was wondering when you would finally come inside,” Christopher said, resting his chin in the palm of his hand. He wouldn’t stop smiling at her.

“You saw me out there?” Adrienne felt weird talking to him as the women watched her intently, but glad she didn’t have to answer Tessa.

“Sure. You know there are two huge windows looking out on the sidewalk. It’s kind of hard to miss someone standing out there.” He laughed. The women automatically returned their attention to Christopher, and joined in with his laughter.

“Maybe I should come back when you’re not so busy?” Adrienne started for the door wishing she could run.

“Nonsense,” Christopher raised the section of the counter that acted like a gate and motioned for her to come through. “Why don’t you go in the back while I finish up with these ladies? Have a look around the old place. See if it looks like you left it?”

“You must come to the Fourth Fest, Adrienne,” Tessa said. “There is still time to enter into the chili cook-off. I know your grandmother always enjoyed the competition. Maybe it’s time for a new generation to take her place, hmm? Now that she has, obviously, hung up her apron? My mother and I will be competing once again. We won in two divisions last year.”

Adrienne looked at the ladies, who were, once again, watching her every move like vultures, waiting to see what she would do.

“I’m not big on chili,” Adrienne said, shrugging her shoulders.

“Well, there are several other categories as I am sure you recall. We all heard you were a chef working in one of those fancy restaurants up north. We all can’t wait to taste your food for ourselves, see what the fuss is about,” Tessa said

as she leaned over the counter. She looked up at Christopher and batted her eyes. “I’ve been trying to get our Christopher here to join forces with me for the contest.”

“There is absolutely no fuss about my cooking, I can assure you,” Adrienne said, and she wanted to smack the smirk off Tessa’s lips.

Adrienne was a bit bewildered. It was like there was no escape, and her whole life, even outside of Harbor Point, was under surveillance.

“Ladies, Adrienne just got back to town, I am sure she will all give us a chance to experience her cooking once she is had some time.” Christopher leaned away from Tessa, and straightened his apron.

Adrienne took this as her cue. She quickly moved past all the women and through the open space in the counter. She hurried to the back room without saying a word to Christopher or any sort of goodbye to the congregation of women.

The back room had changed from what she remembered. It was a bona fide working kitchen now with all the bells and whistles she was used to seeing in a restaurant. Before, there had only been a few tables, sinks, and a large steamer for cooking seafood. Now, there was even a copper pot rack with copper pots and pans suspended over the island. A ten-burner Viking range was the focal piece. She touched the cool metal of the grill. To her, a stove of that magnitude was a thing of beauty.

She heard Christopher talking to the women. laughter erupted, spilling out from the doorway. Finally, the bright staccato of the doorbell rang out. A moment

later, Christopher appeared. He leaned against the door jamb. He was smiling his ever so easy grin. A white bar towel was slung over his shoulder and a few fish scales glittered against the cloth.

“How do you like it?” He moved towards her, throwing the towel into the sink. “I put in the kitchen about six months ago. I wanted to try a few things first and see how the customers liked it. I got such a great deal on the kitchen supplies, I just dove in.”

“It’s a nice kitchen.” Adrienne bumped the copper pots above her, making them clank into each other like a wind chime. “I didn’t know you liked to cook. I thought you were a writer?”

“I remember you saying a long time ago that it would be a good idea to turn this place into a little café.” Christopher sat on a bar stool next to a large butcher block counter. “And I’ve always loved to cook. The writing and the cooking have always been neck and neck for first place.”

“You remember me saying that?” Adrienne was surprised.

“Sure. It was a good idea, especially now that we are getting more and more high-end customers with all the new development.” Christopher spread his hands out. “And here we are now.”

It got quiet. She wasn’t sure what she wanted to say to him. She knew him, but she didn’t know him.

“Why didn’t you call me before Gran sold the place to you? I know you knew I loved the market, I know you knew that much.” Adrienne felt she sounded

like a whiny five year old, but she was upset about the fact the market no longer belonged to her family.

“She wanted to sell. I couldn’t let a stranger buy it. I figured at least I would honor its history and preserve your grandfather’s legacy. Besides, you left, you were never coming back. When I called you last week, even then, I didn’t really think you’d come back. You really surprised me.”

“I didn’t want to come back!” Adrienne slammed her hand down on the metal prep table, sending a stack of tin pie plates crashing to the floor. “You gave me no choice when you called.”

“Why don’t you sit down? I’ll get you a drink.” Christopher went to the large Subzero and pulled out two beers.

“I’m sorry. I’ve been out looking for a job all afternoon. I can’t sit in that house all day long with her. I need something to do.” Adrienne sat down. She put her hand to her forehead. “There’s nothing out there. No one is hiring a cook.”

“How was your first night over there?” he asked, handing her one of the beers.

“As well as you can expect.” Adrienne shrugged. “How is your book? Did you ever get it finished?”

“Nah, I’m still puttering around with it, though. I’ve been doing some freelance work for the local paper and some national magazines, but I’ve sort of devoted myself to this place over the last few years. I guess the cooking is nudging ahead of the writing lately.”

“I remember you were so gung-ho about getting published and becoming a *real* writer. What happened?” Adrienne took a swig from her bottle. She watched Christopher’s face grimace, for a flash of a second, before resuming his typically pleasant demeanor.

“I guess life doesn’t always pan out like you think it will,” he said and then chuckled.

“No, I guess not.” She bowed her head and smiled so he couldn’t see.

“Why don’t you stay and hang out for a while? I can cook us something for dinner?”

She looked up and found him rummaging around in the big Subzero. She was tempted to stay and eat with him, but she still had to get food for the house, and she’d already been gone all day.

“I can’t. Not tonight.” She threw her empty bottle away, feeling the effects of alcohol on a body without any food in it.

He looked up from the fridge. She could see a crease of disappointment on his face. “Tomorrow? Your Gran invited me over for dinner anyway.”

“Of course, she did.” She smiled. “Then, I guess I have no choice but to eat with you tomorrow.”

“I guess not, but don’t think about cooking. I will handle that.” Christopher shook his finger at her.

“Fine, I look forward to seeing what you can do in the kitchen.” Adrienne raised her eyebrows as she slung her bag over her shoulder. She was enjoying the banter between them.

Ten minutes later she was in her car pounding her fists on the steering wheel. Her trusty Malibu wouldn't start. She hoped it was only the battery, but the car was coming up on its tenth birthday, and she had been coaxing it along with hushed promises of a tune up for far too long.

Christopher shrugged his shoulders, but all the time smiling at her through the windshield. He closed up the shop, ignoring Adrienne's protests, and took her to the grocery store. It wasn't as if there was a line of customers clamoring to get in to the small market. It was summer, and Harbor Point was always tucked in by nine o'clock at night.

Shopping for food with Christopher turned out to be an enjoyable way to pass the time. She was impressed at his knowledge of food and the passion he had for cooking all things that came from the sea. She enjoyed listening to him talk about the market. How he had been slowly turning it into a real café. Christopher seemed to know every person they passed by. She enjoyed listening to him make small talk with the other customer's in the grocery store. It took twice as long to filler her cart with all the things needed to re-stock Gran's house, but she didn't mind. Kali had ordered a pizza for her and Gran. No one was starving back at the house.

"Can I read your book sometime?" she asked as they got back into his black Jeep. "I've always wanted to know what it was you were writing about."

"Maybe," he said, smiling. It was an easy smile, and Adrienne felt envious that he was right where he wanted to be, doing all the various things he wanted to

do. There was no pressure, no black cloud following him around. He made life look like it was easy. What was she doing wrong?

As they pulled up to Gran's house, Adrienne realized she didn't want to leave Christopher's Jeep and return to the reality that was her life now. She had laughed. Twice. And she couldn't remember the last time she had laughed.

"Do you want to come in and eat with us?" She couldn't believe she had asked. "It's nothing spectacular, just a pizza from Dino's."

"Maybe just to say hello and then I'll be off." He got out of the car and followed her to the door.

They found Gran and Kali at the kitchen table knitting. Gran was showing Kali how to make a hat. It looked like Kali had picked it up quickly. Gran had tried to teach Adrienne for years. It never took. All their past knitting sessions had ended up with Gran yelling at Adrienne and Adrienne trying not to cry.

The two of them looked up when Adrienne and Christopher came into the kitchen. Kali immediately frowned when Adrienne introduced her to Christopher.

"Well, so this is why you've been gone all day." Gran looked almost amused as she hunched over her project. "Kali and I were wondering if you'd ever come back. It wouldn't be the first time I had a child dumped at my door."

"Gran," Adrienne said harshly, but she caught it and calmed herself down before Gran could react. "Christopher took me to the store after my car broke down."

“I couldn’t leave a lady in distress, could I?” Christopher put the grocery bag on the counter and began to put away the items. He knew where everything went.

“You are still coming to dinner tomorrow or did Adrienne come and rip you a new asshole about buying the market from me, eh?” Gran put down her knitting.

“Gran!” Adrienne said. Her voice was like the snap of a whip. “Watch your mouth, please.”

“Aw, Kali is grown-up enough to hear me swear. And I am an old woman. I am allowed to say what I want to say in my own house.”

“Who’s an old woman here?” Christopher pushed his glasses back up on his nose and gave Gran a big, flattering smile.

“You’re a good boy, Christopher.” Gran waved off his remarks, but Adrienne could see a twinkle come to Gran’s eyes.

Adrienne followed Christopher into the pantry and helped put the groceries away. She noticed his tactic. For every new item he put in the pantry, he threw out one bad item. It had been Christopher keeping Gran alive all these years, Adrienne surmised. He had a covert operation already in place for ridding the house of bad food.

“So, did you find a job today? I bet you didn’t find a lick of work. You know, summer is not the time to look for work around here,” Gran said.

“She’s going to come and work at the market. I’ve got a nice working kitchen, and business is pretty steady. I was going to find some help anyway.”

Christopher looked up at Adrienne from where he sat on the floor of the pantry, arranging dry goods on the bottom shelf. “She’ll be doing me a favor.”

“Well, if you think you can stand being in a small kitchen with her all day, be my guest. But, be warned, she’s a stubborn thing.” Gran shook her head as she fixed a missed loop in her project.

“I know what I’m doing, Mrs. Harris. She already pushed a whole pile of pie plates onto the floor today.” Christopher winked at Adrienne. “I think I can handle her.”

Adrienne was stunned and could not seem to get out any words. Christopher had given her no choice in the matter. She hadn’t even thought about going to work for him. It was her Gramps’s market. It seemed wrong, but she needed a job, she needed to cut the time spent with Gran.

“It’s on a trial basis,” Adrienne managed to get out. “*Nothing* is carved in stone. And I didn’t throw the plates on the floor, they fell.”

“Clumsy too, be sure of that.” Gran sighed. “I would watch her with the knives. She was always cutting herself in the kitchen, I remember.”

“Can we stop talking about me like I’m not in the room?” Adrienne shoved the last two cans of beans into Christopher’s hands and left the pantry.

“Don’t expect me to babysit your child while you are cooking meals for strangers.” Gran pointed at Kali.

“I can take care of myself. I’ve been doing already anyway.” Kali looked up at her mother with pursed lips.

“There is a visual arts summer camp at the high school. The next session starts in a week. It might be something you’d be interested in, Kali?” Christopher emerged from the pantry. He went to the counter and poured a fresh cup of coffee for Gran and set it down in front of her.

“Why would I want to do that?” Kali glared at him, folding her arms across her chest.

“I heard you like to paint. You’d meet some kids your age at the camp.” Christopher smiled at her.

“You don’t know me. None of you know me.” Kali stood and stared Christopher down for a moment before leaving the room.

“Well, I think that’s my cue to leave.” Christopher did a little bow as he backed out of the kitchen and into the hall.

“Sure,” Adrienne said, “let me walk you out.”

They walked side by side down the porch steps. A flock of green parrots made an awful racket in the trees as they went out to the driveway.

“I hope you don’t mind what I said back there to your gran. I was going to ask you first about coming to cook at the Hook & Cook. The idea popped into my head as we were talking today.” Christopher stopped once they made it to his car, and turned to her.

“I don’t know if that’s a good idea. I don’t know if I can go back and work there knowing it’s no longer my family’s store.” Adrienne wrapped her arms around her body. “Besides, it’s summer. Who would come and eat?”

“Will you please consider it? Give it some time. We can talk more tomorrow about it.”

“I just don’t know.”

“What else option is there? You said so yourself, no one is hiring right now.”

“Okay, I will think about.”

“I’ll see you all tomorrow for dinner and more discussion on this matter?”

“Yes.” Adrienne gave him a smile. He was relentless when he wanted something. That much was clear.

“Remember, I am cooking.” He turned and walked to his car.

Adrienne headed back up the shell path to the house. A moment later the engine of his Jeep roared to life.

When Adrienne returned to the kitchen, she found Gran’s attention had turned to a slice of pizza. Gran systematically picked off all the toppings, leaving just some tattered chunks of cheese and exposed sauce, before she took a bite.

“You could do much worse than Christopher,” Gran said with her mouth full of food. “He is quite popular with the ladies, but he is not serious about any of them.

“I don’t know him. I just got here. I don’t want to start a relationship. I have enough to worry about.” Adrienne busied herself by putting away the last few slices of pizza for Kali to eat the next day. “Besides, wasn’t he going to marry that girl he brought with him from England? I thought they were engaged?”

“Oh, she is ancient history. I can’t even remember when she left, it was so long ago. He never talks about her, but I think they had a real big blow up. You hear things, but how can you be sure what is the truth, eh?”

“What things did you hear?” Adrienne hated herself for asking. She felt like part of the gossip-gallery she detested.

“Ask him yourself. Christopher is a good boy. I won’t talk bad about him. He’s done a lot of good things for me over the years.”

For a while, the two of them inhabited the kitchen in silence. Adrienne prepped a chicken for the oven so there would be soup and chicken salad for the next few days. The wind picked up, sending a blast of sea salt through the window. Adrienne could tell a storm was coming.

“That child of yours is going to end up just like you and your mother before that if you don’t start parenting her properly,” Gran said.

Adrienne could hear it in her voice that Gran had a bone to pick with her. There was always that subtle shift in Gran’s tone that gave her intention away.

“Like you parented me?” It felt good to say even if the words only stoked the fire. She was still pissed that Gran had sold the market without telling her.

“I did all I could. I gave you a chance to have a good life and you threw it away.” Adrienne could feel Gran watching her move around the kitchen. “It’s a sickness I think. It was something beyond my control, how you were drawn to those boys. They are not even here, living next door and that child of yours is already being drawn to that house. I don’t understand it. Not one bit.”

Adrienne froze. She turned to Gran. “What do you mean?”

“I saw her going through that crack in the wall by the Banyacado tree. I made her come back to the house, but you know this is not my job to look after her. I shouldn’t have to be going outside and yelling like that. I’m an old lady, after all.”

“I told her not to go over there.” Adrienne returned to her chopping.

“I told you not to go next door, not to mess with that Merritt boy, and look what happened? You get pregnant, and he disappears for good.” Gran pounded the table with her fist. “It’s a curse, I tell you.”

“My dad’s last name wasn’t Morgan, It was Merritt?” Kali said from the hallway. “And he wasn’t here just for the summer, he lived next door?”

Adrienne looked up to see her daughter. Their eyes locked for a moment.

“Why did you lie to me? Tears began to trickle down Kali’s face.

Adrienne went to her and put her hands on Kali’s shoulders, kneeling down so she could look into her eyes. “I’m sorry. People do stupid things when they are hurting.”

“You did this. You made it like this.” Kali pushed Adrienne’s hands off her.

“I told your mother not to get mixed up with either of those boys, especially that Quinn. I could tell they were no good just like their no good father. And then that whole mess with the suicide,” Gran said, shaking her head.

“It was a bad time. We all were hurting.” Adrienne resisted Kali’s attempts to push her away. She made Kali look at her. “Yes, your father and his brother lived next door in the big white house. Then, a very terrible thing

happened, and it just about broke your father to pieces. It broke me too. That's why I left here. I didn't want you to have to live in such a broken place."

"Let me go," Kali said, her voice, a cold void.

Adrienne let her go. She heard the back door slam a moment later. She wanted to go after Kali, but it was one of those moments when she wasn't sure what the best thing to do was. Adrienne turned to Gran who sat stoic in the chair at the head of the table, quietly sipping her coffee. The room felt like a suffocating, cloak, wrapping around Adrienne's face.

"This is your fault. You should have told that child long ago about her father, and the mess you made of things back then." Gran shook her head slowly, avoiding Adrienne's steely glare. "Look what it did to you. Your mother did the same thing to you, and now Kali will follow in the same steps both you and Diana took."

"Who made Diana turn out the way she did?"

Adrienne went to the sink and threw the chicken she'd been cleaning into a pan and shoved it into the oven. She washed her hands once again under searing hot water wringing them harshly. She needed to be anywhere but in that room. Anywhere but near Gran. Before she left, she turned one last time to look at the old woman.

"Maybe you should ask yourself what you did to cause all of us to end up this like this. Maybe you need to find your share of the blame in how we all turned out under your parenting."

Adrienne left the room before Gran could answer her. She knew Gran would deny having any part in the mess Diana and Adrienne had made of their lives. It was never Gran's fault. Adrienne couldn't stand to hear Gran, once again, claim no responsibility in the matter. Adrienne walked quickly through the dark living room and up the stairs to her room, shutting the door behind her. She locked it, for good measure.

The light was on, once again, in Quinn's old bedroom. She could see the dim, yellow glow through the pulled shade as she watched from her own window. This time, she was sure she wasn't hallucinating. Who was in there? There had to be someone inside. She watched the hypnotizing glimmer till she heard the oven timer chime downstairs, alerting the chicken was done. Let the chicken burn, she thought. She was stuck there, not wanting to leave till the light went out.

The pull to slip through the broken wall and sneak into the house was almost irresistible. Even if no one was there, just to touch the familiar knob of the back door, to walk up the stairs, and to roam the rooms she once knew, were temptations hard to ignore. Finally, she made herself leave the bedroom. She wondered if Kali was outside, at that same moment, looking at the light in the window. Adrienne wondered if they both were wondering about the same things.

## Chapter Three

Early the next day, Adrienne called Christopher. She told him dinner was not a good idea. He tried to press her for the exact details of the “blowup”, but she didn’t want him to know what had been said, what had been revealed the previous night. He was still nearly a stranger to her. It was bad enough Christopher had been around during the summer Lucas died, and he knew all the gory details. She ended up promising him that she would come to the market the next day. They could chat about her “new job” then.

Adrienne had to admit, she was excited, at least a little bit, about the possibility of cooking at the market. Kali refused to talk to her, and Gran had been locked away in her room since their fight the night before. Adrienne had distracted herself from reality by thinking of what she would say to Christopher about making the market into a real café. She wanted the freedom to cook what she wanted to cook. She wanted to be an equal, not some lowly line cook who did everyone’s bidding like at all her previous jobs in North Florida. She would work there only under these conditions. She couldn’t bear to feel like Christopher was her boss in her own store. But, it wasn’t her store anymore. She had to come to grips with that.

By that afternoon, Adrienne had seen neither Kali nor Gran. She spent the early part of the day writing up plans, planning potential menus, and working out her demands so that she would be prepared when she met with Christopher. At lunchtime, she put bowls of homemade chicken soup and grilled cheese

sandwiches on two trays and placed the trays at the entrance to Kali and Gran's bedroom doors. Then, she went back to the kitchen and made a batch of corn fritters filled with golden summer corn and coarse cornmeal.

There were only five items in the kitchen she felt comfortable cooking with. She had washed them herself. The lack of implements made cooking even the simplest meal a trial. Most of the pots, pan, and utensils had either a coat of soot from the fire covering them or they had a layer of grime from years of disuse. Gran had refused to pay for a special cleaning crew to come in after the fire. Adrienne made a mental note that every cooking item had to be washed and sanitized or she would never be able to cook a real meal in the house.

The fritters were for Christopher. It was one of her best recipes, and any one she had ever made them for had raved about them. The secret was bacon fat, but she never told anyone. Gran had always said, "Bacon fat was the key to anything that tasted good." As she worked on the fritters, she thought of all the nights she and Gran had spent in the kitchen together. She could see the beads of sweat glistening on Gran's forehead as she labored into the late hours, getting ready for the next big party.

At five o'clock, the phone rang.

"Go to the porch. I left something there for you since you cancelled our dinner. Do not call me back and complain. Just enjoy it and I'll see you tomorrow," Christopher said and then hung up before she could respond.

On the porch was a large wicker picnic basket that could have come straight out of an old movie with its gingham cloth corners peeking out from under the closed lid. She bit her lower lip, and a smile edged its way in. She shook her head, puzzled, and knelt down to open the top. Inside was a collection of small Tupperware containers. Each vessel filled with various mysterious offerings. She also spied a good loaf of Tuscan bread, a respectable bottle of red wine, and a pile of individually wrapped brownies. There was an oval rose colored box in the middle of the basket. When Adrienne opened the lid, she found a beautifully decorated little cake. “Happy Birthday” was written in pale blue on the top, surrounded by yellow buttercream roses.

It had slipped her mind that today was her birthday. She took the basket inside. There were several containers, each filled with a different type of seafood: shrimp, one with clams, another with lump crab meat, and the last had gorgeous chunks of lobster. The largest container was jam-packed with fragrant saffron-infused Spanish rice. Paella. She put the small cake on a plate and set it on the table along with the beautifully penned note card she had found tucked amongst the goodies that read, “Eat everything and enjoy it. It is your birthday, after all.”

Adrienne smiled. The seafood and the rice smelled good. She set to work heating up each element properly so they could come together to make the dish. She felt something akin to admiration that Christopher trusted her to know how to properly reheat the meal he had painstakingly put together. She was impressed, his flavors were spot on. The seafood was meticulously prepared so each would

be at its peak when the meal was reheated. She indulged in a brownie as she got dinner ready. They were good. She normally did not care for chocolate.

Kali was the first to appear at the entrance of the kitchen.

“It smells good in here,” she said, sitting at the table, “but I’m still not taking to you.”

“Okay.” Adrienne put a plate down in front of her. She slid a brownie next to Kali’s glass of milk. “Christopher sent this over for us. That was nice of him, huh?”

Kali grunted and dug into the meal. “He looks too much like a teacher with those glasses he wears.”

“I assume you’ve been on the hunt to find out more about Quinn?”

Adrienne said as she sat down next to Kali.

“The librarian said she knows you from high school. I asked her if she had known a boy named “Quinn Morgan” and she told me that was not his last name. It was “Merritt”. She also told me that he used to live next door with his dad and brother. Both of them are dead and Quinn is the only one left. He’s alive somewhere in this world.” Kali didn’t look at Adrienne. She kept her gaze on her plate of food. “Now that my grandfather is dead, I’m going to find out who owns the house and call them.”

“I honestly do not know where he is,” Adrienne said, her heart constricted.

“Whatever. I don’t need you now that I know what I know. Plus, there are people around town who knew him.”

Gran was next to slide silently into her seat. The three of them ate in a void of conversation, but the food was good enough to keep the tension between them low. The man knew his seafood, Adrienne thought as she let each mouthful roll around on her tongue. She had worked at so many places that never seemed to get seafood right; always overcooked, rubbery, bland. Half of the country truly believed that fish and shrimp were nearly tasteless. Growing up on a fishing boat, Adrienne had tasted the sea at its perfection. Christopher's meal brought all those good memories back to her.

Kali and Gran vanished back to their respected rooms once their plates were empty. Adrienne didn't waste any time. She pulled on her sneakers, and headed out of the house to the store. She was surprised to find her Malibu in the driveway. The key was in the ignition. When she turned the key, the car purred to life. Thanks to Christopher, once again, she wouldn't have to walk the mile to the grocery store after all.

When she got home, she piled up the ingredients on the table and got to work. Corn fritters were not going to be enough. Christopher's covert mission to provide her a birthday dinner had inspired her to make him a meal in return. Catfish was not an easy fish to get right, but Adrienne had taken years to learn how to cook it properly so that it tasted better than anything you ever had. She soaked the fish overnight in buttermilk, onions, and cayenne pepper. Then, just before they would eat, she'd dredge the fish in a secret mix of spices, cornmeal, and flour, then pan fry till golden brown. The corn fritters would go well with the fish. Then, she threw together a key lime pie. It seemed cliché to offer a key lime

pie in South Florida, but it was her favorite. She felt hers was one of the best around. Gran had a real key lime tree in her yard. It took Adrienne an hour to juice and zest the tiny limes.

Even though no one in the house was speaking, Adrienne went to bed pleasantly exhausted from the marathon cooking spree. She was eager for Christopher to try her food. It felt good to cook her heart out. It kept her from thinking of the great divide between her and Kali. It kept her from rehashing the past and letting guilt overcome her. Maybe cooking at the market would be a good thing for all of them.

## Chapter Four

Christopher's hallmark smile greeted her the next afternoon when she came through the door of the fish market. A little sigh of calm gave way inside her when she saw him, cheerful, that naturally occurring exuberance sparking off him. It was hard not to return the smile he seemed to make her give though she felt far from smiling. Kali had left the house at dawn, slamming the front door and waking Adrienne up from a dead sleep. The little hope Adrienne had gleaned, that their shared meal the night before had started the road back to conversing, was shattered. Earlier, Gran had put on a big fuss when she found a half-filled jar of rancid peanut butter in the trash. It was safe to say the morning had not been pleasant.

The band of merrily wed women that had filled the small store the day Adrienne first visited, was nowhere to be seen. Adrienne felt instantly at ease. She roamed around the small front area of the market. There was a collection of tiny wrought iron café tables strewn around the open area of the market. Christopher had taken out some of the old dark wood shelves where Gramps's had displayed fishing lures and other tackle for sale. The place seemed bigger and brighter with them gone. On each table were fresh clutches of scrub daisies in an eclectic assortment of vases. Scrub daisies made the hurt return, but it was easy to turn away from the seemingly insignificant flowers, and pay attention to Christopher.

Adrienne was drawn to the photos on the walls. Christopher had framed a bunch of pictures of her Gramps and of the town. Most had to do with fishing.

One in particular was of Gramps holding a huge Snook. The pride on his face was like looking at the sun. The lure, a yellow worm-looking thing, was mounted below the photo. She reached out and touched the gummy texture of the fake bait, remembering the day when Gramps had caught the fish of a lifetime, and she had been there to see it, to share in Gramps's joy.

"Your Gran let me rummage through the attic and I found a lot of these up there," Christopher said, and she could feel that he had come up close behind her. "It still amazes me how much the town has changed in such a short time. I have to admit, I miss all the old buildings and the people, especially your Grandfather."

"I miss him too." She moved away from the photo. A lump was forming in her throat. "Thank you for fixing my car. I didn't expect to find it in the driveway."

Christopher went to the door and turned the sign to "closed" and pulled the white vinyl shade down over the door window. "It was nothing. I just put in a new battery."

"It's only four o'clock. Isn't that a bit early to close up?" Adrienne stood at the counter, not sure where to position herself. "And I want to pay you back for the car battery."

"Monday's are slow. I always close early." Christopher rubbed his hands together. "Let's talk about our new arrangement."

"Well, it seems you won't even talk about me paying you back." Adrienne held up the bags she had placed on a table." Adrienne held up the bags she had

placed on a table. “I brought dinner since you made such a nice meal for us last night and you didn’t get to eat it.”

“Hmm, is this your audition?” Christopher rubbed his bristly chin. “You already have the job.”

“Your excellent Paella inspired me to cook.” Adrienne went past him into the kitchen. “I hope you are hungry.”

“I’m always hungry,” she heard him say behind her and a funny little electric pulse crept up her spine.

Christopher proved to be very helpful in the kitchen. He followed every direction she gave, carrying out her orders with quick efficiency. She was impressed with his knife skills. He cut the peppers and onions with a quick deft hand that only comes from years of practice.

Christopher had a devotion to seafood that bordered on religious fanaticism. She watched him inspect the fish left in the case with a skilled eye, rubbing his thumb over the flesh to check for viability. There was a beauty to the slick skin that Christopher admired.

As they ate, Adrienne went through her plans, menus, and demands. Christopher proved to be fine with it all.

“Cook what you want, when you want.” I miss getting out on the water. Having you here will give me more time to fish,” he teased, but she felt confident that this would be her kitchen. The thrill of being in command of her own kitchen, plus too much wine, made her start to giggle like a school girl, which she never did, even when she was a school girl.

“So, do you cook extravagant and labor intensive meals then, leave them at the door step of all your fans?” Adrienne took a sip of the hundred year old tequila Christopher offered after the meal was done.

“My fans?” Christopher looked up at her. He was in the middle of putting whipped cream on the pie.

“Those women the other day seemed to really enjoy your fishmonger skills.” Adrienne giggled a bit more. Who was this girl, she thought to herself.

“Oh, them,” Christopher said, smiling.

“I don’t know if I can work here if the place is going to be over-run with your seafood groupies.” Adrienne got up. She took the bowl of cream from him and began to dot the pie with the soft peaks.

“I forgot how funny you are.” Christopher placed a thin knife by her side so she could cut wedges of the pie. “You always made me laugh when you’d come work at the market.”

“Yeah, I’m a regular stand-up comedian.” Adrienne went back to her drink, and drained the last of it. Then, she dug into her section of the pie.

“You are an excellent cook, Adrienne. That was the best catfish I’ve ever had. And this pie is a work of art.”

Christopher had a smudge of whipped cream on his nose, which made Adrienne laugh even harder. She reached over and wiped it away.

“You should enter the cooking showcase at the Fourth Fest. We could team-up and represent the market in the professional division. The festival has gotten really well-known and competitive. It would draw good business to the

market.” Christopher leaned farther over the table towards her as he spoke. He had a way of looking at her that made her feel exposed.

“That doesn’t sound like fun at all with all those old ladies and their daughters talking about me behind my back,” Adrienne said, making a sour face. “Especially, Tessa.”

“They’ll just talk about you anyway. Why not give them a run for their money?”

“I remember that last Fourth Fest Gran competed in. It was right after Gramps died. It was a nightmare.” Adrienne shuddered just thinking about the hell Gran had put her through that year.

“There’s ten thousand dollars to the winner of the professional division,” Christopher said.

“Okay, I’ll think about it.”

Ten thousand dollars was a good way to convince her to do anything.

“I hope Kali wasn’t mad that I suggested the summer camp. I just thought it might be a good fit for her.” He took his napkin and gave his face a good wipe to make sure there was nothing left. He poured more tequila into her cup. “I hope that I’m not the reason things got out of hand at the house after I left.”

“It wasn’t you. She is mad at me and the world.” Adrienne paused for a moment to let the silky cold tequila slide down her throat. It was good. “I actually signed her up this morning. She’d rather be painting than be around me or Gran right now.”

“She seems like your typical sullen teenager.” Christopher offered her a bite of pie from his fork. Adrienne realized that he was, in a way, feeding her. It was nice and strange all at the same time.

“She hates me. She’s found out about Quinn. Well, found out the truth.” Adrienne put the fork down on her plate.

“Oh? You haven’t been honest with her?” Christopher took a sip of his drink as he eased back in his chair.

“I’ve dreaded it all these years.” Adrienne put her head in her hands. “It’s such a mess. I made up a lie instead of telling her the truth. Now, we are here, and even though the Merritt’s are gone, it’s like this place will always be haunted by them, by what happened to Lucas. To all of us. She’s going to be in high school soon. She’s almost grown up. I know what it’s like to be that age and wonder about where you come from.”

Adrienne went to the back window. She could see the mangrove forest that hid the Back Bay and the marina. “I don’t want her to go through the same things I did. I hate that you know all about it. I hate this town knows all my troubles, everything I wish I could keep from her.”

“You need to tell her about Quinn and Lucas before she finds out on her own,” Christopher said. “It was a sad thing that happened. I know you loved them both very much. Quinn and Lucas are her family. Screw this town and what it knows.”

“I don’t know if I can. I don’t want to remember.” Adrienne wrapped her arms around her body, suddenly cold though it was June. “The words won’t come out.”

“You can’t go forward unless you deal with the past.”

She turned around and watched Christopher sit there, watching her. He looked genuinely concerned. He had always cared about her family, more than he ever should have, more than Adrienne ever did. He helped out when Gramps got sick, and then took over the market when Gramps died. He had obviously been caring for Gran all these years, making sure she didn’t go up in a blaze.

“It makes no sense why you stayed in this place. You had so much more potential than Harbor Point could ever offer you. But, here you are; still in this shack, in this annoying little town.” Adrienne shook her head. “Why did you give up on the writing? Why did you stay here?”

“I like it here. And, I didn’t give up on the writing.” Christopher joined her at the sink. “Shitty stuff happens to everyone, Adrienne. You are not the only one. I’ve had my own share. So what if life doesn’t pan out the way you think it’s going to when you are a teenager? You get over it. You move on and make the best of what you have. I’m sorry if what I say makes you mad, but you gave up, you are still giving up. Not me. I, at least, press forward and try my best to carve out a little space for me and my life.”

“It was my fault. Lucas killed himself because of me.” She could feel the crying coming. She hadn’t cried since the night she found him dead. “He died because he loved me and I loved his brother. He died because we all ignored that

he was spiraling out of control those last weeks of his life. No one helped him. He was all alone. I was his best friend and I left him alone. I will never forgive myself for that.”

“No, I don’t believe that. It wasn’t your fault.” Christopher shook his head. “Lucas struggled with depression long before you ever met him. Quinn told the police that in his statement. Even Quinn didn’t blame you.’

“Quinn blames me. He may not have said it out loud to everyone at the time, but he does blame me. That’s why he disappeared and never came back. He disconnected all the numbers I had for him. My letters came back unopened from Yale. He doesn’t know about Kali. ” Adrienne slumped to the tile floor, gravity a force too hard to fight with any longer. “You don’t know what Lucas saw the night he died. He found me and Quinn together. He had to see us together. He was all alone. I may not be the only reason he killed himself, but what he saw was the push over the edge.”

Christopher sat next to her on the floor. He put a hesitant arm on her shoulder. “You have to tell Kali, maybe not all the gory details, but you must talk to her, for her sake and for your own. This is not life. This is not the way to live.”

She let him circle his arm around her. There on the floor of the kitchen, in the fish market, for what seemed like hours, she sobbed into the sleeve of his shirt. Christopher said nothing more, just held her. When her eyes finally began to dry and droop from exhaustion, she felt him lift her and carry her up the narrow stairs to the tiny studio apartment above the market.

The last thing she saw, before her eyes would no longer allow her to keep them open, was the shadowy outline of his body as he sat in the chair by the bed.

## Chapter Five

The next afternoon, Adrienne sat in the living room waiting for Kali to get back from her summer camp orientation. She had dropped Gran off at the senior center for a knitting circle. The house would be all theirs for the next few hours. She was still going over the previous night's events in her head. She felt out of sorts and troubled by her break down in front of Christopher. Early that morning, she woke to find she was in the apartment above the market. She could vaguely recall the night before.

Christopher, thankfully, was gone. He had left a note on the small table that he'd gone to meet the fleet for the morning's haul of fish. The last person she wanted to look in the eye was him. He had seen her so vulnerable and broken.

The thought of working with him, just the two of them, side by side in that small kitchen, was an unbearable idea now. She had scrawled a note on the back of the one he had left her. It said she would not be able to work at the market, but she did thank him for the offer, and she hoped that he understood. She had left the note on the cash register before she fled back to the cottage.

Waiting for Kali, she picked at a frayed piece of the couch. Her cell phone was on silent, but she could see that no one had called. A thrill of dread passed through her when she considered that Christopher might show up at the cottage to try to get her to reconsider. She should have told him to give her space, but it was too late now.

The front door slammed, Kali appeared a moment later at the entranceway with her arms folded across her chest.

“You didn’t come home last night. I had to give Gran her breakfast this morning since you weren’t here,” Kali said.

“I’m sorry. I was at the market deciding if I want to work there or not.” Adrienne swallowed hard.

“Whatever,” Kali said, hoisting her canvas bag back up on her shoulder. “I’ll be in my room.”

“Can I see what you’ve been working on?” Adrienne stood quickly, not wanting to have this opportunity pass by. “You never show me what you paint.”

“No.”

Adrienne couldn’t help but smile a little. She knew that would be Kali’s response. She wasn’t going to give up though.

“Your uncle used to draw too. He would never let me see anything he did either. It used to make me so mad.” Adrienne sat back down, she motioned for Kali to come and sit too.

The piece of information, a little taste of Kali’s unknown family, was enough to make her sit across from Adrienne. Kali looked at her mother skeptically as she put her bag down on the ground.

“Was he good?” Kali finally gave in and asked.

“What little I saw, yes, he was good. He could have been great.” Adrienne felt the old familiar hitch in her throat that came when she thought about Lucas.

“He killed himself?” Kali’s voice was far away. She looked out the bay window at the water instead of Adrienne.

“Yes.” Adrienne watched her.

“Will you tell me about Lucas and my father?” Kali finally turned to face Adrienne.

“Yes.” Adrienne took a deep breath. She let it out slowly, and as the breath left her body, time spun backwards to the summer she met Quinn and Lucas. “I was seventeen the summer they moved next door. I had one year of high school left and then I was going to leave Harbor Point for good. I never expected that summer to change my life the way it did.”

## Chapter Six~ *June 1997*

Adrienne pedaled her beach cruiser slowly down the sidewalk feeling the June heat pulse against her bare shoulders. To her, the day was like every other day. It was hot. It was mundane. Everything an almost seventeen year old expected a day in Harbor Point to consist of. Even the traffic on A1A was sluggish. The cars seemed to swim by like huge lazy fish. Her fishing pole was strapped to her handle bars, making the occasional pedestrian move off the walk to let her by. Most of them waved and said hello to her by name, not minding the fact that they had to step aside for her to pass. Harbor Point was so small, anyone who had lived there any length of time got to know the town's people pretty well. Adrienne had lived there her whole life—her seventeenth birthday was just a few days away—so she knew everyone.

She skidded to a stop in front of her grandfather's shop, the Hook 'N' Cook Fish Market. From that exact spot on the sidewalk, she could see the 'Welcome to Harbor Point' sign to the north. To her it wasn't a welcoming point, but more like a finish line she so desperately wanted to cross. To the south, if she stood on her tiptoes and bent out over the street, she could just make out the last of the four stoplights in town.

She pulled herself out of the road and sighed deeply before going around to the back of the shop. She locked up her bike to the chain-link fence that guarded the salt water crab tanks. No one was at the market, there was a small sign in the window that said, "Gone fishing, be back at 3:00pm". Adrienne headed

down the gravel path behind the market, through the mangroves to the marina with her poles and bait bucket. The tide was low. The smell of rotting sea life was steaming up from the exposed sea beds.

Adrienne stopped on the dock next to her grandfather's boat, The *Hello Dolly*, and dropped her gear. She pushed her cap down low on her forehead, hiked up her cutoff jeans, and took a moment to scratch a bug bite on her calf as she stood on the dock.

Then, and only then, did she allow herself to look up and peer at the tall dark-haired guy in tennis whites, sitting on the bait well at the back of the boat. Of course, she knew who the man was; Christopher Crane. Rumor had it that he was currently writing a book called, *Strange Florida*, which was all about strange and interesting things that had happened in the great peninsular state over the years. Apparently, Florida was a magnet for the odd and unusual.

Adrienne had never asked what he was writing about. All she did know about him was that he helped run the counter at the market, and he lived, rent-free, in the tiny room on the second floor as part of his wages. Christopher also occasionally wrote articles for the Harbor Point Star. Adrienne always seemed to catch him scribbling away in a small leather bound notebook he kept religiously in the back pocket of his pants.

Gran had been at the center of a few of Christopher's articles. And there had been many events, in Gran's repertoire, for Christopher to choose from. One such fiasco was to block Twyla Pushcart from building a dock during the Bromeliad Festival that Gran had organized for the Harbor Point Bromeliads of

America Club, a club that Gran had founded and presided over. There was also the time Gran had spent a night in jail for kidnapping Benson Davis's Pekinese, named Captain, and locking him in the backyard shed for a day and half. "The damn dog never shuts up," Gran told the police officer.

The biggest piece Christopher had penned for the Harbor Point star was the scandal at the 1991 annual Harbor Point Historical Society's chili cook-off fundraiser at the Fourth Fest. It was suspected that Gran had rigged the contest that year to ensure a certain win. The previous year, Gran lost first place for the first time in five years. Paola Suarez, Harbor Point's butcher, snatched the title from Gran, and the very next year, Paola's prize winning Chili Verde gave the panel of judges' explosive diarrhea. Sensing something was afoot, Paola sent a sample to a food lab. Low and behold, the test showed that the same ingredients found in Exlax to be found in Paola's pot of chili. It was only when the lab's results were revealed did timid Pete Spicer, the Ocean Blvd Bridge tender, come out and admitted he saw Elizabeth Harris lurking around Paola's hot plate the day of the event.

Christopher stood when he saw Adrienne ready herself to jump down into the boat. Knowing he planned to help her with the fishing gear, Adrienne scampered quickly to beat him to the dock side, pushing him out of the way. The last thing she wanted was his help. She could manage fine on her own, she always had.

"I can handle it," she said to Christopher, shielding her eyes against the sun.

Christopher had also written several articles about the Banyacado tree fight between their new neighbor, Mr. Merritt, and Gran. One piece followed the community-wide protests Gran had spearheaded. Another piece covered the three day courtroom trial with painfully embarrassing details of Gran's courtroom antics. All the fainting spells and uncontrolled outbursts of crying were rendered on the pages of the Harbor Point Star. Sure, everyone in town knew Gran was one for the dramatics, but to see it all written down in an article in a newspaper made it even more horrid for Adrienne. She worried others might read the article in other towns. Then, Gran would become notorious throughout South Florida, and her special brand of crazy would no longer be contained to the four-streetlight-long town of Harbor Point.

Christopher rolled his eyes at her. He cocked his head and peered down into the cabin. "You think he should be going out today?"

"He's going to die. He might as well enjoy what he has left. If he's feeling up to it, I'm taking him out." Adrienne cringed at her own frankness, but it was the truth. Gramps was going to die and pretty soon. "Since he's refused to do chemo anymore, the nausea has stopped. This is turning out to be a good time for him. The doctor called it 'Last Hurrah Syndrome'."

"I know. You're right. How many golden days is he going to get?" Christopher held onto the outrigger. "I'll be up at the shop. Stay close to the shore, okay?"

He looked sad. Adrienne knew he cared about Gramps a great deal. Why else would he work at the fish market for the little pay he got? There wasn't a

person she could name in the whole town that didn't love Gramps. He was that kind of man.

"Sure. You know, I'm almost seventeen. I can handle this." Adrienne creased her brow as Christopher hopped off the boat onto the deck.

"I know, and it's not you. I just worry he'll get sick while you're out on the water." Christopher jammed his hands in his pockets. "All I have is a jet ski to get to you."

"We'll be fine, Christopher." Adrienne jumped onto the boat, sticking a perfect landing, though the boat rocked violently.

"Fine, fine," Christopher said, throwing his hands up in the air. Before he turned to head off towards the path, he called to her. "But, call on the CB if anything happens. A jet ski is better than nothing."

"Fine," she said, relenting. Then to change the subject, Adrienne turned her focus to Christopher's long-term fiancée. "I saw Rachel at the post office yesterday. She was really giving it to the postmaster. I've never seen her yell like that before."

"Yeah, she was waiting for a package from her mum, back in England. Seems the post lost it. It's really not Gary's fault, but Rachel was mad and he, unfortunately, was the one to get the brunt of her wrath." Christopher scratched his head, looking away from Adrienne down at the row of boats tied to the dock. "I just hope the box shows up soon or I'll never sleep again. There were some of her childhood things in it."

“It must suck for her to be so far away from home,” Adrienne said as she tried in vain to pull her hair back in a ponytail.

“It’s been a hard adjustment for her. She does miss England, but there are better opportunities for us here.”

“Have you two set a date yet? For the wedding?”

“We’re in no hurry, but I’ll make sure you’re the first to know.”

Gramps came out on deck. He smiled at Adrienne. His wrinkled weather-beaten face was nothing but joy—as it always was—when he was headed out on the water. Gramps’s blue eyes sparkled as vibrant as a child’s in the bright sun. Adrienne loved to look at him, his white shock of hair smoothed back with VO5, his brown trim chest peeking through his unbuttoned faded Hawaiian shirt. He had been handsome and strong as a young man, and those qualities lingered now he was well into his seventies. Adrienne spent as much time at the fish market or out on the boat with him as Gran would allow. They were kindred spirits. Gramps loved her just the way she was, and though he was a man who said little, she knew it.

“Adrienne and I will dance at your wedding.” Gramps put his arm around her and looked up at Christopher. “I love a good wedding. Ready to get going, Adrienne?”

“I’m always ready,” she said, helping Gramps get settled in his chair. She had to fight the sadness away, thinking about the small possibility Gramps would make it to Christopher’s wedding.

An hour later, Adrienne moved the *Hello Dolly*, through the water. It felt as if there was no difference between air and ocean. The water was dark and cool. The shore was lined with estates hidden by sea grass, mangrove, and palmettos. There were just a few small homes tucked in between the massive mansions. Gran and Gramps was one of the last few.

Gramps sat next to her as she stood at the wheel guiding the boat in lazy curves around the markers in the channel and the occasional boat moving, if possible, more slowly than theirs. Dots of white bobbed past on the swells. They didn't talk. Gramps never minded. He liked to talk as little as possible, especially when out on the water. Adrienne hoisted up the bright yellow flag that read; "Hungry? Out of bait? Just honk!" It waved above their heads on a pole as they plowed through the water jumpy with wake.

A series of bright staccato honks made her bolt up and seek out the direction to take their floating lunch & bait wagon. Someone wanted them.

"Over there," Gramps said, pointing towards the mouth of the inlet as she turned the wheel and brought the boat about.

Adrienne could see Gramps's blue eyes reflect the sparks of sun off the water as she commanded the boat towards their customer. Gramps was still humming. He always had a song to sing. Sometimes he would break out into words, but the hum was always there it seemed, even if you couldn't hear it. He didn't look like a man about to die. Adrienne tried to absorb his image, take him in. She wanted to be able to close her eyes and always see him in the sunlight,

looking out at the water. After he was gone, she would still have all of those moments to remember. The golden moments of Gramps's golden time.

“Well, it's almost three. We'll, let this be the last of the day, okay, Dolly?” Gramps put his arm around her shoulder, and she put her head on his. Dolly, his pet name for her, as in *Hello, Dolly*, a favorite song of his from the mental playlist of songs he liked to sing. It always made her secretly happy that the boat was named after her.

“Sounds good to me, I'm ready to go in,” Adrienne said as she inhaled his scent. The Old Spice completed the intoxicating cocktail of smells that was summer on the Back Bay.

They neared the large Boston Whaler moored on the sandbar just off Beer Can Island, a small patch of sand kept alive by a clutch of mangroves. A deep trough about ten feet wide separated it from the mainland. It was a popular place to stop to swim and fish. Adrienne loved to troll the shallows at low tide for sea urchins, letting them “urch” in her hand, feeling them prickle as they did so. Gramps wouldn't let her eat them. It was her favorite thing to do, to suck out the raw yellow pulpy meat, but the water was too polluted. She wondered if she would grow an extra eye or something one day from swimming in it so much.

“Geez, this is a great little operation you got going on here,” a red man with a large belly said as Adrienne threw a rope to him so they could connect.

He took off his Dallas Cowboy's hat and wiped the sweat from his pink forehead with the soft canvas. The Rolex Submariner on the guy's wrist bent the light into sharp triangles that splattered against her face. She'd seen so many

variations of the same watch on many of their customers. She saw a lot more of them when they took the half hour trek up north towards Palm Beach to sling sandwiches, cold beer, squid, and ballyhoo.

“Thanks, my good man,” Gramps said, holding onto the outrigger with one hand, and tipping his blue skinny brim hat with the other. “It keeps us out of the poor house. Right, Adrienne?”

Gramps smiled. He nudged Adrienne and she smiled at the very well-done man. He was going to hurt later, Adrienne thought. She wanted to tell him to go home and rub some Sarna on his burn, but it seemed that many tourists didn't like that kind of advice.

“I'll take some of those chicken sandwiches, and a pound of bait shrimp.” The guy pulled out a money clip stuffed with folded bills. He peeled off two twenties and handed them to Adrienne who replaced the money with the bag of food and bait.

“What're you out here looking to catch?” Gramps asked as Adrienne handled the money.

“Ah, we plan to get some of those Snooks we've heard so much about.” The guy handed off the bag to one of the other guys on his boat. He assumed the position of shooting the shit; his feet spread and arms resting on his large belly.

“They're called Snook, not Snooks.” Adrienne pointed her hand, full of dollar bills towards the other side of the island. “And you should be over there, where the island butts up against the inlet shoal. The bait fish fly through that current and the Snook just sit and wait for them.”

The man paused and looked at Gramps. Gramps nodded in approval.

“Adrienne is the best fisher I’ve seen.” Gramps looked down at her and placed a hand on top of her tangled mess of dark hair. “She knows this place better than anyone. She’s been raised in these waters.”

“Thanks, Kid,” said the man, hiking his sunglasses back up on his face. He pushed her outstretched hand back, curling her fingers around the money. “You keep it, Kid. Tip money.”

“Thanks. I hope you look for us next time you’re out here,” Adrienne said, stuffing the wad in the back pocket of her cut-offs. “And good luck. They’re buggers, those Snook.”

“That they are, Dolly.” Gramps gave a low laugh, so soft and gentle only Adrienne could have picked it out of the breeze.

Later that afternoon, they pulled up to their small wood dock cloaked in dappled shadows and light from the overhead jungle that grew around their part of the Back Bay. Automatically, Gramps began to clean and ready the boat for the next day, but was too weak to do little more than sweep the deck. Adrienne said nothing, knowing Gramps wouldn’t want to hear things he already knew. When he finally sat down in the captain’s chair, she quietly took over, finishing the work on her own.

The muck on the bottom of the bay, a concoction of mud, sand, and who knows how many year’s worth of rotting mangrove roots and leaves, squished in between her toes as she scrubbed the hull. The tide was almost at its peak ebb.

The smell of rot and heat brewed together, rising up from the warm murky water. Gramps began to hum, *Dream a Little Dream of Me*, as he tallied up the day's totals above her in the boat. There was only one tuna sandwich left in the cooler and no beer or soda. Adrienne knew that meant they had made about \$200 since they always took the same amount of supplies each day, depending on the season. It was the beginning of summer, so they took less. High season was over, and the snowbirds had flown home. In the winter, they could make \$500 a day.

As they headed up the thin dock and through the arched gable of mangroves, trimmed and bent to make a passage through to their house, Gramps push something into her hand. Adrienne looked down and saw it was a crumpled fifty dollar bill. He put his arm around her and squeezed her close as they emerged out into the open grassy field that ran along the road. Adrienne kissed his cheek, and he returned the kiss to her forehead.

“For the college fund or for something fun. It’s your birthday soon anyways. Just don’t tell your Gran, you know how she is.”

“Every penny must be accounted for,” Adrienne said in her best “Gran” voice with her best “Gran face”. She even shook her finger like Gran loved to do, but then her face softened. She smiled at him. “It will be our secret.”

Gramps dropped his hand from Adrienne’s shoulder when they saw Gran standing out by the road. She wore a thick turquoise crushed velvet dressing gown. It was tied at the waist with a purple sash that had come from some other outfit. There were tiny seed pearls sewn on the material. Her coarse black hair was up in giant yellow curlers. Even at seventy, she looked like she could have

been sixty. There wasn't a wrinkle on her face, and a trip to the salon every three weeks kept the grey away. Gran was short, a smidge under five feet tall, barefoot, but she was strong and built like an oak tree. She could have been called "handsome" if it weren't for the makeup she applied without fear or restraint. Being colorblind—a rare trait in females—amplified Gran's fondness of bright shades. She tended to wear several conflicting color schemes at the same time. Her cheeks were an angry red, so were her lips. Her painted on eyebrows went on thick and slanted inward giving her a menacing presences.

Her garden reflected this free wielding abandon of color use as well, though it worked better outside than on her. Their house was always surrounded by bold patches of wildly colored flower beds. In Gran's reality, Adrienne imagined, nothing was ever as beautiful as it really was. In her eyes, everything Gran saw was always shrouded in muted colors. Adrienne often wondered if Gran dreamed in Technicolor and when she was awake, world always proved a disappointment for her.

Gran's hands were on her hips as she looked murderously at two large moving trucks parked just outside the iron gates of the Merritt house. A third moving van appeared over the bridge and lumbered down South Road. It came to rest between Adrienne and Gran, right in front of their house.

"You cannot park here," Adrienne heard Gran yell to the driver. "This is private property. I will not have Bob Merritt ruin my yard. He's caused enough damage as it is."

Adrienne and Gramps looked at one another and then hurried across the road. Gramps opted to head straight to the garage and avoid the conflict all together. Someone had to go and keep Gran from going off the deep end, and Adrienne knew it would be her.

“Gran, he’s not even on the grass. Look, see the wheels are all on the road.” Adrienne pointed to the truck as she came up next to Gran.

“I don’t care. I don’t want any of these damn vans near my house. The last one almost took out the pomegranate tree. It took me ten years to get that sonofabitch tree to bear fruit. I plan on winning best exotic fruit this year. I don’t want them walking in my grass.” Gran banged on the side of the truck for dramatic emphasis. “I will call the police if I have to.”

Adrienne saw Bob Merritt coming towards them. Two boys, about Adrienne’s age, flanked each side of him. Adrienne felt a twinge go through her as she watched them come closer to her and Gran. Both of the boys had blond hair, but one was as light a straw and the other was darker, like honey. The boy on the left of Mr. Merritt was tall and rather lanky. The boy on the right was shorter and a bit stockier. They both were dressed in tan shorts and rugby stripped polo shirts; one blue and one green. The shorter one was much paler than the tall one, who was deeply tan. They had to be brothers, Adrienne thought.

“Mrs. Harris, please. The van will be gone in just a moment as soon as we unload the one up at the house. I have informed all the movers to take utmost care around your plants and such.” Mr. Merritt extended out his hands, as a goodwill gesture, as he came up to them. Adrienne noticed how Mr. Merritt made sure to

stay on the black asphalt of the road and not come into contact with Gran's grass line.

"Have them park across the street in the field. I don't want them near my house." Gran pointed to the lot across the street as she barked at Mr. Merritt.

Mr. Merritt did a little bow and went to speak to the driver. The two boys stood there smiling at Gran and Adrienne.

"I'm Quinn, and this is my brother Lucas." The tall boy extended a hand to Gran. "I guess we are all going to be neighbors."

Gran snubbed Quinn's handshake by flicking her hand in the air as if dismissing him. Adrienne moved in quickly and grabbed his hand. So they were brothers, she thought. Bob Merritt had kids, and for some reason, all these months as the house was being built, she had never known that information.

"I'm Adrienne." She noticed how warm his hand felt in hers. "So, you will be living next door with Mr. Merritt?"

"Yes, he's our father." The boy named Lucas came between Adrienne and Quinn, braking their locked hands. He extended his own hand in his brother's place. "We've been away at school while the house was being built. Our summer break just started."

"Great! This is just what we need. Now we'll have two horny boys next door to us." Gran threw her hands up in the air. "This just keeps getting better and better."

Adrienne wanted to die right then and there. How could Gran speak like that in front of their new neighbors? How could she live next door to them now the boys knew her grandmother was nuts.

Gran shook a finger at Mr. Merritt. “This moving van of yours better be gone when I come back out here.”

Gran took Adrienne’s hand and pulled her towards the house. The two boys gave a quick wave to her. She didn’t want to leave. She wanted to find out more about them. She couldn’t stop watching the tall boy she now knew was Quinn. He had the deepest blue eyes she’d ever seen. Quickly, she decided it was better to leave and get Gran away from them before she really made a scene. Adrienne waved back, then she turned back to Gran and they walked to the house.

As they walked up the shell rock path, Gran murmured something, too low for Adrienne to make out, but she guessed it was some Hungarian curse word.

“I have a Junior League meeting tonight. You’ll have to get Gramps’s dinner. I wanted you to come and help with the refreshments, but I guess we can’t leave Gramps to fend for himself.” Gran stooped to fuss over some plant at the edge of the path.

“Sure,” Adrienne said, thrilled she didn’t have to go with Gran to one of her stuffy old ladies’ meetings. She would never be a prim and proper young lady, the very thing the Junior League was all about. In fact, she knew that the women in the club were neither prim nor proper to begin with.

“Go clean up before you come inside. You look like a water rat.” Gran erected her body and gave Adrienne a long, critical once over. “We cannot have Bob Merritt thinking we are some dirty, poverty stricken family.”

Gran shook her head, obviously disappointed in what she saw. Adrienne touched her hair and felt the gnarled and knotted ponytail. She shuttered when she thought of how she must have looked to the Merritt boys. They were so clean, shiny, and perfect. She imagined she looked like she had just crawled out of a mud hole. As an added bonus, she also smelled like fish guts and sweat. They were probably having a good laugh over her appearance and aroma.

Adrienne went to the small bathroom in the garage that Gran insisted she and Gramps use to clean up before coming inside. She splashed cool water on her face and washed her hands. She looked at herself in the mirror, warped by salt and heat, and smoothed her hair back. Then, she wiped the stubborn smudges off her face with a clean towel. She touched her face. She stood back and looked at her body. She wished she had boobs instead of a boy’s figure. Like Gran, she was built on a strong frame that would never look slender or elegant. No boy had ever paid any attention to her unless she was swinging a baseball bat or hooking a monster fish. She wanted a different kind of attention now, but she could have been invisible at her school for all the attention the boys paid her. One year of high school left to go, and she had never been in love.

In the early evening, she climbed up in the Banyacado tree to watch the movers bring the huge boxes into the big white house. Beautiful furniture went

underneath her in an endless flow. She watched, imagining it was her moving into the house. That she was someone else, someone beautiful and glamorous with a carefree life. A large birdcage went by with a pure white cockatoo inside. A giant bronze sculpture of a Marlin rolled by on a cart. An old Spanish cannon, still covered in barnacles and oyster shells, went beneath her.

She snapped out her trance when she heard laughter. She looked up towards the road and saw them. She had been waiting to see the brothers. That was the real reason she had climbed up the tree. They were pushing each other as they walked up the driveway, trying to see which would drop their box first. Adrienne sat up straight, trying her best to blend into the leaves. She was horrified to think they might see her up in the tree spying on them. Only kids climbed trees, she knew this. So far, she had been able to get away with not acting her age around town. There were no other kids in the neighborhood so she was relatively free to act as childish as she wanted, but it was unacceptable to have boys her age see her climbing trees, especially cute ones.

She watched Quinn the most. He had an interesting face, angular and a deep set brow line. He wasn't the kind of boy you would see on the cover of a teen heart-throb magazine. He was much too interesting looking for that. He would laugh out loud as he and Lucas talked and Adrienne's heart skipped a beat each time she heard that laughter ring out.

She followed their every move back and forth from truck to house. She stayed up in the tree as they disappeared into the house and reemerged, heading to the moving van. Adrienne could see their faces as they carried the boxes. They

both had a look on their face like nothing in the world could harm them. It was a serene and content look as if they had never known a bad day. Like they knew the world was all theirs. It was the look of money and power.

When she was sure they were not coming out of the house, she slid down the trunk and went to the front porch, flopping down on the daybed. Quinton Merritt swam through her head. Her whole body was in chaos as she thought about him. She lay motionless, watching the old metal fan make wobbly revolutions above her, till the sky darkened and Gran poked her head out the front door, hollering for her to come in and help with the laundry.

“Silly girl, always daydreaming.” Gran clucked her tongue and shook her head as they donned their aprons.

## Chapter Seven

Adrienne spent most of the next day at the beach trying to surf the sad little waves that were coming in at high tide. It was a rare day off from Gran, and Adrienne had sprung out of bed, packed a small bag of snacks and drinks, grabbed her board and headed out to the beach. Gran had been picked up by one of her friends for a day long excursion to some orchid farm in Ft. Lauderdale. Gramps was being looked after by the nurse. She came every few days to change Gramps's catheter and talk about jazz with Gramps. They two had a deep love for Sarah Vaughn, and Gramps delighted in the conversations.

By five o'clock, the sun was still blazing. Adrienne flopped onto her back on her towel and let the day warm her wet body. She loved the intense heat soaking into her bones. She let her mind wander and drift along with the sound of the sea.

It took a while for Adrienne to realize someone was standing over her. It was so hot that the shadow the person cast across her face did nothing to cool her heated skin. The only reason she suddenly was aware of the presence was that the brightness against her closed lids had dimmed.

She opened her eyes, and all she could see was a silhouette of a person leaning over her. Her heart began to race. His blond hair blazed back-lit by the sun. It had to be him.

"Hi, again," a soft voice said to her.

"Hi, again," she said back, struggling to sit up.

He backed away as she propped herself up on her elbows. She was finally able to see him. It was not Quinn, but Lucas. She tried not to let her disappointment show.

If she had seen Lucas first, and Quinn had not been there for comparison, she would have thought Lucas was a nice looking guy. He was muscular. He had a friendly face and beautiful light blue eyes. His hair was light blond, like straw, and short. He wore a pair of black swim shorts and a white t-shirt. Adrienne could see his pale arms and legs. She wasn't sure she'd ever seen someone as white as he was. She could tell he was the kind of guy who burned easily and didn't spend much time outside.

"Can I sit down?" he asked, running his hand through his short hair. She noticed his nose was a bit too big for his face, but, his smile was shy and honest. She felt at ease instantly.

"Sure." She patted the sand next to her.

He sat next to her, and they watched the waves for a bit. He didn't seem to be in any hurry to talk.

"Are you going for a swim?" Adrienne finally broke the quiet between them.

He looked down at his swim shorts and then out at the water with a contemplative slant to his brow. "No, I don't swim," he finally said without taking his eyes off the sluggish waves.

"Why not?"

“Not a big fan, that’s all.” He turned towards her, squinting in the late day light. “I do better indoors with air conditioning. Quinn is the big water enthusiast, not me.”

“So why wear swim trunks?”

“It’s Florida. Isn’t that what you wear down here?”

Adrienne chuckled. “Just the tourists.”

“How long do you have to live here to not be called a “tourist”?”

“It’s not a timeframe, it’s an attitude.” Adrienne smiled at him.

“Well, will you tell me when I graduate?”

“Sure. So you and Quinn are brothers? I didn’t know Mr. Merritt had any kids.” She didn’t know what else to say.

“Yeah, he was pretty old when me and Quinn came along. He wanted to do a lot of things before he got married and had kids. As for the great Quinton Merritt, he’s my big brother. He just finished his senior year of high school.” The more Lucas talked about Quinn, the more soft-spoken he got. “He’s going to Yale in the fall. Then I’ll be stuck with my dad for a whole year by myself.”

She sensed dissatisfaction in him as he spoke of Quinn leaving. But, she couldn’t help but feel an electrical thrill in her at the thought that the two brothers would be right next door all summer. She’d been dreading spending the whole summer alone on South Road.

“What about your mom?” Adrienne dug her feet into the hot sand.

“She died about five years ago in a car crash.” Lucas bent his head down as if he was searching for something in the sand.

“That must be hard, I’m sorry. I never see my mom, but I couldn’t imagine her dying.”

Adrienne shuttered at the thought. It made her think of Gramps’s and his impending death. She suspected this would be Gramps’s last summer with her. Adrienne touched Lucas lightly on the shoulder, feeling a strong connection to him at that moment.

“Sure it was, but really we hardly spent time with either of them. They were always working, traveling. We were either with our nanny or at some boarding school or a summer enrichment program.”

Lucas rested his face in the palms of his hands, which were propped up on his knees. His blue eyes were a light watery blue that you would think wouldn’t be pretty, but they were beautiful, like a clear sky reflecting the sea back on its self. As he spoke, even though it was sad, he looked at Adrienne wide-eyed, the light jumping frantically in his irises.

“Are you going to be a senior next year?” Lucas broke her fix on his eyes and brought her, once again, back to reality.

“Yeah, I go to Crestview. One more year, and then I’ll be free. I’m entering this competition this summer for a scholarship to the Culinary Institute of America for after graduation. If I win, I get a full ride to culinary school.”

The competition was all Adrienne had thought about since Christmas when she sent in her paperwork. It had taken almost a year to find out if she would get a spot in the cooking finals. It was competitive. She had sent in an original recipe during winter break, and only found out she’d made the cut at the

end of the school year. She had focused on the whole process with such drive. Looking back, she could barely remember her junior year of school. The friends she had had faded into the background of her life. School had been out for two weeks and she hadn't had a call from anyone nor had she hung out with any of them.

"I'll be a senior at Crestview in the fall too. I finally broke my dad down to letting me go to public high school," Lucas said, smiling. The smile was shy. He averted his eyes from her for a moment. "He's given up on me being some big shot in our family company or general all-around superstar, like Quinn. All those years of slacking off are finally paying off for me. He almost completely ignores me now."

"I would give anything for my Gran to ignore me. I am never off the radar. I never do anything the right way. Or, at least the way she thinks I should do it."

Now it was Adrienne's turn to look away. It was the truth as she knew it. She was nothing special, had no great talent, was no great beauty. Gran had exhausted every avenue in search for Adrienne's special quality. In the end, there was nothing Adrienne excelled at. Dance, music, painting, floral arranging. The list went on and on. None of them stuck. Cooking was the only thing she could do right, but Gran never seemed to care about Adrienne's ability in the kitchen.

"Ah, so we are kindred, then." Lucas nudged her.

"You don't even know me," Adrienne said, shaking her head, feeling the familiar strain of no self-worth pull tight inside her, but she laughed too. He was

funny. Not like most of the boys she usually found on the beach or at school. Maybe the trouble was all the good guys were up north.

“You should come over. We could make dinner together. Then, I could see if you are a good cook.” Lucas brightened. “Our cook is not here yet. I was going to order pizza, but my dad would love a home cooked meal. He hates take out. And Quinn will be back from the marina soon.”

It took her a moment to realize that Lucas said they had a cook. They actually paid someone to cook their meals. Sure, she knew the people up in Palm Beach had such employees, but it seemed so out of place in such a Podunk town like Harbor Point. Adrienne couldn't wrap her head around the fact that people had strangers live in their houses for the sole purpose of feeding them. Gran barely allowed them to go out to dinner, and when they did go out to eat it was only for a special occasion or a death. They always went to The Olive Garden, and each of them always had a budget of ten dollars to adhere to. There was never an exception to the ten dollar price limit. Adrienne had once paid Gran five extra dollars so she could try something a bit more extravagant than the lasagna.

What was even stranger was how naturally, without apology or a blink of the eye, did Lucas admit to having hired help. Adrienne didn't know anyone who paid someone to do things for them.

“I'm not allowed over at Mr. Merritt's house. Gran would go ballistic if she found out.”

Adrienne shook her head and looked up at her house. She felt like Gran would suddenly appear, as if on cue, even though Adrienne knew Gran was not

home. She knew Gran wouldn't be home till at least ten that night and Gramps had his nurse. She did want to go with Lucas. She wanted to see inside the big white house. Would be like all the opulent mansions she had wandered through in the black and white movies she watched with Gran on the "Late, Late" show? More than anything, she wanted to see Quinn, the tall and strangely beautiful boy.

"Come on," he said, smiling. He took her hand and stood up, tugging her to do the same.

"I'm in my bathing suit," she protested, standing up. She felt like she was at the tip of a mountain and either way she went, there would be falling involved.

"So am I," he said pointing to his trunks. "I'll get you a big shirt to wear. Come on!"

She looked up at the big, imposing house and there she saw Quinn. He stood at the top of the sand dune where the green of the newly laid lawn began. He was almost all shadow with the sun sinking into night at his back. He waved at them. Lucas waved back.

"Screw your grandmother." Lucas gave a small laugh and pulled her along with him. "Screw it all. You only live once and all, right?"

She relented and allowed him to lead her up the path through the sea grass. *Screw Gran.* Adrienne was helpless. The pull of the Merritt's dazzling house and Quinn Merritt's dazzling face were too irresistible.

The moment should have been more exciting, but as she moved closer and closer to Quinn, the shadow of her house loomed at the edge of her vision. It was the image of Quinn she always saw, years after then, when she closed her eyes.

Quinn, a bright light growing closer and closer with gloom encroaching all around.

“Hello, again, Adrienne,” Quinn said, extending his hand once again to her.

She blushed as their skin made contact

“Sorry about the formality, it’s all the prep schools, they bleed all the fun out of being a kid,” Quinn said, sort of laughing and talking at the same time. He looked down at her, his hair falling into his eyes.

Adrienne hardly nodded an acknowledgement to him. She couldn’t stop looking at him. His blue eyes were glowing. They were deep dark blue like a stormy sea. She likened Quinn to James Dean, Gran’s favorite movie star from way back when. Her heart was doing funny leaps in her chest. It was difficult to pace her breath. She realized Quinn was the one who had to end the handshake. She was nearly clutching him. Embarrassed, she took a step back and clasped her hands behind her.

“Adrienne’s going to be a senior next year. And I found out she loves to cook. She is a serious cook. In fact, she’s agreed to make us dinner if we help her out.” Lucas gently put his hand on her elbow and steered her towards the big house.

“I’ll help, but I warn you, I suck in the kitchen.” She heard Quinn say from behind her. “I’m a lot like Charlie Brown. I can make toast, that’s about it. And, I wheel a mean can opener.”

“Yea, don’t let him around the knives or we’ll end up in the ER before we eat.” Lucas fell back behind her. When she turned around, she found the two of them trying to trip one another.

She laughed. She felt like the popular girl on the beach. The girl who was always engulfed by a swarm of good-looking boys, all trying to one up the other and push each other to the ground. Could they possibly be showing off for her? No, she reasoned, this was just the way they were. She had seen them horsing around earlier. This was not for her. Why would it be? Who was she?

“Oh, so you do make sound?” Quinn looked up at her. “I thought Lucas had found a mute out on the beach.”

“I talk,” Adrienne said.

“She’s just worried about her grandmother. Adrienne has been forbidden to come over.” Lucas gave Quinn a final push, making him land into an empty lounge chair by the pool.

“Forbidden? Wow. I don’t think I’ve ever had a girl forbidden to be around me before she was even around me.” Quinn scratched his head. “That is a new one.”

“Yeah, my Gran’s really pissed about the whole tree issue. She still believes your dad cut down the tree. She’s even more pissed that he wasn’t charged with the crime.” Adrienne felt like her whole body was shrinking inward as she spoke about the one-sided war Gran had waged against Mr. Merritt. “She’s convinced that he paid off the ‘right people’ so he wouldn’t get in trouble.”

“Well, I wasn’t here when it happened, but I don’t think he did it.” Quinn looked amused as he spoke, like the whole situation was some kind of interesting story you only read about in tabloids.

“I could care less about the whole mess. And besides, I’m almost seventeen, she can’t tell me who I can be friends with,” Adrienne said this more to herself than to the boys. “And she’s not home right now, anyway.”

“Come on. Let’s go see what’s in the kitchen.” Lucas pushed open the back door of the house. “We’ll get you back home before she even knows you were gone.”

Lucas stood at the top of the stoop, waiting for her. She could feel Quinn right behind her. The door lead into a dark, wood-paneled hallway. Adrienne looked up from the bottom step. The door was like an entranceway to another world. Once she stepped through it, she would have disobeyed Gran. It was something that she never did, something that came with high consequences. There was still time. She could turn away and go home.

She turned to flee and saw Quinn. He smiled at her and her heart started doing those funny flips again. To go through that door, she knew, there would be no turning back. But, if she had been honest with herself at that moment, she would have understood that there had never been any going back from the moment she first saw Quinton Merritt. So, she went up the steps and through the door.

A while later, Adrienne found herself alone in the kitchen with Quinn. Lucas had left to set up a folding table outside on the grass so they could eat by the ocean. Adrienne rummaged around the huge kitchen and through the unpacked boxes of cooking things. She managed to pull together a dinner out of the little food that she found. There would be some fettuccini she made from scratch with garlic shrimp and plate of sliced red tomatoes with some fresh basil stolen from Gran's garden. It was the best she could do, but it smelled good.

Quinn hovered over her, watching what she did, asking questions about how to make the pasta, or how she could make a tomato taste so good with only basil. She could not function with him so close. She didn't even feel the knife slice deep into her thumb until the blood began to drip onto the wood cutting board.

"Hold on, I'll get my first aid kit," Quinn said and flew out the door.

He was back in less than a minute with a red box full of bandages. He made her sit at the counter and let him fix her wound. His hands expertly patched the cut.

"You're good at this," she said. "Thank you."

"I get lots of practice patching up my father's dive crews," he said, looking up at her for a moment, making her hand shake a bit. "Working on a boat can be dangerous."

"He's a treasure hunter? I heard he was." Adrienne felt a bit ashamed relaying the town gossip like that.

“Sort of. Now he’s retiring early from the business, he plans to focus more on treasure hunting. The treasure is why he started a travel business taking groups all around the world to dive at the best reefs. It gave him a chance to explore the waters of the world for wrecks. I’ve been working for him every summer since I could dive.”

“It sounds like a dream to me.” Adrienne could not imagine such a life. To travel the world and see all the wonders she had only read about in Gramps’s National Geographic magazines was beyond what she could swallow as reality.

“It’s not as glamorous as it sounds. There is a lot of hard work involved.” Quinn patted the back of her hand once he was satisfied with his bandage.

She could tell he took the ocean very seriously. That he was a careful and thoughtful kind of person.

“There are a million things that could go wrong at any moment. And my father is not the easiest to work for,” Quinn added. She could tell there was a hint of tension in his face.

“All I ever do is snorkel.” Adrienne was sad when Quinn let go of her hand. Her thumb throbbed, but she ignored it.

“It’s a whole different world when you dive.” Quinn leaned against the counter. The great love he had for the sea came out as he spoke of the reefs and the fish. “You don’t think about anything but being in that moment, suspended in the dark water, that roar of silence in your ear.”

“It sounds great.” She realized she was leaning closer and closer towards him as he spoke.

“I can teach you this summer. The Back Bay looks pretty calm. It would be a good place to learn.” He looked up at her through his thick eyelashes. “I’m a good teacher. You’d be diving in the shallows around here in one lesson.”

“I don’t have any equipment. I know it’s expensive,” she said softly. Their fingers were just an inch apart on the marble countertop.

“Don’t worry about that. We have tons of equipment. I can put together a whole outfit for you.”

Quinn had a way of looking intently right into her eyes.

“That would be great.” The thought of spending time in the water with Quinn was like high voltage through her body.

The pasta started to boil over on the stove and the hiss of the water hitting the gas flame made her jump. She turned the burner to low and stirred the pot, coaxing the foamy mass back down. She took the moment, with her back turned to Quinn, to take a deep breath. How was she ever going to act normal around him?

“Can I try some?” he asked, coming up behind her at the stove.

She snagged a strand of pasta on her big spoon and blew on it for a moment before handing it to Quinn. He sucked it up like a little kid would do, making her laugh.

“Wow, it really is so much better than the dry stuff you buy at the store. It reminds me of when I was in Italy with my father a few summers ago. We were taking a group through the Mediterranean.” Quinn went to the sauté pan with the shrimp and popped one in his mouth. “Hmm, these are great too. But, I should

warn you, Lucas won't eat them. He's allergic to shellfish and fish. But, he won't say anything to you. I just wanted you to know why he won't eat them."

"I didn't know. I could find something else for him." Adrienne went to the fridge.

"No, no. He won't want you to make a fuss. He hates to be the center of attention." Quinn took three peaches from a wood bowl and began to juggle them. He winked at Adrienne. "That's my job."

They heard the heavy oak front door slam. Quinn put down the peaches. He gave her a funny look before disappearing from the kitchen. Just then, Lucas came in from the side door. He washed his hands in the sink. Adrienne heard Quinn and Mr. Merritt's voices coming from the front hall.

"I guess my dad is home," Lucas said.

"Do you think it's really okay for me to be here?" Adrienne peered through the pass-through, trying to see Quinn and Mr. Merritt, but they were out of sight. She had a certain amount of unease being there after all Mr. Merritt and Gran had gone through the past months.

"Sure. He likes you. He admires your ability to put up with your grandmother." Lucas started to laugh, but it was a sarcastic laugh. "He likes tough people. And you made him dinner. He might ask to adopt you by the time we stop eating, depending on how good the meal is, of course."

"No pressure, then?" Adrienne tried to laugh, but the sound hitched in her throat.

An hour later they were all out on the sand ready to eat. It was windy on the beach, but it was a warm wind, and the air smelled like summer. The sun was gone by then. Lucas had set up a few tiki torches around the table for light. It was quiet as they filled their plates with food. Adrienne was thankful for the moment to think as she settled into her chair. She thought it should feel strange to be sitting with three men who she barely knew, but for some reason she felt at home with them.

“Adrienne, you are welcome here anytime. I don’t want the trouble between me and your Grandmother to mar your opinion of us.” Mr. Merritt held up a glass of wine to toast her from the far end of the table. “We are rather agreeable gentlemen once you get to know us. Just a bunch of bachelors here.” He winked at her.

Mr. Merritt was a short man, maybe five feet six. He was built like a sailor; all chest with a narrow waist. Adrienne could see Lucas in Mr. Merritt’s face. She wondered if Quinn looked more like his mother. Mr. Merritt was weathered in that rugged handsome way from a life spent on the sea, which made him look older than fifty eight. It was as if the salt had cured his skin into smooth brown leather. His eyes were a light, sparkly blue like Lucas’s and his hair was salt and pepper, on the longish side and brushed back away from his face. Every once in a while the wind would blow his cologne Adrienne’s way. It was Old Spice, of course. He had a soft but powerful voice. Adrienne doubted if there was anyone out there who would try to mess with him. She knew of only one, Gran,

who had the guts to take on anyone no matter size, shape, gender, or metal stability.

Lucas and Quinn looked at each other and rolled their eyes.

“Thanks, Mr. Merritt,” Adrienne said. She was aware that the attention was on her. She began to twirl her hair in between her fingers.

“So, I’ve heard that your mother works on a sail boat. Is that why you are living with your grandparents?” Mr. Merritt focused his gaze on her more intently.

“She has always worked on some kind of boat or another. She practically had me on a boat, but luckily they got to shore in time for me to be born.”

Adrienne pushed the last few bites of her meal around her dish with her fork.

“It must be hard to be away from her for such long periods of time.” Mr. Merritt shook his head.

“I really don’t see her much, maybe once every few years. She has a hard time being on solid ground. She has this disorder called land sickness. When she gets off the boat and comes on the mainland, she gets sick. Sick like some people would get seasick out in a boat on the water. The doctor told her that being out on the water so much has affected her inner ear.” Adrienne hated to talk about her mother. Diana’s condition sounded like pure hokum when said out loud.

“Fascinating. I’ve heard of it happening, but I’ve never known someone who had it.” Mr. Merritt actually looked interested in her mother’s problem. “I’ve heard that the person afflicted feels as if they are on a rocking boat as long as they are on land, but once they return to the actual ship, they feel quite normal.

“That’s what I’ve been told.” Adrienne nodded.

For the first time, Adrienne didn’t feel that Diana’s land sickness was just an elaborate excuse to abandon Adrienne.

“What about your father? Is he a seafaring man? Do you get to see him often?” Mr. Merritt replenished his plate with a second heaping pile of the pasta as he spoke.

“I know he was a captain of one of the first boats my mom worked on. She was a stewardess at the time for a commercial sailboat that takes tourists to the Caribbean.” Adrienne took a sip of her water. “I’ve never actually met him. I’m not even sure if he knows he’s got a kid out there.”

Mr. Merritt paused for a moment. His fork in mid-air and she could see that he was thinking of how to respond. Adrienne wanted to sink into her chair, crawl under the table. Obviously, her life was far different from the theirs. She was not rich. She could not trace her family line back hundreds of years. She was just a bastard kid left on her crazy grandmother’s doorstep with both her parents MIA.

“Well, the call of the sea can be a powerful siren. Lord knows, I have felt her tug my whole life. The lack of parents in your life has obviously not kept you from becoming a strong and bright young woman.” Mr. Merritt finally put the forkful of food into his mouth.

“I try my best.” Adrienne focused on smoothing every single wrinkle out of her cloth napkin rather than look at any one of the three men at the table.

“Now, tomorrow being a Sunday we have church. We would be more than thrilled if you would join us, Adrienne,” Mr. Merritt said, fighting with the wind to be heard, or maybe, it was the wine that had turned his internal volume up.

“Oh. Well. That’s so nice, Mr. Merritt, but I don’t go to church.” Adrienne felt like an idiot saying it.

“Well, why not?” Mr. Merritt looked like he was in disbelief that there were people out there who did not go to church.

“Gran’s not big on the religion thing. She has it out for God, too, I think.” Adrienne tried to sink down into her chair and get the spotlight off of her. She heard Lucas and Quinn snicker under their breath.

“Religion is not a thing, nor should it be taken lightly under any circumstance. It’s unfair for you to be punished just because your grandmother has issues with the Lord.” Mr. Merritt shook his head as if scolding a young child. “Do you believe in God, Adrienne? You know, God loves all his children, even if they do not have a solid foundation of family. You can let God be your family.”

“I’m not sure, I guess. I’m still young. I kind of think I’ll figure it out as I get older.”

Mr. Merritt seemed to accept her answer, at least partially. He nodded as if in agreement with her. “Well, I will tell you this, he is real. I hope that you accept him into your heart very soon. You are too nice a child to be lost to the darkness. Having a solid relationship with God is the key to an honorable life. Look at me, I have a good life and a respectable family and I owe it all to God and the blessings he has bestowed on me. Yes, he took my wife too early and left me here to raise

these boys on my own, but I trust that God has a plan. I know my dear, Mary, was taken for a reason.”

Adrienne heard both Lucas and Quinn snort under their breath as Mr. Merritt prattled on about the virtues of believing in God. It was obvious—if only to Adrienne—that both Quinn and Lucas did not have the same level of devotion as their father. In fact, the look on Lucas’s face was almost hateful.

“Thank you, Mr. Merritt,” was all she could think to say. He seemed to be satisfied with that.

“Call me Bob, sweetie.” He winked at her.

She nodded as she focused her attention on her water glass, tracing the condensation with her finger. Quinn sat on her left at the table. She had been trying not to notice how close he sat next to her, how his arm occasionally bumped against hers.

“This truly is a divine meal, Adrienne. To think you made this out of the meager offerings in our kitchen. How fantastic is that? You have a great talent.” To emphasize his compliment, Mr. Merritt put the last large forkful of pasta in his mouth.

“I’ve been cooking since I could walk it seems. Gran taught me all her secrets.” Adrienne smiled. She was pleased they all seemed to be enjoying her cooking. “It’s the only thing we do together where we don’t fight.”

“Well, she made be hard to put up with, but I can see she has taught you well.” Mr. Merritt wiped his mouth and threw his napkin on his plate. “Lucas, be useful and clean up dinner.”

“Quinn, help me get the dishes inside?” Lucas said as he stood, picking up Adrienne’s empty plate.

“You can do it on your own,” Mr. Merritt said, his voice stern. “Quinn has put in an honest day’s work moving boxes and getting the boats set up at the marina.”

Lucas gave Quinn a hard look. Adrienne saw Quinn raise his brow as if to say he was sorry he couldn’t help. Lucas looked at Mr. Merritt and then at Adrienne, giving her a shy smile as he took what he could carry off the table. She watched him vanish inside the house.

“If only your Gran would ease up a little, I would make you a little job offer. You see, I’m having a party on the Fourth of July and I’d love to hire you to help my cook get everything ready.” Mr. Merritt pulled out a shiny lacquer pipe and lit the tobacco inside. “We are expecting over a hundred guests.”

Adrienne sat up and the mention of a job. “I could use the money. I want to go to culinary school after high school. And the practice would be good for me. I’m trying to get a scholarship by cooking in this competition they hold every year for the high schools in South Florida.”

“Well, I’d love to have you come and help, but I hate to go against your Gran’s wishes. I am not the kind of man who likes to deceive. But, I’m willing to be accommodating to help you out.” Mr. Merritt put his hand on the table. “I like you, Adrienne. You have the potential to go far in this world. I can feel it. I want to help you get ahead. I’ll pay you five hundred for the party.”

Was this a crazy dream she was having? As she saw it, Mr. Merritt was going to pay her to spend time near Quinn? She would have done the job for free. The money seemed to be an unthinkable amount to her.

“The problem is my gran is a big competitor in the annual Harbor Point Fourth Fest cooking contest. She’s been banned from the chili cook-off, but there are a few other divisions and I know she’ll want to enter. She usually has me help her,” Adrienne said, the disappointment was surely evident in her voice.

“Well, there is time to talk more about it,” Mr. Merritt said. “Promise me you will think about it?”

“Okay.”

“It’s a deal then.” Mr. Merritt reached across the table and extended his hand.

As Adrienne leaned over to shake on it, she knocked her glass of water over in the process. The water ran right off the table and onto Quinn’s pants. Adrienne shrunk into her chair, mortified at her clumsiness. She heard Lucas stifle a laugh—passing it off as a cough—as he returned from the house.

Adrienne turned to Quinn. “I’m sorry about your pants.”

Quinn laughed. “It’s just water, I’m part fish anyways. You’ll see when we get in the water.” He looked up at his dad. “I’m going to teach her how to dive.”

“Good, Good. You will enjoy it.” Mr. Merritt nodded. “You couldn’t ask for a better teacher. I taught him myself when he was just five years old. I’ve been training him to take over the company since he was in diapers.”

“So you will be the boss?” Adrienne looked into Quinn’s face enjoying the way the flames of the torches played across the smooth skin of his jaw.

Quinn looked tense, but the mood morphed quickly to a more relaxed one. He shrugged his shoulders, “if I like it or not.”

“Yale will make him a man. Get his business sense, then he will be ready and I can finally rest easy that the company I built from the ground up will be in good hands.” Mr. Merritt looked over at Quinn. You could see all the expectation there in his eyes.

“Yale. That’s impressive. I’ll be happy if I get into cooking school.” Adrienne said softly, close to Quinn’s ear.

“Yea, it’s great, I guess.” Quinn sighed. “It’s a good drive to the beach. But, like my father says, it will be good for me.”

“So, we’ll head out at five tomorrow Quinton?” Mr. Merritt tapped the contents of his pipe out on the lawn.

“Geez, I was hoping to get a day or two to relax, get some surfing in. Can’t we wait? We haven’t even got the boxes unpacked yet.” Quinn ran his hand through his hair.

“I’ve been waiting a long time to get my hands on that ship. I know she’s out there somewhere. And I only have you for the summer before you go off to college.” Mr. Merritt looked out at the ocean. “Adrienne, there is a pile of gold waiting out there for me. I can feel it. But, it’s not just about the riches, to lay your hands on something lost for hundreds of years. To be the one who finds it. Now, that’s something.”

“It sounds exciting,” Adrienne said. “Maybe once I learn to dive, I could go with you.”

“It can be dangerous out that deep,” Quinn said softly. “We only take highly experienced divers out on expeditions. I wouldn’t want to see you get hurt.”

“Well, we will see how it goes. I’m sure you would enjoy tagging along with us. It’s the best feeling in the whole world. It can make a man give up just about anything to have a crack at finding such a big haul.” Mr. Merritt turned his gaze back out to the breaking waves.

“Maybe she could come out on the boat with us, but I wouldn’t want her diving deep. The bends are a big risk at the depth we usually dive,” Quinn said, his voice stern.

“You doubt your ability to teach.” Mr. Merritt waved him off. “Everything worth obtaining is worth a certain level of risk, son. You will worry yourself to death, I think.”

“We just met her, father. You can’t just throw a person into the deep end without knowing if they can swim.” Quinn’s response to his dad was in a quieter tone than the jovial one he had for most of the dinner. The mood seemed to shift instantaneously from light-hearted to somber. Adrienne felt knocked off center. The change was that sudden.

“That’s how I feel when I’m out there surfing. When you get the perfect wave, it’s just the best feeling.” Adrienne tried to change the subject now that diving seemed to have become a touchy subject for some unseeing reason.

“I know what you mean about that,” Quinn said close to her ear. “I go as much as I can, which is little since I’ve been stuck in Ohio most of the year for school. You wouldn’t believe how hard it is to catch a wave on a lake.” Quinn laughed at his own silliness, which would seem pompous normally, but had a charming effect with him.

“I have a few boards out back. You can use them if you like.” Adrienne tried hard not to fall to pieces as she spoke.

“Yeah? That would be great. Mine are on the truck that hasn’t arrived yet.” Quinn looked down into her eyes. His blue eyes had silver flecks floating in them. Like stars coming out in the twilight. “We’ll have to get out there as soon as possible.”

“Sure,” she said, her voice cracking.

“Great, I was hoping Adrienne was the typical kind of girl who liked to hang out at the mall all summer.” Lucas broke into their conversation. “I’m going to look like a dork sitting on the beach watching you guys surf.”

“I’ll get you a pretty pink umbrella to sit under,” Quinn said, throwing a wadded napkin at him.

“I’ll throw some tasty chum in the water.” Lucas threw the napkin back at his brother.

“If you’d get over your silly little fear of the water, there would be no issue,” Mr. Merritt interjected. “I just don’t understand why you won’t go in. It’s ridiculous, I tell you. You are almost a grown man for Lord’s sakes!”

“I guess we all can’t make you happy, Dad,” Lucas said quietly. The pleasant expression on his face vanished.

“He just wants to be the moody artist that gets all the ass walking down the beach.” Quinn leaned back in his chair.

“Quinton, that language is not permitted in this household,” Mr. Merritt injected. “The Lord does not look kindly on foul mouthed men.”

“My apologies, Father.” Quinn shot Adrienne a quick wink. “The heathens have corrupted me.”

“You mock me now, but you will have to answer to God when your time comes.” Mr. Merritt seemed pleased with his little holy moment. He took a big gulp from his glass, finishing the wine. “You got three days, boy and then you own me some dive time, deal?”

“Yes, sir, I’m all yours in three days.” Quinn pounded the table as he spoke, making the silver wear jingle. Adrienne had to keep herself from laughing.

Quinn leaned his head near hers. “So, tomorrow, you want to show me what you got out on those waves?”

Adrienne’s heart knocked around a bit inside her chest. “Sure, if we get anything. Summers are slow here when it comes to waves.”

“Well, I happen to know a hurricane is skirting up the coast about four hundred miles out. Saw it on the weather report yesterday. So, we should start to see some action late tonight. Morning should be stellar.”

Adrienne let the wind blow against her face. She could see Quinn was right. Something was churning up the sea way out there. It has been so chaotic the

past week with school ending she had not been paying attention to the beach reports. She hoped for some great sets. She was a great surfer. She had a need to show off in front of him. Why, she wondered? But, she knew why. She'd never met someone who made her heart race just by them looking at her. She wished it was morning.

"You want to meet at seven?" Adrienne looked up from the table where she'd been systematically shredding a cocktail napkin.

"Seven? Hey, I'm on vacation for the next few days." Quinn ran his hands through his dirty blond hair. "Didn't you just hear? I'm going to be getting up at five the rest of the summer."

"I'm a busy girl. I have stuff to do." She didn't want to say that Gran usually slept till ten and it would be the only free time she'd have all day.

"Okay, okay," Quinn held up his hands. "Pencil me in for seven."

"If you're not too scared we can go tomorrow night."

"I'm not scared, but I know what creatures like the night." He raised his eyebrows at her.

Adrienne forgot the time. It was almost nine thirty when she caught sight of Gran storming down the beach towards them. In all the excitement, she had slipped into the Merritt's little world and forgotten about everything outside of the stucco walls. Quinn was a great distraction.

Her initial reaction, when she saw Gran marching across the sand with her fingers coiled into fists, was to run. But with the whole Merritt clan around her,

she couldn't do it. She wasn't a little girl anymore who could just run from trouble. Besides, Gran would probably catch her. That thought made her shudder. She decided to meet Gran halfway and hope to spare the table from the brunt of the yelling.

“What do you think you are doing?” Gran's hand flew up above her head as she spit out her words. “I came home and you were missing. I've been looking all over for you, and where do I find you? Here, with these people. How dare you go behind my back and spend time with this no-good man.”

“I technically didn't disobey you. I'm not in the house. We are eating outside.” Adrienne played the humor card, knowing it wouldn't work, but trying just the same.

“Oh, so you think you are a smart girl, I see. You think just because you eat with them on the lawn, makes everything okay.” Gran's eyes flashed with rage. “I don't care if you put the damn table out on the street. I will not have you consorting with anyone related to that man!”

Adrienne turned back towards the table. Quinn and Lucas stood. Adrienne could see they wanted to do something to help. Mr. Merritt sat shaking his head as if this whole scene was absurd.

“It's not right to be alone around so many boys. They will try to take advantage of you.” Gran looked past Adrienne to the table. “I want you to have nothing to do with them. You hear me? Nothing.”

“Well, we meet again, and so soon.” Mr. Merritt rose from his chair, extending a hand outward towards where Adrienne and Gran stood out on the

beach. He had an amused smirk on his face. “Let the kids be friends. If we have to live next door to one another, we might as well make the best of it. Bury the hatchet, as they say.”

“I will bury no hatchet with you. And I will not let my granddaughter be corrupted by a horde of horny teenage boys, especially if they belong to you. I can see it in their faces as I see it in your face, they are nothing but trouble.” Gran shook her fist in the air. Adrienne prayed at that moment that a rogue comet would come and strike her down in a fiery blaze.

“Someone must have done you wrong somewhere along the line, old woman. I really don’t think it’s just me your mad at. I think you got it out for the whole world.” Mr. Merritt slammed his hands against the table, making the silverware and glasses clank together. “And all I can say to you is what a miserable life that is and you very well might deserve it.”

“Stay away from my granddaughter.” Gran cast her gaze at each one of them as she coiled her hand around Adrienne’s wrist. “I will not let you be her undoing.”

“Goodnight, Adrienne.” Mr. Merritt’s face turned kind once again as he shifted his vision towards her. “It was a lovely evening.”

Adrienne gave a shy smile in response, averting her gaze from Quinn and Lucas, unable to bear the thought of how they saw her at that moment. She felt Gran tug her in the direction of their house. She forced herself to turn away and went with Gran without a fight.

Once they were inside, Gran surprised Adrienne by simply kicking off her shoes and going to her chair by the picture window that overlooked the sea.

Adrienne was expecting to get a few smacks and a dose of high pitched screaming that would carry down South Road for all to hear. Adrienne didn't know what to do. She stood still by the door watching, waiting for Gran's next move.

"Go to bed and stay there till I say you can come out," Gran said, her voice sounded tired.

Adrienne quietly slipped through the room towards her bedroom.

A hot shower helped her calm down. She let the water burn against her stomach, her thighs, her groin, trying to make the heat inside her dissipate into the scalding water. Her body was electric. Quinn's face was there when she closed her eyes, deep down in the dark place of her mind. No boy had ever made her burn like this. The need was unbearable. She wasn't sure how to make it stop. Her heart rate wouldn't slow. She put her hand between her legs and pressed her finger on the spot where the pain was centered, moving it back and forth till her body tensed even more. Then, the wave of release came. She leaned her head against the cool yellow tiles of the shower, feeling her bones relax like a sigh, but there was still an ache that lingered. It wasn't enough, nothing less than Quinn would be enough.

She rubbed the towel against her skin hard enough to make her flesh prickle from the friction. Any pain was welcome to get her mind off of Quinn. What made it worse was that she worried he thought she was some kind of freak now that he had met Gran in all her horrid glory. What if she turned into Gran

when she got older? She threw the towel down in disgust and wrapped herself in her old robe and turned off her light as she got into bed.

Adrienne lay in the dark with her eyes wide open. It was only ten o'clock and she knew it was useless to try to sleep. She thought about getting up and going to the kitchen. Cooking was always a good distraction. She could make something to take to Quinn in the morning before Gran got up. Quinn would taste her pie, or maybe some kind of cookie, or maybe a cake, and he would see she wasn't a freak and it didn't matter her gran was crazy.

There was a light tapping at the window. Adrienne sat up and stared through the darkness. The window was open and whoever was out there could get at her quickly if they wanted. A face finally appeared in the gloom. Adrienne could see it was Quinn. His light blond hair seemed to glow.

"Hey, I hope I didn't scare you." His smile was revealed when Adrienne turned on her table lamp. She was wearing just a flimsy tank top and her old running shorts. They felt like nothing as Quinn peered at her through the gloom.

"How'd you know this was my room?" Adrienne came over to the window and unhooked the screen. She was beyond surprised to find him there. If anyone in the world were to show up at her window, she would have thought it would be Lucas. She pinched her thigh hard to make sure she was awake.

"I saw you in here before you turned the light off." He took the hand she offered and jumped up onto the sill. He threw his legs through the opening and landed softly on the throw rug.

She thought about how she had just gotten out of the shower and how careless she usually was when it came to pulling the shade down. She had been prancing naked around her room. Had he seen her? She wasn't sure how she felt about that.

Quinn moved around her room, looking at her books and the photos she had stuck to her desk mirror. Adrienne sat on her bed watching him study her things. She noticed he had a rash guard on and swim shorts. He stood straight, with his shoulder thrown back as if he didn't know how to be shy, picking up bottles of lotion and perfumes from her dresser, examining a birthday card sent from a distant great aunt. He never asked her permission to snoop through her things. What was with these boys? Had nothing ever knocked them down a notch? Had they ever met an obstacle in their lives? Why was he here? Why was he so interested in her things? Why did she have so many questions? She shook her head, forcing the constant ticker tape of questions running through her head to stop.

“Why are you here?” Adrienne wanted him to leave her things alone. She wanted him to be as interested in her and he was in her stuff. She never had a boy sit on her bed in the middle of the night. Well, she'd never had a boy in her room, period.

“I came to see if you wanted to get into even more trouble.” Quinn did sit, on her desk chair, turning it around to face her. “Want to sneak out and go surfing? With me?”

He had this way of looking through his thick dark eyelashes up at her that was just about irresistible. It was her new drug, the way he looked at her. She wanted more, couldn't get enough. Her heart was racing so fast. She felt she had to choke the damn muscle back down every time she swallowed.

“I'll go put my suit on. My boards are in the shed out back”

“I'll go and get them while you change.”

Adrienne got up from the bed. As she slid past Quinn, headed towards her bathroom, his hand brushed her side. It wasn't as if he had reached out to touch her, his hand was merely resting on the top slat of the chair, but the contact of their bodies sent a powerful charge through her. She could feel Quinn still smiling behind her as she disappeared into the bathroom. She left the door open just the tiniest crack. It wasn't that he could see her in the bathroom, but the possibility that lingered with the door open just a hair. It made her knees weak just thinking about the possibility. This was madness. Adrienne had never felt anything so great in her whole life.

## Chapter Eight

Midnight had come. It was officially one day till Adrienne's birthday. She and Quinn sat on top of the surf boards bobbing, looking east out over the vast expanse of black water. The night was dark and warm, but a cool breeze blew off the water, and big juicy swells started to come ashore from Hurricane Grant, swirling out past Grand Bahamas Island.

Gran always said there was something disconcerting about her being born at the first moment of summer—some old Hungarian superstition that Adrienne could never really understand—Gran spoke of fate being a strong force in the matter, but she spoke like fate were a bad thing. For years, Gran had refused to celebrate Adrienne's birthday on the twenty first of June, if the summer solstice did not fall on the date. Gran was adamant that Adrienne's true birthday was the solstice and not the twenty first. Just another eccentric quirk of Gran's. All Adrienne knew was that spending the night on the beach with Quinton Merritt was exactly how she wanted to spend her birthday. She shook off Gran's eerie superstitions, not wanting to ruin the moment.

The moon cast the world into a sepia realm—golden shadows and hazy grays—as Quinn caught a wave. Adrienne watched him skim over the curl and ride the crest. It was a perfect ride, though a bit boring and safe, Adrienne thought, though she'd never say it to Quinn. She liked to shred, to rip up a wave. She took the wave behind him and did her best to pull out all her tricks. She could

feel his eyes on her as she cut to the top and was airborne, for a fraction of a moment, a silhouette against the moon, dancing on the surface of the ocean.

“You sort of rock, for a girl,” Quinn said, pushing her shoulder in a kidding way. They lay side by side on their boards bumping around in the shallows once the set settled.

“I rock, for a human,” she said, pushing him back. “You’re pretty good too. You also get points for coming out at night. Most people are afraid of the water when it’s dark, you know, sharks.”

“When you’ve spent as much time under the water as I have, you tend to lose some of your fear of being in the ocean, no matter what time of day or night. What scares me the most about the ocean are us humans. They are the cause of most accidents, most deaths.” Quinn rolled off his board into the water. When he surfaced, he propped his feet up on her board and let his body float as he looked up at the sky. “The fish don’t scare me at all.”

“I bet it’s beautiful to be under there with all the fish.” Adrienne took hold of his feet, to keep him from floating away, of course. Quinn didn’t even flinch at her touch, which gave her some kind of personal satisfaction.

“It is. I know you are in deep shit with your Grandmother, but I still want to teach you to dive, if you want.” Quinn pulled his feet off the board and rested his head in its place, looking up at her, his face only inches from her own. A million drops of water clung to his hair and ignited in the moonlight.

“I don’t know. It will be hard to get away. She keeps me on a tight leash. I guess you saw that.” Adrienne turned away from him, afraid for him to see the things she struggled to keep from affecting her.

She felt him push off from her. She turned in time to see him duck under the water and pop up next to his board. He began to paddle in, and she followed him to shore. They pulled their boards from the water and sat in the sand, letting the warm night wind dry them.

There, in the dark, they talked about their lives and of all the random things young people talk about on beaches during summer nights. They spoke of nothing too important or heavy. They didn’t mention Gran or Lucas or Mr. Merritt even once. Adrienne was surprised to learn they shared many interests. They both loved the ocean, obviously, but it was a surprise to learn that they both had wanted to be a marine biologist as children until they each found out what was involved in becoming one. Neither of them, it seemed, had a knack for math. They liked the same kinds of music, the same movies. The only thing that disappointed Adrienne was Quinn’s relative lack of interest in food. He liked simple, typical foods like burgers and mac & cheese. It wasn’t that he was picky; he just had no desire to seek out and try new flavors. In Italy, he ate pizza and spaghetti for ten days straight. Adrienne could think of at least a hundred strange and interesting things she would kill to eat if she ever got a chance to go to Italy. On his many visits to Mexico, Quinn had opted for “McPollo” at the local chain fast-food joint. Given the chance, Adrienne would have sought out as many moles

or salsas as she could find. She didn't hold his lack of enthusiasm for food against him. He was a teenage boy. He was beautiful. It was okay.

Quinn was like a sparkler. He couldn't keep still. He was constantly jumping up when something he was talking about excited him. He paced in front of her, using his hands to gesture. Then, he flopped back into the sand as if his mind was too much for his body to handle. She couldn't stop laughing. Her laughter seemed to fuel his silly ways until she was lying back in the sand, laughing so hard she could hardly breathe. She didn't want the night to end, but soon the moon was at their backs, and a new light was emerging in the east. They had spent the whole night out on the beach.

"It's my birthday tomorrow... or today, I guess," Adrienne said, not to try and get some kind of reaction out of Quinn but just to say it out loud.

"We could do something fun?" Quinn piled sand up on the tops of his feet.

"I don't know." Adrienne looked up at the dark house. "Gran will be extra strict after tonight's mess. She knows I'll try to sneak around her."

"I like a challenge." Quinn rubbed his hands together.

She wanted to ask him why. Why did he care? Why would he waste his time on someone like her? He was the kind of guy she saw every day at school, walking the halls, students moving unconsciously out of the way. Nothing touched those guys. They were the top of the food chain. None of those kinds of guys knew she even existed. The few friends she had were only school friends. She refused to let anyone come home with her and meet Gran for obvious reasons. She was the girl always looking in.

But, she didn't ask him. Not because she feared he wouldn't know the answer or he would wake up and realize he was wasting time on the wrong girl, but because she felt she already knew why, as absurd as it sounded. Some kind of instantaneous comfort had come into being the moment she met the Merritt boys. It would be years later before she would understand why their connection was swift and effortless, but the power behind the three of them coming together was felt even in the infancy of their friendship.

“You're different now, when you are not with Lucas or your father. You seem...”

She hesitated, wondering if she was over-stepping some boundary. Despite that feeling of comfort, they had only just met, after all, and Adrienne already knew, deep down, that she was falling for Quinn. It was a strange mixture to feel familiar and yet awkward, simultaneously.

“Relaxed? Happy?” Quinn ran his hands through his wet hair and rubbed the back of his neck. “I don't get to do this much. Just hang out. To be young. To be a crazy night-surfing kid. It's nice.”

“I don't get much time off either.” Adrienne ached to touch the bare skin of his shoulder. “Gran is scared I'll end up like my mother. I'm almost the age she was when she ran away and got pregnant with me. I think it's making Gran even crazier because that is always in the back of her head. So, I get pushed and prodded to be a *respectable girl*, which means joining the junior league and hosting lunches for old ladies who do nothing but gossip. It means wearing

makeup and styling my hair and putting on uncomfortable, hot dresses, and pretending to like people I really don't."

Adrienne rubbed her temples just thinking of the life Gran envisioned for her; married to some business man, a house with a picket fence, and two kids to show off to company. That life would revolve around winning blue ribbons, placing first in canning and preserve contests, and heading up various flower and plant clubs. It made Adrienne shudder just thinking about it. She had no clue what she wanted to do with her life. She knew she wanted to cook, but beyond that, who knew? All she did know was that the life Gran had mapped out for her was not the one she wanted. That was Gran's life.

"You're really easy to hang out with, Adrienne." He looked at her with that dazzling intense stare and that big white smile of his. "Don't let all that—" he waved his hand up to the big white house—"matter. The money, the fancy crap, it means nothing to me. I want you to know that. Underneath it all, you and I are a lot alike, I think. My dad has a life picked out for me too. I'm not that crazy about it."

"What do you want?"

"Who knows the answer to that question? I like working on my father's boats, I love being in the water, but I can't imagine running the whole business."

"Both of us are stuck, I guess." She shook her head. "I'm glad we met."

"I'm glad too." His hand touched hers for just a moment.

It would be so easy to fall back against him. It felt like the most natural thing to do, to touch him, to have her body next to his.

“I should get back,” Adrienne said as she looked back up at her house once again. Gran was prone to waking late at night and staying up till dawn planning the next elaborate function. Adrienne shuddered at the thought of Gran checking in on her and finding an empty bed. She stood and wrapped her towel tight around her.

“I’ll see you tomorrow morning for your first lesson?” Quinn said, softly, almost shy. He seemed a little jittery as if he wasn’t sure what to do with his hands, his body.

“I’ll be there.” Adrienne leaned down and grabbed her board. She brushed his bare shoulder for a moment. His skin was warm against hers. Little firecrackers seemed to pop and spark a trail where they made contact. She could feel Quinn flinch slightly. Maybe he felt it too, she thought. There was a slightly puckered scar right where she touched him. She wondered where he had gotten it, but she didn’t have time to linger, the dark house beckoned her to return.

## Chapter Nine

In the morning, Adrienne paced the short distance from piling to piling on the dock, waiting for Quinn to show up. It was already seven thirty. He was a half hour late. She wondered if he had forgotten or worse, realized she wasn't worth it. There was only so much time in the morning that Adrienne considered a "safe zone" where one could avoid Gran with almost a hundred percent assurance. Rarely did Gran stir earlier than ten in the morning. The later it got, the worse Adrienne's stomach was.

Just before eight, when she was ready to head back home, she caught sight of Quinn coming through the mangroves. Behind him, Lucas tagged along with a beach chair strapped to his back and a large panama hat covering his head. Her heart sank. She was hoping it would be just her and Quinn.

"Sorry," Quinn said as he scratched his head. "I guess I have to get used to this getting up early thing."

"I was ready on time," Lucas offered cheerfully, pushing past his brother on the thin strip of dock. He arrived in front of Adrienne holding a yellow scrub daisy he must have plucked from the side of the path. He tucked it behind her ear and proceeded to set up his chair next to the table where they cleaned the fish they caught.

"Let's get in the water." Quinn jumped off the dock into the Back Bay and then he offered his hand to her.

“I’m good,” she said, scooting into the water next to him, afraid to touch his hand and how it would make fireworks explode down her spine.

“Independent woman, I get it.” Quinn laughed and tossed her a mask.

“Try not to drown her on the first day.” Lucas pulled a large note pad from the pocket sewn on the back of his chair and bent his head down, scribbling on it intently. It was as if he wanted nothing to do with watching their lesson. Adrienne wondered why he had come.

Quinn shook his head pulling Adrienne out in the water till they were waist-deep. He showed her how to put on the mask and clear it underwater. Then, he showed her how to work the regulator and control her breathing. He strapped her into all the gear and adjusted the belts and hoses, brushing his hands against her bare skin. It felt like they were all alone, floating in the dark water. Quinn’s voice was low and serious as he explained all she needed to know about diving. Adrienne could see he was truly an expert. She felt safe with him.

“Why doesn’t Lucas come and swim?”

“Lucas is terrified of the water,” Quinn said. Then he smiled, but it was a strained smile. He went back to tinkering with her gear. “He can’t swim. Being in the water for him is a fate worse than death.”

“That must be hard with you always going to exotic places to dive.”

Adrienne was relieved when Quinn let her go. He turned his attention to his own tank.

“Don’t make a big deal about it. Lucas would hate that I told you,” she said. She wished he wasn’t so close with his hands all over her body. Quinn

looked over at Lucas who was still perfectly ignoring the two of them. “He’ll probably say he just doesn’t like the water.”

“Why is he so scared?” Adrienne watched Lucas up on the dock make furious strokes with his pencil.

“Something happened when we were young.” Quinn bowed his head and pretended to re-check some of her valves. “I think that is something you should ask him, if it ever comes up. He doesn’t like to talk about it much.”

“You care a lot about him.” Adrienne turned to Quinn. She tried to decipher the emotions that vacillated across his face.

“He’s my little brother.” Quinn answered her as if no other reason existed. “We only have each other.”

“He is lucky to have you. I don’t know what that’s like—” it was Adrienne’s turn to examine the valves—“to have someone by your side.”

“It must be lonely,” Quinn said. “Come on, let’s get you under.”

Adrienne dipped under the waterline and was instantly disoriented by the cloudy water. She couldn’t see more than a few inches in front of her mask. Her body jerked back up to the surface. Quinn followed her.

“We’ve stirred up the bottom so the visibility isn’t too good right now. Let’s get the basics out of the way. Then, we’ll paddle over to the inlet where it’s clear.”

She agreed reluctantly and followed him back under. A moment later, Quinn’s hand clasped her vest and pulled her out a bit further. The visibility was better now they were away from the place they had been standing. The tannin

stained water, from the decaying leaves rotting slowly at the bottom of the bay, was never a place Adrienne liked to swim. She only got in when she had to clean the boat. It was spooky to be under the water. Millions of filmy particles splattered against the lenses of her mask. She felt chilled and wished that Quinn had offered to teach her in the Merritt's nice new pool, but it was too exposed. Gran could have easily seen her.

Quinn came into view as a hazy mirage right in front of her. It felt like she was in a movie about the Loch Ness Monster. She saw him give the signal to remove her mask under the water and then to put it back on and clear it. They had spent a good fifteen minutes, before going under, practicing how to do it. Now it was time, but she felt hesitant to go through with it. Her body seemed to reject being under the murky water in the gloom. She looked up above her and could see the shadowy lace of the mangroves overhead. It felt like a prison. She realized her arms were thrashing, trying to get her body back to the surface.

Quinn grabbed her by the shoulders and made her look him in the face. They stayed like that for a while, buoyant, her eyes locked onto his. He let go of her arms and put his hands on her face. She could feel their warmth on her cheeks. He smiled and gently stroked her temples with his thumbs until she calmed. She began to feel more confident knowing her was right next to her. He was a skilled diver and had taught many. She knew these waters better than anyone. There was nothing to fear. She felt silly for panicking.

Finally, she nodded to Quinn and gave him a thumbs-up. He released her. For a moment, a bit of the panic returned now that she was once again on her own

in the gloomy water, but she pushed it away. She wanted Quinn to see she was a badass, fearless, that she could do this. Adrienne closed her eyes and took her mask off. The cool water hitting her face was a shock even though she expected it. She almost took a breath—just as Quinn had said she would feel the urge to do—but, she stopped herself. Carefully, she put the mask back on and blew air out her nose to force the water out of the sides till she clearly saw the watery realm around her. Quinn nodded and gave her thumbs up. He motioned for them to return to the surface and she was more than willing to follow him.

They spent the next half hour making sure Adrienne knew how to work all of her gear under water. Quinn made her clear her mask one more time, which she did as quickly as possible. Adrienne caught on quickly. Soon, Quinn was satisfied she had the basics down.

“Let’s go out to the clear water. You can get familiar with buoyancy,” Quinn said when they popped up to the surface.

They paddled towards the point where the inlet let the ocean water into the Back Bay. Lucas walked along the thin shore, following them down. The water was clear there. A nice little reef had established its self along where a deep cut had been made to allow big boats to come through. Adrienne had snorkeled around there her whole life and was excited to be able to stay down and not have to come up to breathe.

Lucas sat under a palm tree as Quinn and Adrienne stood in the shallows at the point. Quinn showed her how to work her vest adding and releasing air to get the right equilibrium when she was under the water. Adrienne looked up and

found Lucas was still drawing in his sketch book. He was looking right at her. She wondered if she was his subject. She instantly felt insecure standing there in her bathing suit even though she had the air tanks and vest on.

Quinn led her out to where a channel had been cut through. The bottom dropped off quickly to about twenty feet. It was a weekday, but the inlet was a dangerous place to swim. The currents could be wild when the tide went out. Boats were supposed to slow to a crawl as they went through, but few did. Adrienne had seen more than her share of vessels capsize and sink clear to the bottom of the channel. It came from driving too fast and getting caught in a cross current. They would be fine as long as they stayed close to the drop and didn't go out into the channel.

"Stay close to me. Don't go out past the drop." His voice was firm and parental as he took her hand.

She never went out any further than the edge. She wasn't an idiot with a death-wish. But the concern in his voice, and the way he looked down at her with his intense blue-eyed gaze, gave her a thrill.

This time, when she went under, there was no panic. The water was brilliantly clear. It felt like she could see forever into the blue. They took some time to practice swimming and going to different depths. Quinn made her clear her mask once again, but by now, Adrienne felt like a pro.

When they finally got to the little reef, which was really no more than a string of piled up rocks that some corals and sea fans had attached to, Adrienne took the helm and led Quinn around the various outcroppings. She showed him

where a remora eel had taken up residence between two rocks. They chased a fiery red parrot fish through a field of sea grass. Quinn took her down the side of the channel. They watched a school of angel fish flutter past them. She felt at peace suspended in the water. It was a much more pleasant experience than the Back Bay had been. She could stay down there forever. What freedom, not having to surface constantly, not have that nagging persistent urge to draw in a breath.

Too soon, Quinn was tugging on her, pointing to the surface. She checked her air gage and saw her tank was almost tapped out. She inflated her vest so she would rise. Quinn took her hands and smiled at her as she floated upwards. For a moment, it was just the two of them hanging in suspension, holding onto one another. A desire, as strong as anything Adrienne had ever felt, surged through her body. All she wanted was to lean in and kiss Quinn's cool lips as they traveled through the sea. She tightened her grip on his hands as a response to her sudden rush of want. His smile widened. He looked beautiful with his blond hair splayed out wildly in the water.

She got on her back and floated after they surfaced and tried to calm her racing pulse. "Do you like the treasure hunting?" she asked Quinn, thinking of the mystery shipwreck that might be right off their own beach.

"I do it mostly because my father makes me, but I love the reefs with all the fish, the color of the coral. It's not a bad way to spend your summers as a kid, traveling around the world, seeing the most beautiful places on earth." He mimicked her, floating next to her. "I could stay down there all day. But, it is

exciting to find a gold coin or a cup that no one has seen in hundreds of years. It rarely happens, so it feels amazing when it does.”

“The way your dad talks about it, I can tell he loves it.” She concentrated on keeping herself close to him so their shoulders could touch.

“It’s a sickness. I have never known him any other way though. He can’t stop. Treasure, God, and his family’s image are my father’s holy trinity. All in that order.” There was a hint of disgust in his voice. “He’s been searching for gold, glory, and fame his whole life. He’s never found what he’s been looking for after all this time. I got this scar diving with him last summer off Costa Rica. I almost bled to death, but father didn’t really care. He didn’t want to take the boat back to shore to get me to the hospital.” Quinn pointed to the line on his shoulder she’d noticed the night before. “It’s never been enough for him to have money, to have a nice family. When my mother died, he left for Brazil the day after her funeral. ”

“That must have been awful.”

“He’s afraid he’ll die before he finds a wreck he can truly call his find. He’s convinced that the wreck is just off shore. That’s why he moved us here.”

“Hey, you guys, it’s been two hours. Can we go and do something else?” Lucas called to them from his palm tree, waving for them to come in. “I’m frying out here.”

Quinn grabbed her tank and pulled her with him to the shallow water.

“We better go in before he threatens to call the coast guard on us.” Quinn smiled.

“Yeah, I have to get back before Gran comes looking for me.” Adrienne stood in the sand and felt the heavy burden of gravity return, pulling on her air tank.

“It’s your birthday. Do you think you could sneak out again tonight?” Quinn helped her out of her gear.

“Yeah, we will do this birthday thing covertly.” Lucas put an arm around her. His skin was hot against hers.

“There won’t be much to do by then. I won’t be able to get out until late, and only if Gran goes to sleep at a decent time.” Adrienne thought of Gran catching her out, late at night, surrounded by the very boys she was forbidden to be around.

“We’ll manage,” Lucas said, squeezing her shoulder. He gave her a smile that felt sympathetic, and hoisted his beach chair onto his back.

“Can I see what you were drawing on your pad?” Adrienne asked.

“When I’m satisfied with it, sure,” he said and then winked at her. His face was one of those faces that would always look like a child’s. It was hard for her to imagine him as an old man. She had a bad habit of imagining young people at Gramps’s age, close to their death. She wondered if it was some kind of crazy coping mechanism.

“You did real well today.” Quinn came up behind her. Lucas dropped his arm, and pulled his hat back down, hiding his eyes. He started heading for the barricade.

“I think I’ll get the hang of it soon.” Adrienne felt shy again.

“Turn your bedroom light on when it’s safe for us to come and get you.”

Quinn touched her bare wet arm for just a moment as he struggled to move past her, loaded down with two sets of dive gear.

“Okay,” she said, but she wasn’t sure it was audible enough for either of the boys to hear.

She waited till they both disappeared beyond the roadblock. She ducked into the mangroves and retraced Lucas’s trek back to the dock. She couldn’t follow them and risk someone seeing her walking down the road with the boys. It took only one person’s spying eyes to see her with them and one phone call. Gran would believe the accuser over Adrienne’s own side.

Gramps was sitting out on the porch when she came up the path to the house. Though the temperature outside was well into the eighties already, he had a crocheted afghan wrapped around his shoulders. Her heart groaned a bit, but she smiled and waved to him. He held up his bony hand and waved back.

A Nat King Cole record played softly on the player next to him. As she got closer, she could hear him humming along with the music. She put her hand on his shoulder. She could feel the bone beneath the skin, the creaking of the joint as he startled slightly at her touch. Pain? Had her touch hurt? His milky blue eyes took her in, and she could still find delight in them.

“What have you been up to so early? I thought you were still sleeping,” he said.

“I went for a swim.” She hated to lie to him.

“I see,” he said, nodding, but his face looked amused, like he just might know the truth somehow.

She sat down next to him, and they listened to the birds making the morning racket in the trees. Nat crooned, Unforgettable, on the record.

“I think I will miss this the most. The birds singing in the morning,” he said. His voice was wistful and far away inside him.

She cringed as she thought of the time not too far in the distance when she would sit alone on this porch in the mornings.

“I was with the Merritt boys. Quinn is teaching me to scuba dive,” she said, leaning into him ever so gently.

“He looks like a nice boy.”

“He is.”

“I told Christopher to keep the boat for you. I hope you don’t mind.” He patted her leg. His hand felt cold. “He said you can use it whenever you want. I didn’t want Gran to sell it. You know how much she hates the old girl. When you are ready, she will be there for you.”

“I’d never let her sell the boat.” Adrienne looked out at the front yard not wanting to see his knowing eyes.

“I want you to run the market someday, when you are older. I think it would make a nice little café. You can make it your own.” Gramps patted her leg.

“I know you’ve always thought that would be a good idea. I want you to make your dream come true.”

“Thank you,” she said and she gave him a kiss on the cheek.

She didn't have the heart to tell him that she wanted nothing less in the world than to stay in Harbor Point and run the market. Sure, at one point a few years back, she had mentioned a few times that she would like to run the market and turn it into a café. Those musings had been just that, musings; a way to try and make the cruel probable reality that she would never break free of the town more palatable. She would never tell him how she felt. The market could remain a terrible fallback, in the event she didn't make it out. She could handle that.

"I'll miss you the most of all, you and the birds," he said. It sounded as if he might cry. In her whole life, she'd never seen him cry.

So, she started to cry. She gently leaned into him. There was a time when she could curl up on his lap. He would sing to her, and rock her in his old recliner that smelled like him, of Old Spice and long days on the ocean. She could see his hands pulling in the troll lines on the boat. How big and strong those hands had seemed to such a small girl. Now, she thought she could lift him up all on her own. He seemed as delicate as a tattered sail, as crushable as an old paper mache' figurine.

"Come on, Dolly. I promise to stop talking about this stuff. Don't cry."

Gramps patted her hand.

"Don't leave me alone with her," Adrienne said softly, smiling.

Gramps laughed. It was good to hear him laugh. "Well, like they say, 'what doesn't kill you only makes you stronger.'"

It was nearly eleven o'clock at night when Adrienne finally turned on her bedroom light. She waited for Quinn's face to appear at her window. It was only a few moments before she heard feet moving through the grass. But, it was Lucas who popped up into view. He wore a t-shirt, shorts and flip flops. She felt overdressed in jeans and a nice top. She'd even broken out her pitiful collection of makeup that she'd only used a few times.

“How can you wear jeans? It's hot as hell out here.” He sat on the sill with his feet dangling out the window.

She ran into her bathroom and pulled on some shorts and a tank top. She pulled her hair back in a ponytail, mortified that they might think she spent hours getting ready—and she had— when apparently the evening did not call for it.

Lucas held onto her hand as they crept through the maze of trees towards the road. When they emerged, she saw Quinn leaning against the most beautiful car she'd ever seen. It was a vintage Mercedes convertible with the top down. It was a creamy butter color with dazzling polished chrome details. The leather seats were the same creamy color. Adrienne got in the back and marveled at how smooth the leather was under her hand.

“You think she likes the car?” Quinn said as he slipped into the driver's side.

“I think so, brother.” Lucas got in the passenger seat. “Don't get too attached, Adrienne. This is not your birthday gift.”

The boys shared a chuckle up front as Adrienne continued to marvel at the car.

“So, what are we going to do?” Lucas said, rubbing his hands together. You could see he was excited to set out on their adventure.

“Let’s go sightseeing.” Quinn turned over the engine and the magnificent creature growled to life.

“Everything is closed. We won’t see much,” Adrienne said finally finding her voice.

“That’s the best time to go.” Quinn turned around and smiled at her. His eyes were bouncing light in all directions.

They drove up A1A, hugging the coast, towards Palm Beach. The ocean rippled under the fat summer moon. There was hardly a breeze, but with the top down on the car, the warm air blasted across Adrienne’s face. The boys had the radio on. No one said much, the three of them enjoyed the empty road and the magic of the moon on the water.

Quinn pulled the car to the side of Worth Avenue, one of those world famous streets for luxury shops and celebrity sightseeing. Adrienne had lived right next door to Palm Beach her whole life, but had only been once when she was younger. It was another world that could have easily been a million miles away instead of ten.

The street was empty. No cars. No people. The stores were closed for the night, but all the shop front windows were still aglow. The neatly trimmed trees that lined the street were wrapped in millions of twinkle lights. They began to walk down the sidewalk, peering into the glittering windows. Quinn walked ahead, seeking out new discoveries, finding alleys that led to small gardens of

topiaries in the shapes of children playing. One courtyard was actually an outdoor museum full of bronze life-like renderings of sea creatures. This was where Mr. Merritt had bought the great fish sculpture Adrienne had spied the movers bringing into the house. Adrienne rode on top of a regal dolphin as Quinn climbed up a two story seahorse. Lucas preferred to sit on an iron bench, a bronzed woman reading a book as his companion, and sketch things that interested him. Adrienne could feel his eyes on her. She wondered, once again, if she was the one being rendered on the pages of his book.

They found a koi pond. The golden fish raced to follow Adrienne's finger as she traced it along the surface of the dark water. Music floated up from some elusive cranny yet to be discovered. They followed the sounds to the end of the street where they found a small café tucked deep in the back of one of the grottos. A man and a woman sat at a dark corner table in the courtyard whispering to each other. The bartender greeted them. He told them to sit anywhere they liked. They took a table next to the cobalt blue fountain, far from the couple. But, Adrienne could still see the lovers from her seat. She stole glimpse of them. They knew nothing of her being there or that she watched them. The pair, too entranced with one another to care about the mundane trappings of the world around them.

That is what love must be like, Adrienne thought to herself, her finger unconsciously tracing the hem of her top. He eyes automatically went to Quinn. She felt a jolt run through her body when she discovered he was looking at her. He had caught her. He knew exactly what she was doing. She felt only a bit shy that he knew. His lips were slightly parted in a half smile that said he'd been

caught watching her spy. And for one moment she felt what the couple in the dark corner must have felt.

“We need a cake with a candle,” Lucas told the sleepy waiter who arrived at their table. The sound of Lucas’s voice fractured the spell between her and Quinn, and the world seeped back into her view.

“You don’t have to go through any trouble for me.” Adrienne blushed.

“Look, it’s midnight. This is the moment you were born, seventeen years ago.” Quinn tapped his watch. “You have to blow out your candle and make a wish.”

The waiter returned with half a chocolate cake and one white candle. The whole crew of dishwashers followed behind him. They all circled around the small table and began to sing, Quinn and Lucas joining in. Out of the corner of her eye, Adrienne saw the couple in the corner smiling at her.

“Make a really good wish,” Lucas said, his eyes bouncing the candle light out in every direction.

Adrienne did. She wished the night would never end. Quinn bowed his head, looking up at her through his long bangs. She closed her eyes, Quinn’s bright face the last image she saw, and blew out the one light ablaze.

Quinn eased the car up the long gravel drive towards the big white house. It was close to two in the morning, but they were not ready to go home. They ran up to the point where no one could see them. Lucas sat in the sand and watched Adrienne and Quinn try to jump over the thin silver strings of waves that lapped

at the shore. Adrienne finally felt her adrenaline rush begin to wear off and gave up. She joined Lucas, and they watched Quinn run along the shore at the water's edge. She marveled at Quinn's stamina. Energy seemed to pop and spark all around him.

"Does he sleep?" she said, out of breath as she flopped next to Lucas.

"He's a mover and I'm a sitter," Lucas said, shrugging his shoulders.

"Are you ever going to let me see what you are doing?" She touched the sketch pad Lucas held.

Lucas smiled as he moved the pad away from her hand. "Only time will tell." He flipped the cover down and tucked the pad under his leg. "Think of it as a birthday gift... on its way."

"That only makes me want to see what you're doing even more."

Adrienne punched him, jokingly, in the shoulder.

"Quinn's going to be gone a lot with my grandfather. I hope you don't mind hanging around with me," Lucas spoke softly, a shyness entered in his tone. "We can pass the time together being lazy, like good teenagers are supposed to do in the summer."

"I don't mind," She said as she watched Quinn pick something up from the sand. "As for being lazy, I don't think that's in the cards, but you can keep me company in the kitchen while I get ready for the scholarship competition to the culinary school. I'll have to see how much I can sneak away."

Quinn waved from the shore and pointed down the beach towards the houses. Adrienne turned to see what he was pointing at. There was a lone figure

coming towards them. Even though the moon was full, she couldn't tell who it was. They were jogging. She took comfort it wasn't Gran. Adrienne and Lucas stood and went down by the water next to Quinn. Adrienne noticed that Lucas made sure to stay well away from the waterline.

The figure waved to them as he got closer. Finally, Adrienne could see it was Christopher Crane. That was when she felt the first chill run down her spine.

"Adrienne, I've been looking everywhere for you," Christopher stopped and bent over, taking a deep breath.

"What's wrong?" The words were hard to say. There was no reason in the world for Christopher to be looking for her unless Gran had commanded him to do so.

"Your Grandfather, he was rushed to the hospital a few hours ago. Mrs. Harris went with the ambulance. She called me and asked that I look for you."

Adrienne closed her eyes. There, she saw Gramps standing on the boat in the sun.

"Is he okay?" She felt warm fingers twine through her own.

"I'm sorry, but he's gone."

## Chapter Ten ~ July 2010

It had been almost two weeks since her break down at the market and Christopher hadn't called or come by. She was sure he would have been by, trying to convince her to change her mind and work with him at the market. She found that she kept expecting him, in some shape or form, to be part of her day. She would catch herself constantly craning her head through the kitchen window to see if his Jeep was in the driveway. Any time the phone rang, she leapt for it. She knew it was his nature to be relentless. He was not the kind of person to give up easily so his total withdrawal from her life had thrown her off. By the weekend, she was nearly half-crazed. The only thing she could think to do was clean the house from top to bottom to try and get her mind off the situation. She was debating if her agitation was based on the fact that she really wanted to cook at the market or because she really missed seeing Christopher.

“Ugh, you are going to kill me with all this dust in the air.” Gran stood in the living room watching Adrienne pull the remaining white sheets off the furniture. “But, maybe that’s what you want, eh?”

“Maybe you should go sit outside while I clean.” Adrienne gritted her teeth, trying to stay calm. “It has to be done. We’ve been here two weeks, and I can’t live like this any longer.”

“No, no. I want to make sure you don’t get rid of anything I want to keep. I know you, as soon as I turn my back, you’ll be throwing out perfectly good

things.” Gran sat in her chair and followed Adrienne around the room with her eyes.

Adrienne looked around. It would take hours, maybe days, to get the house in order. The more she inspected the house, the more things in need of repair she noted. The walls needed stripping and painting, some of the windows needed work, and quite a few fixtures no longer functioned. She decided to go room by room, leaving the kitchen for last. It would take days just to wash the pots and pans and clean out the cabinets. For some reason, she felt hesitant to tackle the kitchen.

She started in the living room, swatting the cobwebs out of the corners of the room, washing the windows of their greasy salt-cured film. A strong wind blew right off the ocean, bringing the fresh smell of seawater and sea grass into the house. Adrienne used a small brush to excavate the travertine floors in the entrance way and bathrooms. She scrubbed the floor on her hands and knees as Gran had taught her good housekeepers did, revealing the small fossils of sea life caught forever in the tiles. She loved the spirals and flutes of the ancient shells preserved in the limestone.

Adrienne forgot how much stuff Gran had saved over her lifetime. The mothballs in the closets, guarding clothes and absorbing the scent of at least five decades of American history, gave off their own secret mixture of smells; musty chiffons, matted furs, muddied rhinestones, molding hat boxes. There were wigs coiffed in once-current style. There were silk shawls, their fringe yellowed from neglect. Most of it told of times when she had not been alive, family she never

knew, places she had never been. It made her feel lonely, estranged from her history. What did she really know about this family she belonged to? Adrienne had been raised by a woman who belonged to a generation already dying off when she was born. Gran had never been one to talk much about the past. Gran never told stories about when she was a girl. Gran never talked about what Diana was like as a child. It was a rather empty little universe Adrienne lived in.

As Adrienne worked her frustrations out cleaning, deep at the bottom of the den closet, she found the large red lacquer recipe box.

She jumped back as if she had touched a live flame. Somehow, she had forgotten it completely. It was as if the seventeen years she had spent seeing it every day had magically vanished from her mind. She picked it up, not sure why she had reacted so strongly in the first place at seeing it. She held its hefty weight in her hand and brushed a layer of dust off the top. On the lid, two ornately carved doves nuzzled, nestled amongst the filigree branches of a pear tree. The box showed decades, maybe even generations of wear, but the wear made it only more beautiful. You could touch the patina and know that many hands had touched the same spot. Gran's mother had brought the box from Hungary when the family came over in 1910.

“What is that?” Kali's voice caused Adrienne to jump.

Adrienne looked up from where she sat on the floor, with the box in her lap. Kali had an apple in her hand and a scowl on her face. Adrienne returned to the box in her lap. The box was actually a good memory, full of good things to

cook and to eat from more than four generations of Harris women, even a few from her phantom mother.

“It’s Gran’s recipe box. It’s a mess inside, but there are recipes in here that your great, great grandmother used to cook with.” Adrienne took the top off, and they peered inside at the chaos of index cards, pieces of torn paper with faint lists of ingredients penciled in. “I loved to sit in the kitchen at night and read each one. I loved to picture what the dishes would look like when finished.”

As Adrienne rifled through the stacks of tea-stained index cards, she found all the recipes she used to cook with Gran when she was young. She hadn’t made any of the recipes since leaving. The memories of lists of ingredients and cooking methods were lost with the rest of her painful past, buried deep within her subconscious. Her mouth began to water for the food of her childhood as she read the cards one by one. Every taste of every recipe was remembered on her tongue. She put the card to her nose and breathed in the stale scent of age, trying to find the aromas lost to her.

“That is a treasure.” Gran leaned down from her chair, trying to get a closer look. “Every Harris woman has added their most prized recipes to this box over the years. All of my best dishes are in there.”

“Why did you have it buried in the closet, Gran?” Adrienne looked up at her.

“I was worried one of those bitties in the Junior League would snatch it and steal all my prized recipes after I quit competing in the cook-off. You know how they all love to snoop around. I must have put it there long ago. I must’ve

thought it was a good place to hide it.” Gran pursed her lips and tapped the lid of the box. “Must have forgot I put it there.”

“How did you cook anything if you didn’t have the recipes?” Kali asked.

“Well, I know them all up here—” Gran tapped her head with her finger—  
“and the last few years I haven’t cooked like I used to.”

“What have you put in there?” Kali asked Adrienne.

“Nothing,” Adrienne said.

She had never added a recipe of her own. She had only made the dishes of others. She had only cooked the food listed on other’s menus. Nothing was hers when it came to cooking.

“You’ve never cooked any of these for me.” Kali sifted through the ancient cards, letting the recipes flutter from her hand back into the box. “If we hadn’t come here, I would have never known about any of this.”

Adrienne looked at Kali and saw the loss in her face. It was a loss that Adrienne had created by leaving Harbor Point and pretending that her first seventeen years of life never existed. All she had wanted to do was to protect Kali from the sorrow, and all she had done was create even more sorrow. Adrienne sat back against the couch and watched as Kali and Gran rummaged around in the box. She listened to Gran reveal the author of each recipe to Kali. Adrienne watched as Kali’s body came closer and closer to Gran’s till their shoulders touched, their heads bowed over the box, and Adrienne could no longer see either of their faces.

Adrienne got up off the floor. Gran and Kali were too engrossed in a hundred years of recipes to notice Adrienne as she headed to the kitchen.

It took her a few minutes of rooting around in Gran's desk drawers, but she finally found the rubber banded stack of blank recipe cards. At the top of each card was a little image of a cornucopia with grapes, gourds, and corn cobs. Printed on each one, in an elegant calligraphy, they read: *From the Kitchen of Elizabeth Harris*. Adrienne could remember seeing Gran up late at night at the kitchen table, scrawling her recipes on the same cards. She had a million of them made. Gran always thought a perfect recipe was the best gift for any occasion. Adrienne tried to imagine the thousands of handwritten recipe cards, hidden away in drawers and tucked into bookshelves, in all the houses around town.

Adrienne found a pen, and sat at the kitchen table with the blank stack. She scratched out Gran's name and inserted her own. It would have to do for the time being. She would get her own cards made up. Sure, a computer would make fast work of it, but that wasn't what she wanted. She closed her eyes. The meal that came into focus was the first meal she made for Quinn and Lucas. She wrote down the ingredients. Then, she began to write down all of *her* recipes at a furious clip. The recipes she had dreamed up through her life; recipes she had created during late nights in Gran's kitchen when she was a girl. Luckily, they were all tucked away in her head. By one o'clock, she had penned a few dozen.

She found Gran and Kali had abandoned the recipe box in lieu of sitting on the back patio, watching the afternoon swells. She put her recipe cards inside the box, and tucked it under her arm, taking it along with her to the car.

Christopher greeted her with a satisfied smile when she walked into the market. He opened the gate and motioned for her to come in the back with him. She took a deep breath and followed him to the kitchen.

“I’m sorry about avoiding you. I was embarrassed you had to see me like that. I’m such a mess.” Adrienne sat across from Christopher at the island.

“I figured as much. I thought it would be best to give you some time and space to get acclimated to being back. I’m sorry if I was too intense, if I overstepped my boundaries asking you to come and work here.” Christopher chuckled. “I’ve been told I can get over enthusiastic at times.”

“Just a bit,” Adrienne said, and she laughed with him.

“Maybe we could take just baby steps at first? Why don’t you and I team up for the Fourth Fest? We can enter the professional cooking division of the contest? This year the theme is seafood. We will crush them!”

“I used to hate the cooking contests. Gran always made us all so miserable when she was competing.” Adrienne wished she had something to do with her hands. She felt nervous being around Christopher. Her heart had sped up a bit and she kept catching herself watching him.

“This is about you. She has nothing to do with this. It will be a good opportunity for you and me to see how we work in the kitchen together.”

“I can’t stand those other ladies. All they are going to do is gossip and want to squeeze information out of me.” Adrienne rubbed her temples.

“I’ll keep them off of you.” Christopher smiled. “Show them who the boss is and win that blue ribbon from right out under them. That will shut them up.”

“You have way too much confidence in me.” Adrienne still put up a protest, but, like their phone conversation that had brought Adrienne back home, underneath she was already thinking up what they would cook for the festival’s competition.

“You really have repressed all your memories of living here in Harbor Point,” Christopher said, his brow raised. “I was around, you know. I know our age difference was more apparent back then, but it wasn’t a wall that kept me out of knowing you. I must have eaten lunch every day from your Gramps’s boat. I am also a writer and writers like to observe the world. I always saw you and I don’t mean that in a creepy-guy way. I always saw you and saw you as a source of strength and determination, even if you did not see yourself that way.”

“Well, what’s a girl supposed to say to that?” Adrienne hopped off her stool and went over to Christopher and stuck out her hand. “Let’s try. What is there to lose, right?”

He took her hand, and they shook on it. It was a pleasant feeling to feel the rough warmth of his hand in hers.

“Well, let’s get to it. We only have a few days.”

Christopher went to the small pantry and returned with a crisp white apron which he threw to Adrienne. Wrapping the apron strings tight around her waist felt like home. Her mind was spinning like a Rolodex through recipes. What would they make? The possibilities were endless.

## Chapter Eleven

The Fourth of July arrived before they knew it. The morning of the Fourth Fest Adrienne and Christopher were in the kitchen before five in the morning furiously prepping for the competition. They had to be at their make-shift kitchen—a tent housing a rented grill, oven, and stove top, located in the old school square— by noon. There would be three hours of cooking time before the judging. Since they were entered in the professional division, they also had to offer samples of their entries to the festival-goers as they strolled by the booths. It was a great opportunity to promote the market and draw in summer business for dinner.

The past few days had been fun and easy despite the hard work they put in. Even Kali had shown up and sat in the kitchen, watching them try out recipes.

Christopher was good at getting Kali to open up about things. He asked her to design a new menu for the market. This proved to be a magic key that seemed to unlock the sweet and funny kid Kali had been before hitting her twelfth birthday. But, Adrienne had to admit that Kali had been more pleasant since Adrienne had begun to tell her about her father.

They worked well together, and Adrienne enjoyed being next to him in the kitchen. He was easy to talk to. They only had to talk about simple things like ingredients and temperatures, for the most part. He filled her in on what had been happening around town in the years she'd been gone. He talked about writing, and fishing, and all the things he'd learned about Harbor Point and its history. He knew more about the town than she ever had. Adrienne found that she was

genuinely interested in what he had to say about Harbor Point. Christopher constantly fed her tidbits of things, asking her opinion. After a few days, she was feeding him too.

An hour before they had to leave, Adrienne scooped the innards out of a sea urchin into a bubbling pot of seafood stock. The mix of shellfish was making the kitchen smell heavenly. They were allowed to bring only ingredients. All the real cooking had to be done during the contest. They stood close to each other and focused on prepping.

“I remember your meals,” Christopher piped up as he peeled shrimp. “I know your Gran was a great cook and all, but I remember everything I ever ate that you made. Your Gramps would bring leftovers to work and share them with me. He was always so proud of you. Now that you are here, I have a good feeling this place will be a real little gem of a cafe... if you stay.”

“It’s always hard to hear others say, I’m good enough.” She bowed her head. “I guess hearing Gran say I wasn’t for so long kind of stuck with me.”

“For as much as you think you are broken, Adrienne, your Gran is broken too.” He stopped what he was working on and turned to her. “You wanted to protect Kali from the past. I think that your Gran wanted to do that for you. She didn’t want you to make the same mistakes she did. I’ve learned a lot about her in the last few years. She talks more now, about her life. She isn’t so guarded.”

“Well, it didn’t work.” Adrienne shook her head.

“We all make mistakes.” Christopher touched her shoulder. “We can’t let those mistakes rule our whole lives. We only have a short time here.”

She looked up at him. His green eyes were so beautiful it was hard for her to tear herself away. He was a true friend. Regardless if they won or loss, Adrienne was ready to tell Christopher that she would work at the market.

They arrived at the Old School square right at noon and by one o’clock they had the little kitchen set up and were ready to give out samples. It was a good thing they made as much as they did because the line at their booth went through the park and down the sidewalk along Ocean Drive. Adrienne saw many vaguely familiar faces in the line. She wondered if they were only there due to obsessive curiosity. She felt like a circus animal in the spotlight.

“So, what did you do up in the panhandle all these years?” a lady Adrienne knew from the junior league asked her as she handed over a conch fritter.

“I wasn’t expecting you to have a daughter that age,” a man, she thought once worked at the Bakery Man Bake Shop, commented as he picked up a coconut shrimp sample.

Their comments and questions made her feel right at home. Luckily, the inquisition died down as the day went on, and the conversations began to focus more on the food. Everyone loved all of their dishes. They had the longest line throughout the day. Adrienne felt more confident about cooking dinner at the

market. Maybe she and Kali could carve out some kind of life in Harbor Point after all.

Around two thirty, Adrienne saw the fish market groupies heading towards her and Christopher's booth. A sudden urge to duck under the folding table came over her. She could see that Tessa was leading the other ladies in an almost perfect V-shape formation as they cut through the congestion of the festival.

Christopher came up behind her and put his hand on her waist. She felt a chill even though she was sweating in the July heat.

"Don't let those gals break you, now."

Tessa smiled a warm, but fake, smile at Adrienne. "It's a shame you decided to enter the professional category. I was hoping for a little friendly competition between us in the armature section."

"I guess you lucked out, now you won't have to worry about me taking that blue ribbon from you." Adrienne smiled sweetly back at her.

"I wasn't worried." Tessa put her hands up and gave a little laugh.

"Adrienne is partnering up with me at the market, if all goes as planned."

Christopher looked over at Adrienne. He pulled his arm tighter around her waist. "I hope to start serving dinners as soon as next week."

"Really?" it seemed to be all Tessa could manage to say.

Tessa looked at Christopher in a way Adrienne did not like at all. It looked like Tessa was about to lick her lips. Adrienne wondered if there had been

anything between the two of them in the past, but she figured that it was Tessa who was the one who would like there to be something.

Adrienne slipped her arm around Christopher's waist and lean into him, nearly putting her head on his shoulder. "I know. It's going to be great, just the two of us working together, all day long, in that small, hot kitchen."

"I see you are making mostly standards. Conch fritters? Coconut Shrimp? Gumbo? I must say I was expecting a little originality from you. Nowadays, you can't rely on old tired recipes. Everyone is looking innovation." Tessa picked up a plate from the samples and sniffed at the shrimp before passing it to the woman who stood behind her.

"I don't need a bunch of fancy bells and whistles. My dishes may be classic, but they will be the best you ever tasted." Adrienne pursed her lips.

Adrienne was pleased by her boldness. She enjoyed how the look of desire on Tessa's face morphed into one of defeat. Adrienne looked up at Christopher. He seemed to be enjoying the banter between the two women. There was a highly amused smirk on his face, and Adrienne felt confident that she didn't have to worry about Tessa one bit.

He looked down at Adrienne. "We are going to make magic in that kitchen."

"Well," Tessa said in a sharp high-pitched sort of yelp, "we must be going. They are announcing the amateur division awards. Good luck... to the both of you."

Adrienne and Christopher laughed as they watched the band of ladies retreat to the other side of the park. Neither was in any hurry to let go of the other. Over the P.A system, the MC announced there was only a half hour till judging. To let go of Christopher and resume cooking felt like a chore. Adrienne was sure she sensed it was the same for him.

As Adrienne brought the heady seafood gumbo together, she sensed something had shifted in the air between them. There seemed to be an electric current buzzing all around their booth. Over the steaming pot, as she threw in shrimp and clams, she looked up to find Christopher watching her. They smiled in unison before returning to the tasks at hand. Christopher stood behind her, looking over her shoulder into the pot. Their bodies brushed together. Adrienne dropped the large spoon she was holding.

“I can’t seem to stay away from this stove.” Christopher picked up the spoon and set it on the work table.

She turned to him. Being in such close proximity to him made her whole body come alive. His glasses had fogged up from the steam coming off the pot of gumbo. She chuckled as she removed them from his face, wiping them clean on her apron before putting them back on.

It was then that she felt all eyes on her. She turned towards the constant flow of foot traffic to find their line of waiting customers all watching them. She turned back to Christopher and found him laughing. She laughed too and the laughter helped to get them back to work.

At the awards ceremony, Adrienne almost didn't hear their names called for the first place blue ribbon. There was also a check for five hundred dollars. She stood on stage holding the over-sized check. All Adrienne could see, out in the crowd, was Tessa and the nasty scowl on her face.

Kali, Christopher, and Adrienne celebrated by grilling hot dogs on a little hibachi down at the beach in front of Gran's house. Gran stayed on the lawn in a beach chair, covered up with an old quilt. They swam in the ocean and, when it got dark, they watched the fireworks explode above their heads. The scene filled Adrienne with a bittersweet nostalgia for the Fourth she had spent with Quinn, long ago. Christopher placed a confident hand on the small of her back. When she looked over at him, he gave her that smile of his that was only for her. She drew her arm up and hung it around his waist. She returned the smile.

When the fireworks ended, Kali went up to the house, saying she was tired. Adrienne watched Kali help Gran up the steps and through the back door.

"Would you dance with me?" Christopher put out his hand. His small portable radio fought against the brisk wind to be heard.

She took the hand he offered her. He pulled her to him. His arms were strong, confident. He didn't show any hesitation or shyness bringing her body against his. He smelled faintly of smoke from the grill. She knew if she pressed her lips to his neck, she would taste the salt of the ocean. Her body went slack against his body. She leaned into his chest. They moved in lazy circles on the sand. She was a terrible dancer, and kept stepping on his toes, but he never said a word about it.

A cool wind came up, and far out on the water the low boom of thunder came. Adrienne turned to the big white house. It felt like someone watched them from the dark windows. She pushed away from Christopher.

“We should get back to the market and clean up.” Adrienne didn’t know where to look except she knew she couldn’t look at Christopher.

“Sure,” Christopher said.

She could hear him chuckle under his breath as he gathered up their things. Adrienne wrapped a towel tight around her body and headed up to the house.

It was almost eleven when they got back to the market. Adrienne wished she could crawl into bed, but they couldn’t leave the mess for the next day. She got to work washing the dishes and containers. Christopher mopped the floors, then took the garbage out. A wet wind, full of rain, blasted through the open back door and windows.

“I am so tired,” she said to Christopher as he came in through the back door. She threw the last fork into the pan of soapy water in the sink to soak. “But, it was a great day.”

Adrienne felt Christopher come behind her. He put his hands on her shoulders. She let herself feel his fingers on her sore muscles. She enjoyed his touch. She could easily let herself lean back into him, let him put his arms around her

“I have some ice cold watermelon soaking in an assortment of various alcoholic beverages in this very fridge. It can cure anything that ails you.” He left her and retrieved the container from the Subzero.

They sat on stools, leaning against the island, popping the soaked fruit into their mouths, their feet propped up on the counter. The wind blew against their faces from the window. The fruit was a potent potion. After just a few mouthfuls, Adrienne could feel the effects on her body.

“What really happened to Rachel? I thought for sure, I’d come back here, and you’d have a whole herd of kids running around,” Adrienne said.

Christopher sighed deeply. “She always hated it here. I had made many promises to her and none of them were coming to fruition. The book was going absolutely nowhere. My publisher was threatening to pull the plug and demand the advance back. I wanted to stay here. I liked the town. I was happy working for your gramps. I thought it would be a good place for us to settle. Rachel, well she just wanted to go anyplace but here. I guess she was a lot like you, always looking for an opportunity to flee Harbor Point.”

“I never said anything, but she was kind of a bitch.” Adrienne smiled. “She always seemed to be yelling at someone or another.”

“Yeah, usually it was me. After you left town, I started working on a new book, a novel. I set the story here, in Harbor Point. They always say to write about what you know.” Christopher took off his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Then, Rachel got pregnant. I thought we’d finally get married and make

this place our rightful home. I moved us out of the upstairs apartment and bought a small house just a few roads over, right on the Back Bay.”

His words sobered her up.

“When Rachel miscarried, she was already five months along. It was hard on her, being it happened so late in the pregnancy. She kind of went berserk afterwards. She blamed this town for the loss of our child. She couldn’t take being here anymore. She couldn’t face the fact I might never be a working writer. That I might end up working in a fish market my whole life. So, she disappeared one day. I got a letter a month later from her mum that she was back in England and not to contact her again. That was it”

Adrienne let her head lean against his shoulder. “I’m sorry you had to go through that.”

She touched his arm. He took her face into his hands, rubbing his rough thumbs against her cheeks.

“I guess we all have our little heartbreaks,” he said, his voice strained.

Before she knew what was happening, she was kissing him. It was a fast and furious connection. As soon as the soft skin of their lips touched, she felt she couldn’t get close enough to him. She clawed at his back, trying to pull him into her. He responded the same way. She couldn’t breathe, but it was okay. It was a pleasant suffocation. He pushed her against the counter. The kiss came slower with more purpose behind it.

She pulled away, panting as she watched him. He looked at her, bewildered.

“I have to go home.” She pushed her wild hair back from her face, and adjusted the buttons on the front of her shirt.

“Why?” He leaned against the opposite counter waiting for her to answer.

“I just got back to town. I know we have known each other for a long time, but this is happening so fast. I just need some time.” Adrienne grabbed her bag and held it in front of her chest like a shield. She wanted to kiss him again. She had to get out of there.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Christopher said, smiling. “So, how about we shoot for Friday? That will give us a few days to get ready for our first dinner shift.”

“That sounds good. I’ll see you tomorrow then?”

Adrienne didn’t want him to think she regretted the kiss. She moved cautiously towards him and placed her lips on his cheek for a moment. She could feel his whole body relax.

“Bright an early,” he said as she made her way out the back door.

## Chapter Twelve

Friday came quickly. Adrienne felt as nervous as she had been the first day she worked in a kitchen. It was two o'clock, and their first dinner shift would begin at five. She had been in the kitchen since dawn, too wound to sleep. The smell of fresh baked bread filled the small space, making her muscles relax. The small radio was turned to the local oldies station. She could hear Christopher talking to a customer in the front of the shop. He had given her the space she asked for. They had hardly talked the last few days. When they did talk, it was only about the restaurant.

When she was done with the prep-work, she left without telling Christopher and headed for the open market in the next town. A few of the vendors recognized her as she came in under the cool green awning. They greeted her warmly. She spent ten minutes telling the organic honey girl about the new specials at the fish market and learning about the local bees and their honey. When she got to the flower stall, Twyla handed her a lush bundle of snapdragons for the tables and promised to come in soon to eat. It felt almost too easy to move through the marketplace, seeing vaguely familiar faces and new faces.

When she got back to the market, she saw Christopher had put the new blackboard she'd bought on a wood easel outside on the sidewalk. The night's menu was written in his elegant handwriting.

*Tonight's Dinner:*

*Starters:*

*Woodland mushroom tart*

*Caprese Salad*

*Main Dishes:*

*Homemade fettuccini with grilled shrimp*

*Fresh caught catfish with golden corn fritters*

*Dessert:*

*Key lime pie*

She found Christopher in the kitchen cleaning fish. All her nervous energy seemed to dissipate as he looked up from the fish carcass. He gave her his most winning smile.

“Your menu is making me hungry. I think the catfish is my new favorite meal. I’m glad you are making it again. Let’s fire up this rage, shall we? We might have a good crowd tonight.” He tossed her a clean white apron. She put it on and joined him.

The rest of the day was all business. They worked hard, and they had a healthy crowd for their first night. At the peak, around eight o’clock, all ten of the small tables were full. It was more than Adrienne had hoped for. The Fourth Fest competition had been a great move, just as Christopher had said. Many of the customers mentioned they had tasted her food at the competition.

The biggest surprised of the night had been Kali and Gran appearing at the door. Adrienne had not expected them to show. Adrienne sat them at a small table, and spent the rest of the time secretly watching her little family eat her food. It looked like even Gran was enjoying her meal.

It was exhilarating. Customers had asked to talk to her, to praise her in person for her delicious meal. They asked her how she made the pasta taste so good. Why did their shrimp never taste like shrimp? How did she get the catfish so succulent and crunchy? Why didn't all key lime pie taste like hers? They asked her what would be on the specials board tomorrow. She had no clue what to tell them. Her mind was racing. She told them to call the next day. They all promised to tell their friends.

"We need to get some outside tables," Christopher said as he came into the kitchen from the front. She was loading the last of the dishes into the dishwasher. It was almost midnight.

She smiled and threw a wet dish towel at him before returning to the sink. "I didn't even get to eat. I'm just glad that Gran and Kali came. It's such a different feeling when you can cook what you want, when it's your place... I mean, I know it's your place now, but it feels like it's mine."

"It is yours, Adrienne." Christopher leaned against the counter next to her. His face was serious. Adrienne almost laughed, but then he pushed a wild strand of her hair away from her face. "You have to know that I bought this place to

keep it safe. I knew I was the only one who would keep it just like your grandfather had it. He told me to make sure you always had it to come back to.”

She put her hand on top of his. She pushed his rough palm closer to her cheek. His hand smelled like fish and garlic, and she couldn't get enough.

“Let me make you something to eat.” Christopher brushed his thumb along her jawline before letting go.

She watched him layer the last of the fresh mozzarella on some hunks of bread and slice the last tomato and add it to the sandwich. He drizzled just a bit of olive oil over the top and then ran them under the broiler for a moment. Her stomach growled.

“It's silly, but no one ever fed me before. I'm always the one feeding people. I can't remember the last time someone cooked for me.” Adrienne took the plate Christopher handed her. “I guess it was Gran. She was the last person to cook for me.”

“I like feeding you.” He sat down across from her. “I like to look at your face when you eat.”

“Why? What do I look like when I eat?”

“Happy.” He took a big bite of his own sandwich and smiled with his mouth full. “The same you do when you are cooking.”

They ate in the quiet kitchen. She tried not to look at him, but there were only so many places she could rest her gaze. Every time she did look, he was looking back with that easy smile. She ate quickly and got up and put her plate in the sink.

“We make a good team, you and I,” she heard Christopher say from behind her.

“We do.”

She turned around and leaned against the sink. She thought about how he had pressed her against this very spot and kissed her just days before. He hadn't even tried to touch her since. She was not sure if she liked that.

“Why don't we go take a ride on my boat? It's nice out, and the ocean is calm.” He brought his dishes to the sink. “I could stand to get out of here for a bit. I have it tied up just through the mangroves.”

She looked out into the dark through the window above the sink. The moon cast a gloomy glow on the mangroves. She shuttered thinking about going into that web of limbs and leaves. That world inside, where the back bay lay hiding, was the last place she wanted to step foot. There was a repulsive energy emitting from the shadowy network of trees that kept her from entering. She couldn't bear the thought of going any closer than she already was.

“I should get home. It's late. We have another big day tomorrow.” She touched his arm.

He gave an exasperated sigh and grabbed her. His kiss was tender and warm. She felt herself sinking into its sweet trap. Had she been holding her breath since the last kiss? She gave in, allowing their moment to linger. Though he was a persistent man, and had made her relent before in other endeavors, she would not succumb today, she told herself. She had dove in too fast and too fearless once

before with a boy. She wanted to be cautious and careful, but Christopher sure made it hard to.

No, she would not give in today. Not with the dark memories the Back Bay held swimming in her head.

## Chapter Thirteen

The next morning Adrienne woke to find Kali sitting at the edge of her bed. She was dressed in her painting smock, her long hair pulled back from her serious moon face.

“I think my dad is living over at the big white house, but no one knows,” Kali said.

Adrienne sat up quickly as the information registered with her. “Why do you think that?”

“You said you thought you saw a light go on upstairs two different times. I also found out that Quinton Merritt is the sole owner of the house. And there is no for sale listings.”

“How did you find out all of that?”

“The internet. It’s easy. A child could do it.” Kali had an air of superiority to her that Adrienne found utterly endearing about her daughter. Kali was one amazing, wonderful, smart, tough cookie.

“I’m sure he does own it now that Mr. Merritt is gone, but I don’t think he would be living there. People in town would know. This town is famous for knowing everyone’s business.”

Adrienne couldn’t help but lean back and peer out her window at the silent house next door.

“Maybe he’s good at hiding. Maybe a few people know and keep it secret.” Kali went to the window. “I thought... I thought I saw someone standing

in that big picture window that looks out at the beach. When I went up the dune, I saw the person move away from the window.”

“The mind can play tricks on us all when we want something badly enough. Maybe I really didn’t see a light go on.” Adrienne raked her fingers through Kali’s silky strands of hair.

Kali turned to her, a cool expression on her face. “You think I’m wrong? You don’t believe me?”

“It’s not that.” Adrienne’s hand automatically went to her chest. The pain had returned. “I guess I’m afraid that you may be right, and what you being right might mean.”

“Well, I’m going to camp. Maybe you can ask Christopher about it. I bet you, he knows, he is a reporter, right?”

“I guess he is sort of a reporter. I’m sure he would have told me if he knew...”

Adrienne trailed off, her eyes still fixed on the house. She heard Kali leave the room, and then footfall on the steps. Could Quinn be in that house at that very moment, she wondered. Could he have been there all this time? It was enough wondering to drive a woman mad. She had to force herself to dress and go downstairs. Her thoughts were nearly paralyzing.

“Where’s the child going?”

Gran was in the kitchen, sitting at the table when Adrienne came in.

“You’re up early,” Adrienne said.

Gran gave Adrienne a look over. “I assume to her painting camp. Though

I don't know what she does there, she never shows off any of her work. Maybe she is lying. Maybe she's skipping her class to meet that boy, that lifeguard I've seen her running up and down the beach with. It wouldn't be the first time a Harris woman had lied because of a man. But, I've given up trying to keep silly girls from doing the wrong thing."

Adrienne took a fat slice of the bread she'd made the day before, slathering a generous amount of raspberry jam on it.

"You are avoiding that child. She needs rules and a mother with a firm hand." Gran sucked her teeth in disapproval. "She will end up like you if you do not set limits for her."

"And your mothering methods worked out so well?" Adrienne laughed sarcastically.

"I've always done the best with what I was handed." Gran buttered a piece of burnt toast. "This is not the life I wanted. I never chose this. For me. For you. Even for your mother. But, you might be surprised to know I don't blame you. I know you think I do. But, that is not correct."

"Then who's to blame? Gramps?" Adrienne stood. She didn't want to get into the same old conversation they always had about who was to blame for Gran's miserable life.

"No, your grandfather was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. " Gran turned to the window. "I never thought he would stay till the end. I did everything I could to make him leave, but he stayed. If he had been a smart man, he would have left long before he died."

“Let me make you something to eat.” Adrienne got up from the table. She needed to move and to make things with her hands. It was like a flood gate had been opened.

Adrienne rummaged in the cabinets and found all she needed to make palacsinta, the Hungarian stuffed pancakes Gran used to make when she was a girl. The smell of the apricot jam simmering on the stove finally made Gran turn to her. Gran watched as Adrienne ladled out the batter to make a paper thin pancake.

“It’s been a very long time since I’ve made those. So much work to get them thin enough.” Gran eyed the plate Adrienne put in front of her. “My mother was the best cook in our village in Goteg.”

“I haven’t had them in a long time either.” Adrienne sat at the table with her own plate. The smell of sugar and apricots brought good memories.

Gran took a small bite. She closed her eyes as she chewed slowly. A low murmur rumbled out of her chest. Adrienne felt a small twinge of satisfaction at what she knew was approval from Gran. Adrienne took her own bite. The intense fruit hit her first. Then the papery feather-light bitterness of the pancake. It was good. She breathed deeply and let it out, feeling some more of the heaviness lift.

Why had she never made these for Kali? All she did was cook for others, and yet, she hardly made anything for her own daughter. Adrienne couldn’t even recall the last time Kali had helped her in the kitchen, when they had cooked something together. Adrienne felt a great loss thinking that Kali knew nothing of cooking. What a royal mess she had made with her daughter. Though Gran had

made life almost unbearable, she had given Adrienne the gift of cooking. What had Adrienne given Kali? What, if anything, good had Adrienne done by her?

They ate in the quiet of the morning. The birds began to sing out in the bushes.

“I’ve seen a light on at the Merritt’s house. Upstairs. Have you seen it?” Adrienne asked as she cleared the plates.

Gran seemed to shift uncomfortably in her chair. “Kali mentioned something about that to me. All I know is the house has no one living there. I try not to look at it too much.”

“Maybe someone should call the police. I don’t feel comfortable having Kali here if there are squatters next door. Who knows what kind of people they are?”

Adrienne watched Gran, trying and decipher her oddly quiet and uninterested reaction. Gran was always up for a good mystery, a reason to be nosy.

“No, No. I wouldn’t do that. If there is anyone next door, they are quiet enough. It’s probably just your wild imagination.” Gran got up and quickly, for her, and left the kitchen.

Adrienne was left all alone. She wanted to go next door and investigate, but it was Saturday. She needed to get to the market and prep for dinner. She tried to put the idea out of her mind that Quinn could be hiding out next door. It seemed unreasonable.

## Chapter Fourteen

By Monday, her first day off from the market, she still couldn't shake the feeling that Quinn might actually be lurking in the big white house as Kali suspected. Adrienne stood at the sink in the kitchen, washing up the dishes from Gran's lunch. While scrubbing she obsessed over all of her theories and bits of information. Adrienne was sure she saw that light go on in his bedroom. Not once, but twice. She dried her hands and went to the junk drawer. She found a flashlight and a crowbar. Both seemed logical to take with her.

Gran was in the living room having a mid-morning nap in her easy chair by the bay window. Adrienne went upstairs. She put on her sneakers and a fresh pair of clothes. She tied back her hair. Downstairs, Kali's bedroom door was, thankfully, open. Adrienne went in and flopped down on her stomach on the floor. She reached under the bed. She found what she was looking for almost instantly. Taped to one of the wood slats of the bed frame was a key. The key unlocked the back door of the big white house. Adrienne silently thanked Gran for keeping her room like a museum.

She was just able to make it through the part of the stucco wall that the Banyacado tree had managed to crumble, scrapping her arm on the ragged concrete in the process. There was meaning in that, Adrienne thought, how the tree had survived and was now slowly destroying the very thing that had almost been its death.

She found herself in a patch of waist-high grass, once she made it to the Merritt's side. It was cool in the shade of the great tree. A huge Monarch fluttered by her. She started to walk slowly through the over-grown yard, knowing a nice mean snake could be waiting for her. She used the crowbar to part the blades in front of her as she moved towards the house. She was glad the landscaping was neglected. The dense growth helped to hide her. It was still early afternoon, and she felt better about going inside with the sun creeping overhead. She also was a great screamer and a fast runner. All of these things combined gave her confidence.

The house was more decayed than it had looked from her bedroom window. The white lacquer-like finish on the stucco of the outer walls was peeling badly. A ring of paint chips and plaster littered the ground around the house. She saw that the front door was still intact. No one had broken it down, but bougainvillea, with its nasty thorns, had crept up over the ornate wood panels. She felt exposed out in the front lawn and decided to move to the side door.

She almost turned back. On the top step of the side door stoop, a scrub daisy lay wilted. She bent down and picked it up, looking around to see where there might be a patch of the flowers. There was none in sight. She put the dying thing in her pocket as she tried the door. It was locked. She put the key in the hole and turned. The latch whined and the door swung open. A blast of cool air rushed out from inside the house.

It was too cool inside for a house supposedly empty. She stood in the dark windowless hall, listening for any sound. She heard the hum of the air

conditioner. She hadn't noticed the sound till then. She knew the compressor was on the other side of the house. It was really nothing. She knew it would be left on to battle the humidity. Maybe the house was for sale. She flipped the switch in the hall, suddenly, the narrow passage was bathed in yellow light. She felt better now. Maybe the light in Quinn's window had a reasonable explanation. It could have been a real estate agent showing the house. Her concern about crackheads or crazy homeless people subsided once the lights were on.

The door to the butler's quarters was on her right. It was closed. She touched the brass knob only for a moment. God, how she wanted to turn the knob and enter, but she let go.

The windows in the kitchen were boarded up. She knowingly moved into the dark room, crossing to where she knew the light switch was. The room popped to life. The fridge hummed as she surveyed the empty counters.

All the meals she cooked in that kitchen getting ready for her culinary exam. Quinn was always coming in, asking a million questions about what she was making. Lucas always would sit at the counter, watching her move from the stove, to the sink, to the fridge. Lucas always jumped up to do her beck and call. The three of them had laughed a lot in the early weeks of that summer. Adrienne moved her hand along the cold marble counters as she made a lap of the perimeter. She paused when she came to an empty glass where a little pulpy orange juice residue remained at the bottom. When she picked up the glass and held it up to the light, a ghostly thumbprint was revealed.

The fridge had food in it. She stood with the door open trying to make sense of the collection of cold cuts, a half loaf of bread, two eggs in a dish, and a container of fruit salad. There was also a half drunk beer on the door shelf.

She closed the fridge and left the kitchen. Through the pass-through, Adrienne could see into the bright great room. The floor-to-wall windows were made of hurricane proof glass and needed no boarding. She could see that all of Mr. Merritt's things were still set up the way she had remembered them. The house must be selling with all the furnishings, but Kali had said the house was not listed. It could be a private listing, only certain clients made aware of the house? She wondered where Quinn was in the world, brokering the deal remotely, she assumed. A sudden flash of worry ran through her when she thought of Quinn returning to Harbor Point to close the deal on the house. Would he stand here once again to sign the papers? She knew it would be a long shot. Real estate deals went through on a daily basis without the owners ever showing up to physically sign papers. That was what fax machines were for. Or had he been standing in this very room just a short while ago? A chill ran through her.

A newspaper, from only that morning, lay on the coffee table. It was open to the Arts & Entertainment section. There was a small review for the Hook & Cook Café. She couldn't help but skim through the article. It was a good review and.

She dropped the paper back on the table and thought of Christopher, but she only lingered on him for a moment. Someone had been there that very morning, she realized. Maybe they were still there. Maybe Adrienne was breaking

and entering, and Gran had no real clue what was going on with the estate. Maybe it was Quinn. She felt like she should be able to sense if he was near, as if that old familiar electric charge would thrill through her like she was some kind of human divining rod.

“Hello?” she called out. “Is someone here? I’m sorry I barged in. I live next door. I used to know the people who lived here.”

Her voice echoed a little in the huge room. She looked up at the second floor balcony. All the bedroom doors were closed. No one replied back, no doors opened. She went to the stairs and climbed them to the second floor. She couldn’t help it. She was here now. She was going to look in all the rooms. She went to Quinn’s door and tapped the pads of her fingers against it. Why? She wasn’t sure yet, but this was the room that had been the source of light. No one answered her knock. She turned the knob and let the door fall back.

The bed was neatly made with navy blue sheets. A whitewashed wood lamp stood on the nightstand next to the bed. There was no other furniture. She went to the window and lifted up the blind. There she found a small pair of binoculars on the sill. She put them up to her eyes. Through them, she could see right into her room.

She put the binoculars back down, and went to the closet. Inside, one plain white polo shirt hung on one hanger. She touched it, pulled it off the hanger. She held it in her hands, bringing the shirt to her face. She breathed in the scent it held trapped deep down in the fibers. The smell a thousand washes could never erase. A smell she would never forget; the ocean, coconut, sunscreen, the sun itself. She

went to the bed and sat down with the shirt in her lap. She looked around at the room. She had only been in Quinn's room a few times, but back then, it had been filled with all things of him: telescopes, maps of the West Indies, a million photos taken from a million unreachable places around the world. It had been a room full of dreams. Now, the room was just empty. The little remains of a room once filled with life. Things left behind, not worth enough to be remembered. A pair of binoculars. A shirt. A lamp. A girl.

She sat there with his shirt in her lap till the sun started to make a patch of light on the blond wood floor. She hung the polo back on its hanger, and closed the closet door. She lowered the shade, and smoothed out the crease her body had made in the sheet on the bed. She closed the bedroom door, and went back down the stairs. She switched off the lights as she made her way out of the house. She paused only to touch the brass knob of the Butler's quarters one more. She turned the key in the keyhole, hearing the familiar catch of the lock. She even put the wilted daisy back on the stoop before she turned towards home.

She moved fast through the grass. She didn't worrying about bush-whacking with her crowbar this time. It wasn't until she was at the hole in the wall that she realized she'd left her flashlight on the kitchen counter. She wanted to go back and get it. She didn't want a piece of her to remain in that house. She stood half way between the two properties, straddling the crack in the wall trying to make up her mind what she was going to do.

"Mom, what are you doing?"

Adrienne saw Kali by the trunk of the tree watching the silly sight of

Adrienne caught in the crack. Kali had a smudge of blue paint on her face. It was cute, but she wouldn't tell Kali, knowing it would upset her.

"I was just snooping around. I wanted to see the house." Adrienne finally made it back to their side of the wall. She brushed the white chalky concrete powder off her. "I wanted to see if it was still like I remembered it."

"Did you go in?"

"Yes."

"Do you think my dad is there? Did you see him?"

Adrienne felt like she might cry. "No, love. There is nothing but a shirt in the closet. No suitcases, no real signs of life."

"Oh." Kali kicked at some loose rubble from the crumbling wall.

Adrienne put her arm around Kali. "Come on, let's go sit in the sun."

"You had to sneak around a lot." Kali walked with her to the picnic table.

"Yeah, Gran wasn't too keen on me spending time with them. This crack in the wall would have made things a lot easier if it was there back then."

Adrienne smiled, thinking of how Quinn and Lucas would show up at her bedroom window when the coast was clear.

"Did you love my father?" Kali sat down on the wood bench.

Adrienne sat down on the opposite side, facing Kali. "I think so. I'd never really been in love before, but I think I really did."

Saying it out loud for the first time was overwhelming. Adrienne could feel her heart groan under the weight of her words. She had never said it to Quinn.

She had never said it to anyone. She had thought about it endlessly that summer, but now it was outside of her.

“Did he love you?” Kali rested her chin in her hands and watched the waves break out on the beach.

Adrienne bit her lower lip to keep it from quivering. She looked over at the big white house. She could see the window of the Butler’s quarters from where they sat at the picnic table. She looked up at her old bedroom window, now Kali’s room. The prickly pear cactus Gran had planted underneath the sill was still thriving. The cactus had been planted after Gramps’s death as a weak attempt, on Gran’s part, to keep Quinn out of her room. But, Quinn proved that nothing could keep him out.

“I don’t know. I like to think he did.” Adrienne reached out to touch Kali’s cheek. “I want to be honest with you. And the truth is, your father was not the kind of person to talk much about that kind of stuff. But, I do believe that there was a point that he did.”

“Why did he leave and never come back?” Kali focused on the chipping red paint on the top of the table.

“I think he blamed me and himself for Lucas’s death.” Adrienne looked down the beach. The lifeguard tower was closed up for the night. “Your father and I kept our relationship a secret from everyone. No one wanted us together, but we couldn’t help it and didn’t want to end things between us. We only had the summer. Quinn was going away to college in the fall. We just wanted to make each day last as long as we could.”

Adrienne took a long breath. These things were the hard things to say. She hadn't even allowed herself to think them in a long time, but to say them was agony.

"I knew that Lucas was in love with me. That was one reason I was okay with sneaking around. I didn't want to hurt Lucas. He was the best friend I'd ever had. But, I made a mistake. I lead him to believe that I did care about him, more than just friends. Then, he found out about us. The next day, he killed himself."

Adrienne looked out at the ocean. "He never left a note saying why, but I always knew why. I don't think Quinn could stand to come back here and face what had happened. Your father and I were the ones who found him. When I found him, I knew. I knew I had caused him to end his life."

Once Adrienne began to talk about the hard parts of that summer, she found she could hardly stop herself to answer questions Kali would ask. A damn had been broken inside her. She had forgotten that mixed in with all the heartache there had been much good in the memories as well. It was nice to think of those good moments.

When Adrienne's voice became hoarse from talking, they sat quietly till the sun went behind the house, making the back yard full of shadows. They watched two small children out on the beach make a last attempt at flying their kite before night came. Adrienne watched her daughter smile at the children. Lucas was so much a part of Kali's face.

For a moment, as Adrienne watched her daughter, it felt as if the past had swallowed her whole. After a few moments, the world came back into focus. Adrienne looked around at Gran's backyard trying to disconnect from the world she had left behind and return to the here and now.

"I don't know if I'm crazy, but I was sure it was him." Kali's voice finally broke the quiet. She pointed to the house, now dark in the twilight.

"No, you're not crazy. Come on, let's go inside and make some dinner." Adrienne wrapped her arm around Kali's shoulder as they walked up the stone path to the back door.

"It's your day off, we can just order a pizza," Kali said.

"No, I want to cook with you." Adrienne smiled at Kali.

Adrienne couldn't help but turn back and look at the big white house once more. It was dark, but the feeling that someone was watching her was ever present.

All the cabinet doors were flung open wide—the shelves bare, stark white—smelling of pine and bleach. You couldn't cook with dirty abandoned dishes, pot, and pans. Adrienne had been so caught up in everything the kitchen had been left to last and had taken several days to clean. She and Kali worked for an hour continuing the excavating and scrubbing before starting dinner.

Adrienne piled the damp clean dishes in tall fearless stacks wherever there was a clear spot of counter. There was just as much history here as in the closets—Tupperware from Tupperware's inception in once cheerful colors with

lids that never did what they claimed to do. There were rusted ricers and hand cranked whisks with gears that sang hoarse creaky songs as they beat eggs into omelets, yellowed pastry cloths that smelled of the lineage of pie crusts if you held them up to your nose—ancient flour still trapped within the fibers and released into the population of dust already dancing in the air. There were knives that had seen more of the world than Adrienne—coming to this county via the boat Gran had taken at ten, wrapped in linen, the steel now black and tired from generations of tomatoes, cabbages, chickens, and watermelons. They murmured their stories—some Adrienne knew, some still mysterious—as they clanged and banged and clinked in the wash pan.

Adrienne watched Kali examine the tools and dishes as she dried what her mother handed her. Some of the implements were surely as exotic to Kali as they had been to Adrienne as a girl. There was a great beauty to the worn and outdated gadgets. Adrienne felt as if each one was a work of art. It became clear to Adrienne why Gran had kept it all. Why Gran had been so resistant to throw out a single thing.

Gran had slipped quietly into the kitchen. Adrienne turned from the sink and found her sitting in her assigned chair at the table. Her weathered hands rested in her lap. Her face told the journey of her life, but her eyes seemed like those of a child. It felt like Gran was being pulled inwards towards that deep dark place where all begins. Or maybe it was just curiosity.

“We’re going to make paprikash, Gran,” Adrienne said, pulling items out of the fridge and putting them on the counter.

“It’s your recipe,” Kali said.

Adrienne and Kali got to work on dinner. She poached the chicken thighs till the meat was soft and silky and fell off the bone. She stood behind Kali and showed her how to pick out the gristle and fat, how to shred the meat so that it would drink up the cream sauce. Adrienne took out the beige unglazed mortar and stuck her face into the bowl, breathing in deep the memory of a hundred years of spices crushed into the very soul of the pottery. She showed Kali how to gently crush the sweet dried red peppers, holding her hand to show her how to move the pestle around the bowl to turn the peppers into a fine dust, releasing the sweet earthy scents that bit at the back of your tongue.

Gran watched them add the chicken and paprika to the pan of golden chicken broth. Slowly, they added the sour cream, making sure the cream didn’t scald. Adrienne turned to her for reassurance when the memories grew a bit fuzzy and, maybe, it wasn’t time to add the bay leaves or the ginger. She held up the ricer and began to push the stiff yellow dough down through the small holes, pausing just before the first spatzel fell. Gran just nodded once, letting Adrienne know that she was on the right track.

“I changed the recipe, you know,” Gran spoke almost dream-like.

“Spaetzle is from Germany. You should use Hungarian dumplings. They are heavier than the spaetzle, but your grandfather’s mother was from Germany and he preferred them, so I made it that way.”

“Cool,” Kali said.

Sometimes, when Adrienne looked over, Gran had her eyes closed, and her breathing was deep as if she was taking the smells in into her as Adrienne had as a child.

“You always remember the bad stuff, Adrienne”

That was a favorite response of Adrienne’s mother in her infrequent letters or during one of her sporadic phone calls. “You only remember the bad stuff, Adrienne,” is what she would say when Adrienne would list the trials she had to endure living with Gran, would beg Diana to come and get her. Diana was right for the most part, Adrienne tended to focus on only the bad thing, the things that caused her suffering. In fact, Adrienne had spent most of her life dwelling on the bad stuff.

A strange and miraculous thing began to happen, right then in the kitchen. Each new ingredient they added to the dish made the aroma change in slight increments, and revived a memory of Adrienne’s childhood. Maybe it was a mixture of the cooking and revisiting the past, but whatever it was, Adrienne began to experience an overwhelming surge of good moments from her past.

The funny thing was, most of the good memories she recalled had occurred in the kitchen with Gran. She thought of how patient Gran had always been with her when it came to teaching Adrienne the art of cooking the family recipes. Even Gran’s voice became calm and soothing as she instructed Adrienne on how to cut butter into flour to get a flaky pie crust or how to brown a roast of beef to seal in the juices before putting it into the oven. Adrienne’s mind swirled with the flour motes twisting in the air around Gran’s head as she would work a

lump of dough on the counter, her sleeves rolled up to show the powerful muscles in her arms, a bright red bandana tied around her head to keep the sweat out of her eyes. There was an unsung beauty to those images that Adrienne had not noticed or appreciated as a girl, but now, looking back, she could see.

There was a sadness too, as she remembered. It was those moments that had held all the potential for connecting, for becoming an actual close family. But, it seemed those opportunities only arose in the kitchen, and had passed without Gran or Adrienne taking advantage.

They sat in front of their plates at the table. Kali and Adrienne watched as Gran tipped her face down towards her dish—her nose almost touching the creamy pink concoction—and breathed in the smells of her life. They watched the slow unsteady first bite land successfully. Gran murmured in a low, throaty voice as she chewed, her eyes closed.

Kali smiled at Adrienne. “This is so good.”

Adrienne brushed her fingers against Kali’s cheek as she returned the smile. They all ate quietly in the dim light of the dusty wicker hanging lamp, but it was a satisfying quiet.

After the dishes had been cleared, Gran disappeared into the dark hallway. Kali and Adrienne followed her up the stairs to her room. Gran stopped at her dressing table, and picked up an old framed photo. It was her and Gramps on their wedding day. Gran studied it for a moment, then put it back on the counter. She went to the bed.

“Why did you marry him?” Adrienne said as she picked the photo up, touching Gramps’s face through the dusty glass.

It was a question she had wanted to ask since she was little. The two never had seemed happy with each other. That was still a mystery.

“I had to marry him. I was pregnant,” Gran said, her eyes were far off, somewhere back in the past. She sighed deeply. Her shoulders slumped.

Adrienne and Kali sat absorbing the words.

“Do you hear something? I swore I just heard...” Gran’s hand reached out towards the window. “Is someone passing by on the street? It sounded like humming.”

Adrienne went to the window, but no one was out on the road. “There’s no one there, Gran.”

“Close the window, child. I don’t think I could sleep if I heard it again.” Gran sat down at the edge of her bed.

Gran was making no sense, but Adrienne thought it must be due to how tired Gran appeared to be. Adrienne went to Gran’s walk-in closet next to the master bathroom. The teak shutter doors screeched on their track as Adrienne pushed them back, and took out one of Gran’s filmy movie-star nightgowns. Even when she slept, Gran always had to look her best.

Gran shook her head as she lifted her arms so that Adrienne could dress her. “No, there is nothing there. These ears are playing such tricks on me.”

Gran laid her head on the pillow, letting out a great sigh.

“Ah, yes, that is nice,” she said, her eyes closed, hands folded on her chest.

Adrienne touched Gran’s hands. The skin was warm, silky, and flimsy like gold leaf.

“You could have left this place, Gran. You could have been happy,” Adrienne said softly.

“A baby and a husband was the life I was given.” Gran’s eyes began to flutter, her breathing deepened.

Kali and Adrienne stayed till she was asleep. For some reason, neither of them felt like leaving the room. The meal had somehow transformed all of them. It felt as if some great release had happened. Like a deep breath finally exhaled.

Adrienne kissed Kali on the forehead at the top of the stairs before going to her room. A warm wind blew through her window. Adrienne closed her eyes, and took the fresh air deep into her lungs. She couldn’t help but feel that someone watched from the dark windows of the big white house. After spending most the day reliving the past, the Merritt house was now a pulsing, living thing. It’s life-force thrummed a undeniable rhythm.

Adrienne crawled into bed. For a while, she thought of Christopher as she lay there, but it was Quinn’s face that was the last to hover in her dark realm between wake and sleep.

Chapter Fifteen~ *July 1997*

It was the Fourth of July and Mr. Merritt's barbeque was only hours away. Adrienne had been paid the five hundred as promised. She had been working hard for over a week to make sure that the dinner for over one hundred would be perfect, and the five crisp hundred dollar bills, Mr. Merritt had placed in her hands, were earned. She had never worked so hard in her life, but she was glad to be busy.

Gran had bowed out of the Fourth Fest cooking contest due to Gramps's death. Gran went around town wearing all black, though it was summer and they were experiencing a heat wave, telling everyone she was "in mourning". There had been a constant flow of people in and out of the house since Gramps's funeral, which left Adrienne the ability to duck out of the house undetected when visitors came to pay their respects.

Adrienne rushed around the Merritt's kitchen trying to help their cook tie up any loose ends before she had to leave. Lucas came in the back door with his hands full of boxes filled with rented plates and put them gently down on the counter. He wiped the sweat from his brow and took a long drink from a bottle of water.

"You can't put them there. We need all the space in here." Adrienne shook her head as she stirred a giant pot of homemade barbeque sauce.

"I'm not leaving them there, I'm just resting them." She could feel Lucas watching as she darted around the large kitchen.

“I have to leave soon. Make sure you help Molly. I don’t want her doing everything herself.” She turned around, facing him.

She was risking her life by just being in the Merritt’s kitchen. Adrienne tried to keep track of the visitors and the sleeping pills Gran was on, but she always worried Gran would realize she wasn’t home and come looking for her.

“You have nothing to worry about.” Lucas hoisted the heavy boxes back up from the counter and headed for the dining room.

Quinn came in the back with his wet suit pushed half way down, dangerously ridding on his hip bones. Adrienne dropped the spoon she held in her hand. It hit the tile floor and splattered red sticky sauce all over the cabinets.

“Didn’t mean to scare you,” he said, but he was smiling. He bent down and helped her mop up the mess with paper towels. “Sorry I’m late.”

“It’s okay, you’re here now.” Adrienne smiled up at him.

He smelled like coconuts and saltwater after being down at the marina all day helping to fix a broken pump on the boat. She watched him drop the dirty spoon in the sink. With his back towards her, under the halogen lights in the kitchen, she could see the scars that covered his back. A bad tumble off his surfboard into a reef, he had told her. She cringed as she thought about the pain he must have felt. The scars were everywhere, but they did nothing to detract from his beauty.

She had hoped to see him before she had to go back home. He had been gone more than he’d been around and she found herself holding her breath until each time she got to see him. Mr. Merritt always had him on the move going on

dives looking for treasure or sending him down to the keys to their office in Marathon to deal with issues. She hadn't seen him in five days.

When they were together, they hardly spoke or rather he hardly spoke. She wondered if he didn't know what to say now that her Gramps had died. Or was it something else? At first he would never shut up, but now he said little to her.

She went to the sink and washed the splatter off her hands and took the moment to breathe deeply. She had made a promise to talk to Quinn more. They were going to get nowhere if neither of them said anything.

"How are you doing today?" he asked, coming up behind her, putting his strong hands on her shoulders. She was surprised by the attention he was giving her. Here she was, finally ready to make the first move.

"Better today. All this craziness makes it easier." She thought her knees would buckle.

"I haven't been around much to cheer you up." Quinn moved away from her to grab a square of cornbread from the pan on the counter. "But, I think I have the next few days clear so maybe we can get some surfing in or go for a dive?"

"That would be great. I feel like I haven't seen you much, but Lucas has been really great to me." Adrienne felt herself moving towards him in small, almost undetectable movements.

Lucas had been a really great friend in the weeks that had passed since Gramps's funeral. He had even come to the service, sitting in the back so Gran wouldn't know he was there. She had been thankful he was there, even though they couldn't sit next to each other.

“I’m sorry I didn’t make the funeral. I’ve been meaning to say that to you.” Quinn bowed his head. There were only a few inches between them.

“It’s fine. I survived.” Adrienne tried to manage a chuckle and put it off, but the funeral had been a nightmare. Gran put on a grand show, beating her fists against Gramps’s coffin, wailing hysterically. Christopher had to pull her away and take her directly to the rented town car. Adrienne was relieved Christopher had been there to step in and get the situation under control.

By the time Adrienne made it out of the funeral parlor, Christopher had already given Gran one of her sedatives, and Gran was dozing in the back seat. Lucas put her into his car, and took her to the cemetery. They stood, hand in hand, and watched as a few strong workers shoved Gramps’s into the marble drawer of the mausoleum and sealed the door for eternity.

Quinn had been unable to attend, saying he had some business to see to. Adrienne had assured him that it was okay he couldn’t make it. Of course, secretly, she had ached for him to be there with her.

“I’m glad Lucas could be there with you for the services. He really cares for you.” Quinn looked up at her. His stare was almost blistering.

“He’s a great friend,” she managed to say, somehow.

Lucas did anything she asked of him from getting pots and pans out of the back of the cabinet to pouring her a drink. He even did things she never asked him for, like leaving her favorite movies on her window so she could keep her mind off the gloomy things that surrounded her. There were always flowers too. Morning glories in a small bowl on her nightstand, a shaft of fiery orange

gladiolus waiting for her on the porch. All the things a girl dreams a boy would do for her, give her. Adrienne tried not to wish it were Quinn doing those things instead, but it was hard not to.

“I’m glad you’re here.” Quinn smiled. “I have something I want to give you.”

“You do?” Her heart began to go crazy. Not only was he really talking to her and asking questions, but he had something for her? That meant he had been thinking about her.

“It’s up in my room. I’ve had it since your birthday, but it hasn’t been the right time.”

“Is it the right time now?” Adrienne smiled.

They were so close. A rogue drop of saltwater ran down his smooth chest. Adrienne ached to trace its path with her finger.

“Adrienne,” Mr. Merritt said as he came into the kitchen from the great room, “the servers are here. Make sure you and Molly tell them what to do before you leave. And, I saw your grandmother lurking in her backyard. I hate to ask, but I would rather not have her cause a scene over here tonight.”

“No, it’s alright, Mr. Merritt. I’ll go. Everything is ready anyways. Lucas knows what to do.” Adrienne tugged at the knot in her apron and slipped it over her head.

“Now, I told you to call me Bob,” Mr. Merritt said to her, but his focus was on Quinn. “Everything looks just wonderful, darling. Thank you for all of

your hard work. I wish you could attend the festivities tonight. I'm sure all will go well. Try to steal away and come for a while, won't you?"

"Thank you, Bob," she managed to say without sounding too idiotic. "I'll try to come by later, if not I'll come by tomorrow and see how it all went."

"Oh, no need tomorrow. I will be going out of town for a couple days. And you deserve a break after all of this." Mr. Merritt went to the fridge and pulled out a beer.

Adrienne looked at Quinn, wanting to ask if he would be leaving with Mr. Merritt the next day.

"I'll see you later," Quinn said to her and walked out of the kitchen.

Adrienne went out the front door and jogged down the long drive to the road. She turned onto the shell path and ran around the house to the backyard. Gran stood at the edge of the lawn, dress in all black, looking up and down the beach.

"Hey, Gran," Adrienne said as cheerfully as she could muster.

"Where have you been? I've been waiting for you for over an hour to take me to the Fourth Fest." Gran's voice was shrill.

"I went for a run. I didn't know you needed me. I didn't think we would go today." Adrienne moved to the back door, trying to lure Gran into the house where the whole world wouldn't hear her yell.

"And why not? I can't just sit in the house until I die too, can I?" Gran said. "What would it look like if I became some kind of horrid hermit all shut up

in the house? Clean yourself up. I don't want my friends to see you all filthy and sweaty.”

Gran grabbed her hand and inspected it. “Is that blood?”

Adrienne looked down at her palm. There was sauce caked on her wrist. “Yeah, I tripped on the gravel.” She snatched her hand back before Gran could get a better look.

“So clumsy. Can you do anything right? I swear!” Gran put her hands up in the air and finally went inside.

That night, Adrienne sat on the beach and watched Mr. Merritt's party get into full swing. It was just getting dark. The millions of twinkle lights she'd watched the hired men string in the trees and bushes came to life. Everything shimmered like a mirage from where she stood, even the people. This was no barbeque Adrienne had ever attended. The women wore long summery dresses in every color imaginable and the men wore beautiful linen shirts, white and clean. Their tailored children ran waving sparklers that left comet trails of light behind them. A small local live rock band played on a stage erected over the pool. Couples, tipsy on wine and vodka tonics, moved lazily to the music in the thick July night, swirling around the edge of the pool. Adrienne could hear their conversations, their laughter drift out onto the sand. She could smell the charcoal burning in the large grill that had been rented for the party; her Gramps's secret barbeque sauce sizzling on the hot embers.

Her and Gran had ended up staying at the Fourth Fest for only a short while. The heat and Gran's dreary attire were not a good match. Gran was ready to faint after ten minutes in the sun. Once they returned home, Gran had taken a handful of sleeping pills, complaining that the band next door was too loud and much too irritating, and passed out before nine thirty. Adrienne crawled the walls all evening, hoping Gran wouldn't wake and decide to march over to the Merritt's and make a scene.

Once Adrienne was sure Gran was oblivious to the world, she put on the new dress she had bought with some of her savings. It was white and fell to her knees. She watched her reflection in the mirror as she swayed her body back and forth, letting the filmy fabric move with her. She curled her hair with Gran's old curling iron and carefully applied some makeup to her face. She liked how she looked. She almost seemed to be a different person in the dress with the hair and makeup.

At first, Adrienne half-heartedly debated if she should slip herself into the party. She could check on the food, check on the servers. She could find Quinn. Maybe he would give her whatever it was he had wanted to give her earlier.

She wasn't going to be a coward. She made herself go up the dune and onto the lawn. She maneuvered through the crowds looking for Quinn. And then, there he was, dressed in a cream button down shirt and long khaki pants, leaning against the bar set up on the lawn. He was surrounded by a group of very well dressed girls and guys. They were all laughing. They all had drinks in hand. One girl, with perfect blond hair and big green eyes was standing a little too close to

Quinn. She touched his arm each time she laughed at something he'd say. The doubts began to infiltrate Adrienne. She felt bare in her thin-strapped dress. Her hair was wild and unruly. Her makeup felt immature. She didn't belong here. She wanted to slink away, back to the darkness of the beach before anyone saw her.

It was too late. Quinn looked her way and his face brightened. He called out to her and his little group of friends parted so Adrienne could join them. She could feel all their eyes on her as she moved into their circle. She wished that Lucas was there at that moment. He was so good at making her feel comfortable. She looked around the yard and the pool area, but she didn't see him.

"Adrienne, I'm so glad you came back. These are a few of my friends from school. They are here visiting some family in Palm Beach this week for the holiday." Quinn put his hand on her bare shoulder, and proceeded to introduce her to the clan.

Everyone was polite enough when she shook each of their hands. The blond, who came to be known as Ann, was stiffer than the rest and didn't make eye contact with Adrienne.

"Quinn, you should bring her to the polo tournament tomorrow. We have a tent on the east lawn. I think there will be a brunch," a redhead named Finn said once Adrienne had met everyone. "I bet she'd love to see the horses."

Quinn turned to her. "Do you think you could get away tomorrow?"

"I'm not sure. I'll have to see how things go," Adrienne said, her voice quiet.

"Have you ever been to a polo match?" Molly, a tiny brunette asked.

“No, but it sounds like fun.”

“They are boring as hell, but they are a good place to meet rich men and drink.” Ann gave a loud laugh and the rest followed her. “I can let you borrow something to wear if you don’t have anything suitable.”

Quinn gave Ann a dirty look. “Ann, be nice.”

“I am being nice, Quinton. I am offering her help.”

Adrienne finally caught sight of Lucas. He was all alone, sitting at a table next to the speakers by the band.

“Look, there’s Lucas.” Adrienne waved. Lucas got up and came towards them.

“Great, here comes Lucas.” Molly rolled her eyes. “I hope he doesn’t make a scene.”

Adrienne was puzzled at Molly’s comment, but then she saw how unsteady Lucas was as he walked over to them. His light blue shirt was half unbuttoned. Adrienne could see that his eyes were wide and glassy as he came closer. It was a surprising transformation. She had just seen him hours before. He was his bright, jovial self then.

“Run, Adrienne, do not let these wolves corrupt you. You are too good for them.” Lucas patted a guy named Alex hard on the back.

“Lucas, you know you can’t drink,” Quinn said, shaking his head. He took hold of Lucas’s arm. “Let’s go in the house before you do something you regret tomorrow morning.”

“Let me be, Bro. I can handle it.” Lucas pushed Quinn’s arm off of him.

“Adrienne, why don’t you come with me and keep me company? I hate to see you with all these fake people. It’s not becoming.”

“Why don’t you go with Quinn and I will come with you to the house?”

Adrienne smiled, but it was a nervous smile. She could feel the annoyance in the eyes of Quinn’s group of friends.

“Yeah, listen to your friend, Lucas,” Ann said. She smirked. “You don’t want her to see what a mess you truly are. I guess you can’t run from your true, fucked up self, after all.”

“I won’t hit a woman, but I have no problem hitting a slut.” Lucas took a step towards Ann.

Marcus reacted like a predatory cat, leaping between Lucas and Ann. His fist shot out, connecting with Lucas’s jaw. Adrienne sucked in a breath as she watched Lucas stumble backwards into Quinn’s arms. She watched Quinn scanning the party to see how many had witnessed the altercation. Adrienne looked too, but it seemed most people were too focused on the band. Luckily, they were playing a loud rock number. Many of the guests were dancing.

“You are going inside before dad comes over here and deals with this himself,” Quinn spoke in a soft, but firm tone as he pulled Lucas back towards the house.

“I’ll come with you.” Adrienne began to follow, but Quinn put up a hand to stop her.

“Stay here. I’ll put him to bed and be back down.” He gave her a sheepish smile. “Try to enjoy the party.”

She watched Quinn take Lucas up the side stairs and disappear through the door into the house. She reluctantly turned to Quinn’s friends. They all watched her, like she was some sort of strange specimen. She had no choice but to go back to their little circle and wait for Quinn to return. She wanted to talk to him. Lucas’s behavior seemed so out of character. She wanted some answers. The group didn’t seem the least bit surprised by his behavior, which lead Adrienne to believe that Lucas had a reputation she was not aware of.

“I don’t know why they let him out. It looks like he should still be locked away.” Molly pursed her lips and folded her arms across her chest.

“What do you mean?” Adrienne grabbed a light beer from the copper basin on the bar. She normally didn’t care to drink, but she felt shaken by what had just happened.

“You don’t know? Well, you only met Lucas a few weeks ago. He’s been in and out of mental facilities since his mother died. It’s always been volunteer on his part, but I know he’s on some serious anti-depression meds. He’s not supposed to drink while taking them, but he has no self-control.”

“They should have kept him in there, but they thought moving here would be a good thing for him.” Ann clucked her teeth. “He can be unpredictable. Watch yourself around him.”

“Aw, she’s just saying that because Lucas doesn’t put up with her bullshit.” Alex laughed.

“Quinn and I broke up because of him.” Ann gave Alex a cold stare.

“Yeah, but you upgraded with me.” Marcus put his arm around Ann. They shared a private smile.

“So, Adrienne, you have lived here in Harbor Point your whole life?” Alex turned her way, and she was thankful for the subject change.

“Yeah, right next door.”

“That must be awful. This town seems like purgatory. I guess the only good thing is being right on the water.” Molly’s tone was not friendly, almost mocking.

“It’s not too bad.” Adrienne looked out on the dark beach, wishing for escape. “I think I am going to go check on my grandmother.”

“Well, it was certainly nice meeting you, sweetie,” Ann said with a big fake smile. Her voice was dripping with poisonous saccharin.

Adrienne didn’t go home. She stayed on the beach and watched the party from afar. Quinn’s friends had made her feel so small and insignificant. She couldn’t understand how someone so kind and warm like Quinn could be friends with such superficial, judgmental people. She was worried about Lucas too. It was hard to believe that Lucas, sweet and loving Lucas had spent a good deal of the last five years in a mental facility.

A figure came towards her from out of the blazing light of the house. She was pleased to see it was Quinn. He had found her.

“I got tired waiting for you to come back.” He put his hands in his pockets as he navigated around the sea grass.

“It’s quiet out here. How is Lucas?” She found herself moving towards him as if she couldn’t help it.

Quinn’s brow furrowed. “I think he finally passed out. I tell him not to drink, but he never listens. It interacts badly with his medication.”

“What is he taking?” Adrienne asked. Gran had been on almost every known anti-depressant over the years for her anxiety and bouts of depression.

“Wellbutran right now. It’s been working well.” Quinn kicked at the sand. “I guess they told you about Lucas’s time in the hospital?”

“Yeah, I can’t believe it. He doesn’t seem like that kind of person.”

“He’s been doing really well since we got here. Our mother’s death has been hard on him. He’ll feel bad in the morning, so don’t make too big a deal about it.”

“I won’t. You should get back to your party and your friends.” Adrienne bowed her head.

“They left. I hope they weren’t too mean. They are not really that close to me, just some people from my old school I used to hang out with.” Quinn came closer to her. “They are selfish and vindictive for the most part. I’m glad they left.”

“I don’t think I want to go to that polo match tomorrow,” Adrienne said, smiling.

“Neither do I,” Quinn said, and then he laughed. The mood seemed to lighten. Adrienne was glad for it.

“Will they be mad if you don’t show up?”

“Ah, don’t worry too much about it, I’m not.” Quinn shrugged his shoulders. “I brought you that thing I said I had for you.”

His hand came out of his pocket holding something that shimmered when the party lights struck it. A jolt of surprise ran through her.

“I saw it at this shop by the marina. I thought of you.” He reached out and put the thing in her hand. “It was supposed to be your birthday gift.”

It was a bracelet with a tiny surfboard charm attached to one of the links.

“Do you like it?” He looked up at her through his thick lashes, his blue eyes full of something she couldn’t decipher. Something she’d never seen on the face of any boy who ever looked at her. “I wanted to give it to you when we were alone. That’s hasn’t been easy.”

She nodded, afraid to speak. Afraid her heart would leap out through her mouth.

His eyes absorbed the light from the party. He reached out again, his hand trembling a bit, and touched her face. She watched his face morph from relaxed to something serious and aching.

“You look really pretty tonight,” he said and then he smiled, breaking the serious look on his face.

She could hardly breathe. She smiled up at him, putting her hand on top of his. Then, he kissed her.

Adrienne had to do everything in her power to keep her knees from bucking, to keep from falling. The music played through the night. The people danced and laughed unaware of them out on the beach. And they were unaware of

the people at the party. Quinn's mouth was sweet and tasted like cornbread. She wrapped her arms around his neck. If she did fall, then they would fall together, down into the sand. A burning need to be as close as she could to him filled her body. She couldn't find any control, she didn't care.

Above them, the first of Bob Merritt's expensive firework display exploded over their heads. The chandeliers of fire rained down, filling the night sky with foreign stars. It could have been nuclear bombs for all that Adrienne was concerned. They clung to each other under that chaos of light and heat.

Quinn broke free of her for a moment. "Can we please get out of here?"

Adrienne laughed. It felt good to laugh. A release.

"Where can we go?"

"Follow me."

She let go of him. They ran through the dark with the fiery chrysanthemums bursting overhead, the impossible thunder from the detonations. Adrienne's flesh prickled with exhilaration as they ran till they got to the road. Quinn turned and smiled at her in the night. The light reflected in his eyes. He pointed in the direction of the boat. She nodded and let him lead her along the path.

Quinn surprised her by untying the boat from the dock and turning over the engine. She thought they would just hide out in the cabin. Apparently, Quinn had other plans.

“Where are we going?” Adrienne stood next to him as he eased the wheel to turn the boat.

He looked at her. His face was serious. “Do you trust me?”

“Yes.” And she did. She felt safe with him. She thought of the first day they went diving and how he had held her face and made her look at him under the water. She had felt completely secure then as she did now.

Quinn smiled back. He returned his attention to the wheel of the boat. They went slow through the Back Bay and out the inlet into open water. Once they were free of the currents, Quinn opened up the motor, and they speed through the ocean, straight east into the night. The last of Mr. Merritt’s firework display boomed behind them.

Adrienne loved the speed, the dark that encompassed the boat, the thick wet salt that hung in the air. She left Quinn’s side and moved to the bow. She raised her hands from the rail and let her knees go slack so they could adjust to the dips and bounces the boat made as it skipped over the small waves. She looked straight out at the undefined horizon as they cut through the water. The stars reflected in the sea making a little universe out of water and sky.

Quinn slowed the boat. They had to be at least three miles out. She only saw a thin strip of hazy glow that was the mainland.

“It’s too deep to put out an anchor,” she said, hearing Quinn coming closer.

“So what, we drift. Who cares where we go.” He put his hand on her waist. “I promise we won’t get lost.”

She turned to him. “Who cares if we get lost?”

Quinn pulled her to him. The kiss was molten, seething with fire, burning her core. Nothing more was spoken. She didn't tell him this was her first time. Words seemed almost unnecessary around Quinn anyway. She took off her shirt and let it fall to the deck. She watched Quinn's eyes moved across the new territories of her skin. The warm air felt cool against her bareness. Quinn slowly unbuttoned his shirt and let it fall on top of hers. She'd seen this much of his body before. She knew of the deep gash-like scars that covered his chest and back. Now his body had new meaning. It was like she saw him for the first time. She reached out through the small space that divided them and traced one of the thin scars on his stomach. He winced ever so slightly from this action. She wondered if it hurt.

He pulled her to him and the heat of their bare flesh connecting was enough to make her cry out in surprise and relief. She found his mouth, closed her eyes, and let him pull her to the back of the boat. It was too glorious to go into the cabin. They would not make it that far. A few cushions thrown on the deck would have to suffice. Adrienne let her gaze move between Quinn's deep blue eyes and the stars behind him until the stars were like flocks of bright birds swimming in circles in her head.

When she woke, the first smear of light could be seen in the sky. The water was calm like a pool. She sat up and looked for land, but they were still far enough out that no land could be seen. She felt Quinn stir beside her. When she turned to look at him, she found him smiling.

“Are we lost yet?” He traced the side of her body with his fingers from the top of her shoulder to her ankle.

She watched him get up and stretch his long, lean body. She marveled at each new patch of skin her eyes settled on. Quinn gave her a wink and then he dived off the side of the boat, into the water.

“Come in. It’s almost morning. The sea monsters are going to sleep.” He treaded water below her.

“I’m not afraid of sea monsters.” She stood on the rail, not caring if there were boats nearby to see her naked.

“I know. That’s what I like most about you.” Quinn backed up.

She could feel his eyes on her body as she stood on the ledge. She did a perfect front flip into the water. The temperature was cool, but she was already on fire. When she surfaced she did not see Quinn anywhere. She tried to look into the water, but it was still too dark.

She felt his hands on her legs, moving up towards the surface. She almost screamed. He was smiling when his face appeared. He pulled her under the water, and they tangled their bodies together, fighting against the buoyancy, resisting the urge to surface too quickly. In a perfect world, she would have stayed under the water with Quinn and never come up for air again.

## Chapter Sixteen

Hunger and thirst drove them back to shore. There was nothing on the boat. It was late afternoon by the time they could make out the land. The closer they got to the inlet, the less they spoke. They both knew their little trip would not go unnoticed. The unknown awaited them at the docks.

Mr. Merritt was standing at the gate of his driveway in a red and yellow striped bathrobe with a mug of coffee in one hand and several newspapers in the other. He raised a brow when he saw the two of them coming from the path. She hoped she didn't look too terrible.

“Good afternoon, Adrienne,” Mr. Merritt said. “I apologize for my appearance. I slept late due to last night's party. Would you two like to tell me where you have been?”

“Christopher is coming to get the boat soon. I just wanted to make sure I got all of Gramps's stuff off of it. Quinn offered to help.” Adrienne quickly put her hair up, trying to coax the tangles to smooth under her hairband. It was then she thought that Mr. Merritt must realize they were both wearing the same clothes as last night.

“I was down at the dock an hour ago, and there was no boat there.” Mr. Merritt shook his head in disapproval.

“We took her out for one last ride,” Quinn said.

“Is that right? Well, I need to you go and pack. I want you to fly over to Nassau and lead a tour group for the next week. My guide has come down with some kind of infection.”

Adrienne slumped. Quinn was going away again. He had just got back. How could she live without him for a week after what happened the night before? She didn't know how she would bear being away for a few hours.

“I just got back. I was hoping for a few days to relax.” She saw Quinn's jaw tighten.

“Rest is for the weak. Now, get going.” Mr. Merritt pointed his newspaper up to the house.

Quinn turned to her. “I'll see you soon.”

“Okay.”

Adrienne and Mr. Merritt watched Quinn jog up the drive. She wondered why he was still in his robe and just getting the paper if he had been down to the dock the hour before. She realized he was lying. He'd been waiting for them to return. She wondered how long he had been waiting.

“Is Lucas awake?” Adrienne tried to shift the focus and avoid some kind of conversation with Mr. Merritt about what she and Quinn had been up to.

“He is still sleeping. I don't know what I'm going to do with that boy. He's useless. Drank too much last night, made an ass out of himself, but what is new? I've tried to mold him into a productive man... Well, at least I have Quinton.”

He turned to her. “I have seen a change in Lucas since he met you, a change for the good. I am not sure why he acted the way he did last night, it was not expected. I know he is not happy Quinn will leave for college soon. I hope that you will soften that blow for him, and Lucas will have you once Quinn is gone.”

“I hope everyone liked the food,” Adrienne said in a cheerful tone, trying to change the subject once again.

“Oh, yes. They loved everything.” Mr. Merritt smiled and patted her on the shoulder. “A few even asked for your business card. When is that culinary school competition again?”

“Four weeks from today.” She bit her fingernail nervously, thinking about how much rested on her doing well during the exam. Gran would never have the money to send her to culinary school. It cost almost thirty thousand dollars for the two year program.

“I know you will be successful.” Mr. Merritt smiled. “Can’t let that talent go to waste,” he added with a wave.

“Thank you, for letting me practice at your house and hiring me for the party.” Adrienne didn’t know what to do with her hands. “It really means a lot to me.”

“It’s my pleasure, Adrienne. This is an important time, these years between childhood and adulthood. You want to use these years to ensure a successful path ahead. And we all have our paths to travel.”

“I know, I’m working hard.” Adrienne couldn’t look at him.

“I think you know what I mean when I say that now is not the time to do foolish things. God does not want you to fall right off the edge of this world and lose all it holds for you. There is no coming back from that.”

“I’ll keep that in mind, Mr. Merritt. Thanks.” Adrienne backed away from him a bit, giving him an assuring smile.

“Bob, please,” he said, a satisfied smirk on his lips. “Adrienne, I am prepared to help you succeed, no matter the cost. Your tuition to any cooking school in the world will be guaranteed by me regardless of how you do at the upcoming competition. We can work out some cover story to tell your grandmother so she won’t refuse the offer.”

“That is amazingly generous. I could never accept such a gift.” Adrienne was stunned by Mr. Merritt’s offer. “We hardly know each other. I am not your family.”

“Please don’t offend me by refusing. I am not getting any younger. I have too much money, more than Lucas or Quinn could ever spend in their respected life-times. You have been a good friend to them this summer. You have been a positive role model in Lucas’s life. I dare say I have seen an improvement in him, both in temperament and desire to succeed. He is talking about going to college next year. I have never heard that out of him before. Maybe he could find a college near to your cooking school.”

Mr. Merritt paused and rolled his shoulder back so he stood straight and confident. He pursed his lips. It looked like he was trying to figure out exactly

how to word what he wanted to say next. There was no doubt in Adrienne's mind that there was more he wanted to say.

“But, it is up to you now, Adrienne. I trust that you will keep on a straight and righteous path and do nothing that might jeopardize your future success so that you may attend cooking school after graduation.” His faced transformed quickly from serious to jolly. “I'm sure Lucas would enjoy your company on a tour of Europe next summer. Think of it as a graduation present to look forward to.’

It was then it hit her. He was trying to buy her promise that she would not ruin Quinn's life. This was all so she wouldn't try to trap him and keep him from Yale in the fall. Sure, he would send her anywhere in the world as long as it was far from his son. His golden son. Sure, he would throw Europe into the mix. Summer in Europe meant she wouldn't be around when Quinn came home from school. Mr. Merritt would have the golden son all to himself for treasure hunting.

“That is a lot to think about. I have to go now, I'm sure Gran will be looking for me.” Adrienne walked backwards towards her house. “Thank you for the kind offer.”

“Have a lovely day, Adrienne.” Mr. Merritt waved and then turned and headed up his driveway.

When he was no longer in sight, she turned and ran home.

Gran was in the kitchen eating lunch when Adrienne came in. Adrienne slapped a smile on and went to the fridge. She grabbed a bagel and popped it into the toaster. She could feel Gran watching her every move.

“Where the hell have you been? Gone all night and day,” Gran said. His voice was flat. Cold.

Adrienne sat at the other end of the table, farthest from Gran and slathered cream cheese on her bagel. Gran eyed her suspiciously. Adrienne noticed grey at her temples. She’d never seen grey hair on Gran before.

She wondered if she looked any different. Was the virginity sign gone from over her head? Was it that obvious? Why did it seem everyone in town knew she’d had sex with Quinn the night before?

“It’s the Merritt boy. I know. I know you are disobeying me. You think just because Gramps is dead I don’t know what’s going on? I know.” She shook her head up and down slowly as she spoke.

“No. I was on the boat. You know Christopher is coming to get it soon. I fell asleep. That’s all.” Adrienne shoved the bread into her mouth.

“You are a liar. You are a bad one at that.” Gran stood, and Adrienne flinched, ready to run if necessary. But, Gran went to the sink and threw out the last sip in her mug. “He is nothing but trouble. He’ll bring nothing but heartache to you. The pretty ones always do.”

Adrienne said nothing. Not wanting to fight and ruin everything that had happened the night before. The whole evening was on a continual loop in her

head. It took everything inside her to ignore the slow-motion movie going on in her mind and listen to and answer Gran.

“Am I going to be punished?” she said in a flat and bored tone.

“I got you a job. I told Stacy Keller that you would come and work in her shop in the afternoons. She’s been looking for someone to run the register.”

Gran’s face puckered up with self-satisfaction.

“Stacy’s shop is creepy. I feel like all those dolls are watching me.”

Adrienne shivered at the thought of having to work in the doll shop all day. “I need time to practice for the culinary competition. If I don’t get everything perfect, I’ll never win.”

“If you’re not sneaking around with those boys, you’ll have plenty of time to work for Ms. Keller and practice.” Gran shook her finger at Adrienne. “I will know if you skip out on work. Stacy will tell me.”

“Whatever,” Adrienne said. It was no uses arguing.

Gran stopped next to Adrienne on her way out of the kitchen. She grabbed Adrienne’s face and made her turn to look her in the eye. “If I catch you with him, you will no longer live under this roof. You hear me? Stop it. End it. You are lucky I am in mourning.”

“Loud and clear.” Adrienne pulled her face out of Gran’s hand.

“You can’t trust boys that look like he does. You are not good looking enough for him to treat you respectably. You look too much like your father.”

Gran shook her head. “It’s a shame.”

Was this is it? Was this all Gran had to give her? Adrienne had stayed out all night, gone behind Gran's back. Gran knew exactly what she'd been up to. Adrienne had suffered far worse for smaller infractions. Maybe Gramps's death had knocked some of the fight out of Gran.

"I have a hair appointment at twelve. Be ready to drive me," Gran said and then left the room.

Wanda's New Do Salon was across from the marina, and as Adrienne stood looking out the big storefront window, waiting for Gran to come out from under the spaceship-like hairdryer, she saw Quinn hauling gas cans towards Mr. Merritt's giant boat. Gran still had twenty more minuets under the dome, and her eyes were, blissfully, closed. Adrienne slipped out of the salon and ran across the street to the docks.

Quinn smiled when he saw her coming up to the boat. She took that as a good sign.

"Sorry about my dad," Quinn said as he looked up at her from the boat deck, shielding his eyes from the sun.

"It's fine. We are still alive." She turned back to the salon. If Gran was to look out the window, she would have seen Adrienne with the enemy.

"Come aboard," Quinn said, offering her a hand. "My dad won't be here for an hour."

She followed Quinn into the spacious quarters. It was cool inside. Quinn went to the fridge and grabbed two sodas, handing one to her. She was hoping he would kiss her hello, now that they were out of sight.

“I’ve been trying to get out of going, but he’s now insisting I go.” Quinn leaned against the counter farthest away from her.

“I don’t think he wants you around me.” Adrienne looked out the window at the rows of boats moored along the docks. She thought about her chat with Mr. Merritt.

“He likes you a lot.”

She felt him come closer. His fingers brushed the charm on her bracelet.

“You know what I mean.” She turned to him.

“I know. I guess we should have been more careful.” He bowed his head and smiled. “My father worries I won’t take over the company. He built the business on his own. It’s his baby. He doesn’t want to see it leave the family.”

“Do you...” she felt the question get stuck in her throat, “do you want to be around me?”

He leaned closer to her and settled his forehead on her shoulder.

“I like being with you, Adrienne,” he said softly. “You make it easy to want to be around you.”

She felt his lips on her neck. They moved up to her jaw and reach her lips. The kiss felt assuring. That last night wasn’t just a fluke. Just as the kiss began to deepen, she remembered Gran was at the Salon.

“I have to go—” She pushed herself away—“Gran’s waiting for me.”

He put his arms on her shoulders and bent down so they were eye to eye.  
“We have to keep this hidden. We can let them know. We can’t tell Lucas either.”

She nodded. She knew he was right.

“I’ll see you in five days.” He looked as pained about the situation as she felt.

He kissed her, once more, before she returned to the salon.

Gran was just emerging from the dryer as Adrienne came in. They looked at each other for a moment, but Gran said nothing. Adrienne took a seat and buried her face in an ancient magazine till Gran was finished.

Adrienne didn’t get to take a nap until almost four that afternoon. She was exhausted from the whirlwind of a night. When she woke it was dark outside. She sat up and found Lucas sitting at her desk. He had turned on the little gooseneck lamp. She wasn’t scared to find him in her room. Some mornings, she would wake to find him at her desk drawing, waiting for her to open her eyes.

“Hey, how are you feeling?” She yawned.

“I’ll live.” He put his feet up on the desk and teetered in the chair. “I’m sorry I acted like an ass last night.”

“It’s okay, but I wish you had told me about your time at the hospital. We are friends. If there is something wrong, I want to help.” She scooted to the end of her bed, and put a hand on his leg. “Did you not tell me because you thought I’d think less of you?”

“Maybe. This move to Florida was supposed to be a fresh start. I thought I could leave my ghosts behind in Ohio. I could be someone new, someone who doesn’t have to fight so hard to keep the darkness away.”

“You can do all that. This is a new start.” She stood and went behind him and put her arms around him. “You just have to promise you won’t drink anymore while on medication. It could kill you.”

“I hate the people Quinn was hanging out with. I thought I had left them back at school I didn’t know they were coming till yesterday afternoon.”

“They are not worth the time or trouble.” She pressed her cheek against his unshaven face.

“I run my mouth. I don’t let them get away with their shit. That’s why we don’t get along. Ann hates me because I couldn’t stand she was with my brother. I was glad when he finally saw the light, and broke things off with her.” Lucas scoffed. He put his hand on top of hers, he brushed his lips across one of her thumbs. She jerked slightly, not expecting such a gesture.

“Let’s go see a movie. It’s only nine, there’s a late show at the Carefree.” She patted his chest and went to her closet for a sweater.

“I’ll meet you at the road with the car.”

Lucas got up from the chair with a bounce. The movie idea seemed to give him energy. He crawled through the window and leapt clear of the cactus Gran had planted below. She watched him disappear out on the beach. A sense of relief filled her, seeing Lucas back to his old self. She hoped that the previous night’s episode would be the one and only.

## Chapter Seventeen

Quinn's week in Nassau was almost over. He would be home the next day. In an attempt not to watch the clock, Adrienne lay on her bed trying, with not much success, to finish a crossword puzzle from the newspaper. She didn't know why she even tried. She rarely got any of them right.

Lucas sat at Adrienne's desk drawing something in his sketch book. As usual, he wouldn't let Adrienne see it. They had been in her room most of the afternoon being lazy after spending the early part of the morning working in the Merritt's kitchen on one of her contest recipes.

When she was done cooking, Lucas watched her swim in the Merritt's pool, but she felt badly he wouldn't come in. They moved to her house. Gran had been picked up by a car packed with old ladies at ten in the morning. It was some knitting circle for widows. She wasn't expected home till dinner. It was the first time Lucas had been in the house, other than her room. She made them lunch. They ate their grilled cheese sandwiched on the porch, playing board games. After that, they gave up on keeping busy.

Adrienne threw the newspaper down onto the floor. She looked up at the corkboard on her wall. It was full of recipes she had written down on pieces of paper. Each recipe got a five second consideration from her. She was still unsure what she would make for the upcoming contest. She had to submit the final recipes in one week, along with a list of ingredients the sponsors would purchase, and have ready and waiting for her the day of the competition.

“You promised me there would nothing about cooking for the rest of the day.” Lucas looked up from the desk, his face half in light from the gooseneck lamp and half in shadow. “We’ve been cooking all week. I think I’ve gained ten pounds.”

“I know, I know,” she said, throwing the paper to the floor. “I need something that will take my mind off of it. And ten pounds is good for you. You need to gain weight, you’re too skinny.”

She got up and roamed around the room, looking for something to occupy her. Her head was full of Quinn and cakes, and more Quinn, and braised lamb shanks. She started to clean out her closet. That terrible thought of Quinn going away to college tried to get in. She wasn’t in the mood to harp over it.

“Alright—” Lucas put down his pen— “you want to go for a walk?”

Adrienne looked up at him, surrounded by boxes and old clothes. She looked out the window.

“It’s starting to rain.”

“Not much. We’ll just go up to the lifeguard tower and back.” He stood and stretched. “You are driving me nuts.”

The rain started to fall harder, and they had to run to the tower and hide under it. A stab of lightning touched down nearby, so close, Adrienne could feel her skin prick from the energy.

“Okay, not one of my best ideas.” Lucas laughed, and Adrienne laughed too.

They sat huddled under the tower, waiting for the rain to let up. Adrienne taught him some silly school-girl hand claps to pass the time. Lucas started a sandcastle. They worked on it diligently for a while, fixing some broken shells to the sides for windows, carving out doors with their fingers. When the castle was perfect, Lucas pulled out his Swiss army knife and carved their initials into one of the wood legs of the lifeguard tower. Adrienne thought it was a lovely gesture. She watched in fascination as Lucas's skilled hands cut the scrolled letters into the plank. She imagined it was Quinn, not Lucas, carving their names there.

"I love being with you. It's so easy, so peaceful to just be like this." Lucas returned to the sand and leaned back on his elbows.

"I'm not sure what I would have done without you and Quinn here. If you and Quinn hadn't been here, after Gramps passed away, I don't know what I would have done. It would have been a nightmare." Adrienne laid back in the sand and looked up at the wood planks above.

"It's not easy over on my side of the fence either. It never has been." Lucas kept his gaze out on the sea.

"You and your father don't get along very well."

"He's a selfish man, only concerned with his image and getting what he wants." Lucas's face grew hard and his tone, harsh. "I've never been good enough for him. None of us are. Even Quinn falls just short of my father expectations."

"You will be free in just one more year. So will I." Adrienne let her mind drift to that distant finish line when she would be free to leave this place finally.

"I'll never be free, no matter how far I get away from him."

“You can’t think like that.”

Lucas turned to her then. She could see the coldness in his eyes.

“He was in the car the night my mother died. He left her there. He got out of the car and left her there. The police found him a few miles up the road. He didn’t even tell them she was back in the car. He was driving. He had been drinking. He hit a tree. She flew through the windshield. He got off with a slap on the wrist and a closed record.”

“Lucas, that is so sad,” she said as she reached out and touched his arm.

“He never seemed sorry about it. He’d kill me if he knew I told you. I hate him for it. For everything he’s done.” Lucas shook his head, not really looking at her, but fixed on a point somewhere off to her side.

“I’m so sorry, Lucas.” She scooted closer to him. “Do you think this is what you struggle with the most? Why you went to the hospital?”

“I guess. I hate not being able to talk about her. He never treated her right, he never treated any of us right.”

He finally looked up at her. She could see the pain in his eyes. He leaned over and kissed her quickly on the mouth. She watched him—wide-eyed—as he kissed her. When he finished, he returned his gaze to the black sea.

“Lucas—”she said, but he cut her off.

“It seemed like a good time.” He looked over at her, smiling now, wiping the slight moistness from his eyes. His eyes were as wide as hers. Those eyes that would never grow old.

“It’s letting up. We should go before it gets worse again.” Adrienne stood.

“Sure,” Lucas said. His brow furrowed. He got up, slowly, and brushed the wet sand from his pants.

Had he expected her to respond in another way? Adrienne reviewed the time they had spent together and she couldn't find any moment where she had given him a false impression.

An hour later, Adrienne sat at the window watching the rain come and go. She was relieved that Lucas had gone home instead of coming back to her room. She didn't know what to say to him. She did feel a certain love for him. She knew that much, but it was the love she would have had for a brother, if she ever had one.

On her desk, Lucas had left her a gift. He was ready to let her see what he had been working on. It was a drawing of Gramps's boat tied to the dock. Even though it was done only in pencil, it was magnificent. Adrienne tacked it to the bottom of her cork board where there was a little space. She turned to look at it every few minutes, its image startling her each time she saw it.

## Chapter Eighteen~ *August 1997*

By August, Adrienne had become accustomed to Quinn's frequent absences. He would be home for a few days, and then, Mr. Merritt would send him somewhere for a weekend or five days. The last trip, to Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, was the longest. Ten days. There would be only two weeks of summer left when he returned. He was due back late that night. Adrienne tried to stay awake so not a moment would be missed, but somewhere around midnight, she gave in to sleep.

Quinn had written her at least a dozen letters while on these various trips. Most were simply notes telling her about the reefs he got to dive. There were always a few photos of the colorful landscapes tucked into the envelope. There were never any lines of love scribbled in the pages. He would say how he missed being there with her, but that was as close to endearments as he got. She didn't complain, she read each one over and over again. It was enough he thought to write, even when the trip was only a few days long. All of his letters resided in an old shoe box put high up on her bookcase.

It was four in the morning when Quinn called to her through the bedroom window, saying he was home from Mexico. She woke instantly. He beckoned her to come with him. She slipped a sweater on and went out the window. She was surprised he led her back to the white house. There was a small room on the right that was built for a live-in housekeeper. Mr. Merritt had yet to find one he liked. No one ever went in there, it was an ideal place for them to go.

Adrienne surveyed the sparsely furnished room as Quinn locked the door behind them. The room had a small twin bed and a nightstand. That was all.

“I missed being here,” he said in her ear as he pulled off her sweater, and pushed down the straps of her top. “I always miss it. Ten days was agony.”

“We should have stayed in my room.” She closed her eyes. Her voice was unsteady as he moved his hands to her hips. “What if we wake up your dad or Lucas?”

“They can’t hear us down here. I don’t want to be quiet.”

That one sentence made her knees fail. She could hear Quinn give a throaty chuckle as he let her slide down to the bed.

Later, when they were spent, and their bodies overlapped, Adrienne tried to capture the feeling of the weight of his body pressing down on her. She recorded his smell, the smooth feel of the skin by his hip. Like his letters, these memories were put away deep inside her for the months he would be away at Yale.

“Will you have to leave again? You know, there’s only two weeks till my school starts and you leave for Yale,” her voice hitched as she spoke. She didn’t want to get emotional in front of him. She had vowed to keep calm and collected. She didn’t want him to see her come undone.

“I made it clear this would be the last trip. Dad agreed, finally.” Quinn rubbed his rough chin back and forth on her stomach. “We should just disappear. Tell your Gran you want to go visit your mom up north.”

She shivered thinking about running away with Quinn. “Where would we go?”

“Christopher hasn’t taken the boat. We could just get lost.” He looked up at her and smiled. The first night they were together played in her mind. She returned the smile.

“I could get away for a day, maybe two. I’ll tell her I’m staying with my friend from school. She lives out west. Gran would never call. She’s got some big event coming up at the end of the week so that will keep her busy.”

“What about your job?”

“Stacy is pretty cool. She understands what I have to deal with when it comes to Gran.” Adrienne kissed his cheek. “And she likes you. She’ll cover for us.”

“I’ll make sure we have food and drinks this time.” Quinn started to kiss the sensitive skin along her rib cage. “We’ll go after your cooking thing. We’ll celebrate.”

“Don’t celebrate just yet. The competition is not till tomorrow.” She had a hard time talking. Quinn’s lips were on the move up her body.

Adrienne left the small bed and went to the window. The sky was turning pink. She quickly got dressed in the dark. As she groped for her shoes, a hand closed around her wrist.

“Where are you going?” Quinn said.

“It’s morning. I have to get back.”

She sat at the edge of the bed, and put her lips against the warm skin on his back.

“It’s not even light out yet,” Quinn said, his voice was hypnotic and nearly overpowered her resolve to go.

“It’s nearly seven. I have to be there by nine.”

“Lucas is going with you?”

“I need him to help me get set up. I can only have one person.” She shook her head as she tried to tie her laces. “I can’t have Gran go. She’ll just make me nervous.”

“And I make you nervous?” he rolled onto his back.

“Lucas has been helping in the kitchen all summer.” She patted his chest.

“You’re not jealous are you?”

“I’m not happy he kissed you.”

“That was weeks ago. And he’s hasn’t tried again.” She looked at his beautiful body, trying to find a reason to stay for just five more minutes. “And he doesn’t know.”

“Know what?” Quinn said, sounding so innocent.

“You know what.”

“Good luck.” He called to her as she opened the door.

She smiled, but knew he probably couldn’t see her in the dark. She closed the door as softly as she could, and crept down the hall to the side door of the big white house.

As she went across the lawn, she saw the culinary competition as a sort of finish line. One of many finish lines she envisioned in the upcoming year. The

CIA was only a few hours from Yale, she had found out. A few hours seemed like a much better deal than the two day drive it would take from South Florida.

That was her new finish line. She knew Mr. Merritt's generous offer to pay her tuition would not include Greystone, the CIA's campus in New York. So what? She would pay her own way. She would make it work, if Quinn wanted her.

## Chapter Nineteen

Later that day, Adrienne looked around her cooking station as she took a deep breath. Everything was ready. She felt good. She knew where everything was. She checked her oven thermometer once again. The oven was heating up nice and even. She noticed none of the other twenty participants seemed to have any concern if their ovens were dependable. She felt the confidence rise. She was light years ahead of most of her competition.

When she was satisfied everything was perfect, she smoothed her apron, closed her eyes, and thought about Quinn. Her body flooded with adrenaline each time she thought about the night before. How was she going to go months without nights like last night? She worried she might go mad with need. They didn't have enough time to get it out of their systems. She needed years, not weeks. Adrienne wondered if she would ever tire of being close to him.

"They said the helpers have to leave in the next five minutes," Lucas said from behind her.

When she turned, she saw Lucas standing there, holding one scrub daisy. She hugged him. They had become so close over the last few weeks. Adrienne felt confident that Lucas was making good strides in finally dealing with his mother's death. They had shared a few more sad moments, but she had been there to help him through. She hadn't seen him take one drink. She hoped that she would be able to tell him about Quinn soon. It was not easy hiding, and she didn't want to

anymore. It was crucial to tell Lucas. Adrienne knew his feelings for her were growing.

“Thank you for helping me. I don’t think I could have done it alone.” She let go of him and took the flower. She placed it on a rolling cart far from the food, but where she would be able to turn to it for assurance if things started to get out of hand. She turned back to him, and mustered a brave smile. “Wish me luck?”

“You don’t need luck.” He shook his head.

“I need a prayer.” She laughed.

He reached out, tugging her long braid. “I know you think you’re not good enough. You think if you do win this thing, and get the scholarship, it will be some kind of supernatural event, but none of that’s true. Look around. You got this.”

She bowed her head. She didn’t want him to see how his words speared right through her like he had x-ray powers that tapped into the dark place, deep inside her, where doubt powered her life.

“I wish I could make you see how I see you. That you are ... the best,” he said, the confidence in his voice growing more sure of its self. She felt his hand drop from her braid. “You are going to ace this because you are better than the rest of these idiots.”

She looked up at him.

“I know your Grandmother makes you think you are a burden, but... you are ... salvation. At least, you are mine.” His eyes were so full of love and devotion. She had never seen anyone look at her like that. His eyes were

remarkable. They were hard to turn away from.

Before she knew what she was doing, she was kissing him. He was the one to pull away this time.

“Go and cook your ass off,” he said softly, near her ear. His voice was filled with some new kind of tenderness she’d never heard before. Adrienne’s heart already began to sink, knowing what she had done, in a moment of impulse, had been wrong.

And there it was. A victorious smile dominated his face. She watched him walk away. She didn’t have time to dissect what had happened. The head chef of the school came in and began his welcome speech followed by the competition’s instructions. She hurried quickly, following the rest of the hopeful would-be chefs up to the small stage area. A ragged lump was beginning to form in her throat as she tried to pay attention to the directions being given.

As soon as they were allowed to return to their stations, Adrienne tried to push what had happened out of her mind. It was easier than she expected once she began to cook. Surprisingly, all she thought about was Gran as she prepped her main dish. It was a country pie full of woodland mushrooms and savory bits of braised beef, all tucked into a delicate crust. It was not as easy to make as it sounded. It was one of Gran’s favorite recipes. She made it for special dinners given by the Junior League.

Adrienne could remember watching Gran roll out the crust, her thick arms flexing as she made the dough thin. Adrienne went step by step, just as Gran did. She browned each cube of beef in a pan and then she added a bottle of cabernet to

deglaze the brown bits that had stuck to the bottom. It was great that the committee allowed them to cook with wine, even though they were underage. Adrienne sautéed the mushrooms and onions in another pan till they caramelized. The smell took her back to those late nights cooking with Gran. Gramps would be there at the table, humming while he worked on a fishing pole, but Adrienne knew he was there because the smell was irresistible. The memories helped her get to the finish line. She hadn't worried about Lucas the whole time. She was glad for that small favor.

It was five by the time she got home. Gran sat in her chair in the living room watching the ocean. The gold medal hung heavy around Adrienne's neck as she sat on the couch across from Gran.

“So, you won, eh?” Gran finally said.

“Not only won first place for the competition, but that means a full scholarship to the CIA next year.” Adrienne tossed the bouquet of roses she was given onto the coffee table and leaned her head back on the couch and looked up at the ceiling. There was a spider up at the eave making a web. “You don't have to worry about having to pay my way.”

“Well, you must be happy with yourself. But, you better remember who taught you how to cook. You would've never got that gold medal without all my help. You should be thanking me.” Gran rested her hand on her chest and prattled on without even looking at Adrienne.

“In my day a woman cooked because they had to keep their families fed.

There were no gold medals for something you were expected to do. Now look, you make a pie, and they kiss your cheeks and throw money at you. What this world is now?"

"Isn't it the same as you competing in all those cooking contests at the fair and the festivals? I'd think you would be proud that I am following in your footsteps." Adrienne burned with anger.

"I would have been a rich and famous woman had I the chance to do what you do. All these chefs now; people look at them like movie stars! I would have been the star if I had a chance. I could have done so much if I had been given the chance." Gran prattled on as if she hadn't heard anything Adrienne said.

It was then Adrienne realized the truth. Gran was jealous of Adrienne's recognition. For some reason, Gran saw Adrienne's win as Adrienne taking something from her. It could be the only reason for the hypocritical reversal of her views on the merit of being a good cook.

"Why didn't you? You wanted to be somebody. You could have done it and been happy." Adrienne saw that Gran's grey roots were now at least two inches long. She was finally starting to look old.

Gran laughed a hard bitter laugh. "I never had a chance."

She turned towards Adrienne, and watched her with a critical eye for a long moment. Adrienne tried to shrink into the couch. How she hated that icy stare of Gran's. How it felt like it went right through you, and there was no place to hide.

“All it takes is one mistake, Adrienne. Boys are very good at making girls make mistakes.” Gran’s gaze returned to the window. “They make you act stupid and then they leave, free to do what they want. Free to see the world. But, the stupid girl is left to pay.”

“I wish you had been helping me get ready for this competition,” Adrienne said. “Do you even know that I cooked your recipes? But, I couldn’t even ask you. All you do is look down on what I am trying to do. I could have used your help. Cooking is the only thing we do together that doesn’t end up in a fight.” Adrienne felt her fist clench as she spoke. “I won’t be like my mother. Maybe you don’t want to see it, but I am working hard to have a good life.”

There was a knock at the door. Gran didn’t turn from the window. Adrienne bolted for the hall, glad to have a reason to leave the room.

She was surprised when she saw Quinn on the porch. He held a pink bakery box in his hands.

“Not for you, for your grandmother.” He stepped past her, not waiting for her to invite him in.

“Are you on a suicide mission?” Adrienne caught his arm, making him stop. She looked down the hall. Gran was still watching the ocean as if she hadn’t heard the knock at the door. “I was just sort of yelling at her. She is not in a good mood.”

Quinn grabbed her, pushing her against the wall where they would be invisible to Gran. He kissed her hard on the mouth.

“You did something really great today. I want to celebrate. All we do is sneak around. At least we can try to strike a deal with your Gran. I want at least one part of my life not in secrete. I want to sit at the pizza shop and not care if someone sees us and reports back to the dragon lady.”

She smiled. It felt like one of those important moments. Quinn was taking a stand. It was a declaration. Sure, it was a small declaration, but one nonetheless. She took his hand and led him down the hall to the living room.

Gran turned as they came in, an amused look on her face as she sized up Quinn. He put the box tied with twine on the coffee table right in front of her.

“So, you finally want to stop being a liar,” Gran grunted. “I told you, I was right. You better not be knocked up.”

“Gran!” Adrienne made her hands into fists.

“Ms. Harris, forbidding Adrienne from seeing us is not working. Adrienne did something really amazing today. We are going to take her out for pizza to celebrate. Just pizza, I promise. I’ll only be around for two more weeks. Then, I’ll be gone, far away for college. So, there is really no good reason for you to worry, is there?”

Two weeks. Adrienne flinched as he said the very thing she could not stop thinking about. That, and kissing Lucas earlier in the day were vying for center stage in her thoughts.

“I don’t have to worry? Ha!” Gran leaned forward in her chair. “What’s in the box?”

“There are a dozen raspberry turnovers from the Bakery Man in this box. I heard they were your favorite.” Quinn kept his eyes on hers.

“Well, I want her home at a decent time.” Gran wasn’t really paying attention to them any longer. She was already removing the string from the box and prying the lid open.

“Thank you, Ms. Harris.” Quinn did a little bow.

Adrienne hurried him from the room back to the front door.

“You are a magician,” Adrienne said as she pushed him out the door.

“Haven’t met a girl yet that could resist a pastry.” He pulled her outside with him when they got to the door, pushing her up against the rail. He held her close, putting his lips to her neck. “Don’t forget to talk to her about your “sleepover”. I’ve got everything ready. We can leave tomorrow.”

“Sounds good.”

“I’ll pick you up in an hour.” He let go of her, and went down the steps.

Gran caught her as she made her way to her room to get ready.

“Don’t you think I don’t know how you feel about that boy,” Gran said between bites of her bribe pastry. “He’s going to ruin any chances you have of making something out of yourself. You are making a mistake. You are going to pay for that mistake the rest of your life.”

“He’s a good guy,” Adrienne said. “Being around him is not going to ruin my whole life.”

“None of them are good.” Gran shook her head and returned to watching the waves. “Not one of them.”

“Well, then you will be happy to know that my friend, Michelle, asked me to come stay at her house this weekend. She is back from summer camp and wants to go shopping for school stuff.”

Gran narrowed her eyes. “Sure, you are going to her house? Maybe I should call her parents and see if you are lying, eh?”

“Go ahead.” Adrienne rolled her eyes.

“Well, I might just call them, so this better not be a story so you can go have sex with that boy.” Gran shook her head and returned to the window. “In my day, when a girl goes missing, she comes home married and pregnant.”

That night, after their pizza outing was over, Adrienne waited in her room willing the very universe to produce Quinn at her window. It had been a great night. It felt good to eat pizza with Quinn and Lucas in front of the whole town. She was relieved Lucas didn't try to do something like kiss her in front of Quinn. It was hard enough that both boys had the same look on their faces as they sat there eating their food and listening to her talk about how the competition went.

She had to talk to Lucas. She had to make him know, she didn't feel the things he felt for her. She wasn't sure if she wanted to tell Quinn what happened at the competition. Adrienne was the one to kiss Lucas this time. He had tapped into something deep a profound inside of her. That was enough to make anyone

do things they may not understand. She wasn't sure Quinn would see it that way though.

But, as Quinn had said himself, he was leaving for college in two weeks. She would be back to school a week after he left. Summer would be gone, and time would start back up again. Where would that leave them? She didn't want to ruin their last two weeks together.

She put on the dress she'd worn to the Fourth of July party. She hoped that Quinn would recognize it. She stood in front of the mirror on the back of the bathroom door watching her reflection as she thought of how Quinn had gotten her out the very same dress, the night they drifted on the boat, out in the middle of the ocean. She felt she looked different. She was not the same tomboy, rough and tumble girl she had been in the beginning of June.

"Come out, little girl," Quinn said in a menacing voice behind her.

It was instant relief to see him leaning against the sill of her window. She went to him, messing his hair with her hand. He grabbed her wrists tugging her to come outside.

"I shouldn't. I'm a good girl." She shook her head.

"That's how I like 'em." He kept the villainous voice. Adrienne laughed as she navigated the opening of the window in a dress.

They went out on the beach up close by the dune where no one could see from the lawns. A lazy yellow August moon began to crawl out of the sea. For a while, they talked in the usual little spurts she was now so accustomed to. Quinn fastened things for her out of fallen palm fronds as he talked about Yale. A hat to

keep from getting moon burned, an angel fish, a star. She tried to learn how to make them, but Quinn seemed to have some special magic she did not. Her creations kept unwinding back into palm fronds. She accused him of using glue, or maybe it was witchcraft? He roared at her, the predator voice coming back, making her get up and run from him. She laughed as she ran, delighted at his lively behavior. It had been awhile since he had seemed relaxed and talkative when they were alone together. The whole day had been full of unexpected surprises. First, him confronting Gran, and now this.

He was fast, but she managed to stay just out of his reach. She shot towards Gran's lawn, Quinn right behind her. The white bed sheets she had put up on the line to dry overnight, glowed in the moonlight as Adrienne weaved in and out of them. She ran through the panels, letting the cool damp of the sheets run across her face. She could see Quinn's shadow cast on the linens. She tried not to laugh, to give away her position, but he always knew right where she was.

Finally, he caught her, and pulled her down to the grass. His face floated above her, blocking out the moon, casting its glow all around his head. She pulled him closer so she could kiss him. The kiss turned needy. The hanging sheets were not the best hiding place, but she didn't care. She just wanted him, right there in the grass, with the wash of moonlight on their bare skin. She pushed down the top of her dress. He smiled down at her, knowing what she wanted. His body was warm against her body, and the smell of the ocean mixed with the sweet scent the crushed grass gave off. The world slept as they approached the finish line. Quinn's hand softly covered her mouth when the aching got too unbearable.

She lay there on his chest, catching her breath once they had exhausted themselves. Something caught her eye out on the beach, a flash of movement near the bushes at the edge of the lawn. Then, it was gone. She thought it must be a Heron. She hoped it wasn't someone walking down the beach. She got up, and pulled her dress back up on her shoulders, hating to ruin the moment.

“Wham Bam, thank you, ma'am,” Quinn said. He sat up, laughing.

“Someone might see us. It's bright out tonight,” Adrienne said. She felt chilly now. “Come and tuck me in?” She pulled him up with her.

“So are we going to get lost tomorrow?” He brushed the grass from his chest, and pulled his shirt back on.

“Yeah, we're good to go.” She grabbed him and pulled him to her. “Can we never come back? I bet we could float all the way to Africa, if we tried. They have great waves there.”

“I could build a hut out of palm fronds. You could cook us fish every day.” He kissed her head. They started back towards her bedroom window. “Let's start with just a boat trip and work our way up, okay?”

She heard him laugh, amused with his own wild imagination. He seemed relaxed and happy. She wanted it to stay this way forever.

Quinn snored softly next to her in the small bed, but she couldn't sleep. Time was running out. She was giddy to start the new day, to get on the boat. They would be

trapped together out on the water with nothing to do but be together. She watched her alarm clock record the minutes until the sky filled with grey light.

Quinn stirred. She watched him get out of the bed, and dress in the silence. She felt his lips, warm with sleep, kiss her on her temple. He paused for a moment, half in and half out of the window.

“You look like Peter Pan, coming to visit Wendy,” she called to him from the bed.

“The boy who never had to grow up,” he said, rubbing his jaw. “If only it was that simple. I’ll see you at the boat at three, sharp.”

She nodded, and then he was gone, leaving the filmy curtains to blow in the breeze coming off the sea.

## Chapter Twenty

Now that it was morning, and Quinn had left, Adrienne could not fall back to sleep. She got dressed and went out on the front porch. She sat in Gramps's chair, listening to the birds make their morning racket. She thought back to the beginning of the summer, when she imagined a time she would be, in that very spot, without Gramps. The birds helped. She found herself out early almost every morning since Gramps had left her.

Gran was wrong. There were good guys. Gramps was one of the best. She shook her head. She put Gramps's Nat King Cole record on and went to the rail, curling her fingers around the peeling paint. She closed her eyes and let the music turn time around. She indulged, momentarily, in the idea that Gramps was there, sitting behind her. She expected him to begin to hum at any moment or ask if she would like pancakes for breakfast. Then, she would feel the coarse grit of the skin of his palms rest on her shoulders. He would call to her, call her, "Dolly," and the aching would end inside her chest.

"Am I interrupting you?" She heard Lucas's shy voice filter into her meditation. Her eyes popped open.

Lucas stood on the shell path by the foot of the steps. It was odd that she hadn't heard him crunching his way towards her. She must have been really gone inside her head. He was wearing the same bright blue shirt and plaid shorts from the night before. His eyes were bloodshot. It looked like he had not slept last night to Adrienne. She worried he'd been drinking again

“Hi,” she said.

“Hey,” he said back, kicking at some bleached ancient remnant of a cockle shell.

She got a funny feeling in her stomach. He seemed like someone new. The voice. The way he would do anything but look right at her. It was all wrong. They had spent so much time together through the summer, she knew all his tells by then. This was not the boy she knew. She didn't like it.

“Want to come and sit with me? I'll make us some breakfast.” She went to the top of the steps.

“I'll sit, but I'm not really hungry.” He made his way slowly up to her.

“Yea, I'm not really up to eating.” She let him choose his seat before choosing her own. She wanted to be facing him. She had to fix things between them and fix them now, but, she hesitated.

“You miss your grandfather.” Lucas looked all around the porch.

“Yeah, we used to sit out here every morning and listen to the birds.” Adrienne picked at her nails. A nasty habit she had. She got up and turned the music off.

“I saw you last night,” he finally said in a quiet, matter-of-fact way.

The funny feeling turned into a knot. “What do you mean?”

“You know. I was coming over to see you. I was going kind of crazy after you kissed me an all.” He gave a short laugh. “I couldn't sleep. I thought it would be romantic to show up at your window in the middle of the night. I guess Quinn beat me to the punch, huh?”

She fought the bile that was rising. “What did you see?”

“Enough.” Lucas wrapped his arms around himself. “I wasn’t trying to be a pervert, but you were out in the grass. Anyone on the beach could have seen. It was hard to turn away.”

“I shouldn’t have kissed you. It was just that you said all those things to me.” She reached out and touched his knee. He flinched, making her retreat. “No one has ever said things like that to me. It was like a wave slammed against me, when you said those things to me.”

“But you want Quinn.” He turned from her. “I’m the one that gets you. I know who you are and still, you want him. Has he ever said those things to you?”

“You know him,” she tried make it light.

“I do.” He looked at her. “I know him well.”

He got up and paced. “I can’t believe I didn’t see it. Maybe I did see it, but I had so much god damn hope it was not happening.”

“Lucas, you are the best friend I’ve ever had.” It was her turn to look away. “I’m not sure how I would have gotten through this summer without you. You helped me after Gramps died and I would have never been ready for the entrance exams without you. You are like my life preserver. I would have drowned without you. What did you say yesterday? Salvation. I feel that way about you too. I’m sorry, but I love him.”

“In the end, even though I’m your salvation, Quinn *gets* you.” He stood. “And I get to watch.”

There was something about his voice. The change it had undergone since last night. She didn't like it. He could flip the switch so fast. This time, she was at fault for the change in him.

"I can't help how I feel about him." She grabbed his shirt.

"Don't worry, I'm used to it." He gave her a brave smile.

"Don't go. Let's go down to the bakery and get something full of fat and sugar and stuff our faces." She pulled him back from descending the steps. "We will get through this. I need you in my life and you need me. We can get through this if we choose to."

"I'm tired. I'm going to go to bed." He was gentle but stern when he removed the hand she clutched his shirt with.

"Okay, but come back when you get up. We'll go somewhere and talk more."

"Sure," he said, nodding his head.

She watched the trees swallow him. Then, she went inside and dialed Quinn's cell phone number. It rang five times then went to his voicemail. She left a short message, asking him to call her when he got the message. She tried to sound ordinary, but something felt wrong. She sat at the kitchen table and waited for the phone to ring.

It was almost two o'clock when Quinn called her back.

"Sorry, I've been at the marina working on the boat. My phone was in the cabin," she heard him say.

“Is Lucas home?” she asked.

“Um, yeah, I just saw him go in the bathroom. I guess he slept most the day.”

Adrienne sunk in the chair. She felt her heartbeat begin to regulate almost immediately. “Good.”

He paused, and Adrienne could hear Mr. Merritt’s voice float over the phone from the background.

“I’ll see you at the boat,” Quinn said softly.

“Okay,” she said softly.

Adrienne met Quinn at the boat at three. He looked excited as she came near. She sat down on the dock, but hesitated to jump down into the boat. Quinn’s face morphed to that of concern when he realized she wasn’t getting on the boat.

“I don’t think we can go.”

“Why, because of your grandmother? Screw her. We only have a few days left. I don’t care if she sends the coast guard after us.” Quinn hit the back of the Captain’s chair with his hand.

“It’s not Gran. Is Lucas home? I was hoping to see him before you and I leave,” Adrienne said as she watched Quinn pace in the boat.

“Yeah, he’s there.” Quinn shook his head. “He was still in bed when I left. He must have really got plastered last night. I thought he was getting better.”

“I’m worried about him,” Adrienne said.

“Don’t be. I know you have been trying to help, and it’s been working.

Your friendship has been a good thing for him.” Quinn put his hands on her legs and looked up at her. “But, you have to know there is only so much you can do for him. He has to do the work too.”

“I don’t think that’s it. I saw him this morning after you left.” Adrienne coiled a long cord of her hair around her finger. She could feel the individual hairs groaning from the pressure she put on them. “He saw us last night. He saw us out on the lawn.”

Quinn stiffened. “Maybe we should have told him. I guess it was stupid to think he wouldn’t find out. We haven’t been too good at hiding.”

“Did you know how he feels about me?” Adrienne’s stomach began to turn and twist.

“He’s not very good at playing it cool.” Quinn pulled her down into the boat. “You must have known too. All the flowers he brought you. How he would follow you around like a puppy, always at your beck and call.”

“I guess I didn’t want to admit it.” She fingered the silver bracelet on her wrist. “I guess I was too distracted by you to really think about it.”

“We’ll talk to him tomorrow. It’s better to let him sleep it off. It will be okay.” He touched her face. “Let’s just go out for a while. We will come back tonight after everyone’s sleeping.”

“I didn’t like his face.” She put her cheek to his chest. “It was frozen in this strange way. Maybe we should go now and get this resolved.”

“Time is...running out.”

“I know. I don’t want to think about it.” She reached up, pulling his face close to hers. “What’s going to happen after you leave?”

His body stilled. She felt like she could hear him thinking of what to say, how to respond to her question.

She kissed him hard. There was time for answers another day. There was time and no time to waste. His body relaxed.

He let go of her and went the wheel. She wrapped her arms around him, burying her face into the small of his back as he pulled the boat out into the Back Bay. Quinn was right, it was their time. They would talk to Lucas tomorrow.

They had to come back to Adrienne’s house around eleven. A storm was brewing. They didn’t want to get caught out on open-ocean. They snuck into her room and collapsed in her bed. Their boat ride had been too short, but they made the best of it.

“Maybe we can sneak away again in a few days,” Quinn whispered in her ear before they fell asleep.

She wasn’t sure how she would ever fall asleep without him next to her.

## Chapter Twenty One

Adrienne bolted up in bed. It was dark and, for a moment, she wasn't sure where she was. She gulped in the air as if she had been smothered while sleeping. Quinn lay beside her, his face down in the pillow with his arm, slack, over her waist. The alarm said five in the morning. A low boom of thunder shuddered far out on the water.

Now she was awake, a strange feeling that what had awakened her had been tapping at her window. The feeling itched at her thoughts. Yes, someone had been knocking, that was it. Not at the door, but at her window, she was sure. It was a lousy feeling—irritating and creepy—to think someone had been at the window. Maybe it had been Lucas, she thought. Her heart sped up. She looked outside at the empty lawn, goose bumps rolling over her flesh in waves. She got up and went to the window above her desk. She leaned out and looked up and down the side of the house. There was nothing.

She got dressed and headed for the front door, unable to shake the feeling that the knocking had come from somewhere. Gran was still asleep upstairs. The house was dark except for the tiny nightlight Gran left plugged in the outlet in the hall. It was there so she could find her way to the kitchen in the middle of the night. Adrienne was glad it was on.

She peered out the kitchen window, straining to see out on the porch. In the yellow overhead light, no one was there. She felt safe enough open the door.

It was then she wished she'd awakened Quinn, but she didn't want to go back till she was assured.

The birds were restless in the trees, waiting for light to fuel their songs. The porch was empty. She stood on the landing and looked hard into the dark mess of branches for any sign of movement. She grabbed the old rusty shovel Gran had propped against the rooting table. It made her feel better about being alone. Still, there was nothing there with her but the waking birds. Satisfied she had only been dreaming about the knocking, she turned to go back inside and wake Quinn.

That was when she saw the single sheet of drawing paper, folded once in half, on the cushion of the daybed.

She went to it, her hand reaching to pick it up as she moved. It was a slow-go to open the rough paper, her hands failing to work right and slipping to undo the crease. Finally it was open, the image revealed. It was her sitting in the sand watching the ocean. It was all in pencil, but that was its beauty. There was an angry storm out on the sea. The clouds were penciled in with harsh slash-like marks. She dropped the paper, watching it float back down to the daybed. She went down the steps to the gravel path. The broken shells dug into the flesh of her bare feet.

When she got to the road she stopped to consider what she was doing. She wasn't quite sure. There was light in the sky, faint but building. She scanned the length of the road for signs. What signs? She wasn't sure about that either. She half expected to find Lucas standing there waiting for her. His sketch felt like

some kind of calling card to her. There was nothing except empty road there to greet her. The wind blew from the west. She looked towards the Back Bay. Black storm clouds were building out over the glades in typical August fashion. It was then that she saw something across the street, in the grass by the path that lead to the docks. She moved towards it.

Lucas's sketch pad was on the ground. The cardboard cover was flipped open and the first few pages agitated in the growing wind of the coming storm. Thunder boomed again at her back, out over the sea. Soon the two cells would collide unleash a great spectacle of wind and rain on Harbor Point. Adrienne could feel the heat caught in between the dueling storm systems. The pressure was trapped and building. Nothing good was coming.

Nothing good at all.

She knelt in the sand, feeling the sting of the scrub daisy's burs sink their teeth into her knees. She picked up the pad and flipped through it. Many pages had been torn out hastily. All that remained were blanks. She touched the jagged edges of what was left of the torn pages and looked up, peering down the path to where the mangroves hid the bay.

She got up and moved towards the shadowed canopy, clutching the book to her chest like a shield. Something warm trickled down her leg. She looked down. She was bleeding. A trail of blood, as thin as a hair, drew a line of red from her knee to her ankle.

When she got to the dock, she stopped. The sun had risen, but the clouds had it hidden. She held onto a branch and stood on her tip toes, trying to decide if

anything looked out of place. The birds had hushed as if spooked. She only heard the movement of the water as the tide turned and began to go out. She put a foot on the first plank. It gave a low groan under her weight. There was something at the very edge of the dock. She didn't want to go, but her body moved automatically towards the one bit of color against the canvas of greys and browns.

Once again, she knelt. Her knees groaned. It was a scrub daisy, crushed and dying. The daisies only grew up in the field. She looked at the water, looking beyond the battered flower in her hand.

That is when she saw him. Those palest blue eyes of his looked up at her through the water.

She didn't move. That first second when realization hit at what she was seeing, she was stone. She could do nothing but look back at him. There was a strange incomprehensible beauty in the way he seemed to be suspended in the water. Trapped in a frozen lake. But his body moved with the current ever so slightly. His outstretched hands swayed, reaching up towards her. He had taken his shirt off. His white skin glowed in the dark water. It was hypnotizing. She reached a hand out, dipping her fingers into the cool water, wanting to take that hand he seemed to be offering her.

She thought of the day she had gone under the water in the bay when Quinn taught her how to dive. The same uneasy feeling of dread filled her as she watched her friend floating there. A fish swam across his face. She snapped awake, pulling her hand back out as if she had touched a flame.

Then, she ran. As fast as she ever had run, she ran up the dock and through the mangroves, bursting into the field before she took a breath. She made it to the edge of the grass before bewilderment set in and she couldn't take another step.

That is when she began to scream.

It seemed days passed as she screamed, standing there at the end of the path where the road met the grass, before she saw Quinn come running, shirtless, from her house. She felt him touch her, shake her, hit her across the face to get her to stop the screaming.

"He's dead—" she managed to get out between the sobs—"In the water."

From seemingly far away, somewhere other than her own body, she saw Quinn let go of her and turn to the Back Bay. She watched him disappear into the groves, knowing what waited for him, knowing what he would find.

And then she was pulled back into her body. She felt herself falling then, and the world went black.

## Chapter Twenty Two

Adrienne woke to find she was in her room. The sky was dark above her head when she looked out the window. Her small desk light had been left on. For the first few moments she stretched and a thin veil of comfort from the long sleep still covered her. She lay there looking out her window. All the traces of peace receded as the reality of Lucas's death came back into focus. She started to cry and curled her body up into a tight fist of a ball. When she closed her eyes, the image of Lucas in the water was burned into the darkness of her mind like a negative.

She heard her door open and she bolted up. Gran stood in the doorway, a hard look on her face. She had a small tray in her hand. A bowl and a glass of water rested on it. Adrienne wiped at the hot tears that dripped down her cheeks.

"I was going to wake you up. You've been out for over ten hours. The paramedic gave to a strong tranquilizer." Gran moved to the desk and set the tray down. "I made soup. You need to eat or you'll end up in the hospital."

"How did I get here?" Adrienne raked a hand through her tangled hair. There was no use trying to make order of the clumps.

"That boy you are so crazy about. He carried you in here." Gran busied herself by picking up the dirty clothes on the floor. She would scoff and shake her head as she moved to a new corner of the room. "He said you fainted. I suppose you don't remember much."

“He’s dead.” Adrienne pulled her quilt around her shoulders and watched Gran tidy the room.

“Ms. Pilchard called and said that poor boy used some kind of weighted belt they use for diving. He tied it around his waist before he jumped in. I guess he wanted to make sure he didn’t come up.” Gran shook her head again, but this time it was pity and not disgust. She picked the tray back up and brought it over to Adrienne’s night stand.

“He hated the water. He would never go in,” Adrienne said. The smell of the steaming bowl of chicken noodle soup made her want to vomit.

“I don’t want you going over there. There’s been police in and out all day and a whole bunch of madness. The TV station was even out there, parked on our property. I had to make them move.” Gran stood over her with her hands cross in front of her, looming in the path of the little light the desk lamp gave off. “They almost took out my prized Oleander.”

Adrienne stood. She towered over Gran. “My friend is dead. All you can think about is your stupid tree?”

Adrienne pushed past her, feeling Gran latch on her wrist. “You can’t stop me. I’m going to see Quinn.”

“It’s when bad things happen that people get stupid. Make mistakes. Don’t go and do something stupid. I won’t let you live in this house if you ruin your life.” Gran held tight to Adrienne’s hand.

Adrienne turned and yanked her arm hard, finally pulling free of Gran. “I

need to see him. He's the only one who can understand. He lost his brother. He needs me."

"They never need us. They just take and take," Gran yelled after Adrienne.

"They take and leave us ruined!"

Adrienne ran out of the room and out the back door taking the beach route to Quinn's house instead of the road. She didn't want to be anywhere near the Back Bay.

She found Quinn sitting on the stoop at the side door. He was smoking a cigarette. She could see the red glow of the embers in the dark.

He looked up as she stopped in front of him. She realized she was wearing a flimsy top and some running shorts. A chill went through her even though it was quite warm out. The grass was wet from the rain, and she had no shoes on. She sat next to him on the step.

"I tried to come and check on you a while ago. She wouldn't let me in."

He flicked the butt of the cigarette out onto the grass.

"I didn't know you smoked." She leaned into him, smelling the faint traces of salt and suntan oil that were permanently embedded in his skin.

"I'm good at hiding things." He stood.

"You don't have to keep stuff from me." She stood up and put an unsure hand on his shoulder, coaxing him to look at her.

He was reluctant to face her. He kept his eyes down on the ground, but he rested his forehead against hers. "I'm not good at letting people in, when it really comes down to it. I put on a good show, I know, but I suck at loving people."

It wasn't what she had been aching to hear him say all summer, but it was enough. She pulled his face up from the ground and kissed him.

He put his arms around her.

"We are leaving tomorrow. Father wants to take Lucas back to Ohio to be buried in the family plot... next to mother," Quinn said. He moved his lips to her neck, pulling the thin strap of her top down, but she could hear only torment in his voice.

"We leave tomorrow night. It was the only flight we could get—" Quinn's voice hitched in his throat—"the coffin on."

She pulled back and looked at him, relieved to finally see his eyes. They were bloodshot. The thin skin around them was swollen. She touched his cheek. He put his hand on top on hers. He had lost so much for someone so young.

"Take me with you," she said.

"I don't want to go."

"I loved him too."

He kissed her hard and full of needing. They stumbled up the steps and through the door to their secret place. He was desperate, she could feel that. If he started to cry, she wasn't sure she could handle it. All she wanted to do was end his pain, make all of this go away.

There was no gentleness, only need. No thought, only instinct. They lay in a panting heap afterwards, their clothes torn on the floor, their bodies bruised and sore.

## Chapter Twenty Three

In the early morning, before the sun, Adrienne knelt by the bed. She was always amazed that Quinn could sleep through her leaving. She watched his eyes flutter behind his closed lids. Maybe he just couldn't handle that time of parting. What would he say to her as she left? He probably didn't know what to say. She didn't want to leave, but she didn't want to be there when Mr. Merritt woke.

She brushed back his long bangs. He groaned softly. A queasy feeling started to stir in her stomach. She couldn't shake the need to stay close to him. A great war waged in her over staying or leaving. It all seemed to be ending.

She kissed him gently on the lips. His eyes opened.

"I promise. I'll come to say goodbye before we leave," Quinn said as he reached out and touched the cold links of the silver bracelet on her wrist. "You should go. Things are going to be tough around here today."

She nodded and stood up. She took a long moment to look at him, making sure to remember each line of his body.

She turned back to him and said, "meet me out at the beach before you go? I'll wait for you."

"Okay," he said, giving her a long, needy look.

## Chapter Twenty Four

That night, Adrienne stood out on the sand waiting for Quinn to come to say goodbye. It was almost ten o'clock. The night was cooled by the stormy day. She wrapped her sweater around her tight as she watched the big white house for signs of life. Light came through the huge two-story windows in the great room. Their flight was set to take off at midnight. They would have to get there early to make sure Lucas was loaded properly. The thought of them rolling Lucas into the luggage compartment, locked in a coffin, started her crying again.

She hadn't really said it yet to herself, but the thought was there, tucked in the back of all the other thoughts she was thinking. Lucas had seen her with Quinn. Lucas had put himself in the water. The equation was simple in her mind. One had led to the other.

Everything seemed to be ending. Finding Lucas in the water was the beginning of that end. She had made up her mind that she would say the things she had been waiting Quinn to say first. There was no time left now. When he came out to say goodbye, she would tell him. They would get through this together. They would be together. Love could be enough.

An hour went by.

The lights in the big white house went out. The sudden darkness startled Adrienne. She ran up the dune and through the backyard to the driveway. She was just in time to see the red brake lights on Mr. Merritt's car as he turned out

onto the street. She ran down the gravel drive and through the gate. The car was already going over the small footbridge and headed for A1A.

She ran to the bridge, but by the time she got there the car had already disappeared. It was useless to run up to the corner. Their car would be long gone by then.

She stood in the middle of the empty road, panting. The few street lamps they had on South Road were not working due to the wild storm the day before. She looked down South Road, eyeing the dim yellow flicker of the lights on the barricade at the end of the road.

He had left without saying goodbye. He left her in the dark, in the night. Alone. The queasiness in her stomach intensified. She ran to the grass and threw up the little bit of food she had eaten earlier. She wiped her mouth, and watched the cars stream by like comets over the bridge on brightly lit A1A.

She stayed there till her whole body shook violently with cold. She stood there, and was sure the true end had come. She would never see Quinton Merritt again.

## Chapter Twenty Five ~ *August 2010*

After Adrienne finally told Kali about Quinn and Lucas, and the summer that changed all of them, the Harris women all enjoyed a peaceful time on South Road. In fact, Adrienne felt as if a huge weight had been lifted from over the whole town. The heat wave, they suffered through the first weeks of the summer, lifted and even the air seemed easier to breathe. Adrienne found a well of energy inside of her, and she got to work bringing the old cottage back to life. Kali surprised Adrienne by joining in. The two of them painted the walls and fixed the windows that refused to open.

Even Gran seemed to be filled with the new spirit that filled the house. She didn't even complain about all the changes to the cottage. Though she never said a thing about the paint or the repairs, Adrienne felt that Gran was pleased to see her childhood home revitalized.

Working at the market with Christopher had been affected too. Adrienne didn't feel the need to keep distance between her and Christopher any longer. After they would close up the market for the night, they took long walks on the beach. Sometimes, they would sit at the island in the kitchen and share a meal, each taking a turn to cook for the other. Every night, Adrienne would fall into bed, exhausted, exhilarated, and eager for the next day.

There was little talk of Quinn during that time. For the first time since that summer, Adrienne felt like she was starting to move on. That her life was not shaped by the history of one summer. Once she made that revelation, she did not

see Quinn's bedroom light go on again. After a while, she even stopped looking to see if was.

And the peaceful spell lasted for several weeks, as July turned to August, and the long hazy final days of summer settled into South Florida.

One day, as she stood at the sink washing the dinner dishes, Adrienne found her thoughts had turned to fall and Kali starting high school. It was Monday, her day off, and they had eaten early. Lately, Gran seemed to tired easily, and was going to bed before eight o'clock most nights.

Kali was out in the water catching a late evening set on Adrienne's old surf board. She had met a lifeguard, and was spending a lot of time with him. His name was Tam. He seemed to be a nice boy, but Adrienne worried. Kali was so young, and soon she'd start high school. Now, Kali had a new boy in her life. It was all going so fast. Adrienne now felt what Gran must have felt when she was raising Adrienne. Those same thoughts Gran must have thought were now her own. Now, Gran didn't seem so crazy, after all.

Kali came into the kitchen, still wet from the ocean. She was out of breath. Adrienne left the sink, alarmed, and went to Kali.

"Mom, I swear I just saw Quinn... my dad. He was out on the lawn of the big white house. I think he was watching me surf with Tam." Kali sat down at the table and looked up at her mother. "I got out of the water and started running towards him, but he went inside too fast. I even went up to the house and banged on that side door, but no one came."

The knot in Adrienne's throat instantly came back. She knew, deep down, that Kali was probably right. That meant that their momentary spell of peace was ending. Nothing was really over yet. There would be no fresh start, there would be no new life, until the mystery was solved. Adrienne put her arm around Kali. She stroked her long shiny black hair.

“Why would he run from me? Why is he scared of me?” Kali furrowed her brow.

“If it is him that you saw, then all of this is probably overwhelming for him. You have to remember, he doesn't know about you, but he is a smart man. I am sure the pieces are all falling into place. He must know I am here, and then he sees you, and you look so much like Lucas.” Adrienne knelt and looked at Kali. “I'm going to find out what's going on.”

## Chapter Twenty Six

The next day, Adrienne waited until Kali was at camp before she went to Christopher's house. It was late morning. They had a new employee working the early shift at the Market so they both were free to work dinner. She'd never been to his house, but she knew the way and she hadn't called to say she was coming. She was taking a chance. Christopher always went to the marina to pick the best of the haul, but that would have been hours ago. She hoped he would be home.

She saw Christopher's Jeep parked outside a classic Key West style cottage, painted a bright cheerful yellow and nestled into the mangroves that hid the Back Bay. The yard was green and well kept. The place fit him perfectly. He had been smart to buy on the water before Harbor Point saw a boom in waterfront property and prices sailed. How had she not been to his house yet? She realized she had turned down each and every request he had made for her to come over in the past month and a half. She almost made a U-turn and went home. She had her reasons for avoiding his house. They all had to do with her vow to move at a snail's pace with Christopher.

She parked behind him and went up the shell rock path to the door. Through the big picture window, they saw each other and Christopher waved. There was no turning back now.

He seemed pleased and amused to see her. He leaned against the door waiting for her to speak first. He was wearing only a white towel wrapped around his waist. His hair was still wet. He looked good.

“Hey,” she said.

“I had made up my mind that you were ignoring me.”

He folded his arms across his bare chest. It was the first time she’d seen him without clothes on. A wild vibration ran through her.

“It was a busy day off. I meant to call you.” She kicked at the gravel underneath her feet.

“I was hoping you’d give me a chance to take you out last night. I was a little puzzled you didn’t call me back.”

“You called? I’m sorry I can’t seem to find my cell phone.” She went up to the stoop, close to his half naked body. “I wasn’t technically ignoring you.”

“You’re lucky I forgive easily,” he said, moving aside to let her in. “And your cell phone is at the market on the counter, but that’s no excuse for not answering the house phone.”

“I was outside most the day,” she said, brushing past him.

His little cozy house was just like she had imagined it. The walls were lined with bookcases choked with books. A lone yellow couch was the only place to sit except for piles of books stacked so you could sit on them. Even the side table was constructed out of books with a glass top.

“I wanted to talk to you before the dinner shift.” She tried to look anywhere but at his towel.

“Why don’t you go into the kitchen? There is a pot of tea on the stove. I’ll go put some clothes on.”

Christopher steered her to the kitchen and then left to change. He hadn't even tried to touch her. It was all she could think about while she was alone, his hands on her body, his lips on her lips.

The kitchen was small, but it had a good flow to it. She could tell that Christopher had redone the kitchen with great care. She pulled the screaming tea kettle off the flame and poured the boiling water into the tea pot ready with loose tea.

She looked out the back door to the yard. She saw he had planted quite an impressive garden. There were spiraling heirloom tomato vines, topiaries of rosemary and thyme. Lush beds of field greens made up a patch work quilt of colors, and endless waves of flowers in every color imaginable spread out all around her. She was impressed. It was something she had not expected from him. Everything he touches seems to flourish, she thought.

When she went around the corner of the house, she saw the *Hello Dolly* up on a boat trailer. The boat looked almost as it had when Gramps bought. All the wood had been refinished. The whole thing gleamed in the hazy late morning light. The navy paint on the hull had been given a new coat, and all the barnacles were gone. The chrome shone brilliant silver. She hadn't thought about the old girl in a long time.

"I've been working on her for a few years now in my spare time. She's been a rather royal pain in the butt. I found her sunk right to the bottom of the Back Bay, still tied up to the dock, a few years back. It cost me a mint to raise her, and haul her here, but I couldn't let her go."

Christopher was right behind her, close enough she could feel his body heat.

“This is why I’ve been trying to get you over here. I wanted to show you. She’ll last a hundred years I think. I should have taken her when your gramps offered, but I just didn’t have the heart to take her away from you.”

“She looks beautiful. I always loved that boat.” Adrienne felt her voice hitch.

They went back into the house. She noticed the photograph on the wall by the small dinette. It was the shoreline. The sun was just coming up out of the ocean. A girl stood with her surf board, just a silhouette really, all detail blacked out by the coming day, but it was undeniable, it was her. Adrienne went to the photo. She had to be sixteen or maybe seventeen. It was beautiful. Adrienne touched the glass.

“Now, I’m embarrassed,” Christopher said behind her.

She turned around to him.

“When did you take this?”

“I didn’t. Your grandfather did. I found a roll of film at the market a few years back, after you left. I had it developed. This was on it.” Christopher sat down at the small table and motioned for her to do the same. “It’s exactly how I see you; facing the sea, ready to tackle any wave that comes. I hope you don’t think I’m a lunatic for having it.”

“No.” She went to him, sitting on his lap, wrapping her arms around him. He looked up at her. She pushed his glasses back up on his nose and kissed him

softly. It was a relief to dissolve the space between them. This was happening, she told herself and this time she didn't hold back.

Christopher pulled her up with him. A warm breeze came in through the window above the sink. She could smell the herbs in his garden and the faint tendrils of exhaust from a passing boat out on the hidden bay. She could hear the old tin clock clatter the seconds off above the back door. A cricket chirped somewhere behind the fridge.

She looked at him. His green eyes were there. He bent down slightly and put his warm lips to hers. He smelled like a hard night in a kitchen and saltwater. She was amused by how she dug her fingers into the meaty parts of his back. Surprised by how she hoisted herself up on him, wrapping her legs around his waist. He sighed softly as he wrapped his arms around her, and then carried her down the hall to his tiny bedroom.

She didn't hesitate or over-think any of it. His mouth left little hot patches along her neck that cooled as he moved down to her shoulder. She felt his lips touch the base of her throat. She had to breath deep and let it out slow. She could feel the heat build in her toes and rise through her body, curling and blistering.

It was surprising, being with Christopher. She hadn't expected the reckless abandon, the primal instincts that came over her. She lay there a few hours later, drained, loose. Like every joint had come unhinged. Every bone disassembled and reconfigured. The light looked different coming through the small window in his bedroom. She watched him lay beside her—his eyes closed—and she

contemplated leaving. What was she supposed to say to him now? How could she look him in the eye without him knowing he had unglued her and then reshaped the pieces in some strange new form?

Too late. He turned towards her and smiled. She felt his hand on her face, they were rough from the rough work of fishing and cooking, but they felt good. He pulled her closer to him. The heat returned instantly.

“I wish we didn’t have to go to work. I could stay here all day.” His breath was warm against her neck.

She pulled back, remembering why she had come. The mind-blowing sex had delayed what was inevitable. She looked at Christopher quizzically not sure if she wanted him to answer her question truthfully or lie.

“Is Quinn in Harbor Point? Is he here now?”

She felt his muscles tense against her skin. She knew the answer.

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t you tell me that first night I came to see you? You knew then, didn’t you? When I asked about the house?” Adrienne got up out of his bed and groped for her clothes.

He stood behind her, touching her, ever so lightly on her shoulder, with just one hand, like she was something delicate and had to be handled with care.

“I knew it would make all this, coming back here, taking care of her, harder,” he said.

“I’m not a child. I deserve to know these things.” Adrienne ran her hand through her hair and moved away from Christopher, pacing the small footprint of

his bedroom. “He knows I’m here, doesn’t he? He’s seen Kali, he’s probably struggling to put it all together. My God! He’s been here this whole fucking time!”

“All I know is that he is there. He comes and goes. Here sometimes and then gone. It’s his house.” Christopher sat back down on the bed. She could feel him watching her pace. “I don’t talk to him. I just see him from time to time, walking on the beach. He keeps to himself.”

“How long has he been here?” She didn’t want an answer.

“The first time I saw him again was about a year after you left.”

Christopher bowed his head. “It was right after Rachel lost the baby. I was out on the beach early one morning, you know, contemplating life and whatnot. I saw him.”

“Gran knows too.”

“Everyone knows. No one talks about it.”

“No one talks about it? This fucking town talks about everything! And no one talks about him!” Adrienne smacked the bathroom door with her hand. It stung, but she didn’t care.

He got out of the bed and came close, testing the water to see if she would allow him to comfort her. “I was going to tell you.”

“Did you think I’d run up to the house and throw myself at him? The very man who abandoned me and now might be kind of crazy hermit?”

Adrienne threw her head back and laughed. She pushed his arm away when he tried to touch her.

“It’s not your place to keep this from me. Spending a handful of weeks with me and now... this—” she pointed to the bed—“does not mean you have some kind of ownership over me and what I know or don’t know.”

“I should have told you, but I didn’t want you to run away,” he said, his tone, defeated, deflated.

She stood there, still, unmoving, watching him. She knew, deep down, that he was a good man. In all the world, Christopher was, down to the bone, the very best kind of person. She knew this. She had known this even, as a kid, but at that moment there was no reasoning with her.

On the short drive home, she kept looking in her rearview mirror, expecting to see his Jeep behind her, following her home. For some reason, she expected him not to allow her to leave without a fight, but his Jeep never appeared.

She pulled into the driveway and turned the car off. She looked in the rearview mirror one more time. This time, she almost hoped he would be there, pulling up behind her.

But there was nothing behind her but the road. She leaned her head against the wheel and closed her eyes. She stayed there for a while until her breathing slowed, the urge to cry subsided. Then, she got out of the car and went inside.

## Chapter Twenty Seven

After returning home from Christopher's, she tried not to think about the fact that Quinton Merritt was lurking somewhere in the big white house right next door to her. She made it through the rest of the day by busying herself on ignoring Christopher's calls and finishing the painting in the den. But by the next day she could hardly keep herself from the window in her bedroom. Kali called at noon from camp to ask if she could go over to her new friend's house for dinner. Gran appeared to be committed to sleeping in the big chair by the bay window for the remainder of the day. Adrienne paced by the back door trying to convince herself she was not ready to face Quinn, even though there was plenty of opportunity to go.

She put a big pot of soup on to simmer away for a few hours. She cleaned the bathrooms; she swept the sand out of the floorboards downstairs. She left a message with Phillip—the new counter helper at the market—that she was feeling sick and to tell Christopher she would not be in for the dinner shift again. She hoped Christopher would give her some space, and not come over.

She gave Gran a bowl of the soup, and put the rest in the fridge. She couldn't eat anything. An hour after that, she caught herself leaning out her bedroom window, once again, watching the house next door for any signs of life. She went downstairs, ready to tackle the hall closet. She found Gran asleep in her chair. The soup was drained from the bowl. Adrienne was happy she had eaten.

Then, Adrienne was outside, moving through the grass to the place where the wall was broken. She slipped through the crack and made her way, through deep shade of the late afternoon, to the big white house.

She knocked as hard as she could at the double front doors of the big white house, then, waited for him to come and let her in. After twenty breaths, the foyer light came on. Ten more breaths, she heard the bolt slide free.

Then, his face appeared, looking back at her through the opened door. He had cut his hair short, almost spiky. A faint unshaven shadow bloomed across his chin. There were bruise-like circles under his eyes. He wasn't so thin anymore, yet these new qualities only made his beauty more apparent, more heartbreaking. It was enough to make her shiver.

“You're cold.” He reached out and took her hand and gently pulled her inside the house.

She let him lead her into the unlit house, never taking her eyes off of him. Her breathing was erratic. She feared she might pass out if she didn't get it under control. It was terrible. After all that time, Quinn could still make her feel so scattered. They had said hardly a word to each other, only mere moments had past, but it did not matter. Suddenly, she was seventeen and utterly under his spell.

She sat at the big kitchen island as Quinn put a kettle on the stove for tea. It was like no time had passed and she had been in his arms just the day before. She watched every move he made, comparing her mental notes of him years ago to the man he was now.

He put a steaming cup of tea in front of her and then took a seat across the island from her. She marveled at his face. She felt a sense of relief to see it once more. She had been rehearsing what she was going to say to him, but now it was all forgotten from one momentary touch and a cup of tea.

“I knew you’d come back. I knew you’d figure it out pretty fast after you were here last.” He smiled and bowed his head. “I was hiding in the downstairs bathroom while you were here. What a brave guy, huh?”

“It’s a good thing I didn’t have to pee.” She twirled the mug in her hands.

“Yeah,” he said, looking out the pass-through, anywhere, it seemed, but at her.

“There are no clothes in your room upstairs, just one shirt. It was enough to make me believe no one was living here,” Adrienne said as she thought about how she had sat up in his room alone with that shirt in her hands.

“I use my dad’s room when I’m here. If you had gone in there, you would have found me out sooner. I don’t use most of the rooms. In fact, It has been years since I’ve been in many of them.”

She wondered if that mean Lucas’s room. She wondered if that meant their secrete room, the butler’s quarters, but she didn’t ask.

They grew quiet again and sipped their tea purposefully.

“Do you hate me?” Quinn said. He came over to where she was sitting and slumped into the chair next to her.

“No. I think I understand why you... left. I’ve had a lot of time to think about it.” She felt that familiar tug to move closer to him as if he were gravity itself.

“She’s mine?” It wasn’t really a question. “I’ve seen her on the beach and I just knew.”

“Her name is Kali.”

“Kali,” he said. “I like it.”

He looked at her, and she felt naked. She wasn’t seventeen anymore. And even at her peak, she wasn’t anything special. What did he see? Did he see the fine lines that were gathering at the corners of her eyes? Did he see the few strands of grey slinking their way through her hair? A body ravaged by pregnancy and too many hours spent in hot greasy kitchens?

“You knew about her that night. You knew you were pregnant? Is that why you wanted to come with me?” He reached out and placed his hand on top of hers.

And his touch brought those last few days of the summer back to her. It was funny, as she thought about them, how the best and most horrible days of her life were commingled into some kind of terrible soup. All she could think about was watching him drive away without saying goodbye.

“I would have gone anywhere with you.” She pulled her gaze away from him. “I didn’t know for sure, yet. But, I had a feeling.” Adrienne wiped the wetness from under her eyes. “We never were very careful. And I started throwing up. At first, I just thought the throwing up was from all the guilt I felt.”

“Why did you feel guilty?” Quinn’s brow furrowed.

“Lucas. He went into the water because I couldn’t love him enough.”

Adrienne let out a sob.

“Adrienne, it is not your fault he killed himself.” Quinn brushed her loose hair away from her face.

“He saw us out in the yard the night before. He stood there and watched us having sex right out where anyone could see.” Adrienne could see Lucas’s face in her mind. “You should have seen him. He was broken. I shouldn’t have let him leave.”

Quinn stood up and held out his hand for her. “Come with me?”

He led her up the stairs. His hand was softer than Christopher’s. It was her only thought as they made their way to the landing. She remembered his hands being rough from being out on the water so much. Now, they felt as if he hadn’t been diving in a very long time. She wondered if he had been back out since Lucas died.

Quinn let go of her hand, and opened Lucas’s bedroom door and stepped aside so Adrienne could go in first. She went into the dark room. When she turned on the light, the room burst into clarity. What she saw, nearly brought her down to the floor.

All the walls were covered with drawings, paintings, sketches. It looked like the total of all of Lucas’s work; each one in various stages of completion. Some were complete and full of vivid swaths of colors. Some were mere pencil outlines on paper. Most of them, from what she could see, were of South Road

and Harbor Point. She was in most of them. Some were only of her. The room was a museum of their summer.

She slowly walked around the room looking at them all, giving each one a long moment of consideration. In them, she looked pretty, far prettier than she ever thought herself. How young she looked. How sad her face was. There was even a whole wall of drawings of the practice meals she made for the culinary competition. He had chronicled everything.

The one that made her stop, was the sketch of the point. It was barely outlined, but she knew instantly what it was. The sky was a swirl of stars. It was the night they had spent out on the beach for her birthday. In it, she stood right at the tip of the point, her toes just touching the water. The stars reflected in the sea so it looked as if sky and ocean were one. It was just how she imagined the edge of the world to be like. She touched the paper, her finger tips smudging the sky. She rubbed the pencil dust between her thumb and finger. Lucas had known her so well. The sketch felt like a piece of her rendered on paper.

“Could I have this one?” Adrienne couldn’t pull her eyes from the drawing. Lucas had been an amazing artist.

“You can have any you like. I couldn’t take them down. I made my dad promise to not take them down. Once Lucas was gone, Dad was never the same. I was glad he listened and kept Lucas’s room as he left it.”

Quinn sat down in the chair at the draft table. There were still containers of Lucas’s art supplies lining against the back.

“He told me soon after we met you that he thought you were special. I saw that deepen as the summer went on, and he spent more time with you. But, I took what I knew I could easily get. I took you and knew he wanted to be with you.”

He looked up at her, realizing what he had just said. “I didn’t mean it like it sounded. I saw what he saw in you, I couldn’t stay away from you.”

“Why? I was nothing special and you. You were the boy I should never have had a chance with.” She kneeled on the floor rug in front of him, not wanting to sit on Lucas’s bed.

“You don’t see it right.” Quinn stood and went to the window. “He never told you why he was afraid of the water, did he?”

“No, but I remember you said it was because of something that happened when he was a kid.” She tucked her legs underneath her.

“My father decided when Lucas’s was four years old that it was time for him to learn how to swim. It was summer. Since I was older, I already knew Father’s method for teaching little boys how to swim. Luckily, I always seemed to be a natural at anything that had to do with the water. Lucas was not the same. He was always smaller, weaker. He was sick a lot as a kid. He always had ear infections, bronchitis or asthma. I used to call him the walking medicine cabinet.”

Quinn smiled as he remembered. He turned from the window and came over to her. He sat down next to her. They both leaned back against the bed frame. She watched him look around the room at his brother’s things as if this was the first time he’d been in the room.

“I remember watching my father throw Lucas in the water. We were at our house in Bimini. He just tossed Lucas into the ocean from the end of the dock. It wasn’t too deep, but Lucas wasn’t very big. I remember watching him try to stay above the surface of the water. I can still hear him scream when his head would break the surface. I tried to dive in after him, but father held me back. He struck me across the face. I fell down on the wood planks. He told me I better not dare interfere.”

Adrienne touched his shoulder. She could hear how tight his voice was becoming. She couldn’t imagine the horror of being there and watching Lucas, so young and frightened, struggling to stay above the water.

“Lucas stopped coming up. That was when Father jumped in and pulled him out. He had to pump on Lucas’s chest to get him to breathe, and cough out the water.”

Quinn closed his eyes. She saw he was shivering. She pulled the quilt down from the bed and draped it over Quinn’s arms.

“I lay there, my face pressed to the hot wood of the dock, watching Lucas’s face, waiting for his eyes to open. I reached out and took his limp hand, and I prayed that he would live. It’s the only time I really ever did pray. All the time at church, I only faked it. Then he coughed and the sea water dribbled out of his mouth, and he opened his eyes and looked at me.”

He turned to her and they sat there with their heads on Lucas’s bed watching each other. Their hands found each other, and they laced their fingers together in the space between them.

“My father left us there on the dock under the hot sun and we stayed there for I don’t know how long, just looking at each other, my hand still holding his. Lucas never went back in the water after that day. Father never spoke about it. Lucas and I never spoke about it either. This family never talked about anything. Maybe Lucas would be here still if we had talked more.”

Adrienne thought of Lucas under the water with the dive belt wrapped around his waist. She thought of how his hands seemed to reach up towards the sky. She didn’t want to think about it, but it was all she could think about as she stared at Quinn’s face, knowing that he had to see Lucas that way. She knew that Quinn must be thinking the same thing she was.

“When I ran down the dock that morning and saw him in the water like that, I wasn’t surprised.” Quinn pulled his gaze from her. “I never told you any of this. It was hard for us, growing up. It was always harder for Lucas than me. I guess if I was honest, I would have to say that the thought crossed my mind Lucas might kill himself one day. I was a fool to ignore those feelings.”

“Tell me now. Tell me everything,” Adrienne said, touching his face. She made him turn to face her. “I want to know.”

“I jumped in and pulled him out and laid him on the dock. I tried to do CPR on him, but it was too late. I knew, before I started he was gone, but I had to try. He was so cold.” Quinn took a deep breath. “I lay there just like we had that day in Bimini. I lay there on my stomach watching his face, waiting for him to open his eyes even though I knew they would never open again. I guess I went a little crazy.”

“We all did.” Adrienne felt the crying coming. She fought to keep it at bay.

“We were never good enough for him. I guess that is why Lucas and I were drawn to you. We may have suffered differently, but we all suffered. We were kindred.” Quinn rested his head in the palms of his hands.

“He said that to me once. Lucas. The first day we met. He said we were kindred.” Adrienne looked up at the ceiling. “Then, when he told me about your mother...”

“I never blamed you for his death.” Quinn touched her face, bringing her attention back to him, trailing his thumb down the side of her cheek. “I knew you kissed him. He told me the second he got home from the competition. He always told me everything.”

“But I found the flower and all these sketches. He was acting so strange when I saw him the day before. He was so hurt and angry when he found out about us.” Adrienne shook her head.

“Maybe it had its part, but it wasn’t the only reason he killed himself. Lucas struggled with depression his whole life. My father did nothing to help him. My mother was too scared, when she was alive, to help him and defy my father. Sure, they put him on medication, but it was shameful to my father that Lucas had problems. They both ignored it and never talked about it. They never tried to help Lucas get better. Then, when my mother died, the way she did, things got worse and again, we were never allowed to talk about that either. My father thought if he

was tougher on Lucas it would make him a stronger man, get him over the things he couldn't get past."

Quinn got up, hovering above her. He took off his shirt and let it drop to the floor. She looked up at his naked chest. A flash of heat blossomed inside her. It was a natural reaction, even after all the years, to seeing his bare skin. She stood, they were only inches apart. He bowed his head and turned around slowly so his back was to her. She saw his shoulders slump as if the weight of exposing himself was too great to bear. The scars on his back had faded over the years and now only shimmered slightly in the light as his breath moved inside his chest. She touched one of the marks with the tip of her finger.

"They aren't from a reef accident like I told you." He ran his hands through his hair and looked up at the ceiling. "My father thought the way to make us men was through physical pain. You never saw Lucas without a shirt on because he felt the wrath more than me. I could always tell the reef accident story since I surfed and dove, but he had no excuse for his marks. If anyone put him in the water, it was my father. I guess Lucas just had enough."

She traced the longest line, one that ran from his left shoulder blade to the dimple at the base of his back, just above his hip. She felt him shiver as she touched him. She leaned forward and pressed her lips to the scar. Then, she kissed another. She closed her eyes and felt how warm his body was. She could smell that scent of the ocean and coconuts that would never fade, no matter how long Quinn strayed from the water. She heard him groan. It sounded like a mixture of

pain and relief all at once. Her heart was hammering so badly she thought he must have heard it in the quiet room.

“I did come back,” he said, almost a whisper. “I was too late. You were already long gone.”

She started to cry. She leaned her head against his back and beat her fists into his flesh. He turned around and pulled her into him, wrapping his arms around her, holding her tight.

“I should have tried harder. I knew where you were all along. I just couldn’t do it. The years just went by and I kept hiding.” He buried his face into her hair. She could feel him crying, hiding in her tangles. “I should have done more to help him too. I should have told him how I felt about you. Look what I have done.”

They kissed. It was nearly automatic. “Not in here,” he said, pressing his face next to her ear.

## Chapter Twenty Eight

They moved to Quinn's room bumping into the hallway walls, tripping over each other's feet as they went. When they got to his room, she could see the darkness draining out of the sky through the window. It was almost dawn.

A part of her felt like a missing piece had finally been found and fitted back into place as their bodies wound around each other. It was so easy, so familiar. But a small part—which at the moment was quiet, but gaining voice—the part that was heartbroken and wanting to be heard, would not let her fall into the trap. She wanted to fall, she wanted to have the trap outsmart her, she wanted to command this growing portion of her conscience to be still and silent, to wait till later, and to let her have the now. She wanted her mind to let her just be in that moment for that moment's sake and to leave the worry for a different moment. She could live the lie till morning and then she would face the truth, but the truth would not lie in wait.

She pushed Quinn away from her. As he drew back, she could see he knew it too.

“We can't do this,” she said as she tried to fix her shirt. “That part of our lives is over.”

“I know.”

The truth was they couldn't get back what they once had.

All Adrienne could think about was Christopher and the last day she spent in Harbor Point.

*August 1997*

Three weeks had gone by since Quinn left Harbor Point to go back to Ohio to bury Lucas. She hadn't heard a word from him. Adrienne hadn't expected him to call or write, but when she tried his cell phone number and found it was already disconnected, she knew it was over for good. She had even called the big white house. The small housekeeping staff did not answer. She watched the house from the beach for any signs of life. The lights never came on.

It was on the day that marked three weeks since Quinn left that Adrienne found herself sitting on the toilet in her bathroom trying to keep the room from spinning. The EPT test she held in her hand had two blue lines. That would explain the desire to throw up all the time, she thought to herself. She had suspected for weeks, but ignored her suspicions. Now it was real. There was a little life swimming around inside of her. In her half-crazed state, all she could think about was how half of the little thing was Quinn's and it felt like the closest thing to a life-raft she was going to get.

The first thing she did was throw out the sleeping pills the doctor had prescribed. Sleep had been a luxury she was not afforded in the days after losing both Quinn and Lucas. She threw out the anti-depressants too. She worried that the drugs might have hurt the baby. She would have to call the doctor immediately and get an appointment.

Then, she took a shower. The first one she had in a week or more. The hot water felt good. It seemed to wake her up out of the fog she'd been in for what

seemed a lifetime. She couldn't stop touching her belly. In the span of a half an hour, her whole life had taken on new meaning. Nothing else matter but to keep this new person inside her alive and healthy. To do that, she knew she had to pull herself together.

"I'm pregnant," Adrienne said to Gran just an hour after the EPT test changed her life. There was no use trying to hide it, and she didn't care anymore about anything but the baby.

Gran was sitting on the porch doing a needlepoint project. Adrienne stood at the door waiting for Gran to respond.

Gran stopped sewing, her eyes growing wider by the moment as she looked up at Adrienne.

"How could you do this to me?" Gran finally said. "How could you make the same stupid mistake your mother did?"

The rage was building. Adrienne could see it in Gran's eyes. Gran stood and threw her canvas out onto the lawn. Adrienne backed up into the house a bit.

"I have sacrificed so much of my life to ensure you wouldn't fuck up like you mother did. And what do you do? You fuck up your life just like she did." Gran's hands failed in the air as she yelled.

"I want you out of this house," Gran said and then went down the steps and left Adrienne alone on the porch. "Today. You should not be here when I come back."

Christopher showed up as Adrienne finished packing up the back of Gramps's old Ford truck. She hoped that she'd make it to Grayton Beach before the truck died. She hoped Gran wouldn't be too pissed she'd taken the old thing. Gran hated the old Ford anyway, Adrienne reasoned.

"This is a surprise. I'm glad to see you are back in the world,"

Christopher said as he leaned against the rusty red flatbed. "Where are you going?"

"I'm knocked up, and Gran kicked me out so I'm getting the hell out of here." Adrienne slammed the tailgate shut and hooked the bungee cord across the gate for extra insurance. She didn't want to lose what little belongings she took with her.

"Where will you go?" he asked. She could tell he was concerned.

"My mom has a condo up in Grayton Beach. She never uses it unless she has some layover till her next sailing gig." Adrienne sat down on the stone bench by the edge of the driveway. "I'm going to look for a job cooking up there. It's a big touristy spot. I'll get my GED, and when the baby comes, I'll figure out what to do next."

Christopher had been more visible since Lucas's death and Quinn's disappearing act. He came by the house almost every day. He would chat with Gran. He always brought them things from the market since Adrienne spent most her time in bed and Gran couldn't drive well. He had even cooked them dinner a few times.

He was easy to be around. He would sit with her out on the porch some days. He never prodded her to talk. He didn't seem to mind her silence or that she wore the same clothes for several days in a row. He would put Gramps's old records on and read while she would stare out at the yard. For some reason, his presence was comforting.

"You should stay, Adrienne," Christopher said. He sat next to her and put his hand on top of hers. She was a bit surprised at his touch.

"You can't just run away. There's the little apartment above the fish market. I'm buying a house so I'll be out of there. It could be all yours. You could stay there and finish school. I'll help you out anyway I can. I'm sure your Gran will come around. This will blow over eventually."

"I can't." Adrienne shook her head. "I don't belong here. I'm done."

She got up and went to the driver-side door. He followed her, his brow furrowed. He looked like a man out of options. He leaned once again against the truck, trying to pull some sort of blocking maneuver so she wouldn't be able to get in the driver seat.

"Will you come back?" he said. She never noticed till that moment that he had green eyes. They were beautiful. "This is your home. Your Gran is the only true family you have."

"No." She shook her head.

She pushed him aside—he didn't protest—and got in. She turned the ignition on, and the old Ford roared to life. In the side mirror, she saw Christopher move away from the truck.

“Bye,” she said as she eased the truck back down the driveway.

He followed her down the driveway, but stopped in the middle of South Road. She watched him from her rearview mirror, his hands in the pockets of his cargo shorts, watching her leave. She watched him till she made the turn and went over the bridge towards A1A and he disappeared.

\* \* \*

Adrienne shook off the memory. She looked down at Quinn. His was watching her. He seemed different now from when she had first arrived at the house. He looked older, no longer the boy she loved. They couldn't re-make what they once had in childhood. In childhood that deep love would live forever, she knew. The thought gave her some comfort. It was all so heartbreaking. All she wanted was to be able to go back to that summer, to reclaim that time and re-shape it—to love Quinn—but, it couldn't be done.

“How did your dad die?” she said it in a low tone even though there was no one else in the house. It felt like something to be said quietly.

“I'm sure you heard all about it already.” Quinn rolled onto his back and tucked his hands under his head, looking at the ceiling. “He was diving, looking for that damn wreck. He started to come up too fast. People don't understand how all that nitrogen affects the brain. He must have gotten confused, and his spear gun went off.”

“Were you with him?”

He turned to her and studied her face for a moment. “Yes.”

“He was a great diver. It's hard to believe that he would die that way.”

Quinn turned away from her, returning his gaze elsewhere. “The sea can be unforgiving. It can take the expert. It can take the fool. It takes what it wants.”

He finally turned to her, he looked so tired.

“Honestly? He was never the same after Lucas's death. It really shook him up. Maybe, for the first time in his life, he truly saw the world and realized that it did not revolve around him. He got quieter every year that went by. We hardly

spoke after we buried Lucas. I think he had had enough. I think he just couldn't go another day living with what he had caused. He had two lives to carry. That's a heavy load."

She searched for the words to say next.

"Come and meet her when you are ready." She bent and touched his face for just a moment. "We're just next door, you know."

"I don't know what to say to her." His deep blue eyes were wide and searching in the dim-lit room.

"Tell her everything," Adrienne said as she moved away from the bed.

"Show her Lucas's room. She paints. Get to know her."

"This isn't going to be easy," he said as she was walking out of his room.

She turned to him. "What has ever been easy? All we can do is try to carve out a little place for all of us."

## Chapter Twenty Nine

Two days later, she found Christopher out back of the fish market fixing the motor on one of the live wells. Half of his body was missing through a little door at the bottom of the tank stand. She stood there waiting for him to fully appear. When he finally emerged, he smiled when he saw her. It was a sheepish smile, but he looked pleased that she had come, and he hadn't been the one to go find her.

“I'm sorry I sort of abandoned you, and the restaurant, for the last few days.” She held tight to the chain link fence for support. “It's been a rollercoaster.”

“We've survived okay, but you have been missed.” He sat on the concrete floor with his arms resting on his knees as he looked up at her. There was a smudge of black grease on his jaw. “I'm sorry. I should have told you about Quinn as soon as you got back into town.”

She sat next to him on the ground and wiped the grease mark away with her hand. “I was thinking about the day I left here.”

“I remember,” he said. She could see the worry on his face. “Did you see him?”

“Yes.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

She looked at him. Her heart did little flips around her chest. “You need to know that I think I might be in love with you.”

He smiled and bowed his head a bit. “That’s a really good thing because I was going mad wondering. I didn’t want to be the first one to say it.”

It was crazy to know that, in such a short time, she was falling for him. It was a feeling like nothing she’d ever felt before.

“We kissed. Things started to get out of control. It was such an overwhelming rush of emotions. I stopped it before we went too far.”

It was her turn to bow her head. She didn’t want to see his reaction.

It was quiet. So quiet she could hear the cars rushing by out on the street. She looked up and found him sitting against the tank. He had taken his glasses off and was slowly wiping them with a piece of cloth.

“I’m telling you because I want to be honest and I don’t want to keep secrets from you or anyone anymore.” She wished he would look at her. “We had a difficult talk, we both were...are still hurting.”

He put his glasses back on and got up off the ground, wiping his hands on the back of his jeans. She got up too and followed him back inside the market. He went to the fridge and got an ice tea. She watched him drink it.

“It made us both realize that what we had is gone.” She stood in the kitchen not knowing what to do with herself. “All I could think about was you and that last day and how it was you there with me. It’s been you all along.”

“How “out of control” did things get?” he asked. He leaned across the counter as if he didn’t have the strength to hold his body up.

“I told you, I stopped things before they went too far. I know that’s no excuse for it, but we both realized it was simply a reaction. There was nothing

behind it,” she said, leaning across the opposite side of the island counter, their fingers only inches apart. “You have every right to be mad, but I hope you can forgive me. I hope you’ll see how something like that could have happened and give me another chance with you.”

He backed up, leaning against the sink, like he didn’t want to be close too her.

“I wasn’t prepared for you to affect me like this. But you come back and hit me like a bullet,” He said. “I started thinking I might be able to wait for you to work things out. I thought I had it in me because I started hoping you’d want to stay here once you got used to the town again.”

“There is hope. Truckloads of hope.” She went to him and put her hands on his chest.

He lowered his head and put his hands on top of hers. He pushed her hands down off him, gently, but off him none the less. “I guess I need some time,” he said.

“I’m sorry.” She backed away.

“I’ll see you tomorrow.” He moved away from her, disappearing through the opening that led to the front of the market without looking back at her.

She didn’t want to drive home so she left her car parked in the back lot of the market. She followed the path through the mangroves to the marina. She hadn’t been able to face the thick overgrowth of the groves, Lucas’s final resting place, but now they called to her. She kicked off her flip flops, leaving them in the dirt.

She went to where the path led to the marina, but took the turn before the break in the canopy, opting for the faint trail that lead deeper into the tangle of green running along the Back Bay. It was like riding a bike, her feet knew where to step, to tread. Her body knew where to duck, to bend and curve though the trees.

The sun barely penetrated the crossed limbs of green above her. She could still hear the faint sound of the cars rushing by on A1A, but now, alone in the middle of the only forest she'd ever known, she could hear the suck of the tide turning, pulling the murky water out to sea to be cleaned and replenished by the next high tide. Tiny bait fish rushed by her feet in the little water left amongst the dark slimy roots of the mangroves. The faint call of an alligator made her pause, holding onto a branch for support. She was almost to the bridge leading to South Road.

She saw a flash of white ahead. Adrienne went towards the movement. The white thing unfurled its wings and took flight, causing a great ruckus as it lifted from the shallow pool it stood by. It was a Great White Heron. Adrienne watched the Heron disappear into the sky. Its strange honking call faded slowly from her position.

The adrenalin rush made her run, but she wasn't scared. She just wanted to run. The warm mucky sand tried to hold her feet, but she wouldn't let it. She ran and ran till she broke through the canopy by the bridge. She began to laugh as she ran up South Road, her dirty bare feet smacking the hot asphalt as she went. She bypassed the house, for now, and ran up to the point, hurdling over the barricade, instead of going around it, just as she had done as a kid. She ran all the way to the

tip where there was no more room to run, just the seething swirling ocean that pulsed in and out of the back bay, through the cut in the land.

Her whole life, she had stood at that very point, with her feet at the water line, thinking how that was the very edge of the world. She screamed against the wind and the rumbling sea. She screamed until her voice hurt. Then, there was nothing left to do, nothing more to give. She walked along the beach back to the house. As she passed the big white house, she wondered if Quinn watched her go by. She saw Kali up ahead in the back yard. Kali waved to her. Adrienne waved back. For the first time in as long as she could remember, she couldn't wait to get home.

Kali made dinner. Not only had she made dinner, but she had made a recipe from the Harris recipe box. Adrienne marveled at all Kali had accomplished by herself. There was even a jug of snapdragons in the middle of the table. The sun shone through the open windows and everything gleamed and glimmered in the light.

Adrienne took in a breath, a real breath, drawing in the smells of coconut and curry. It was a fish stew, one of the few recipes Diana had contributed. Adrienne could remember the day the square recipe card had come in the mail. She had been ten or eleven. There had been no note with the recipe, but the ingredients were put down in Diana Harris's familiar scrawl.

Adrienne went to the pot on the stove and gave the milky stew a stir. She pictured her mother on some sun drenched island eating the stew, watching the ocean, writing the cooking secrets of the exotic land on a scrap of paper. Even

though Adrienne could not recall the last time Diana had come ashore, somehow she was there with them at that moment. Diana was there in the smells of the stew as were all the Harris women. They all seemed to hover over Kali and Adrienne as they finished up the meal.

“It smells good,” Adrienne said as she drew her arm up to Kali’s shoulder and placed her hand there.

“We may not get much right in this world, but the Harris women know how to cook,” Gran added as she rocked back and forth in her chair.

“Maybe I can add a recipe to the box?” Kali said as looked up at Adrienne. “Will you help me?”

“I’d love to help you. And you can add as many recipes as you want.” Adrienne buried her face into Kali’s fine hair and placed a kiss to the top of her head.

After they had filled themselves with the good stew and bread, Gran got up, disappearing into the living room. When she returned, she carried an old shoe box that she set down at the table. Kali lifted the lid to find old black and white photos inside. Adrienne was surprised to find a box full of photos. Gran never threw anything out. Adrienne expected to find almost anything under the lid of the shoe box. But, photos were always something Gran paid particular attention too. They always ended up in a frame on the wall or well-preserved in an album. Adrienne had spent the better part of her childhood sifting through endless books of pictures trying to gain some insight into the people she came from. Most of the

albums contained rusty images of people she didn't know and that Gran never seemed to have the time to tell her about.

Adrienne picked up a few of the photos on the top of a stack in the box. They were all of Gran as a young girl. Adrienne had seen very few pictures of Gran before she'd married Gramps. This was a vital, beautiful young woman, dressed in a sequin outfit with an outrageous hat on her head. It was hard to see Gran happy, to understand that there had been a time when Gran had enjoyed life.

"I was such a good dancer. I was going to be a star." Gran bent between them, touching the image of the girl in the photo with the tips of her fingers. "I was never going to be married or have children. I was going to see the world. I was going to make men want me."

"What happened, Gran?" Adrienne said as she marveled at the strange young woman in the photos, trying to make connections to the bitter old woman the photographed girl became.

"I was in love. Not with your grandfather, but another man. He was my dance partner. We had such plans. We were going to go to New York and leave this terrible little town." Gran moved to her chair and sat down. She had an amused look on her face. "Yes, I too wanted to leave. You and I are not much different, I think. Your mother was the only one to break free, and look at her, she's never come back. In the end, maybe she's the smart one after all."

"You never did get to New York, did you?" Kali said as she touched the gold filigree clip in her hair. Adrienne noticed it was one of Gran's.

“No, I would never have come back if I had gotten the chance to leave.” Gran looked out the window. “If you think this town has nothing now, you should have seen it back when I was young.”

“What happened to the man you loved?” Adrienne found herself leaning closer to Gran for it seemed Gran’s voice was getting softer, farther away as she spoke of the past.

“He disappeared with one of my friends. She had gotten the call from the Arthur Murray studio in New Jersey to come and audition. I guess he saw her as his ticket out of here. New Jersey was close enough to New York.” Gran gave a little grunt-like laugh. “She had bigger boobs than me. I knew she had her eyes on him for a while.”

Adrienne and Kali looked at each other and then at Gran, waiting for her to finish the story. Adrienne couldn’t help but see the endless revolutions the women in this family seemed to be stuck in. She wondered if Kali would fall victim to the mistakes of the past. No, Adrienne wouldn’t let it happen. She thought of Quinn. He was right next door. Maybe he would be the key to breaking the cycle.

“Then, your grandfather came into town for the season. He was so handsome. He drove this rich widow lady all around Palm Beach. All the girls thought he was something special. And he took a liking to me. He gave up the driver job to stay in Harbor Point near me. I was so heartbroken, I went a bit wild. And then I was pregnant with your mother. Back then, there was no choice but to get married.”

Kali insisted on clearing the dishes on her own. Adrienne stayed at the table, watching Gran look out the window.

“I’m tired,” Gran finally said.

Adrienne followed her up the stairs into the dark bedroom. Gran sat at her dressing table. She took off her rings, and took up the paddle brush, pulling it through her wispy hair. Adrienne could remember lying on the bed, watching Gran primp before all her functions. Gran always said to her, “you see this skin? You are lucky to have my skin. Women would kill to have skin like mine at this age. When you are old, Adrienne, your skin will still be beautiful, like mine.”

Yes, there was vanity, but now there was also something majestic to the art Gran made of dressing for an event. Even the way Gran threw a party or planned an orchid society meeting. It was a sad yet beautiful art, the way Gran had fought through life.

Gran eased into bed after putting her nightgown on. Adrienne stood by the foot of the bed, not knowing why she lingered. Gran folded her hands on top of her chest.

“You are a good cook,” Gran said, her eyes were closed as she spoke. “You should add more recipes to the Harris box. They have a place there.”

Adrienne smiled and then headed for the bedroom door. “Goodnight, Gran,” she called softly, but Gran was already snoring and hadn’t heard her.

Adrienne found Kali at the sink washing up the dinner dishes. Adrienne took her place beside her, drying as Kali handed her the clean wet plates. They

stood there in front of the sink working. The window was open, letting the breeze come in. It felt nice.

“You were right, Kali. Your father is next door,” Adrienne said as she set the last plate down on the counter. “I spoke to him yesterday. He wants to meet you.”

Kali looked out the window and said, “can I go and see him, now?”

“Okay.”

Kali was out the front door before Adrienne could say another word.

Adrienne stood out on the porch. She could hear Kali’s racing footsteps crunch against the shell path out to the road. She wished she could see over the wall from the porch. Adrienne ran up to her room and leaned out the window. She could see Kali at the front door. Then, the door opened, and Kali vanished inside. She lay on her bed thinking of what they might be saying to each other. She thought of Christopher. She was restless with so many thoughts.

She went down stairs and pulled out all she needed. Christopher was not a big fan of really sweet things, she was learning. He preferred the ocean to have something to do with everything he ate—his brownies the exception—but even they had a healthy dose of sea salt in them. She had learned to make a certain pastry called, Kouign Aman. It almost tasted like the sea from the sea salt in the layers of dough, yet it was still slightly sweet. It took forever to make, but she had time while she waited for Kali to come home.

She worked the butter into fine sheets then, layered them with the dough and then she folded, and rolled, and then folded in on its self once again, and

rolled it out again. Her arms ached from making the thin alternating layers of butter and dough. She threw the flakes of salt and sugar on the layers with careless abandon. The sweat dripped into her eyes as she worked.

As the delicate layers baked in the oven, the house filled with the most unusual scent. It was like smelling the ocean, the sea grass warmed by the sun. She couldn't help but pick a hot morsel off when the parcels came out of the oven. She smiled as the pastry melted in her mouth. She sat back and let the butter and the salt sink down the back of her throat. It had been hours of labor, but it was worth it. Christopher was worth it.

Kali came in just before ten o'clock. Adrienne didn't ask her one question. She could see that Kali was filled up with information. There was time tomorrow for questions, Adrienne thought. The look on Kali's face was enough for one night. She beamed. Adrienne handed Kali a Kouign Aman. Kali took it with her to her room, but not before throwing her arms around her mom.

Adrienne slipped out of the house with a box of the pastries in her hands. She cursed herself that she had left her car at the market. She walked the mile or so to Christopher's house in the dark.

She didn't want to leave them on his doorstep in fear the carnivorous red ants would have them devoured by morning, so she knocked timidly. Christopher opened the door.

"I said I need some time. More time than that." He pushed his glasses back up on his nose.

“I know. I just wanted to bring you something. I made these for you. They are a pain in the ass to make, but I know you don’t like dessert very much, but this is different. I wanted to bring you something like you brought me dinner that time when things were rough at the house.”

She handed him the box.

“You know, I always thought this place was the edge of the world. A place I’d just tip over that edge and vanish forever. But now, ever since I’ve come back, I feel like I’m just waking up. I feel like I can see the whole world spread out right in front of me.”

She stepped up and put her hand on his chest. “I want you, and this town. I see that now.”

She walked away before he could respond. And she was glad he did not follow her. She went along the sidewalk that ran parallel to A1A. The town didn’t look that different from her point of view as she neared the market. She stopped at the fish market to collect her shoes from the back lot by the mangroves before she got her car. It was out of her hands now.

## Chapter Thirty

Gran was dead by morning. Adrienne had woken early, though she'd gone to bed well after midnight. It was too quiet in the house. Gran's familiar house-rattling snores were missing. She slipped into Gran's room, and again, the feeling that the room felt too quiet came over Adrienne. When she leaned over Gran's still form, Adrienne realized Gran wasn't breathing. When Adrienne went to shake Gran, her skin was cold. She had died long ago, well before dawn.

Adrienne stood there, watching Gran's unmoving body, in a state of uncertainty. She didn't feel any of the emotions she expected to feel. She had thought about Gran's death a lot over the years. At night, after arguing with Gran, Adrienne would lay in bed and think of what the world might be like if Gran suddenly keeled over dead. It became a morbid type of coping mechanism to get her through the hardest days living with the old lady.

Adrienne always thought she'd feel relief. That the weight pressing down on her would suddenly lift, and she would feel a sense of freedom she had never experienced before. In the reality of the moment, that Gran was truly gone from the world and would never again open her eyes, Adrienne only felt a strange tightness in her throat and a heightened awareness to the unusual quiet in the house. There was also a good amount of surprise that Gran had gone out of the blue. Not with a bang or any wild death throws, but with a whisper. Elizabeth Harris *would* show them all and go quietly, Adrienne thought. She never did like to do what people expected of her.

Adrienne sat at the edge of the bed and clipped Gran's favorite brass barrettes into her hair. She touched a tiny bit of Gran's favorite angry red lipstick to her lips and smudged a dab of rosy pink rouge to each cheek. Gran was never one to leave the house without "putting her face on", as she always said to Adrienne. Adrienne put Gran's silver dressing gown over her body. She slipped Gran's beloved silver lame ballet house slippers on her feet. Adrienne couldn't bear to think of Gran leaving the house, for the last time, looking less than her best. When she was sure Gran was perfect, then and only then did she go downstairs to make the call.

She dialed Christopher's number first. He didn't answer. She looked at the clock. It was six in the morning. There was a good chance Christopher was at the marina meeting the fishing fleet. A moment after she hung up, the phone rang.

"Is something wrong?" Christopher asked. The concern in his voice was real. She was relieved he didn't sound annoyed she was calling. He said he needed time, after all.

"Gran's gone. She's died sometime last night. I just found her," Adrienne said, her voice hitching in her throat. Saying it out loud, that Gran was really gone, made tears come to her eyes.

She heard his breath deflate out of him.

"I'm on my way," he said. She didn't really need him to come, but she was happy he was.

Kali was in the kitchen eating a bowl of corn flakes when Adrienne came in. When Kali looked up at her, Adrienne couldn't help but think how young Kali was, even though she'd be starting high school in just a few weeks.

"Gran is gone." Adrienne kneeled next to her at the table. "She died last night."

Kali looked out the window. Adrienne could see that she was crying.

They went into the garden and collected clippings of Gran's favorite flowers. The wind began to stir as they did their work in silence. Once they had amassed a proper bouquet, they climbed the stairs, side by side, and went to Gran's room. Kali tucked the flowers Gran loved so dearly into her clasped hands. Adrienne clipped a favorite orchid into her hair. They stood there for a while. For the first time that Adrienne could remember, Gran looked peaceful. It was a terrible revelation to know that peace had only come with death. That is what Adrienne mourned. Gran had known little happiness while alive.

"Are we going to leave?" Kali asked. They sat on the porch steps waiting for Christopher.

"We can stay, if you want to." Adrienne touched the fine black strands of Kali's hair.

"I want to stay. It feels like home here." Kali looked up at her.

They threw their arms around each other and held on to one another till they heard Christopher's Jeep pull up.

## Chapter Thirty One

There was a storm the day of Gran's funeral. Tropical storm Stella, which had been looming off the coast, had gained strength and made an unexpected turn towards the coast. The wind was not the strongest gusts the town had seen. No one boarded up their homes. All the local shops were still open. So it came as a huge shock to Adrienne and the residence of South Road when the great Banyacado tree came crashing down during the night. Adrienne woke instantly from the sound. She watched as the tree moaned in its death fall, crushing Mr. Merritt's beloved stucco wall into rubble where it fell. They were lucky the tree hadn't fallen towards the house.

There was no time to inspect the damage the next day. Gran's funeral was set for the morning. The storm had stalled right over them, dumping buckets of rain, flooding the roads. It took Adrienne twenty minutes to clear the debris from the driveway so they could leave the house. It felt like the whole world was in disorder now that Gran was gone.

From inside the funeral parlor, Adrienne could hear the low moan of the wind as the squall lines came through. She sat in the first row with Kali, waiting for the service to begin. Christopher stood at the entrance, greeting the few who came, helping them situate their wet umbrellas. Only ten people besides her, Kali, and Christopher were in attendance. It wasn't unexpected. Most of Gran's inner-circle of friends were already dead. The rest of the old-timers who still were alive had been alienated in one way or another from Gran. Adrienne wasn't even sure if

her mother had gotten the news yet. Diana was even harder to track down now that she was across the ocean in Greece.

Adrienne saw Quinn appear in the reception area. It was his first real appearance out in town. Adrienne noticed how Christopher's whole body stiffened when he saw Quinn come in. She watched the two men nod to one another. It was a strange scene to watch from her vantage point. Both men shared so much in common, yet they were, for the most part, total strangers. They both inhabited separate realms of her world. It was like the Venn Diagrams she had worked on in high school math; two seemingly mutually exclusive circles, but actually sharing a sliver of space in the middle. The reality was that Adrienne wasn't even sure if she had either of them in her life anymore.

Quinn slipped into the row right behind them. He placed an unsure hand on Adrienne's shoulder for a brief moment. It was the first time he had touched her since their irrational encounter. For the first time since she had met him, his touch did not ignite the heat within her. The familiar thrill of electricity his closeness once brought was absent. It was a relief. It was devastating. She took a moment to mourn the loss of that ability to feel the world shift by his touch alone. She didn't need more time than that moment. She had been in mourning for long enough.

Kali turned, kneeling in her seat so she could whisper to Quinn before the short service began. Adrienne couldn't hear what they said to one another. In fact, she still had no clue what they talked about during the time they spent together. They had been joined at the hip since meeting. It wasn't her place. She didn't

belong to their little world. It was only for them. Maybe in time, she would find where she fit in their new circle, that new realm, but for now, the world only existed for father and daughter, and Adrienne was okay with that.

What concerned her was how quiet Christopher had been for the last few days since Gran's death. He had been there, ever present, to help in any way that she needed him, doing any task that she asked. But, that was too close to the role he had played long ago in her life—present, but nearly invisible—and all she wanted to do was scream, yell at him, tell him enough was enough, to leave or talk to her, but not this.

She was surprised when Christopher appeared and sat next to her in the front row. A sense of relief and calm came over her having him beside her. He was always there when she needed him. Christopher rested his arm along the back of the bench behind her. His hand touched the back of her neck. A deep overwhelming sense of love and desire spread through her. She looked over at him. His face was filled with devotion.

Being in the funeral parlor reminded her of Gramps's funeral. But, Gran's own funeral was nothing like his. All the chaos Gran had put on for Gramps's burial was absent for her own farewell. Before Adrienne knew it, the sermon was over and the people clad in black were leaving. There wouldn't be a burial ceremony at the cemetery due to the weather. She hadn't extended any invitation to the few who showed up to come to the house.

It was over.

After she said her goodbyes and thanked the few people in attendance, she went to the glass double doors of the parlor. The world outside was a grey windy landscape. She found Christopher out on the steps with a black umbrella open and waiting. He waved for Adrienne and Kali to come so he could escort them to their car. Adrienne smiled at him as she and Kali ducked under the umbrella. They all moved quickly through the rain to the car.

“Can I buy you ladies some breakfast?” he said, leaning half in to the driver’s seat as Adrienne shook the rain drops off her skirt.

“Do you have any plans with Quinn—I mean, your father?” Adrienne turned to Kali who sat in the passenger seat.

It was still so new, to refer to Quinn as being back in her life and also now as a living, breathing father for Kali. It would take time to get used to talking about him in present tense. It would take time to call him Kali’s dad.

“No, he’s going back to the house. He thought we might want some time together. He is working on clearing out Lucas’s room for me. It gets good light in the morning for painting.” Kali looked at Christopher and smiled. “I’m starving.”

“Great. Margie’s Diner just re-opened. I’ll meet you two over there,” Christopher said. She watched him run to his Jeep through the rain. His scent lingered in her car.

## Chapter Thirty Two

*The beginning of the world is a town called Harbor Point...*

As they waited for their food to arrive, Adrienne watched Christopher and Kali talk about their new joint venture. Their heads were almost touching as Kali sketched something on a paper napkin. Now that Kali's project designing the menu covers was finished, Christopher had asked her for help in illustrating a children's book the Harbor Point Library had commissioned him to write. It was all about the local intercostal ecosystem. Kali was over the moon about the job. Christopher was a clever man. He had found the way to Kali's heart. He would make an excellent father, Adrienne thought, someday.

This could be home, Adrienne mused as she observed the happy scene.

Harbor Point didn't seem so small or constricting, now she was older and wiser. She looked around the diner. It looked the same as the day she left, even though it was now in a new building with ten stories of condos above it. Margie had kept every single picture and knick knack in her eclectic collection; all lovingly carried over from the old place. She had even painted the walls the same Robin's egg blue. Maybe the new and the old could find harmony in the same space, after all.

She listened to Christopher and Kali laugh. The smell of bacon and waffles surrounded her. Out on the sidewalk, a group of kids ran by, screaming in delight as the powerful winds from the tropical storm pushed them along. Even

though it was supposed to be a somber day, everywhere she looked there was delight.

She refocused on the little crowd at her table. For a moment, she imagined that many eyes watched them from outside the window. Deep within her, Adrienne felt that all her ghosts were satisfied with her progress. Adrienne felt Gran was there too. This struck her with sadness. It was a small tragedy that Gran had left just when they were finally coming together. If they both had not been so stubborn, well, who knew what they could have shared? Adrienne tried to cast out all the unpleasant memories and focus on only those good moments. There had been enough time dwelling on all the gloom.

Christopher looked over at her. For a moment, they both were still, their eyes locked together. It was like there was no one in the diner but the two of them. He smiled a shy smile. Taking her wrist and lifting it to his lips, he pressed a warm kiss to the back of her hand. Adrienne's heart did little cartwheels. Yes, she thought, there was delight everywhere she turned.

She closed her eyes and imagined a piece of herself floating up out of her body, hovering higher and higher above South Road, then, above the whole town. From way up there, she could see the world spread out all around her in every direction. And just beyond the end of South Road, with its barricade and the dull blinking yellow lights, warning you could go no further, there actually was another peninsula, just out of sight from South Road, but reaching out, nonetheless. It was all just how you looked at it.

It was then, Adrienne Elizabeth Harris realized that Harbor Point was, in fact, not the end of the world. It was just the beginning.

The End

