

CHAPTER ONE

THE FERRY DEPARTED from Haggspoint Harbor into the still waters of the bay early Friday morning, two days before the wedding. A group of nine travelers huddled at the bow of the boat, wrapped in layers of cardigans and shawls and cotton scarves, clutching the iron railing as a salty breeze tousled their hair. Their luggage was piled on several wide wooden benches behind them. They sipped steaming cups of coffee, tea, and hot chocolate, though the fresh air was more bracing than the caffeine.

Despite the chill in the September air and the ocean spray that dampened their skin, it was a beautiful morning. The forecast had called for sunny skies — a perfect weekend for a wedding — so no one on the boat had any notion of the storm that would rise up later that evening. The ferry glided smoothly past the jagged rocks of the coastline. Tall pine trees stretched up from the land, packed tightly together. A bald eagle screeched. Several in the group oohed and aahed in surprise, pointing toward the bird's nest perched atop a tall barren trunk, unaware that by the next morning, the nest would be gone, taken out by the torrential rains and the gusts of wind that would also impede electricity, communication, and travel between the mainland and the many islands off the coast.

Behind the wheel, up on the bridge, the ferry captain stared into the peach haze of sunrise, setting a southeasterly course, steering as best as he could around the hundreds of lobster buoys that speckled the surface of the bay like colorful pieces of candy. The captain was a grizzled-looking but jovial man. His one crew

member, his eighteen-year-old grandson, was hiding in the cabin below, reading a comic book, waiting to dock at the next wharf. The *Sea Witch* wasn't nearly as large as the ferries that delivered mail and sundries to the islands closest to the coast, but it was a good size for a private party like this one. Those other ships never journeyed out to the farther islands, especially islands with a single, extravagant home like the one on Stone's Throw Island, where he was now headed, completely unaware that the *Sea Witch* would be gone tomorrow, wrecked on a shoal off Haggspoint. If he'd suspected that a third of his current passengers would never set foot on the mainland again, he'd have turned the boat around immediately.

The wedding planner, a bubbly and bubble-shaped woman named Margo Lintel, had arranged this ride, as well as several more throughout the weekend. Margo stepped away from the small crowd and sat perched on the edge of a bench, disguising her clenched anxiety behind her businesslike face. She scanned her notebook, checking off completed tasks and writing down new ones. So far everything was going perfectly, but there was still a lot to do. She would not function half as well if not for her assistant — a young, bearded, and bespectacled man with narrow shoulders and a prominent gut — Gregory Elliott.

"The caterers confirmed the live lobster delivery for Sunday morning," Gregory whispered in Margo's ear while glancing at his cell phone. "Gagnon said he'd help me arrange the fire pit, and the seaweed planks tomorrow night. Everything according to plan. And the forecast is still clear."

"Good. Great." Margo nodded, jotting his words in her notebook. "Thank you, Gregory. Make sure everyone is comfortable, yes?"

Gregory smiled and headed back toward the group.

Margo flipped through a few pages searching for the guest list, glancing up at the company at the bow, trying to place names with faces. There was nothing more embarrassing than calling the groom's mother by the name of the bride. Soon, she found what she was looking for:

The Sandovals

Bruno, the groom

Vivian, his mother

Josie, his little sister

Carlos, his father (arriving Saturday with the grandmother)

The Barkers

Aimee, the bride

Otis, her father

Cynthia, her mother

Elias (Eli), her little brother

The youngest two stood on opposite sides of the group, both staring into the distance. Josie and Eli. According to her notes, they were both starting seventh grade next week, in different schools, in different cities. They'd only just met on the wharf back at Haggspoint, and here they were already pretending that the other did not exist. Margo made a mental note to nudge the kids together once they reached the island. It was her job to make sure everyone had fun this weekend, not just the bride and groom.

She had no clue how quickly the coming storm would drag this idea away in a whirlpool of terror, spiraling it down into the depths of her memory, soon to be forgotten entirely.