

WIDOW'S ISLAND NOVELLA 9

BONE DEEP

KENDRA
ELLIOT

ALSO BY KENDRA ELLIOT
COLUMBIA RIVER NOVELS

The Last Sister

The Silence

In the Pines

MERCY KILPATRICK NOVELS

A Merciful Death

A Merciful Truth

A Merciful Secret

A Merciful Silence

A Merciful Fate

A Merciful Promise

BONE SECRETS NOVELS

Hidden

Chilled

Buried

Alone

Known

BONE SECRETS NOVELLA

Veiled

CALLAHAN & MCLANE NOVELS
(PART OF THE BONE SECRETS
WORLD)

Vanished

Bridged

Spiraled

Targeted

ROGUE RIVER NOVELLAS

On Her Father's Grave (Rogue River)

Her Grave Secrets (Rogue River)

Dead in Her Tracks (Rogue Winter)

Death and Her Devotion (Rogue Vows)

Truth Be Told (Rogue Justice)

WIDOW'S ISLAND NOVELLAS

Close to the Bone

Bred in the Bone

Below the Bones

The Lost Bones

WIDOW'S ISLAND NOVELLA 9

BONE DEEP

KENDRA
ELLIOT

 Montlake

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Otherwise, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

1

“Dr. Powers! Can you come out here?”

Henry Powers frowned at the alarmed tone in his nurse Julie’s voice. The two of them had stayed late at the island’s urgent care clinic, patching up a pair of ten-year-old twins who had taken a tumble down a cliff face after daring each other to scale it. One boy had two broken fingers, and both were covered from head to toe in abrasions. The other twin had three loose teeth and had been jealous and sulking that his brother was the first to break a bone.

Their mother had rolled her eyes at the rivalry.

The family had left ten minutes ago, and Julie was at the front desk, typing up their notes. Henry wondered if the twins had returned with a new issue, creating the urgency in Julie’s voice. In the third exam room, Henry threw the last of the bloody gauze in the biohazard bin and then tossed in his gloves.

I hope I didn’t miss something on one of the boys.

He’d worried about head injuries, but surprisingly, the twins’ heads had been abrasion-free. The loose teeth were the only injuries Henry had found above the neck.

Henry headed down the hall to the waiting area, crossing his fingers this wouldn’t take another hour. His fiancée, Cate, was barbecuing salmon at home, and he was starved.

“What—” Henry broke off as he stepped into the office and stared at a pistol aimed at his face.

“You the doctor?” asked the man holding the gun, its barrel three feet from Henry’s eyes. The man wore a black mask, only his mouth and eyes visible.

“There are no narcotics here,” Henry said calmly as his heart tried to beat its way up his throat.

Two masked men were in the office. Julie sat in the chair near her computer, the second man behind her with a gun

pressing against the back of her head. Her eyes were wide, and she appeared calm, but suppressed anger sparked in her glare.

The two men were tall and in shape. Both were dressed in camouflage pants, black T-shirts, and heavy boots. But desperation hovered around them. Their eyes were visibly bloodshot, and dirt caked their boots and pants.

Stay calm.

“We’re not here for drugs,” said the one with the gun on Henry. His heavy, thick eyebrows filled most of the mask’s eyeholes. “We need you to come with us. Grab an emergency kit.”

“What’s the emergency?” Henry asked, refusing to jump at the command and tamping down an urge to grab or knock Eyebrows’ weapon out of his hand. Henry had a sense that the men were far out of their comfort zone holding weapons on him and Julie.

How can I get them to leave?

“Just do it!” ordered Eyebrows, tightening his grip on his pistol. “Bring supplies for a gunshot wound,” he added.

“Gunshot?” repeated Henry. Apprehension crept up his spine, and he wondered if the men had already shot someone. “If someone’s been shot, you need to go to a hospital. An emergency kit isn’t going to be enough.”

“I told you we should take the nurse instead,” snapped his companion. He had a rough smoker’s voice. “We can control her better.” He took a handful of Julie’s long hair and tipped her head back, moving the gun to her temple. Julie’s fingers whitened, gripping her chair’s armrests.

Alarm shot through Henry. “I’ll put together a kit,” he said rapidly. “But the more details you give me, the better I can prepare. Where were they shot?”

The smoker pulled Julie’s head back farther and trained his weapon on Henry. “That’s none of your fucking business.”

Henry’s gaze bounced from one gun’s muzzle to the other, two black holes staring at him.

Better on me than aimed at Julie.

“He means where was he shot on his body, you idiot,” said Eyebrows. “Right here,” he told Henry, touching near his waistband. “Two days ago.”

In the gut. Intestines. Bacteria. Infection.

“What is his condition now?” asked Henry. “Did the bullet go all the way through?”

“He’s got a fever,” said the smoker. “He won’t eat or drink, and there’s an exit wound on his back, so I assume it went through. The bleeding’s mostly stopped, though.”

Worry accented the smoker’s words, but when he mentioned the bleeding, his tone lifted, and he held Henry’s gaze, as if hoping Henry would agree that was a positive sign.

Give them hope.

“That’s a step in the right direction,” Henry said. “But he really needs to be in a hospital.”

“No,” stated Eyebrows.

“But what if—” the smoker began in a pleading tone as he looked at Eyebrows.

“No hospital.”

The smoker stopped talking, but his mouth formed a hard line.

Dissension between them. Smoker is the one to press.

“You’re describing a fatal wound,” Henry said, looking from one man to the other. “It probably went through an intestine, which is full of bacteria. He’ll probably die if you don’t get him to a hospital.”

“Scott—”

“Shut up!” Eyebrows snapped at the smoker.

Eyebrows lifted his weapon an inch, refocusing on Henry. “If he dies, you die.” He moved his weapon to point at Julie, holding Henry’s gaze. “But I have no problem killing her right now. I suggest you start packing.”

Julie's dark eyes flashed as they met Henry's, her hair still in the smoker's grip.

Henry nodded. "I'll pack."

Not good.

2

Cate pulled into the clinic parking space next to Henry's truck, noting that Julie's little car was also present. She sighed. Henry had hired more help, but it seemed like he was always the doctor on duty when patients made them stay late. Her calls and texts to his phone had gone unanswered, so she knew he was swamped with patients.

Cate grabbed the two containers of salmon and green beans that held enough food for five people. She'd brought him dinner at the clinic many times and knew to bring extra. She shut her vehicle door and headed toward the back entrance, glad Henry had installed good lighting. It was late, and the sun had set hours ago. She went up the steps and opened the door.

A medical-facility odor greeted her. A combination of disinfectant and bandages. She closed the door and started down the hall, passing empty exam rooms. The building was eerily quiet. "Henry?" she called.

She heard thumping ahead. Curious, Cate strode into the office and nearly dropped the dinner.

"Julie!"

The nurse's arms and legs were bound to her chair with duct tape, and another piece covered her mouth. Julie's eyes were wide, and she tried to speak behind the tape. Cate tossed her food onto a counter. "Are you *okay*?" Cate peeled back a tiny corner of the tape on Julie's face and then paused, meeting her gaze. "This might hurt."

Julie's words were indecipherable, but Cate was pretty sure she said, "Fucking get it off!"

The nurse screwed her eyes shut as Cate slowly removed the tape.

Where's Henry?

Cate's heart pounded from the adrenaline flooding her system.

"They took Henry!" Julie blurted out. "Two men with guns!"

Henry. No.

Cate's fingers shook as she pulled out her phone. "Are you hurt?"

"No." Julie jerked her shoulders, pulling at her taped arms. "Call the police and then cut me loose." She jerked her shoulders again. "Fucking assholes," she muttered.

Cate dialed Tessa directly. Her best friend was a county deputy and would know the fastest way to get a search activated. "How long ago did they leave?" Cate asked Julie, waiting for Tessa to answer. She switched her phone to speaker and set it on the counter so she could tackle Julie's bindings.

"It's been almost two hours. Two men." Julie rattled off descriptions. "They were dressed in camo and black T-shirts. Black ski masks. Both tall. Probably six-one or -two. Glock's."

"Why? Drug seekers?" Digging in a drawer, Cate found a pair of scissors. Her hands were still shaking as she sliced through the tape, trying not to cut Julie.

What did they want with Henry?

"No. Someone they know was shot, and they wanted medical help. They threatened to shoot me if Henry didn't go with them."

"Hey, Cate." Tessa answered the phone call, her voice filling the small office.

"Tessa, I'm at the clinic. Julie was tied up, and she says two men with guns forced Henry to go with them a couple of hours ago." Cate repeated Julie's descriptions as her mind shifted into fast-forward, worrying about Henry and debating her next actions. She freed Julie's arms, and the nurse took the scissors to cut away the duct tape from her legs.

“Hang on,” Tessa said. In the background, Cate heard her radio another deputy, Bruce, to get to the clinic immediately. “Bruce is twenty minutes out,” she told Cate. “I’m at home, so I can be there in ten. Do you have a vehicle description?”

“No,” said Julie. “But they said something about a boat. I don’t know where it’s docked, but I got the impression they were leaving the island right away.”

More talking in the background.

“I’m sending Bruce to the marina at Harlot Harbor instead of the clinic,” said Tessa. “And I’ll call Kurt to check the marina at Bishop Bay. Henry has cameras at the clinic, right?”

“Yes,” Cate said in unison with Julie.

“Pull up the video. I’ll be there ASAP.”

Eight minutes later, Tessa Black strode in the front door of the clinic. She wasn’t in uniform, but she’d put on a vest and her duty belt. “What do you got?”

Cate’s friend was in work mode. Both of them had spent many years in law enforcement. Tessa with the Seattle Police Department and Cate with the FBI. But the two had eventually returned home to tiny Widow’s Island in the Pacific Northwest, drawn back by family and possibly something more intangible. Tessa was now engaged to Cate’s brother, Logan.

Her heart now beating normally, Cate had also moved into work mode while pulling up the clinic video. She’d left the FBI months ago, unable to deal with particular stresses of the job, and now ran a bookstore and bakery. But her mind had effortlessly shifted into a mental FBI zone.

Find Henry.

“We’ve got video of them coming in and then leaving through the front entrance,” said Cate.

“Show me.”

Julie started the footage on the computer screen again, and Cate stepped back to give Tessa more room. She had already

watched the footage five times and had strong opinions about what she'd seen, but she wanted to hear Tessa's take first.

The video had color but no sound. The first man entered, his face covered with a mask, and Cate agreed with Julie's guess about his height. He quickly scanned the room, then gestured behind him, and a second man appeared. They looked like twins. Same build, same height, same mask, and dark clothing. They strode forward, determination in their steps.

"No fear," murmured Tessa, her gaze locked on the screen.

"None," agreed Cate.

They vanished from the camera's view.

"I'd heard the front door notification ding," said Julie. "But I was typing with my back to the waiting area. By the time I turned, they were in the office. They moved fast."

"They clearly knew where they were going," said Tessa. "Did you see any men of their size come in earlier today? Maybe just to look around?"

"Cate asked me the same thing, but I didn't notice if it happened." Julie's voice cracked, and Cate set her hand on her shoulder.

"We can review video from the entire day," said Cate. "Maybe yesterday too."

"If they cased the clinic, I think they would have done it today," said Julie. "They were in a hurry. They wanted help tonight. I can't see them waiting from yesterday to get help. Their friend or whoever sounded like he was in bad shape."

"Show them leaving, please," requested Tessa.

Cate steeled her stomach. The first time she'd watched them march Henry out the door, she'd nearly vomited. Julie started the second video. One man walked to the door, his weapon at his side. He opened it and glanced outside and then gave a jerk of his head for the other to follow. Henry appeared. He was in navy scrubs with a light-blue medical gown wrapped around his head. The gown's arms were tied around

his neck, and its strings were knotted to keep it in place. A makeshift hood. His hands were duct-taped behind his back. The second man walked behind him, one hand on Henry's shoulder to guide him and a large duffel assumably with medical supplies in his other. He'd tucked his pistol into his camo pants at the small of his back. Henry tripped over the doorsill, and the second man grabbed his upper arm to steady him.

Tessa blew out a breath. "Again, please." The three of them silently watched again.

"I think the first man's name is Scott," said Julie. "He was the one in front as they left. The other man had said his name and was immediately cut off."

"Any accents?" asked Tessa.

"No. The other had a heavy smoker's voice, though."

"Did you smell cigarette smoke?" asked Cate.

Julie tipped her head to one side as she thought. "No. But they did smell like they hadn't showered in a few days. Their pants and boots were dirty."

"Maybe living rough," said Tessa. "I requested both marinas to pull up video for the last few hours. Kurt and Bruce will let me know what they find."

"At least no ferries until midday tomorrow," said Cate. "If they're leaving the island, it will have to be by private boat."

"Boating in the dark," Tessa said grimly. "Not the smartest move."

"None of what they've done is smart," said Cate. "Except wear the masks." She rubbed at the back of her neck.

Is Henry all right?

"They move with confidence . . . how were they when they confronted you in the office?" asked Tessa.

"The same," said Julie. "They had me turned around and a gun at my head before I could think." She paused. "The only time I saw doubt or uncertainty was when Henry told them to

get the injured guy to a hospital. He'd been shot in the stomach and was running a fever. The second man—not Scott—seemed to waver and want to go to the hospital.” Julie glanced at Cate. “Scott said that if the other man dies, he'll kill Henry.”

Nausea threatened Cate again. “Can Henry save him, Julie?” she whispered, knowing it was an impossible question to answer.

The nurse blanched. “I don't know. His condition sounded critical, but who knows what was actually going on with him.”

“Why on earth wouldn't they take him to a hospital?” asked Tessa. “Why risk a kidnapping instead?”

“Because they were more worried about how the man got the injury,” Cate said slowly, her mind trying to find logic in the situation. “Gunshot injuries have to be reported, and . . .”

What did I read the other day?

“Hang on,” she muttered as she started to do a search on her phone.

Gunshot.

Cate touched a link on the screen, held her breath, and read. A piece of the puzzle clicked into place. “Armed bank robbery,” she said. “Two days ago. Three robbers. Authorities believe that one of them had been injured by gunshot.” She paused. “They killed two employees during the robbery.” Her stomach turned over; Henry was with very dangerous people.

“Where?” asked Tessa.

“Seattle. My former stomping grounds. The story had caught my eye because if I had still worked for the FBI, the case could have ended up on my desk.”

“That could be them,” said Tessa. “But why the fuck are they on Widow's Island? Does the FBI know who did it?”

“Not according to the media,” said Cate after checking a few more articles. “Julie, replay them coming in the front door again, and freeze it on a good view of both men.”

The nurse promptly did, and Cate took a photo of the men with her phone. “They’re in masks, but I suspect the FBI has similar footage if these are the men that robbed the bank. Look at the eyebrows on that one guy. They’re hard to miss. I’ll send it to my old boss.” She texted the photo to Phillip with a brief explanation.

The three of them went silent, staring at the phone in Cate’s hand.

No reply.

“It’s late,” said Cate. “Or maybe he’s out.”

“We’ll keep pressing on,” said Tessa. “Julie, start fast-forwarding through today’s videos, and see if any of the men that come in feel familiar. Watch how they stand and move. And look for those eyebrows.”

Julie nodded, already focused on the computer screen.

“They have to get to a marina first,” said Cate. “That indicates a vehicle close by.”

“If you wanted to sneak a doctor off the island, would you use a marina where they might have cameras?” asked Tessa. “We need to talk to anyone with a dock.”

“The whole town shuts down at nine,” said Cate. “It might be tough to get cooperation.”

“Do you think I care?” asked Tessa. “Henry is my priority. Not someone’s sleep.”

Tears pricked in the back of Cate’s eyes. “Thank you.”

Tessa touched her arm. “We’ll find him.” Sincerity and confidence filled her tone.

I hope so.

3

“Slow the fuck down!”

“*You want to drive?*” yelled Scott.

“You’re going to kill us going that fast. I can’t see that far ahead, and it’s not going to be my fault if we hit a fucking log,” grumbled the other kidnapper.

Henry felt the boat slow. The two kidnappers had been arguing most of the trip. He had mentally labeled the man with the gravelly voice *not-Scott* since he knew the other was named Scott. They had tied a rope gag over the makeshift hood covering his head after they’d left the office, warning him that if he made any noise, he’d be shot.

If he hadn’t been gagged, Henry would have pointed out how illogical it would be to fire a gun because he’d made some sort of noise. Logic didn’t seem to be a strong point with these two.

The men had given Henry one minute to gather supplies. Scott had pointed a gun at his head as Henry had thrown a trauma kit and two suture kits in his bag. Then he’d shoved in as many bags of fluids as he could, along with an IV kit and some broad-spectrum antibiotics, both injectable and IV. He’d told the men there were no narcotics in the clinic, but he had parenteral opioids for an IV. He’d used them daily in the Los Angeles ER but had never had the need on Widow’s Island. He’d grabbed those too.

After leaving the clinic, they’d walked for a long time, Henry constantly tripping and worried he’d fall on his face and break something, unable to protect himself since his hands were taped behind his back. They’d walked on asphalt and packed dirt and even through tall grass, making Henry lose track of their location with the numerous turns they’d taken. Several times they’d pulled him down into a crouch, and he’d heard a vehicle go by. Finally they’d led him down a wooden walkway, and Henry had heard gentle splashing sounds.

A dock.

The men had mentioned a boat, so Henry hadn't been surprised to hear water, but he couldn't place the dock's location. There was one public dock at a park not too far from the clinic, which Henry thought they would have reached much quicker. He suspected it had been a private dock. Several of the homes on the island had them.

It had been awkward getting into the boat without his hands. One of the men had practically pushed him, and the other had caught him. Both were strong. Henry had sat on the deck of the boat and wondered if anyone had noticed the suspicious loading.

Cate will come looking for me. It won't take her long to realize I'm missing.

The refrain had repeated in his head the entire walk to the boat.

But what if she goes to bed, assuming I'm working late?

Doubt haunted him.

No. She'll wonder why I didn't let her know. And Bruce will wonder the same about Julie. One of them will go to the clinic.

He hoped Julie would tell whomever that the men had mentioned a boat.

Henry shuddered, remembering Julie's eyes when Not-Scott had suggested taking her instead of him. She was tough and quite fearless, but at that moment he'd seen terror flash in her eyes. There was no way he'd have let them leave with her.

Not-Scott yelled to slow the boat again, and Scott snapped something back.

They bicker like brothers.

Henry suddenly understood. The men's similar builds, their similar stances. They had to be brothers.

There was definitely a hierarchy. Scott was the leader, and Not-Scott reluctantly deferred. A division that Henry had made

a note of, possibly a weakness he could exploit later.

“Arummmph,” Henry said, not even trying to create words. He wanted their attention. “Arrugh.” He banged his feet on the boat deck.

“Shut up,” said not-Scott.

Henry repeated the noises.

“No one is going to hear him where we’re going,” said Scott. “Take off his gag.”

Something tugged at the back of his head, and the rope’s tension vanished. Henry spit the gown’s fabric out of his mouth. Now he had a large wet spot against his lips and nose.

Can I get them to remove the gown from my head?

“Thanks,” he said. “Not being able to see is making me queasy. Can you take off the hood?”

“No.”

Was worth a try.

“Can you tell me more about the injury?” Henry asked. He wanted the two men to talk for several reasons. He wanted to find something else that he could use to further divide them, or maybe they’d give something away about their identities or a hint to where they were taking him. The only weapon currently available to Henry was his brain.

“You’ll see it when we get there,” said Scott.

“Tell him about the bleeding,” said not-Scott. “Maybe it would help if he knew that.”

“You said the bleeding had mostly stopped,” said Henry.

“It took a long time to slow down,” said not-Scott. “He was—”

“Shut up, Jason,” ordered Scott.

Scott and Jason.

“I think the doctor should know he lost a ton of blood,” argued Jason.

Shit. Not good.

“Yes, that’s helpful information,” said Henry. “When did the fever start?”

Keep them talking.

“Yesterday,” said Jason.

“He’s conscious?” asked Henry.

“Sometimes.”

Henry mentally ran through what he’d thrown in the duffel bag, thankful he’d grabbed several IV bags of fluids but wishing he could have brought blood for a transfusion.

“There it is,” said Jason.

“I see it,” answered Scott.

See what?

Henry had no concept of time. He didn’t know if they’d been on the boat for fifteen minutes or thirty. During the ride, his mind had churned up a thousand thoughts and worries. He’d vacillated between concern for Julie and worry about Cate’s reaction when she discovered he was missing. He wished he could stop the shower of emotions that she was about to experience.

His own situation was lower down in his list of concerns. He had a skill the two men wanted, and he doubted they would hurt him until their friend was better. He hadn’t seen their faces, so he currently wasn’t a threat to them. He needed to make it clear to them that his priority was to help the gunshot victim. He suspected the threat about shooting him if their friend died was an empty one. The men had simply said whatever it took to get him out the door.

The boat slowed almost to a stop, and the two men quarreled again as one of them maneuvered the boat and the other dealt with rope. Henry sat still, listening for any sort of sound that could tell him where they were. His best guess was that they’d gone around to the north side of Widow’s Island. Maybe somewhere off the state park.

But why wouldn't we just drive there?

The boat swayed as Jason jumped out, and Scott snapped at him about the way he'd tied up the boat. Henry was tired of their sparring. Then there was another awkward moment where Henry had to essentially flop onto his stomach on the dock as Scott heaved his legs over the edge of the boat and up onto the wood. Jason helped him stand.

"This would have been a lot easier with my hands free," muttered Henry. Wherever they had docked was quiet. No distinguishing smells or sounds. Just the usual lap of water against the pilings.

"Take that thing off his head," Scott ordered.

"But, Scott—"

"Do it."

"But—"

"I don't fucking care anymore. It doesn't matter. Take it off. He can't work on Mark if he can't see him."

Scott, Jason, and Mark.

Henry tensed, elated yet apprehensive. He didn't care what had changed Scott's mind. He wanted the thing off his head. One of them pulled at the gown and worked to untie the knots. Henry stood perfectly still, as if a single movement might make them reverse their decision.

A moment later it slid off, and Henry took a deep breath.

His first observation was that it was dark. But one of the men held a flashlight that showed him they were on a short dock near a rocky beach. Then the flashlight shone in Henry's face, blinding him, and he shut his eyes and turned away.

"Let's go," said Scott.

Henry blinked, trying to get rid of the spots in his vision that the flashlight had created. "Hang on," he said. "I'm a bit blinded."

Someone shoved his shoulder. "Then you can walk the same as it was before with your head covered."

Henry automatically looked back at who shoved him and met Jason's gaze, and his stomach dropped.

Jason had removed his mask.

Shocked, Henry turned to Scott. The man smirked over the gun pointed at Henry.

Scott was unmasked.

I can see their faces . . . and they don't care.

I'm a dead man.

4

Cate looked over Julie's shoulder, watching her fast-forward through video of every person who had walked into the clinic that day. Cate was stunned by the number of people coming in the door. "How do you see them all for treatment?" she asked.

"We've got a good system," said Julie. "And truly, most of them have minor issues. It's all tourist scrapes and bruises this time of year. I think it will slow down and return to residents by the end of September. It seems like the locals avoid us unless it's completely necessary during the summer."

So far the women had paused the video for two different men who'd entered but then agreed they didn't have the same physique of the men in black. The front door was a good reference for height since they had a freeze-frame of when the men in black had entered.

They knew what they were looking for and hadn't seen it yet.

In the waiting room, Tessa paced back and forth while on the phone with the sheriff and checking in with the other deputies at the marinas. She ended a call and approached the reception window. "No odd reports have come in from anyone on the island," she told Cate and Julie. "Nothing that sounds remotely related to this."

Cate nodded and continued to focus on the stream of people rapidly entering and exiting the clinic. It was frustrating to stand in one spot when she ached to run outside and look for Henry. Her phone rang, making both her and Julie jump.

It was her old boss.

"Thanks for getting back to me, Phillip," she answered.

"I thought you retired," said her former FBI supervisor. "But every time I turn around, you're knee deep in a federal investigation."

“Not by choice. Are you familiar with the men in the photo I sent?” Cate had no patience for small talk at the moment.

“Yes and no,” said Phillip. “I believe these are two of the three men who robbed a bank outside of Seattle. We have video of them dressed exactly the same way. They shot two of the employees dead at the scene, and a third just passed away from their injuries two hours ago—that news hasn’t been released to the media yet.”

“Oh, my god.” Cate ran a hand over her eyes. She’d known the bank robbers had left death in their wake, but Phillip’s serious tone was hammering home one fact:

Killers have Henry.

“I’m sorry, Cate. I know that’s not the news you wanted since Henry is with them.”

“Who are they?”

“That’s the part I don’t know. We’ve linked them to three other bank robberies—two in Montana and one in Idaho—but we don’t have identities. They’ve left nothing behind to pinpoint them. No fingerprints, no vehicles. They vanish into thin air after every robbery.”

“Someone will eventually talk,” she said. “Someone will be unhappy about their cut or will feel slighted. It always happens.”

“I don’t want to wait that long,” said Phillip. “These guys are violent, and from what your text said, one of them is gravely injured.”

“That’s what we think.”

“They can’t get far,” said Phillip. “You’re surrounded by water, and it’s night. No planes have left the island, right?”

“That’s correct. We’ve confirmed that there’s been no activity at all today at the island’s tiny airstrip.”

Tessa nodded as Cate spoke. She’d contacted the owners of the airstrip, who lived adjacent to it.

“And we’ve got deputies at the marinas right now to see who has left within the last couple hours.” Cate looked at Tessa. “What have you found out?” She touched her phone, switching it to speaker before setting it on the counter between them.

“Deputy Black here,” said Tessa, leaning toward the phone. “We believe two boats left Harlot Harbor Marina within the time frame, and none from Bishop Bay. I have men viewing the videos at Harlot.”

“Your island has the oddest names,” said Phillip. “Good work, Deputy. Cate, I’m sending Special Agent Isla Ross and a team first thing in the morning. You should get a call from her any minute. The robberies have been her case for the last four weeks. She knows them inside and out.”

“Good,” said Cate. She’d met Special Agent Ross a couple of months before and knew she was a skilled agent.

“I’ve got one!” said Julie, straightening in her chair.

Cate turned her attention to the screen and immediately agreed. Julie had frozen the feed as a man stepped in the door. His height and build were perfect. “Keep it going,” Cate told her. Julie started the video in slow motion, and the man paused at the door and took a long look around the waiting room.

“He’s looking for a camera,” Julie said smugly. “And he didn’t spot it.”

Julie had shown Cate the little waiting room camera hidden in the pot of a silk plant on a high shelf. The plant and pot were nondescript, nothing a patient would want to examine closer or handle. Julie had said they’d debated putting the camera in a stuffed bear on the shelf but worried someone would take a closer look or pull it down for their kid.

“What’s going on?” asked Phillip through the phone’s speaker.

“I think we’ve found one of the robbers casing the clinic at two o’clock this afternoon,” said Cate. “He’s unmasked.” She stared at the man’s face as Julie enlarged the video. He looked young, possibly still in his twenties. He had thick

eyebrows but not like the ones Cate had noticed on one of the robbers.

“He must be the one with the rough voice,” said Julie.

He wore a T-shirt with *Widow’s Island* emblazoned across the front, cheap nylon shorts, and flip-flops one would find in a bulk sale bin. “Looks like he got a change of clothing at one of the souvenir shops,” said Cate. “I know of three different stores where he could have bought that shirt. We can check their cameras—”

“I know exactly which three shops you’re thinking of,” Tessa said. “I’m positive two don’t have cameras. I can check the third, but it’s doubtful. I’ll find the owner’s number and give her a call.” She walked to the far side of the waiting room and tapped on her phone.

“I’m surprised you found them on video,” said Phillip. “We’ve combed through weeks and weeks of video before the first three robberies, searching for when they cased the banks. There’s no way they skipped that step. They moved deliberately in each one and knew exactly where they were going. Why would they suddenly be sloppy with casing a medical clinic?”

“My guess is desperation,” said Cate. “They’ve been forced into action here. Previously they had time to plan the robberies—possibly they used a fourth person to case the banks. The third person’s injuries have screwed with their plans and changed their priorities.”

“Honor among thieves?” asked Julie. “I can’t believe they’d risk prison and losing the money because of someone’s injuries. How much money did they steal?”

“Sixty-five thousand altogether,” said Phillip. “Don’t repeat that number to anyone, and if you do, I’ll deny that you heard it from me.”

“FBI doesn’t release amounts,” said Cate, surprised that Phillip had broken a policy.

“That’s a lot,” said Julie. “But it isn’t much divided between three people—make that four people if there is

another person casing for them. You'd think they'd cut their losses and leave the injured guy to die."

"Or kill him," added Cate. She'd seen it happen a number of times—robbers had turned on one another and left bodies behind. One time a robber had barely been alive when the FBI had found him, and he'd helped the FBI arrest and prosecute his partners.

"Who knows what they're thinking," said Phillip. "Send me a copy of the unmasked video, and I'll get it to Special Agent Ross. I'll be in touch, Cate." He ended the call.

Tessa rejoined them. "The owner isn't answering her phone. I left a message to call me immediately."

"It's almost midnight," said Cate. "Normal people silence their phones at night."

"I never do," said Tessa.

"Me neither," added Julie.

Cate didn't either. "You're proving my point."

Tessa's cell rang. "It's Bruce," she said as she put him on speaker. "Did you review the marina videos, Bruce? You're on speaker with Cate and Julie."

"Hey, Julie," he said.

"Deputy Taylor," Tessa stated. "*Did you review the video?*"

"Yes." Bruce's tone shifted into business. "Two boats left Harlot Harbor Marina in the time period you specified. The first boat had three women get on board."

"Are you sure?" asked Cate. Her brain was considering all angles. Men could have disguised themselves.

"Positive," Bruce said dryly. "There was no hiding the fact that these were women."

"And the second?" asked Tessa.

"One guy sprinted to his boat and boarded. I backed up the video, and no one else boarded the boat earlier. The boat

also went faster than it should have while leaving the harbor. It's registered to an address on the north side of the island. I checked an aerial view of the area, and there is a private dock at that home."

"Can you and Kurt get over there and talk to the owners? And see if the boat is there?" asked Cate, glancing at Tessa, knowing she was overstepping since she was no longer law enforcement. But her friend nodded in understanding.

Maybe he was going to meet the two men who have Henry.

"On our way," said Bruce. "Kurt thinks the guy in the video might be a son or son-in-law—says he's too young to be the homeowner. He knows the owners and mentioned that they won't appreciate being woken up."

"Too bad," said Tessa with no sympathy at all. "Let me know what you find." She ended the call and looked at Cate. "I'm going to the souvenir shop owner's home to wake her up. We need to know ASAP if her shop has video." She looked pointedly at Cate. "Stay with Julie, and watch the rest of the clinic video. Maybe the other guy comes in for some reason too."

Cate exhaled and bit her tongue. She wanted to go with Tessa, but it wasn't her place.

Sympathy filled Tessa's eyes. She reached over the counter and squeezed Cate's arm. "We'll find him." Then she was gone.

"I'm not going to sleep tonight," said Julie. "I feel like I've had ten espressos."

"Same," admitted Cate.

"What can we do to help after this?" asked the nurse. "I don't like feeling useless."

Cate completely understood. Every muscle in her body wanted to run outside and look for Henry. Frustration flooded her. "It's simply too dark. I'd say we could drive around and keep an eye out for anything odd, but I don't think it'd be

helpful. And we'd get overtired. The best thing we can do is get some sleep and start fresh as soon as it's light."

How many times have I said that to discouraged families?

It was time to take her own advice.

Julie looked like she wanted to argue but turned her attention back to the screen, and Cate continued to watch over her shoulder.

Where are you, Henry?

5

Henry followed Scott through the pitch-black woods with Jason behind him. Each of the two men had a flashlight, but only Jason helped light Henry's way. He was thankful his head was no longer covered. The faint path they followed was full of rocks and roots. He'd asked to have his hands freed after nearly falling on his face, but Scott had refused. Jason had said nothing, and only the kidnapper's fast reflexes had kept Henry upright.

The tops of the fir trees vanished into the darkness. Based on their trunk circumferences, Henry knew they were several stories tall. This was a Pacific Northwest forest on an island, typical of many islands in the area. Islands here didn't have beautiful flat sand beaches with warm turquoise waters. They had high cliffs, dense forests, and jutting rocks. The ocean was insanely cold and often rough, with its colors ranging from pale grays to dark blues.

The smell of the ocean followed them into the woods, blending with the scents of damp earth.

Scott and Jason were stressed, their anxiety increasing as they moved through the woods. At one point Jason had asked "What will we do if—" only to be cut off by Scott.

"No sense in worrying over something that's already happened," Scott stated. A muscle flexed in his cheek, his gaze hard.

They're worried the other man died while they were gone.

After ten minutes of walking in the woods, both flashlights shone on . . . a hovel. Henry didn't know how else to describe the shack in front of them. It had been assembled out of plywood, corrugated fiberglass, and two-by-fours. Several tarps had been hammered in place over the wooden roof. It wasn't new. The plywood had swelled and rotted in places, and some of the boards were paler in color, possibly recently replaced. The shack was quite long but not tall at all, and Henry ducked as they entered through an opening between

the boards. The flashlights lit up a narrow room lined with water jugs. A few backpacks leaned against one wall along with two rolled-up sleeping bags and two inflated air mattresses. No windows. No doors. No sink. The room was dim. Scott turned on a battery-operated camping light that hung on one wall. Henry had the sense that the men hadn't been there long. It didn't appear to be a place someone had lived in.

It's a hideout.

A well-stocked hideout.

What crime did these men commit?

Henry also didn't see a patient.

Scott strode directly to the end of the room and vanished behind a piece of plywood, making Henry realize the hovel had a second "room."

"Follow him," said Jason.

Henry passed the water jugs and paused in the opening to the other area, which was poorly lit by another camping light. A man was on an air mattress, a sleeping bag beneath him. Scott was kneeling beside him, covering the man with another sleeping bag he must have kicked off. The room smelled of blood. And something else. Henry sniffed and recognized the faint sickly sweet odor. Infection.

"He needs a hospital," said Henry.

Scott looked up. "No hospital."

"I don't even need to examine him to know he's in bad shape," said Henry. "If you want him to live, get him to a hospital. I can only do so much in this shithole." He deliberately looked around.

"No hospital. And I don't want to hear another fucking word about it."

Henry sucked in a deep breath. He wouldn't win.

It's up to me.

“Free my hands,” he said, not taking his gaze from the patient.

The man’s eyes were closed, and he appeared to be as young as Jason. Henry had glimpsed a blood-soaked towel on his belly before Scott had covered him with the sleeping bag. The patient’s chest moved rapidly with his breaths. Henry’s brain shot ahead, visually analyzing and making a priority list of what needed to be done.

Something pressed against his wrists behind his back, and he waited for the release, already frustrated that he couldn’t touch the patient.

Scott rose and pressed his gun against Henry’s temple. “Don’t try anything. One of us will be watching you at all times. And I meant what I said earlier. If he dies, you die.” He increased the pressure against Henry’s skull.

Henry turned his head, holding it firm against the gun until the muzzle was centered in his forehead. Any fear had evaporated; he had a mission lying on the floor before him. He stared into Scott’s eyes. “I will do everything I can to help him, no matter how big of an asshole you are. Right now *he* is all that matters.” He stood motionless, their gazes battling.

Scott looked away to the man on the floor. And then lowered his gun. “Do it.”

The tension from the duct tape vanished, and Henry’s hands fell to his sides. He took a deep breath and rubbed his wrists and fingers. The tape hadn’t been tight, so his circulation was not affected, but his hands and arms were cramped from being in the odd position.

“I need my duffel,” he said, dropping to his knees beside the man. He lifted the sleeping bag and then the bloody towel.

Shit.

A hole filled with blood. Reddened tissue surrounding it. The belly slightly distended.

Henry had seen numerous gunshot wounds during his years in the Los Angeles ER, and he’d seen exponentially

worse trauma than this. Bigger holes. Multiple holes. Multiple bigger holes. And more.

It was part of the reason he'd left his job and moved to Widow's Island. He'd seen too many atrocities inflicted on humans by one another. Back then he'd been speeding toward burnout and depression and had recognized that he needed to make a change before he was messed up forever.

Widow's Island had accepted him. In the short time he'd been there, he'd grown deep roots.

"I can't watch this."

Henry looked over his shoulder.

Scott looked ready to vomit. He adjusted the gun's aim at Henry's face. "I meant what I said. If he dies, you die. And you won't be the first man I've killed."

Scott spun around and left.

Henry's heart pounded, and instant sweat formed on his temples. In the dim light he'd seen the truth about killing in Scott's eyes. It hadn't been an empty promise.

He wasn't surprised Scott had left. He'd heard the man make a low strangled sound when he'd lifted the blanket. From the other room, he heard Scott tell Jason he was leaving and to not let Henry out of his sight. Scott said he'd be back sometime in the morning.

He was concerned enough about this man to kidnap me at gunpoint but won't stick around?

Jason entered the room and dropped the duffel of medical supplies beside Henry. He pointed his flashlight at the patient. It wasn't enough.

"Can I get another flashlight?" asked Henry. He touched the patient's forehead. *Hot*. He checked the man's pulse. *Too fast*.

He's compensating.

The high fever, fast pulse, and rapid breathing meant the man's body was doing its best to stay alive. Henry preferred to

see that than a patient decompensating, which meant everything was spiraling down toward death.

He gently shook the patient's shoulder and tried to wake him. The man was silent.

Jason went into the other room and immediately returned with a second flashlight. He moved to the other side of the patient on the floor and pointed both beams at the wound. Henry glanced up and saw Jason's gaze on the silent man's face. The worry in the lines on his forehead and the tension in his mouth spoke volumes.

"His name is Mark?" asked Henry.

"Yeah."

"He's your brother," said Henry, going with his gut. "You're all brothers, aren't you?"

Jason met his gaze. "Yeah."

"How old is he?"

Jason grimaced. "Twenty-two."

"Scott's the oldest?"

He nodded.

"How did he get shot?" Henry put on a pair of gloves and continued his assessment of the young man. The bleeding seemed stable for the moment, so he pulled out what he needed to start an IV.

Jason pressed his lips together, looked away, and said nothing.

"You don't need to tell me," said Henry. "I'll do what I can." He wrapped a tight tourniquet around the young man's arm and ripped open a package of IV supplies. "Point the light here," he told Jason, who moved the beam to the inside of his brother's elbow. Henry ran a gloved finger over a fat vein and pierced it with the needle. Blood immediately flowed to the chamber. He slid the needle back a bit and moved the cannula into place.

I could do this in my sleep.

He released the tourniquet, flushed the line, and hooked up the bag of normal saline. Henry handed the bag to Jason, who took it reluctantly. “Maybe there’s another nail you can hang it on?” Henry asked him. “It needs to be elevated.” He peered closely at the line in the poor light to check that fluids were still moving, and Jason tentatively hung the bag on a nail.

Henry injected a broad-spectrum antibiotic into the IV fluids.

Now the wound.

He lifted the sleeping bag and towel and kept his expression neutral. It would take a miracle to save the young man. Or at least a hospital. “Flashlight here,” he ordered.

Jason moved the lights to the wound and turned his head away.

Fuck. It’s worse than I thought.

Henry rolled the patient to one side to see the exit wound. The towel under Mark was soaked with blood. Henry eyed the wound for a few seconds and determined that the bleeding had mostly stopped. “Hold him up.” Jason set down the flashlights with the beams aimed at Mark’s back and held him in place. Henry ripped open several packages of clotting gauze, pressed a wad into the wound, and taped it in place.

I can’t fix what’s going on inside.

Mark probably needed surgery to repair his intestines—but Henry suspected it was too late. Essentially, poison had been leaking into his body for two days. No doubt his fever was the result of sepsis.

Henry sat back and wiped his wrist across his forehead.

Not good.

He could suture the wounds closed. But that would be the equivalent of putting a Band-Aid on a broken bone.

“Bring in a couple of those water jugs,” he directed Jason. He handed Henry one of the flashlights and went in the other room.

Henry leaned close to his patient. “Okay, Mark. I’m going to help you in every way I can,” he whispered. “But I need you to help *me* by staying alive.”

Mark won’t survive for long.

Which meant Henry didn’t have long.

He was positive Scott would kill him if his brother died.

6

Cate rolled over and checked the time. 4:47 a.m.

I'm done trying to sleep.

She lay on her back and stared at the ceiling, feeling the gentle breeze from the overhead fan. It'd been a shitty night. She'd been awake for hours, and when she had finally drifted off, she'd slept fitfully. Henry had raced through her thoughts all night.

Is he safe? Is he alive? Is he dead?

Tears had leaked constantly. Cate and Henry had planned a December wedding. She and her grandmother, Jane, had spent the last few weeks pulling things together. They'd reserved a meeting room at the Harbor View Inn with a view of the bay for the ceremony and reception. Jane would make the cake. A local florist would do the flowers. Cate had gone to Seattle and bought a wedding dress off the rack. She'd hung it in the guest room closet and ordered Henry not to look, even though it was in a bag.

Will I ever wear it?

Nausea gripped her, and she fought down the bile that tried to rise up her throat, remembering how a month ago she'd sat talking with Henry over cocktails—and abruptly it'd hit her how happy and content she felt. How much she'd looked forward to building a life together. How peaceful she'd felt since leaving the FBI. How deeply in love she was with this man who had been placed in her path. They'd talked nonstop about the future.

Two children.

They'd agreed to have kids immediately. Both of them were in their midthirties and saw no point in waiting. Neither felt a need to travel and see the world first. They wanted a swing set in the backyard and toys in every corner of their home.

While working at the FBI, Cate had never envisioned having children. But she'd thought about it more in the last month than she wanted to admit.

Henry will be found today.

He has to be found today.

They had a future to continue building.

Tessa had updated Cate twice during the night. The boat that had rapidly left the marina had been tracked down. Kurt and Bruce had interviewed the owners, who had promptly woken their son. The twenty-something young man had sheepishly admitted he had taken the boat without permission and had been rushing to get it home before his parents returned that evening.

Lead number one eliminated.

Tessa had contacted the owner of the store who sold the T-shirt that the man casing the medical clinic had worn. The shop didn't have video, and they'd sold at least a dozen of the same shirt in the last few days.

Lead number two eliminated.

Instead of calling Cate last night, Special Agent Isla Ross had sent a text stating she was flying to the island first thing in the morning. Her team would arrive later that day on the first ferry.

I'm not waiting around for Isla to get here.

Cate sat up and swung her legs over the edge of the bed. She was determined to not sit on the sidelines during the search for Henry. She didn't care about bank robberies; she wanted Henry back. Special Agent Ross would have to accept that Cate would be her shadow until Henry was found.

He's not dead. I'd know.

Right?

Bile rose in the back of her throat again. She lurched for the bathroom and vomited. Moments later she flushed the

toilet and sat on the floor, leaned against a wall, and willed the worst to be over. She wiped the sweat from her forehead.

I can't let the stress get to me. I will be involved in this investigation.

She exhaled and closed her eyes, trying to settle the turmoil in her stomach.

No.

Her eyes flew open as she concentrated, counting.

Shit.

She crawled to the bathroom vanity, opened the bottom drawer, and dug out a small open box. She stared at it, her mind racing. She'd bought the two-pack pregnancy test a few months ago for what had turned out to be a false alarm.

Please be another false alarm.

She fought back tears as she used the test and then started a timer on her phone. She set the test on the bathroom counter and went to brew coffee. She poured grinds in the coffeepot, hit the start button, and stared until coffee streamed into the carafe.

Shouldn't I avoid caffeine if I'm pregnant?

Cate turned off the coffee maker and rooted through a cupboard until she found a glass jar of decaf coffee crystals. She opened it and tentatively sniffed, expecting her stomach to complain, but instead it made her mouth water. She studied the jar and spotted a date printed on the label. It'd expired two years ago.

Dammit!

Tears and anger and hopelessness flooded her. She slid down the cabinets until her rear hit the floor, laid her head on her knees, and bawled.

The fucking expired coffee had broken the camel's back.

Her phone's alarm trilled. Cate wiped her eyes and nose. She turned off the alarm but stayed on the floor. She couldn't

face what waited for her in the bathroom. Tears drained down the back of her throat, making her cough.

I can't be pregnant.

What if I am?

Henry should be here. We should be doing this together.

Her cheeks grew wet again. Henry had been excited during the false-alarm pregnancy test, his expression one of controlled eagerness. While they'd waited the few minutes for the test, they'd discussed the what-ifs. They'd agreed it'd be wonderful if she was pregnant but no big deal if she wasn't. When they'd seen the test was negative, disappointment had flashed in his eyes.

Cate had also been disappointed.

What do I want now?

She wanted Henry to hold her hand.

I don't want to do this without him.

Go check the test.

Cate cleared her mind, climbed to her feet, slowly walked to the bathroom, and stared at the test. Her world started to spin.

She was pregnant.

It's what we wanted, but you're not here. I can't do this alone.

Find Henry.

Cate exhaled noisily and wiped her eyes. The test changed nothing about her morning. She still needed to locate Henry. That was priority number one. Everything else could wait.

I'll still be pregnant next week. I'll think about it then.

She fought back an urge to call Tessa and their other friend, Samantha. After her false alarm, she'd told her two closest friends about her disappointment. They'd been sympathetic. Sam was the only mother among the three of them, although Tessa was practically a mother to her much

younger sister, Patience. She knew they'd be happy for her, but Cate wasn't ready to talk about it.

I need to tell Jane about Henry.

When Cate was ten, her mother had left for Arizona, leaving her two children behind, so Cate's grandmother, Jane, had raised her and her brother, Logan. They'd never lacked for love and affection. In addition to being the best grandparent, Jane was an icon on the island. She was the head of the Widow's Island Knitting and Activist group, which unofficially managed the social needs of the island. If you needed help with a difficult neighbor, you asked the group. If you needed money to keep your electricity from being shut off, you asked the group. They didn't give handouts; they helped people help themselves.

And they knew every scrap of gossip on the island.

Cate's phone rang. It was Jane.

She shook her head, unsurprised. Jane often knew what Cate needed before she knew it herself. Her grandmother had an uncanny ability to read people—even when they weren't standing in front of her.

"Good morning, Jane," Cate said. Jane refused to be called Grandma.

"I just heard about Henry," Jane said. "Why didn't you call me last night?"

Cate was a tiny bit surprised that the gossip chain hadn't reached Jane until that morning. "I was going nonstop last night . . . I still am. The FBI will have a team here this morning to help the search."

"Are you all right?" the woman asked sharply.

A dozen answers filtered through Cate's mind. Most of them a version of *I'm a fucking mess*.

"I'm exactly as you'd expect," Cate said. "Worried out of my head and trying to focus on ways to find him." She glanced out the window. The sky wouldn't start to lighten for at least another hour.

“I’ll send out a group text and get the knitters organized.”

Cate half smiled, knowing no knitting would be done. It meant the women would call or meet with everyone they knew to ask if someone had seen anything strange yesterday. The group had a much greater reach on the island than the sheriff or the FBI. And could do it much faster.

“Thank you,” Cate said. “That means a lot.”

Jane was silent a long moment. “What aren’t you telling me?”

I’m pregnant.

“The men who took him are very dangerous, Jane. No one should approach them. *No one*. Please emphasize that.”

Jane inhaled sharply. “I’m so sorry, Cate.”

“I know.” Her voice cracked, and she hoped Jane didn’t notice.

“What else can I do?”

I need a shoulder to cry on.

“The store and bakery need—”

“I’m on top of both,” Jane said. “Don’t give them another thought.” She paused. “I’m getting an odd energy from you.”

“Through your cell phone?” Cate tried to make light of it, but tiny soft sparks of energy had been simmering in her spine since Jane had called. The two of them were descendants resulting from an illicit love affair between the island’s most historical figure, Elias Bishop, and his mistress, Ruby. Cate had seen Ruby’s ghost several times, and each time she had experienced the same sensations in her spine. She’d often wondered if Jane felt the same phenomenon . . . which possibly explained how Jane *knew* things.

A small gasp sounded through the phone. “You’re pregnant,” Jane stated in wonder.

Tears burned. “I am.” The words burst out of Cate. “What will I do if I don’t get Henry back? He doesn’t know I’m pregnant.”

“Oh, honey. Everything will be all right. I can feel it.”

A thin layer of calm swept over Cate. An absolute truth in Jane’s words. She shuddered. “I know, but—”

“No buts. Not now. We need to focus all our energy on bringing him home. Then we’ll talk about the baby.”

Baby.

Cate had only thought of it as *the pregnancy*.

“Do Tessa and Sam know?” asked Jane.

“Not yet. You’re the only one, and I’d like to keep it that way for a while. I just found out this morning.”

“I promise. Now. I’ve got texts and calls to make.” Jane shifted into her “getting shit done” mode. “I assume you’ll be working with the FBI and Tessa?”

“Unofficially.” *If they’ll let me.*

“Good. Keep me updated. I love you, Cate.”

“I love you too.” The call ended, and Cate looked at the pregnancy test again.

I can do this.

Two hours later Cate and Tessa watched a tiny plane land at the island's airstrip. Special Agent Isla Ross hopped down and jogged across the grass. The agent had been with the FBI for only two years, but Cate knew she was sharp and intelligent. The fact that she'd been given a big case like the robberies indicated her supervisor's confidence in her skills.

Isla approached with her hand extended. "Cate, good to see you again. You too, Deputy Black."

"Call me Tessa, please."

The three of them got into Tessa's vehicle. Cate was walking a fine line. She had no place on an FBI investigation . . . or any investigation, for that matter. Isla or Tessa could ask her to leave. But they hadn't. Yet.

As they headed back to the medical clinic, Isla immediately brought up the case, which Cate appreciated. "So far the man in the video you sent us has produced no leads. We've run him through some facial-recognition data banks without luck, and we're doing some more. I sent his image to the local law enforcement where the robberies took place. Someone has to recognize this guy." She turned in her seat to meet Cate's gaze. "What are the odds that these men are still on the island?" Isla included Tessa in her question.

"We haven't found any reports of boats that left the island last night," said Tessa. "We've got the marinas locked down for now. Anyone needing to leave has to get permission from my office."

"But there are dozens of private docks," said Cate. "Most people know better than to take out a boat in the dark, but clearly these men had a mission. I don't think the dark would stop them if they wanted to leave."

"Mentioning a boat in the medical clinic might have been a ruse," said Isla.

“Absolutely,” agreed Cate. “Frankly, I think there is a very good chance the men are still on Widow’s. Especially since one of them is hurt.”

“Two other deputies have started a canvass of the businesses in North Sound,” said Tessa. “They’re starting from the clinic and working out.”

“Why wasn’t that done last night?” asked Isla.

“It was dark, and everything was closed,” said Tessa. “Checking the harbors for boat activity and the clinic’s video feed took priority yesterday.”

“I agree,” said Isla. “I know you don’t have a lot of manpower, so I’d like the three of us to search the area outside the clinic. Maybe something will point in the direction they went.”

Cate nodded, pleased to be included. “Julie didn’t hear a vehicle after the men left.”

“Would she have been able to while inside the clinic?” asked Isla.

“If it was parked close enough. I can hear cars pass on the street when I’m inside.” Cate looked at Tessa. “Jane activated the circle to keep an eye out and nose around.”

“What is that?” asked Isla.

Cate explained. The FBI agent looked amused at the description of the knitters but agreed it could be helpful.

Tessa parked on the street near the clinic. The only visible activity in North Sound was several tourists near Black Tail Bakery two blocks away. Cate was proud to see her bakery doing business at the early hour. “There’s Bruce,” said Tessa. The deputy was talking to two tourists outside the bakery.

The three women got out of the vehicle. “Where is the closest place to find a boat?” asked Isla.

“There’s a very small pier to the south,” said Tessa. “People only dock there for short periods of time. It’s not well kept up.”

“And there’s a dock less than a mile from here at the park, but people mainly use it for kayaks, and there are always swimmers jumping off. I think it’s a little shallow for a lot of boats. I rarely see one in the area.”

“Let’s circle the clinic, and then, Tessa, you go to the pier to the south, and Cate and I will walk to the park. Keep an eye out for outdoor cameras you might not be aware of. Tessa, it looks like the deputies’ canvass will cover most of the buildings before your dock?”

“Yes. And the businesses on your route. You’ll start passing homes after a few blocks, though.”

The three women did a slow grid search around the clinic. Other than two empty water bottles behind the clinic in some tall grass, they found nothing of interest. Tessa bagged the bottles. They parted to walk to their respective docks.

“If I was trying to avoid being seen on the way to the park, I’d stick to that side of the street,” said Isla, pointing to the opposite side and the fence that separated the road from the bay’s rocky beach. It was a useless piece of land. Too many rocks to make a good beach and regularly immersed at high tide. A few bushes offered cover. “Are there seriously no streetlights at night?”

“Very few,” said Cate as they crossed the street. The bay side of the road didn’t have sidewalks. They walked in silence for several long moments, their gazes sweeping the ground. “Lotta footprints,” said Cate. “Tourists take pictures at this spot.”

“It’s a nice view of that tiny island in Widow’s Bay.”

“That’s Ruby’s Island,” said Cate. “It’s named after an ancestor of mine.”

“That sounds like a story I need to hear.” Isla’s eyes brightened in expectation.

As they continued their progress toward the park, Cate told her about Elias Bishop and his affair with Cate’s great-grandmother, Ruby. How the two of them had been found dead at the foot of the high cliff, which was later named Widow’s

Walk. How Elias's angry wife, Camilla, had been suspected of killing them but had never been arrested.

"That explains the names like Widowmaker Brewery and Harlot Harbor," said Isla.

"The whole island relishes the story," said Cate. "For decades Camilla's descendants hated Ruby's descendants. That didn't come to an end until Samantha Bishop became one of my closest teenage friends. Even her mother didn't like me back then because of my lineage."

"Sometimes small towns have nothing better to do than focus on feuds." Isla stopped and squatted to get a better look at the ground. "Does it look like something was dragged here?"

Cate lowered herself beside the agent. "Maybe? Could be anything. Could be from a boogie board." The women continued their slow progress. The road quickly narrowed as they left town. A few homes started to appear on the opposite side of the road, but they were set far back with long driveways and gates. Property crime wasn't that prevalent on the island, but tourists had a tendency to wander wherever they pleased. Many homes near the small town put up fences and gates.

"We can knock on their doors after I see the dock," said Isla.

Up the road, Cate spotted the turnoff to the park but pointed to her left down a gentle slope. "You can see a faint trail here. Looks like people on foot often take this as a shortcut."

Isla agreed, and the two of them followed the path of trampled grass. The park was set on a small spit of wooded land that jutted into the bay. It had a small playground for children, bathrooms, and a paved parking area. There were no cars that morning.

Cate grabbed Isla's arm, halting the agent. "Did you see that?" she whispered. Something had caught Cate's eye. The

agent shook her head. "Right there." Cate pointed far to their right. "It's a person. He keeps peeking from behind that bush."

A large person.

As she spoke, the man peeked at them again and then scrambled away deeper into the trees.

The women immediately broke into a jog, Isla signaling for Cate to veer left to flank him. Cate sped up, her gaze locked on the dark figure stumbling between trees far ahead.

He's the right size for a suspect.

Is Henry here too?

She turned on more speed. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed Isla had done the same. But the agent had on low-heeled boots. Not the best footwear for a sprint through the woods.

I'm not armed.

The thought sent a small chill down her spine, but Isla was armed. Cate had seen the bulge under the woman's thin jacket.

Ahead the man slowed a bit, and Cate realized that his awkward stride wasn't from the uneven ground; it was because he had a limp.

"Stop! Federal agents," shouted Isla.

The man halted and threw up his hands. And promptly fell backward down a small embankment into a mass of rhododendron bushes.

Cate reached the top and stopped to catch her breath, watching the man on his back a few yards away try to untangle himself from the brush. Isla halted beside her and drew her weapon. "Federal agent," she stated again. "Down on your stomach, please."

"I didn't do anything!" The man managed to roll to his stomach and raise his hands at the same time. "The bathrooms were locked!"

He wore a dirty dark sweatshirt and baggy black pants. His hair was as unkempt as his beard. Wide, scared eyes stared at them.

“Oh, shit,” muttered Cate. It was Oliver.

Oliver was homeless. The locals had raised a fuss when he'd appeared on the island earlier that summer. Some had tried to help, and others had tried to get him to leave. Henry had treated him for an infected thumb. Last Cate had heard, Oliver was helping at the organic dairy in exchange for staying at a small cabin on the property. Henry had said he seemed harmless and estimated his intelligence at the level of a third grader.

“You know him?” asked Isla.

“Sort of,” said Cate. “Oliver, why did you run away from us?” she asked the man.

“You caught me.” He looked down at the dirt.

“Caught you doing what?”

He squirmed and didn't say anything.

Then she remembered his comment about the bathrooms. “You were . . . um . . . going to the bathroom near a tree?”

Isla coughed.

“You caught me,” he repeated.

Isla sighed and put away her weapon.

“Oliver, why are you in the park so early?” Cate asked. “Don't you sleep at Stan and Clover's farm?”

“Yeah, but I slept in the park last night. I like to be close to the water sometimes.”

The women exchanged a look, and Isla raised a brow.

“Oliver, you can get up now,” said Cate. “You're not in trouble.”

The man pulled himself to his feet and brushed off his pants. He ran his hands over his hair and focused on Cate. “You're the doctor's wife.”

“Not yet, but soon.” Her heart cracked as she forced a smile, trying to keep the man at ease. *Henry*. “Are you hurt?”

“No, I’m good.”

Isla stepped down the embankment and gave him a hand, pulling him up the short hill. Cate understood how she’d wondered if he was one of the suspects. He was easily the size of the two men who’d taken Henry.

“Oliver, did you see anything strange in the park last night?” asked Isla.

“No.” He smiled as he looked from one to the other, happy to no longer be in trouble.

I think we need to be more specific.

“Did you see three men together in the park last night when it was dark?” asked Cate.

“Yes.” Another smile.

Cate’s heart rate sped up. “Where did they go?”

Oliver pointed in the direction of the dock. “They got on a boat.”

Isla pulled out her cell phone and stepped away.

“Did you recognize any of the men?” Cate asked. She didn’t want to say Henry’s name and possibly lead Oliver into agreeing.

“No.” Oliver shook his head vehemently. “They looked mad, so I stayed away.”

“Did they all look mad?”

Oliver thought. “I couldn’t see one man’s face.”

“Because it was dark?”

“No, because it was covered.” Oliver raised his hands and circled them over his face and head. “Something was over his entire head.”

Henry.

Cate briefly closed her eyes. They were getting closer.

“Did you hear them say anything? Like where they were going or what they were doing? You must have been close to see they were mad since it was dark.”

“I was close. I was on the bench not far from the dock, but they didn’t look my way.” Oliver scratched his chin. “Hurry up!” he suddenly said in a loud whisper, startling Cate. “Shut up,” he continued in a scratchy voice. He smiled expectantly at Cate.

He’s imitating what he heard.

“I’m sure you sound just like them,” Cate said. “Anything else? What did the man with the covered head do?”

“Tripped.”

Cate waited a moment, but Oliver appeared to be finished.

“That’s too bad. Was he okay?”

“Yes.”

“That’s good. Did you notice which way the boat went?”

Oliver turned and started walking toward the dock. After a second Cate trailed after him but glanced back at Isla, who was still on the phone. The FBI agent followed at a distance. Cate heard her ask for an ETA on the other agents’ arrival.

They passed the children’s play area and headed down a narrow paved road to the dock. Cate spotted the bench Oliver must have been sitting on. It was set back under a tree where parents could keep an eye on kids at the playground but still see the bay.

“It went that way,” said Oliver, pointing to the west of Ruby’s Island. “It went past the island.”

The park was at the north end of the bay. Boats could only go south, veering to the east or west of Ruby’s Island.

Isla joined them as she slid her phone in a pocket. “What do you have?”

Cate repeated what Oliver had seen.

“What’s in that direction?” Isla asked.

“Anything,” said Cate. “There are a dozen different locations they could have gone in either direction. Including open sea.”

“Suggestions for tracking a boat that left around midnight?” Isla asked hopefully.

Cate thought for a moment. “No.”

They’d hit a dead end.

8

“More food?”

Cate was stunned as Julie brought a sixth covered dish into the break room at the medical clinic. The nurse set it on the counter.

“That’s what people in small communities do when something bad happens,” Julie said. “They bring food. Every single one of them is worried about Henry.” The nurse’s eyes were red, and her voice cracked on his name.

“It’s barely noon,” Cate said as Isla peeked under the foil of the latest offering. “I can’t believe how good people are.” Cate’s phone had been ringing nonstop with messages from the islanders.

The outpouring of love had calmed her anxiety.

We’ll find him.

The nurse practitioner Henry had hired a month ago had shown up that morning to take Henry’s shift, and she knew a physician’s assistant in Seattle who could help. Cate had asked her to call the PA to get some shifts covered, but it made Cate feel as if she’d given up on Henry, as if she didn’t expect him to return to work. But covering the medical needs of the island was important; there was no other clinic. Henry would have made the same decision.

I haven’t given up.

Isla grabbed a spoon and dished out what looked like cheesy tater tots with bacon onto a plate. A smoky deliciousness filled the room.

Cate’s stomach rumbled. Her morning nausea was long gone. She’d already sampled two of the dishes that neighbors had dropped off, but clearly she still had room to try the latest.

The FBI had set up headquarters in the clinic’s break room. Space at the county sheriff’s office would have been the logical place to set up a command station, but the entire

Widow's Island Sheriff's Office was about the size of a large bedroom. Right now the clinic's break room's table was covered with laptops and maps of Widow's Island and the islands around it. Besides Cate, Isla, Tessa, and Bruce, three other FBI agents—Cho, Hamilton, and Nikitin—were working out of the room.

It was the right place to set up. It was roomy and central, and the new agents had immediately processed the front office for evidence. Based on Julie's description of what had happened that night, Cate doubted anything would turn up in what they'd collected. The robbers had been gloved and barely touched anything. They'd been in and out of the medical office within minutes.

One FBI agent had just left to review footage of the ferry passengers over the last few days, hoping to spot the men. It was a long shot, but it had to be considered.

Tessa's phone rang. She listened for a few minutes and asked questions as she wrote notes on a yellow pad. She ended the call and looked at both Cate and Isla.

"That was a local. She said that two men are hanging out at the north end of Broad Beach, and they have a boat. She was hiking in Bishop State Park yesterday and spotted them from the lookout."

"If she was at the lookout, she was a couple hundred feet above the beach. Did she have binoculars?" asked Cate. "She's positive it was two men?"

"No binoculars, but she's positive there were at least two men. Said there was a boat anchored off the beach."

"You can't get to that beach unless you approach by boat," Cate told Isla. "It's surrounded by the state park's cliffs."

"Where can we borrow a boat?" asked Isla.

"We've got a boat taxi service," said Bruce. "I'll check with Adam to see if he's available to run me out there."

"You two go with him," said Isla, gesturing at the two other FBI agents working on their laptops. The three men silently filed out of the break room.

“We got a second report about two men fighting outside Widowmaker Brewery a few nights ago,” said Tessa. “Supposedly the fighters fit the physical description of who we’re looking for. I know the brewery has some cameras we can check.”

Cate considered the report. “I don’t see it being them,” she said. “These men wouldn’t be out drinking if they were worried about a third person who’d been shot. Plus these guys had been very professional about keeping their identities hidden except when they cased the clinic.”

“I agree,” said Isla. “Put it way down the list of leads.”

“We don’t have many leads,” Tessa said softly.

Cate took a deep breath. Focusing on the search kept her distracted from obsessing about Henry. But sometimes the fear came out of nowhere and slapped her in the face. Like right now. She suddenly felt as if she’d guzzled a gallon of coffee, and every nerve was raw. Cate doodled on her notepad, concentrating on her breaths, willing her fear to subside.

The best people are looking for him.

The robbers need him; they won’t hurt him.

But Julie’s description of the robber threatening to kill Henry haunted Cate. Henry was a good doctor, but treating an infected gunshot wound had a high risk of failure.

“We need more leads,” Isla agreed. “Is it time to take the incident public?”

“It’s already public,” Tessa said dryly. “Trust me. Everyone on the island knows what happened last night. The gossip train is in overdrive.”

“But what about the tourists?” asked Isla. “I doubt they are in touch with gossip.”

“True,” said Cate. “But it would take a boots-on-the-ground campaign to reach them. There isn’t a local radio or TV station, and if there was, it’s doubtful they’d watch it anyway. To get the word out would mean passing out flyers

and putting up posters in every business on the island to reach them.”

“Do you have people who can do that?” Isla directed the question to Tessa. But Tessa pointed at Cate.

“Her grandmother, Jane, would be the one to head that up. She can get anything done and get it done quickly.”

“Then ask,” said Isla. “It can’t hurt. But I want to see a flyer before they’re passed out. I don’t want any reference to the robberies and murders. Just state that they are dangerous.”

“That could scare off the tourists,” said Tessa. “I know that shouldn’t matter, but we don’t want to cause a panicked exodus.”

“But shouldn’t they know that there is a danger?” asked Isla.

Tessa grimaced. “You have a point. We’ll consider the wording. Maybe ‘Do not approach’ would get the point across without making people feel they can’t leave their homes.”

“I’ll text Jane,” said Cate, who picked up her phone at the exact moment Isla’s phone rang.

“It’s Phillip,” said Isla, referring to her supervisor and Cate’s old boss. Isla put the phone on speaker and answered.

“Good morning, Phillip. You’re on speaker with Cate and Deputy Black.”

“Morning. We’ve got an ID on the unmasked man in the image.” Phillip wasted no time on small talk.

Elation shot through Cate as she met the delighted gazes of the other women. Everyone leaned closer to the phone Isla had set on the table.

“Go on,” said Isla, controlled impatience in her voice.

“Jason Carpenter. Age twenty-four, out of Wyoming. Two brothers, Scott and Mark. Ages thirty and twenty-two. No criminal records on any of the men. They run an autobody shop in Jackson. I’ve got agents on their way to check the business and their apartments. Their parents also live in the

area, and we'll approach them next. Photos of all three men should be in your email."

Isla tapped the keyboard of her laptop and turned it so Cate and Tessa could see the screen.

"That's two of them," Cate said quietly. The three photos had been lifted from driver's licenses. Jason was definitely the man who'd scouted the clinic, and Scott Carpenter had the eyebrows that had been visible through the mask holes. The third man looked very young, more like eighteen than twenty-two.

"Do you think Mark could be the injured man?" asked Tessa.

"It would make sense," said Cate. "They were very anxious and taking risks to get help for the third. It seems logical that it would be a family member." She studied the youngest man's face, wondering about the family dynamic. The older two must feel very protective of their brother.

"You're not going to find them in Wyoming, Phillip," said Cate. "They're somewhere in our area. I'd send agents straight to the parents."

"She's right," agreed Isla. "You said these three have no records at all? Why would they suddenly rob multiple banks?"

"Desperate need for immediate money," said Cate. "With a little digging, I suspect we'll find out why."

"I agree," said Phillip. "I'll reroute two agents to the parents' home. Do you have a lead on their location?"

"We know they got on a boat at a dock not far from the medical clinic around midnight," said Isla. "We're following up on a sighting of campers with a boat on the other side of the island."

"And if that's a dead end?" asked Phillip.

The three women looked at each other. "We're digging deep and getting the word out," said Cate. "Someone has to have seen something."

Phillip was quiet for a long second, and Cate understood his frustration. They were at the mercy of the public to provide leads.

“We’ll search for Pacific Northwest connections to the three men, now that we have names,” she added. “Places they’ve visited, friends who’ve moved to the area, previous employment. There has to be a reason they picked this area to hide.”

“Keep digging,” said Phillip. “We’ve got three murdered people whose families are in shock and don’t understand how, after four robberies, these killers haven’t been caught. And they have every right to be.”

“Understood,” said Isla.

“I’ll update you when I know something.” He ended the call.

Cate sat back in her chair and rubbed her temples. She’d been focused on Henry and nearly forgotten that there were other victims. Innocent people murdered in cold blood, leaving spouses and children behind. She eyed the photos of the three men. They were neatly groomed and appeared healthy, and there was intelligence in their eyes. They ran a family business. Their parents lived in the same town. They didn’t look like killers; they looked like high school sports coaches.

What drove them to kill?

Would they do it again?

9

Despair. Frustration. Fear.

Cate's feelings ricocheted from one bleak emotion to another. She focused on hope as it fought for territory in her heart, but it was losing ground, making Cate angry. It was too soon to give up hope. But her emotions were out of her control.

It was nearly ten o'clock, and she sat on the bed in her old room in Jane's house. Her grandmother had insisted she sleep there, and Cate hadn't argued. The thought of another night alone in her and Henry's home had made her want to cry. Cate's mind raced as she stared at the wall, trying to come up with new search avenues out of thin air.

Henry had been gone for almost twenty-four hours, and the investigators had hit dead end after dead end. The men camping on the beach were in their late sixties. Definitely not the men they were looking for. No one had given up, but the investigators' expressions had grown more troubled by the hour. She crossed her arms on the desk and lowered her head in a fruitless search for peace.

There would be little sleep tonight, even though her exhaustion was bone deep.

"Cate! Can you come down here?" Jane called up the stairs.

She wanted to say no, but Cate stood and headed toward the creaky wooden staircase. Jane lived in the second home that Elias Bishop had built for his mistress, Ruby. It was a small manor and wasn't as big and ornate as the historic Bishop Mansion, where his wife, Camilla, had lived, but it had more character. It was showing its age, and something always needed repair, but it was a cozy home to Cate.

Jane was at the bottom of the stairs, and she gestured toward the kitchen. "I had nothing to do with this," Jane said as she passed. Cate frowned, wondering what to expect.

She entered the kitchen and saw Tessa and Samantha seated on stools at the island, devoted expressions on their faces. Cate immediately burst into tears and covered her eyes.

“Oh no!” exclaimed the women.

Cate was instantly engulfed with hugs. These were her sisters. Not by blood but by choice.

“We didn’t mean to make you cry,” said Tessa. “We just thought you’d like some company tonight.” Cate met her stricken gaze and then took in the identical look in Sam’s eyes.

“I’m thrilled to see you,” Cate said, wiping her cheeks. “Ignore my tears. I have absolutely no control over my emotions right now.” Her gaze dropped to the pendant at Tessa’s neck and then spotted the same on Sam’s. She started to cry again, and her hand went to the empty place at her own neck. “My necklace is back at my place.”

Jane had gifted the pendants to the three girls when they were teenagers. It was a heart divided into three pieces with the word *Sisters* engraved on each one. It was dear to all of them.

The two women pulled her to the island and made her sit. Tessa poured her a glass of water, and Sam looked in the pantry. “Jane,” she called. “I don’t see any cinnamon rolls. Where are they?”

“I don’t have any right now,” said Jane as she entered the kitchen. The woman was in a cotton bathrobe, her long gray hair in a braid down her back.

“What?” exclaimed Sam and Tessa together.

“Try these.” Jane pulled a large Tupperware container out of the pantry. “They’re ginger-and-date scones I’m experimenting with for the bakery. They have big chunks of candied ginger.”

Tessa took the container. “Sounds amazing.”

“I’ll leave you girls alone. Don’t stay up too late.” Jane vanished.

Sam opened a cupboard, grabbed delicate floral plates, and passed out the scones. “How many times has she told us not to stay up late?”

“Too many,” said Cate. “And did we ever listen?”

“No,” answered the other women.

Cate noticed dark circles under Tessa’s eyes and knew hers looked the same. “You should get some sleep,” she told the deputy.

Tessa ignored her and slid some wineglasses off Jane’s rack. She lined them up on the counter. “We’ll get sleep when it’s time,” she said. She pulled a bottle of red wine out of her bag and unscrewed the top. “Other things are more important right now.” She poured wine in a glass and passed it to Sam.

Tessa gave Cate a glass and held hers up for a toast. “To Henry. Hang tight. We’re coming to find you.”

Cate’s heart cracked a little more, and she fought back more tears, but she clinked her glass against the others. The rim of the glass touched her lips, and the rich scent of the wine had just filled her nose when she abruptly set it back down.

I’m pregnant.

How quickly she’d forgotten.

How on earth will I ever be a responsible parent when I can’t even remember I’m pregnant?

Frustration flowed through her, and she shoved a big bite of scone in her mouth, willing back the tears that seemed to threaten every sixty seconds. And then she met the wide eyes of Sam and Tessa.

Oh shit.

Sam and Tessa exchanged a glance and then stared at Cate again.

The scone completely dried out her mouth, making swallowing impossible. She drank from her water glass, avoiding the staring eyes.

“Cate . . . *are you pregnant?*” Sam’s voice went up two octaves.

Her mouth was still full of scone. But wet scone now. “Yes,” Cate managed to say. There was no point in keeping a secret. The women knew there was no other reason she’d turn down wine unless she was very sick.

“Oh, my god!” said Tessa, her eyes lighting up with joy. Then she blinked. “Oh, my god,” she said in a softer voice. Worry and concern filled her face.

“That about sums it up,” said Cate. Her shoulders slumped in relief that her secret was finally out.

I only found out today, but it feels like a lifetime.

“I was going to tell you both soon. I just tested this morning.”

“Oh, Cate.” Sam’s eyes filled. “I’m so happy for you.” She hopped off her stool and hugged Cate. “Everything will be all right.”

Tessa joined them, pressing her cheek against Cate’s in the group hug. “It will absolutely be okay.”

“I don’t know what I’ll do if he doesn’t come back,” whispered Cate.

“We will always be here for you,” said Sam as Tessa nodded. “You will never be alone, and your baby will have two of the most amazing, nosy, overprotective aunts possible.”

“We’ll bring Henry back,” Tessa said. “I promise.”

Cate forced a smile through her tears, meeting Tessa’s gaze, knowing it was a well-intentioned promise but an impossible promise to keep.

I won’t give up.

10

Henry jolted awake, abruptly aware that the sun had come up and that natural light was streaming in through the cracks of the shack. From his sleeping bag on the floor, he fought for breath.

Cate?

She'd been in his dream. The two of them had been on the Widow's Walk cliffs, where he'd first kissed her. In his dream, she'd looked down to the crashing waves far below and then turned to him with pain in her eyes.

Something bad had happened.

But he'd woken before she could speak.

Dread expanded in his heart, and Henry immediately rolled over to his patient to feel the man's pulse.

Thank God.

Through the night, he'd woken a dozen times to check on Mark. Each time fearing the man had died. Somehow Mark had hung on, but Henry didn't like some of the signs in his patient. He'd never gained consciousness. He looked thinner every hour. His blood pressure would drop and rise. The same with his heart rate and intensity of his breaths.

He was still hot to the touch.

The antibiotics aren't gaining ground.

There was a chance they hadn't targeted the bacteria that had invaded Mark's body. Henry had packed a broad-spectrum antibiotic, but it didn't tackle everything.

Not good.

Yesterday Scott or Jason had asked how Mark was doing every hour. Jason had sat next to Mark's bed most of the day, while Scott could stay for only a long minute. It was clear in the oldest brother's face that he couldn't bear to see Mark in his condition. Henry wondered if part of the issue was guilt. If

somehow it was Scott's fault that Mark had been shot. Henry had pressed Jason for answers, but the young man had been stoic in his silence.

But Henry had suspicions.

He knew the men had done something illegal, and there would be serious consequences if they were caught. Those facts were a given with Scott's adamant refusal to go to the hospital.

Scott had gone somewhere the first night and returned much sooner than he'd said he would. When he'd arrived, he'd pulled Jason out of the shack, and they'd exchanged angry words. Henry had listened but had picked up only Jason's plea to take Mark to a hospital.

"This is what Mark would choose," Scott had stated. "He swore he'd never go to prison."

What had they done?

To choose death over a prison sentence made no sense to Henry.

He took Mark's pulse again. Sometimes he sat for long periods of time with his fingers on the young man's wrist, feeling the beats speed up and slow down. It was an assurance that the man's heart still functioned. When Henry would remove his hand, he'd experience an illogical fear that Mark would abruptly pass. As if Henry's touch were the only thing keeping his heart beating.

Ridiculous.

He reviewed his medical arsenal for keeping Mark alive. Medication to raise his blood pressure if it started to crash. Pain medication to keep him comfortable. More of the same antibiotics. More fluids.

And a lot of hope.

It was a very small arsenal.

He pulled his hand away as Jason entered the room. "How is he?"

“No change,” Henry said.

“I guess that’s good.” Jason sat on Mark’s other side.

They’d had the same exchange two dozen times.

“Can you watch him for a minute?” Henry asked, needing an early-morning bathroom break.

“Yeah. There’s some jerky out there if you want breakfast.” Jason took Mark’s hand, his gaze on his brother’s face as he spoke.

Henry stood and stretched, his body protesting from sleeping on the hard ground. He went into the other room of the shack. Scott snored at the far end, apparently comfortable on an air mattress. Henry silently walked outside and took care of business against a tree behind the shack.

I could leave. Just walk away.

And Mark would die.

He’s going to die anyway.

Henry knew it in his heart.

I still have to try.

He zipped up and listened to the sounds of the woods, wondering where he was for the hundredth time. Scott no longer had him watched twenty-four seven. Henry had heard Jason say, “Why do I need to watch him? He’s got nowhere to go, and there’s no one here,” making Henry suspect they were on one of the uninhabited islands. If that was so, Jason was correct, and Henry was screwed. The archipelago, including Widow’s Island, was made up of over a hundred islands and reefs. The majority had no people. A few islands had inhabitants who avoided society, preferring to live in isolation off the land.

Henry headed back inside the shack, knowing he’d never walk away as long as his patient was alive. But he needed a plan in case Mark died. If they were on an empty island, Scott could kill him, and no one would find his remains for years.

Henry ducked inside and looked for the jerky, scanning the backpacks along the wall. Scott continued to snore. He recognized the brightly colored packaging half sticking out of a blue backpack, and his mouth watered. Even though jerky and crackers were the only things he'd eaten in thirty-six hours. Barely eaten. This would be his first food since yesterday morning.

He squatted by the backpack and pulled out the bag. The smell sent his salivary glands into high gear. He ripped open the top and shoved a few pieces in his pockets in case Scott decided he wouldn't get to eat again until tomorrow morning. He crammed a big piece in his mouth and tried unsuccessfully to keep the drool from running down his chin as he chewed. He took a few more pieces, sealed the bag, and shoved it back in the top pocket of the backpack.

What is in there?

It felt as if he'd shoved the jerky bag against a couple of bricks. He glanced at Scott and the opening to the other room and then unzipped the main compartment of the backpack.

It *was* bricks. Of cash. Bundles of cash with their bank bands intact. A lot of them. Stacks and stacks of bundles strapped together with rubber bands.

Oh shit.

Henry's heart skipped two beats, his body frozen in a crouch at the backpack, his mind spinning.

Where did they get so much money?

He zipped up the backpack and stood, swaying slightly, feeling the blood run out of his head.

Billings, Montana.

He'd glimpsed "US Bank" and "Billings" stamped on the top bank band.

What did I just read about Billings?

The online article's information flooded his brain. A bank robbery. More than one in Montana. Bank employees murdered.

The brothers did it.

No wonder they won't take Mark to a hospital.

Fury rushed through him, along with the confirmation that he was in deep danger.

They've killed before; they'd do it again.

Just like Scott threatened.

“What’re you doing?” asked Scott in a sleep-filled voice. “Is Mark okay?” His tone was suddenly sharp and clear, and he half rose from the air mattress.

“Jerky.” Henry held out a piece, unable to form any other words, his brain still processing the danger he was in.

“Is Mark okay?” Scott repeated, now on his feet and closing the distance between him and Henry.

“There’s been no change,” Henry managed to say. “Jason stayed with him while I went outside and grabbed something to eat.” His heartbeat pounded in his ears.

Scott brushed away Henry’s hand that held out the jerky. “I need to see him.” But the brother paused and apprehensively eyed the opening to the other room.

“You could take him to a hospital and drop me off with him,” Henry said. “I’ll make sure he gets the right care. I don’t know anything about you guys other than your first names. I’ve got nothing to tell anyone. Drop us off and disappear.”

“No.” Scott was firm.

But emotions battled in Scott’s eyes.

“It’s his best chance to survive,” Henry said, his gaze pleading with the other man.

I’ve got to get through to him.

Scott grabbed Henry by his shirt and threw him against the wall, rattling the thin boards of the shack. He put his face up close to Henry’s, his grip twisting in his shirt. “I don’t want to hear another fucking word about a hospital,” he hissed. “*You*

are his best chance of survival. Got that? *You!*” His eyes were feral, his breath hot in Henry’s face.

Henry was calm. Finding the money had shocked him; Scott’s anger did not. “Understood.”

Scott held Henry’s gaze another long second and then stepped back, yanking on Henry’s shirt to thrust him toward the other room. “Go check on my brother. I don’t want to see you out of that room again unless you need to piss.”

Henry headed back to his patient.

Scott had put the final nail in his brother’s coffin.

Am I next?

“We’ve got three possibilities from the ferry video,” Isla announced in the break room.

Cate sat up straighter in her chair.

Please be a viable lead.

The group had just finished eating dinner from the masses of food that had been dropped off. The day had been long and made to feel even longer because Cate had spent all of it staring at a computer screen, searching for any online trace of the three brothers’ history in the Pacific Northwest. She’d gone down a dozen rabbit holes, following possibility after possibility.

The only concrete link she’d found was a comment by Scott Carpenter five years ago on the blog of a local kayak tour company headquartered on another island. He’d asked for more information and left an email. Cate had called the company but had to leave a message. According to their web page, the company offered two-day, four-day, and weeklong kayak and camping adventures in the islands. It appeared to be a one-woman company, and she personally led all the tours. Cate wondered if she was currently on a tour and not answering messages.

If Scott had done a tour, he could have a limited working knowledge of isolated hiding places in the islands.

But the question is, Where?

“And an agent in Wyoming spoke with the Carpenter parents,” said Isla. “According to them, their three sons left on a camping trip. They didn’t expect to hear from them for several weeks.”

“Don’t the three own an autobody business?” asked Cate. “Didn’t the parents think it was odd for everyone to leave at once?”

“I don’t know. They did say their sons have done long camping trips in the past, so this one wasn’t unusual activity for them.”

“Someone needs to check the dates of those trips with unsolved bank robberies,” said Cate.

“Absolutely,” agreed Isla. “But we might have uncovered a recent financial motive.” Her eyebrows narrowed. “The parents are upside down in their home. They owe a lot more than it’s worth. Mainly because they took out a second mortgage several years ago to finance the autobody business.”

“That sounds like a movie plot,” said Tessa. “The kids rob banks to save their parents’ home?”

“Do not portray them as devoted sons,” said Cate, her stomach in knots. “They killed three people and . . . have Henry.”

“It’s just a theory,” agreed Isla.

“What are the possibilities with the ferry video?” asked Tessa impatiently, seated with Kurt and Bruce on her sides. Tessa and Kurt had been in and out of the clinic all day, responding to normal daily calls. Cate knew it was Bruce’s day off, but the young deputy insisted on being involved in the search. Across from them were the three other FBI agents on Isla’s team.

“Three vehicles where the occupants resemble our suspects. We don’t have clear views of anyone’s face, but the size and what we *can* see of the faces warrants a closer look.” Isla cleared her throat. “We’ve run the plates on all three vehicles. One is local, one is registered in Seattle, and the third is a rental.”

“The rental,” Cate and Tessa said together.

“I think it’s the best lead too,” said Isla. “I’ve requested the rental agreement and GPS coordinates for the car from the rental company. I pulled up driver’s license photos of the owners of the other two vehicles.” She turned her laptop screen so everyone could see. “According to their licenses, they’re both tall men. So I suspect it is actually them with their

vehicles that we see in the video, not our suspects. And neither vehicle has been reported stolen.”

“That leaves the rental,” said Tessa.

“Watch.” Isla tapped a few keys, and a video filled the screen. It was a shot of the ferry level where the cars were parked in long rows, bumper to bumper. A few people walked among the cars, headed to the door that led to the upper seating levels. “This is our rental.” She pointed at a car three vehicles from the rear. The top of the car and half its windshield were visible. Cate wondered why Isla was showing an unhelpful view when the passenger door opened and a tall man squeezed out. Because of the tight space between the rows of vehicles, entering and exiting had to be done cautiously to not ding the door of the neighboring car.

Unless you were an asshole who didn’t care.

The tall man headed directly to the door to go above.

“He uses the bathroom upstairs and immediately returns to the car,” said Isla. “We have video of him on the stairs to the upper level, but he’s wearing a hat and keeping his head down.” The next video showed someone jogging up the stairs exactly as she said. He moved with the energy of a young man.

Cate instinctively felt it was Jason Carpenter.

“That’s him,” Tessa mumbled. “When was this shot?”

“The day before they took Henry,” said Isla. “The other man doesn’t leave the vehicle.” The video switched to a view of the cars filing off the ferry, the camera positioned to capture license plates and drivers. “Here’s our car,” Isla said as a Toyota Camry entered the shot. Two men were in the front seats, both wearing baseball caps. Isla froze the video on the best angle of the men. Only the lower thirds of their faces were visible. Strong jaws. Wide shoulders.

“How long until you hear from the car rental company?” asked Cate, staring at the image.

“They said tonight, but it might take until tomorrow.” Isla looked at the other agents. “Cho, I’d like you and Hamilton to

visually verify the local car and owner. I'll text you the address." The two men jumped to their feet and headed to the door. Hamilton grabbed a home-baked roll from the food on the counter as he passed.

"The injured man must be down in the back seat," said Tessa. "Does the video show anyone getting in and out of the back seat while it's on the ferry?"

"No," said Isla. "But if we zoom, you can see movement. To me it looks like the men in the front seat often turn and lean over into the back of the car. But the camera view is too far, and the slant of the windshield makes it nearly impossible to see. My brain might be seeing what it wants to see." She zoomed in on the original video, and Cate agreed. It looked like movement in the car, but it was difficult to determine what was happening.

Isla turned the computer back around and started to type. "I'll share this with Phillip and ask him to send an agent to the address in Seattle."

"If they took a car to get to the island, where did they get a boat?" asked Cate.

The room went silent.

"We can't be certain they left on a boat," Agent Nikitin finally said. "We have one rather incredible eyewitness say he saw three men—"

"Oliver is credible," snapped Cate. "He described the medical gown covering Henry's head. No one makes up a detail like that."

Nikitin nodded and refocused on his laptop.

"But you're correct that we need to keep our minds open to all possibilities," Cate added, annoyed she'd briefly lost her temper.

"The most likely place they got a boat is to steal one," said Tessa. "Nothing is missing from the marinas, so most likely a private dock." She paused. "And there've been no reports of stolen boats."

“Yet,” said Cate.

Henry had been gone for almost forty-eight hours.

We’ve got to get a break in this case soon.

12

“Henry!” Panic filled Jason’s voice. “Get in here!”

Henry stepped inside the main room from another visit outside, Scott directly behind him. After his threat that morning, Scott had followed him each time for the rest of the day. The sun had just set, but the sky would be light for another half hour. Henry dashed to the other room as a sound reached his ears.

Agonal breathing.

He’d expected it ever since he’d first seen Mark. The gasping, labored breathing that often preceded death. He stepped into the room and dropped to his knees. Jason had Mark’s hand clasped against his chest and panic in his eyes.

“He just started doing that! What happened? What’s wrong with him?”

Henry didn’t answer as he quickly assessed Mark and checked his vitals. Pulse had slowed. Blood pressure was dropping. Mark’s chest movements were exaggerated, and his rasps filled the room. The previous shallow, almost silent breaths now in the past.

He’s decompensating.

This is the start.

The agonal breaths could continue for minutes or hours, but Mark had crossed a line that Henry couldn’t bring him back from. Definitely not in these primitive conditions.

Do I tell them what’s happening?

There was no advantage in telling them their brother was about to die.

But there was one huge disadvantage: Henry’s life would have an expiration date.

“What the fuck is happening?” Scott’s whisper was barely audible behind Henry.

“He’s struggling to breathe,” said Henry. “I can give him something to make that easier,” he lied. “It can relax him,” he continued to lie, his brain assembling a deceptive situation under which he could escape.

“Do it!” ordered Scott.

Henry made a show of adding Ativan to the IV. The benzodiazepine had a sedative effect. It would ease the loud breathing but would do nothing to stop Mark’s downhill slide into death. In fact it would probably hasten it. It wasn’t a Hail Mary pass to help save their brother. It was pretense.

Henry wanted to buy time because he might need to pretend Mark was still alive . . . when he was not. He would need Scott and Jason to believe that the Ativan had stopped the agonal breathing and he was resting comfortably. Not that their brother was dead.

It might give Henry the minutes he needed to make his escape.

“I need all his limbs flat,” he told Jason, who immediately lowered Mark’s hand and tucked his arm next to his body. Henry didn’t want Jason to notice when the pulse stopped. Henry made a show of pulling up the sleeping bag over his limbs. “I need him as warm as possible.” More deception, hiding the dying man beneath the covers. Guilt racked him.

Am I doing the wrong thing?

Is this against my oath?

No. Henry was positive. He’d done everything he could to save the young man, and now it was time to save himself. Remorse filled his chest, and he sucked in a breath.

Guilt. So much guilt.

He set a hand on Mark’s shoulder. “You’ll feel better in a few minutes,” he told the patient, loud enough for both brothers to hear. But inside he silently begged for the patient to forgive him.

This is the worst thing I’ve ever done.

Henry pressed his lips together, fighting back tears that burned in his eyes. He couldn't let the brothers see him cry.

13

“I’m glad those noises stopped,” Jason said for the third time, pacing around the small room. “It was hard to listen to.”

“He’s more comfortable now,” said Henry as stress sweat ran down his back. He’d put his own sleeping bag over the one already covering Mark, pulling both up to his chin and tucking them around his arms as he explained that he wanted the man to stay warm.

Henry went through the motions of taking Mark’s blood pressure and pulse again.

The pulse had stopped ten minutes ago.

Henry’s own pulse and heartbeat pounded in his head from anxiety that Scott or Jason would realize their brother had passed. The sleeping bags helped hide that he was no longer breathing.

I’ve got to get out of here.

“Will that difficult breathing come back?” asked Jason. “Do you have more meds to ease it again?”

“I have more,” said Henry, avoiding the first question. “Why don’t you get some sleep? I’m wide awake, so I’ll sit with him awhile.” Scott was snoring again in the other room.

“Yeah.” Jason looked as exhausted as Henry felt.

“Is there any jerky left?” asked Henry.

“I think so. I’ll grab it.” He vanished into the other room.

What else should I take with me?

His trauma kit was basically empty. He had no clothes but the scrubs he’d been wearing for days. There was nothing to take but any food he could scrounge.

I have no idea where I am.

But he didn’t care. He just needed distance between him and Scott.

“Here you go.” Jason handed him the bag of jerky, which was about a third full, and a bottle of water. Henry appreciated the water and set it aside to take with him. He’d been drinking heavily all day, preparing himself to possibly go without once he got away.

Someone must be tracking these guys.

He had money on Cate being that someone. She would push and fight until she found him. Just like he would do for her. But she had superior resources through Tessa and the FBI. They were probably turning the islands inside out looking for him.

“Thank you for all you’ve done for him,” Jason said in a rougher voice than usual.

“You didn’t leave me much choice.”

“I know. I’m sorry. But I can tell that you care,” Jason said. “You’re the kind of guy that cares about all his patients, aren’t you?”

“I am.” Henry paused. “No matter what eventually happens, you need to know I’m doing everything in my power to keep him alive.” He’d almost said, “I did everything in my power.” It’d taken concentration to refer to Mark in the present tense.

“I know you are.” Jason looked toward the other room. “Scott’s not so sure.”

“Not my job to convince him,” said Henry. “I took an oath to help people. Even if I hadn’t, I always do what I can.”

“Wake me up if there’s a change,” Jason said. “Night.”

“I’ll need to go outside in a while,” Henry said casually. “I’ll try not to wake you.” He didn’t want the young man curious when he walked out of the shack for the final time.

He was finally alone with Mark. Henry let out a deep breath, closed his eyes, and hung his head as he sat cross-legged next to his patient. He gently laid a hand on the man’s still chest and silently spoke to him.

I tried. I sincerely tried. I tried to convince Scott to get better care for you, but he fought me every minute. I don't know anything about you, but I know you didn't deserve to die like this. Your brothers love you very much, but they made your life difficult.

Henry felt that Mark got his message. He'd silently spoken to other patients after they'd died. He believed their presence hung around for a small amount of time. He also believed they hung around their loved ones even longer. Henry occasionally sent thoughts to his grandfather, who'd died several years ago, and he could feel his essence at those times.

He made himself wait a full twenty minutes, giving Jason time to fall asleep.

Hopefully.

It's time.

Henry had nothing to lose.

He positioned his duffel and some wadded-up towels where he usually slept. They didn't resemble a body at all but might buy him crucial seconds.

He stood and shoved the water bottle in a pocket and the jerky in another. He loosened the cover on one of the flashlights so it would malfunction when someone tried to turn it on and set it next to Mark's head, where it always lay. He wanted to get rid of the camping light that hung on the wall so the room couldn't be lit up at all, but its absence would immediately raise a question if one of the brothers checked the room. He settled for turning it off. He grabbed the second flashlight.

He paused, looking down at Mark.

Rest easy, Mark.

He took a deep breath and exhaled silently. He put his fingers over the end of the flashlight he was taking with him, muting the light, and casually passed through the other room like he had a dozen other times when heading to take care of business outside.

Scott snored. Jason was silent.

Outside, his eyes adjusted quickly, and he was pleased the moon was nearly full. He could faintly see but would still need the flashlight to keep from tripping. He turned in the usual direction, uncovered the flashlight, and walked normally for several yards.

Then he ran.

Henry made a wide arc until he found the faint path that led to the rocky alcove area where they'd docked the boat. He followed the trail, the sound of the waves growing louder, and then he paused as the trees opened up to the beach. The boat was still there, but there was no point in going to it because its keys were clipped to Scott's belt loop. Henry had known not to try to get them. He'd gone to the beach only to try to get his bearings. Staring hard in the moonlight, he could faintly make out two islands far in the distance. Their silhouettes were narrow and tall and completely unfamiliar.

I have no idea where I am.

He knew the brothers hadn't brought him too far from Widow's, but he could be on one of over a hundred islands. How long would it take someone to find him? The jerky in his pocket was suddenly priceless.

Shouting came from far behind him.

Adrenaline spiked in his blood.

The most logical place for them to start their hunt was near the boat.

Go!

He tore down the beach of jagged rocks, leaping from rock to rock, nearly twisting his ankles a half dozen times.

"Henry!" The shout was still muffled by the forest.

It's Scott.

Ahead the rocks were huge, the size of dump trucks, creating an effective wall that ended his run along the water.

He cut inland, headed back to the firs but a hundred yards west of the dock. The ground sloped up steeply. He turned off the flashlight and shoved it in the waist of his scrubs. He needed his hands for balance. Panting, he half crawled up the dirt bank toward the trees, praying he'd be out of sight before the men made it to the beach.

His kneecap slammed into a rock, and he saw stars but pushed on. Up and up. He finally reached some cover from the trees, and the steepness of the slope lessened a few degrees.

Find a place to hide.

But first Henry wanted more distance between them.

Should I find a place where I can keep an eye on the dock? Keep an eye out for rescuers?

More shouting sounded on the beach, and he sped up, knowing that getting as far away as possible was his best option at the moment. The angle of the slope suddenly steepened again, and he grabbed branches of bushes to help pull himself up. He could barely see ten feet up and ahead. His hands stretched out, grasping at anything to propel him up the hill. Jutting rocks, prickly bushes, long grasses. Twice he felt something slice his fingers as he blindly fumbled for a handhold.

He couldn't use the flashlight even if he wanted. Henry's hands were working as hard as his legs to get him up the hill and deeper into the woods.

The slope leveled off, and he looked behind him. The ocean was no longer visible through the trees. Its roar was ever so slightly muted. He listened hard but heard no more shouts.

Maybe they'll take the boat and leave.

Henry suspected Jason had discovered Mark was dead. Scott was always uncomfortable near Mark, hesitant to touch him.

Does Jason believe I tried?

He shoved the thought out of his head. He couldn't care less what either of the brothers thought of him.

He pushed forward through the firs. They were bigger as he moved inland, and the ground below was less crowded with bushes. But there were still huge jagged rocks sticking out of the ground that he had to constantly maneuver around. He'd stubbed his toes, banged his shins, and nearly slammed his face into several rocks as he'd tripped.

They should've taken my shoes if they didn't want me to leave.

He wouldn't have made it fifty yards without shoes.

Henry paused again, his hands on his knees, trying to hear past his heavy breaths and pounding heart. Still quiet. Making a decision, he turned on the flashlight, covering the lens with his fingers again, creating an orange glow. Now he could see where to place his feet.

I can move faster. Get more distance.

He had little sense of direction. He moved in as straight of a line as he could, trying to keep the sounds of the ocean on his left. In his mind's eye, he pictured himself heading northwest, following the edge of the island . . . to who knew where.

Away from Scott.

He shouldn't have wasted time going to the beach. He should have gone in the opposite direction when he'd left the shack. The boat would have been the first place they looked.

Henry pushed on, feeling the ground start to slope up again. He angled to his left a bit, trying to find a more gradual incline.

A gunshot sounded a split second after something hit the tree next to him. Henry broke into a sprint before the shot's echo dissipated. A stumbling, zigzagging, tripping sprint.

"I see you, asshole!"

The flashlight.

He hadn't kept the lens covered consistently, letting more and more light filter between his fingers as he'd struggled through the woods. He flicked it off.

“You’re gonna die for killing my brother!”

The shout came from his right, and Henry angled more to his left as he ran, thankful it was the path of least resistance.

A gunshot cracked, and Henry tensed, expecting the fire of pain to rip through a limb.

It didn’t happen. Henry plunged forward, the ocean’s roar growing louder. Suddenly the trees opened up; the moon lit his surroundings. He slammed to a stop, realizing his path had suddenly vanished. He was high above the water and near the edge of a cliff. He turned sharply, keeping the ocean on his left.

What if there had been no moon?

He would have gone right off the edge. He couldn’t make out the exact edge of the cliff. It was inconsistent and jagged, but he sensed a great drop as the waves crashed far below him.

I’m a silhouette against the open sky and ocean.

A perfect target. No flashlight needed.

I’ve got to get back into the woods.

Another gunshot cracked, and he instinctively ducked as he ran.

The ground gave way under his left foot, his balance lost. Henry flung his entire body to the right as the ground crumbled under his knees and thighs. He flailed his arms, grabbing at everything and finding nothing. His dream of Cate looking over a cliff with dread in her eyes flashed in his head. His stomach and chest slid down the rocky dirt.

I’m going over.

Feeling nauseated, Cate stared. The group searching for Henry gathered in the medical break room early the next morning, and somehow the food had multiplied overnight. Now trays of muffins and bowls of fresh fruit crowded the table.

It'd been another sleepless night, worrying about Henry, and between pregnancy queasiness and anxiety, Cate wanted nothing to do with the food.

"How many people do they think are working out of here?" mumbled Isla, peeling a banana.

"Our kidnappers stole a boat," Tessa announced, looking at her phone.

"But there aren't any reports—" began Cate.

"No stolen-boat reports until this very second," said Tessa, holding out her phone for everyone to see. "I was just notified that a family on the east side of the island returned home from vacation yesterday and didn't notice until this morning that their boat is missing."

Isla tossed her banana peel in the garbage. "Let's go."

Cate was already out of her seat.

Please let this lead to Henry.

A few minutes later, Cate sat in the back seat of Tessa's vehicle with Agent Nikitin while Isla rode in front on the way to question the owners of the stolen boat. Isla had finally reached someone with the car rental company, and Cate wished she'd put the phone on speaker. Instead she had to be satisfied with hearing half the conversation, which amounted to a lot of *uh-huhs* and *okays*. Isla finally ended the call.

"I've got the coordinates of the vehicle," Isla announced. "They said it hasn't moved since the day before Henry was taken. And the car was rented in Jason Carpenter's name."

“Why would they use their own names?” asked Agent Nikitin.

“Because they didn’t plan for this outcome, and they had to show ID to rent the car,” said Cate. “The pressure from their plan going awry and the brother being injured caused them to panic, take chances, and make stupid mistakes.”

Like taking Henry at gunpoint.

Since Tessa was driving, Isla handed Cate a piece of paper. “Do you know where this is?”

Cate barely glanced at the road name. “Absolutely. And it’s less than a half mile from where the boat was stolen. Let’s go there first. Tessa, turn at the gravel road that’s immediately before the waterfront neighborhood.”

“That’s right up ahead,” Tessa said. She slowed the vehicle and started to scan the side of the road to their right. Cate knew that the gravel road led down to the water and a deserted spot that was a favorite hangout for teenagers to smoke, drink, and fool around.

She had this knowledge because she and Tessa had partied there several times as teens. And according to Tessa’s teenage sister, it still was a popular hangout.

“I can’t count how many times I’ve responded to calls down that road,” grumbled Tessa. “There it is.” She made a hard right. The SUV bounced, and Cate grabbed the handle above her window. They’d driven less than a hundred yards down the gravel when they spotted a navy Camry far off the road, tucked into some trees.

“If we hadn’t been looking for it, we could’ve easily passed it,” said Cate.

Tessa parked behind the vehicle. “Looks like someone else didn’t have a problem spotting it.”

Cate got out and instantly understood; the car had been sprayed with graffiti.

“Teens,” muttered Nikitin. “They’re the same everywhere.”

“Watch where you step. I want to protect any evidence left on the ground,” said Tessa, passing out gloves. “I’ll call Bruce out to process—”

“No,” said Isla. “I want one of our forensic teams to process it.”

Tessa shot the agent a hard look. “When? Two days from now? You want this car to sit here until then? I’ll have Bruce do an initial go-over and then have it towed to a location where it won’t be a plaything for teenagers. This needs to happen *now*.”

Isla grimaced. “You’re right. Make the call.”

Cate read the bright-red graffiti. “I don’t understand what these comments mean.”

“They’re band names,” said Tessa. “I wouldn’t have known, except I live with a teenager.”

“Feeling old,” Cate muttered. She put a hand on her belly. A movement she’d found herself doing frequently since she’d discovered she was pregnant.

Will my baby think I’m old and ridiculously out of touch when she’s a teen?

For some reason she thought of the baby as a girl.

The four of them circled the car, careful not to touch anything or step on any visible footprints. The vehicle had two flat tires.

Cate cupped her hands to see better into the back seat. “We’ve got blood,” she said. “A lot of it.” Nearly half of the gray fabric rear bench seat had been soaked with something dark. Crumpled-up towels lay on the floorboard. Also stained with something dark.

Tessa tentatively pulled up on a door handle with one gloved finger. “Locked.”

“I think we can move on for now,” said Isla. “Our main question is, Where did they go from here? Which, I suspect we’ll learn, is to the stolen boat a half mile away.”

“Agreed,” said Cate. She pointed farther down the gravel road. “From the rocky area at the end of the road, you can see big homes along the coastline. A lot of them have docks. They may have made the decision to steal a boat after seeing them.”

“Let’s go,” said Isla.

Minutes later Cate rang the bell at the Squires’ oceanfront home. The home was one of several dozen on the east coast of Widow’s Island. Even when Cate was a kid, it’d been where the rich people had lived, but this home showed signs of heavy wear and tear and lack of upkeep. It was a nonstop job to maintain homes that were assaulted daily with wind, salt, and moisture. Taking on an oceanfront home meant work.

A woman with short, dark hair answered the door and looked slightly stunned to see four people instead of the one deputy she’d expected to take a report. She was vaguely familiar to Cate—as were most people on the island—probably from visiting the bakery or bookstore.

Tessa stepped up. “Lauren Squire? I’m Deputy Black. These are Special Agents Ross, Nikitin, and Wilde. I got your report about your stolen boat.”

“Special agents? As in the FBI?” Lauren scanned their faces. “I don’t understand.” Her gaze landed on Cate. “Don’t you work at the bakery?”

“I do,” Cate said. “I’m retired FBI.” She’d mentally cringed when Tessa included her in the other agents’ introduction.

Medically retired.

A man joined Lauren, placed his arm around her waist, and frowned. “Did you say FBI?” He looked to Tessa, the only person in uniform. “Why is the FBI involved in a stolen-boat case? It’s not an expensive boat.”

“Yes,” said Tessa. “Can we come in? I can explain. You’re Dave Squire, correct?”

He nodded as the couple stepped back and gestured them in. The Squires exchanged a confused look, and Dave shrugged one shoulder at the question in his wife’s eyes.

“Come out on the deck,” said Dave. “You can see the dock from there.”

Cate followed the group onto the deck. It was heavily weathered, its boards gray and warped. Enough to make her step cautiously. A couple dozen yards away was a long dock.

“You’ve been out of town, correct?” she asked.

“Yes,” answered Lauren. “We got back last night from Puyallup. We went to see Dave’s parents, and it wasn’t until this morning that I noticed the boat was gone. You can only see it from one window or if you step out on the deck.”

Cate glanced behind her, noticing that the back of the house did sit at an odd angle, making the dock a little too far south to see from the big windows.

“Do you have any outdoor cameras?” asked Isla.

“We don’t,” said Dave. “This isn’t an area for crime. It’s a very safe neighborhood. We’ve never had any issues before this.” He frowned, eyeing Tessa. “You haven’t said why the FBI is here.”

“We believe your boat might have been stolen by people involved in a federal crime,” said Isla.

Cate approved of her vague but accurate explanation.

Lauren’s eyebrows rose. “What kind of crime? Are they dangerous?” She sent a nervous glance around the yard. “Should we go back to the mainland until they’re caught?”

“We suspect they’ve left the immediate area,” Cate said. Then she added, “With your boat. Do you know if your neighbors have cameras?”

“The closest house is a hundred yards away, with tons of trees in between,” said Dave. “There’s no way they’d have a view of our dock.”

“Does your boat have a GPS tracking system?” asked Agent Nikitin. “Have you tried locating it?”

Dave shook his head. “It’s an old boat. It doesn’t have that many bells and whistles.”

“What’s going on?” A teenager stood just inside the open sliding glass door, large headphones covering his ears. He was all long limbs and shaggy hair. Cate guessed he was around fifteen.

“Nothing, Dalton,” said Lauren. “We’re just talking.”

Caution filled his eyes as he focused on Tessa’s uniform, and he shoved the headphones down to around his neck. “Why are the police here?”

“To take a report,” answered his father.

Cate wanted to give the teenager a direct answer, but she deferred to the parents.

The teen joined them on the deck, his fascinated gaze on Tessa’s holster weapon. “Have you ever fired your gun?”

“Dalton!” said his mother. “Don’t be rude.”

A brief flash of shame covered his face, and he looked away. “Hey,” he said in a surprised voice. “Where’s the boat?” He looked back at the group. “Is that why you’re here? The boat’s missing?”

“I called them to make a report,” said his father. “Now go finish your breakfast.”

“Why didn’t you mention it to me? Where’d it go?” asked Dalton.

Cate smiled at his innocent question. “That’s the big mystery.”

Dalton’s brows came together. “Why is that?” He looked to his dad. “Didn’t you check?”

“What?” Dave studied his kid as if he’d grown horns.

“The app,” replied Dalton.

“What app?”

“Wait a minute,” said Cate, suddenly understanding. “Is there a tracking device on the boat?”

“Yes,” said Dalton at the same time his parents said, “No.”

Dalton shot his parents that exasperated look, which included rolling eyes, that only teens could deliver. “I told you.” He looked at Cate and the others. “I put a device on it right after my birthday in June. Grandma got a few for me after my bike was stolen, and I stuck one on the boat because I had one left over.” He shrugged. “I told you to download the app after I did it.”

“I don’t remember that,” Dave said earnestly, meeting each adult’s gaze.

Cate tried to control the elation that shot through her.

Please have the device work.

“Doesn’t it need Wi-Fi or a good cellular network?” asked Tessa.

“Nah. Grandma got the satellite link ones because she knows how crappy the service can be on the island.” Dalton pulled his phone out of his pocket and started tapping.

“You got it in June?” asked Cate. “Won’t the battery be dead?”

“I put it on low power. It’s supposed to be good for six months like that.” He scrolled on his phone, and his face lit up. “I can see it.” He held out the phone. “It’s several miles away.”

Everyone leaned in to see the screen.

According to the app, the stolen boat was near a tiny island north of Widow’s Island. Cate was 99 percent certain the island was uninhabited.

“I’ll get our department boats activated,” said Tessa, pulling out her phone. “I think they’re all at San Juan Island right now. They were running training exercises yesterday. I’ll have them meet us at the marina ASAP.”

Cate’s nausea threatened. She clamped her lips together, knowing this time it was anxiety, not hormones.

Hang on, Henry.

It was almost noon as the two sheriff's boats sped across the sea. Cate held on tight, her gaze locked ahead. Tessa, Isla, Special Agent Cho, and Cate's brother, Logan, were also on board, along with a sheriff's deputy, who captained the boat. The second boat carried the other two FBI agents, Bruce, and another deputy captain.

Emotions had swamped Cate while she'd strapped on a tactical vest that morning.

Fear. Regret. Hope. Determination.

The vest was a remnant of a world she'd left behind.

She kept tugging at the vest, trying to pull it down farther to cover her lower belly. The vests weren't made to cover the uterus, and she felt vulnerable. And exhausted. She'd barely slept last night.

Please let Henry be okay.

She tugged her vest again, and Tessa shot her an understanding glance. Logan caught Tessa's glance and gave Cate a curious look. She looked away. Her brother could be overprotective, so she hadn't told him about the baby, worried he'd argue against her accompanying them to find Henry.

He doesn't make that call.

Her brother was on board because he'd been to the island in question. He was a former army major, now a park ranger, and a multiskilled person to have along on any operation.

"There it is!" Cate shouted. The island came into view, a tall forested mountain in the middle of the sea. It spread wide east to west, but on the map, it was only a couple hundred yards deep. Something white was visible at sea level in a big alcove.

"The boat is still there," said Tessa, speaking loudly over the engines. Isla stood beside the captain, binoculars in hand, and pointed as they discussed how to approach. Agent Cho

checked his weapon, as did Tessa. She also had an AR15 slung over one shoulder. She moved to the front of the boat and looked through the scope.

Cate's impatience roiled under her skin, and she wished she had binoculars.

"Here." Logan handed her a pair.

Like an Eagle Scout, Logan was always prepared. At his side was his large backpack, stocked for every emergency. Cate knew he was armed—probably with more than one weapon—but saw no sign of one.

She'd deliberately left her weapon at home. It'd been in a safe for months, and she didn't have an official role in this operation. Cate appreciated the professional risk Isla was taking to include her. If this mission went south, Isla could lose her job over Cate's presence.

Cate studied the small island through the binoculars. She traced the coastline to the east and west and saw that the boat's location was the only place to access the island. In both directions the beach gave way to huge rocks spreading into the ocean and up the slope of the island. Logan had told them the north side of the island was unapproachable by boat. This alcove on the south side was their only choice.

Both boats slowed as they approached, and the captains spoke to each other over the radio. Cate heard that her boat would directly approach the docked boat, and the other would flank to the east.

This is it. Please be okay, Henry.

She brought her binoculars back to the docked boat. "There's something moving on the boat," she shouted just as Tessa turned around and stated, "There are two people on board the boat."

Henry?

The boats slowed even more as Isla spoke with the captain. Cate strained her eyes, trying to identify who was on board, suspecting that they were getting ready to leave.

At least the GPS tracker is still active. We can follow.

Her boat slowly moved closer as the other sheriff's boat moved east. The actions and movements of the men on the boat didn't resemble how Henry moved. Cate knew in her heart that she could identify his stance and gestures from this distance.

Everyone abruptly ducked as a loud crack sounded.

"Down!" Logan shouted at Cate and yanked her farther down, making her drop the binoculars. His head swung to check Tessa, who was already on her knees, her rifle barrel balanced on the edge of the boat.

Impossible shot from a rocking boat.

But if anyone could do it, it was Tessa.

Another shot sounded from the island.

"Shit." Logan suddenly had a weapon in hand, and Cate touched her empty hip. No gun.

She'd known the bank robbers were deadly, yet she had to respect her role as a civilian. A second later Logan pressed a pistol into her hand, a serious expression in his eyes.

Always prepared.

Cate stared at the weapon and tried to tug her vest farther over her belly.

A third shot came from the beach, and Cate stayed low.

"They're out of the boat!" yelled Tessa.

Should I have brought my baby into this?

Three closer loud cracks told her Tessa was firing.

"One's down!" Tessa shouted. She fired two more times.

"He's headed back to the woods," yelled Isla.

Cate raised her head and was surprised at how much closer the boat had moved since she had dropped. Someone lay on the dock, and a second figure was sprinting toward the trees. He turned and raised his weapon, pointing at the boat. Cate dropped to the floor again.

Two more shots from Tessa. “He’s down,” she announced.

“Any sight of Henry?” Cate asked, getting up. She gave the pistol back to Logan, not having a place to put it. She raised the binoculars. One man was spread-eagled on the rocky beach. The other was slowly pulling himself along the dock toward the boat.

“No,” said Tessa. “Watch the guy on the docks. He’s armed.”

The dock guy left a wide blood trail behind him. The second man hadn’t moved.

The captain pulled along the makeshift dock. Tessa had switched to her pistol, and she, along with Agent Cho and Isla, trained her weapon on the injured man on the dock. It was Jason Carpenter. He’d stopped moving. His eyes closed.

“I’ve got him,” said Tessa. She holstered her weapon and nimbly leaped from the edge of the boat onto the dock. She picked up a pistol near his hand and quickly searched him for more weapons. “All clear. I need a medical kit.”

Agent Cho grabbed a first aid kit, and Logan hoisted his backpack onto a shoulder. After he moved to the dock, Cate leaped too. As Agent Cho and Logan addressed his injuries, Tessa and Isla headed toward the immobile man on the beach.

Cate bent over Jason. His eyes were closed, his chest heaving and his jaw tight with pain. “Where’s Henry?” she asked. “Where’s the doctor?”

Jason turned his head back and forth, digging the back of his head into the dock.

“Where’s Henry?” Cate wanted to shake him.

“Answer her,” Logan ordered, his focus on the gushing gunshot wound in the man’s shoulder. Jason had a second wound near his hip.

“Gone,” the man forced out between clenched teeth. “He’s gone.”

“Gone where?” Her heartbeat pounded in her head, and she was terrified they were too late.

“Ocean. Off cliff. Rocks.”

Cate couldn't breathe. The dock seemed to tilt under her knees, and a dizziness swamped her.

Jason flung his arm toward the west. “Cliffs. Sorry. So sorry.” He finally opened his eyes and met Cate's gaze. She saw pain and regret. “He tried. For Mark. He tried.” He screwed his eyes shut again, his entire body going rigid as Logan packed his wound.

Cate sat back on her heels and looked toward the west. The island's west end was made of abrupt and jagged cliffs, dropping to huge rocks far below, where the ocean crashed against them.

No.

She pushed to her feet.

Henry is not gone. He can't be. I'd feel it.

Right?

Tessa was headed back toward the group while Isla stayed with the man on the beach. She met Cate's gaze, and alarm crossed her face. “What happened?” She looked down at Jason as Cho and Logan continued their work.

“He said Henry's gone,” Cate forced out. “He said he went off a cliff.” She pointed at the island's west edge. Her head felt buoyant, removed from the sudden heaviness of her limbs.

Disbelief crossed Tessa's face. “You believe him? These fucking guys who murdered three people?” She motioned to the man on the beach. “That one didn't survive.”

The second sheriff's boat arrived, and Bruce jumped off. “I've radioed the coast guard.” He knelt next to Logan and took in Jason's injuries. “They can helicopter him to a hospital faster than we can get him there by boat.”

Cate moved past the men working on Jason and took Tessa's arm. “Where's the third brother?”

Focus. Tessa is right. I have no reason to believe Jason about Henry. All I have to judge him on is that he and his brothers left three people dead in their wake.

“There’s sort of a path that leads into the woods,” said Tessa. “I think the brother on the beach was headed that way.”

“Let’s check it out.” She led Tessa off the dock and met up with Isla. “We need to see where that path goes.” Cate told Isla what Jason had said.

“Let’s go,” said Isla. The three women headed toward the woods.

“Hey.” Logan caught up with them. “I’m coming with you.” Cate glanced back at the dock. Jason had four people working on him now.

Single file, they moved along the faint path. The ocean roar quieted a bit as they went deeper into the woods. The sunlight filtered through the trees as Cate scanned in all directions, wondering what they would find.

“There,” said Tessa, halting the trek. “Sheriff’s department!” she shouted at the shack up ahead. “Please come out with your hands where we can see them!”

Silence.

Tessa repeated her demand.

Henry would have responded.

Bile rose in the back of Cate’s throat, and she wondered if they were on a fruitless search. After a few more moments of silence, they approached. Tessa entered with her weapon at ready as Isla and Logan checked the perimeter of the building.

Tessa was back a few moments later, her face grim. “All clear. I’ve found the third brother. He’s dead.”

“No Henry?” Cate blurted out.

Tessa shook her head.

The four of them entered the little building, and Cate took in the air mattresses and backpacks. “What were they thinking? How long did they believe they could last here?”

She followed Tessa into an adjacent room and caught her breath. The third brother lay on a mattress, sleeping bags covering him, his eyes closed as if he were asleep. Medical debris covered the floor. Ripped-open packaging, stained gauze, and bloody towels. Cate spotted the duffel the men had taken from the clinic along with Henry.

Henry tried, she remembered Jason saying. Cate knelt next to the young man and lifted the sleeping bag and then the bloody gauze. She drew in a sharp breath at the sight of the gunshot wound.

Logan shook his head. “That’s not survivable. Not here. Not like this.”

But Henry had tried.

“I want to go to the west cliffs,” said Cate. “I have to see.”

The others exchanged a look and nodded.

They had headed west from the shack, simply plunging their way through the woods. Cate’s heart had been in her throat the entire hike, her brain churning, wondering what she would find. It’d been a tough haul, mostly uphill, and often they’d had to veer south to find a path less steep.

“Stop,” said Logan as Cate grabbed a tree trunk to pull herself up another hill. “Look.” He pointed at the ground to Cate’s right.

The dirt on the hill was disturbed. As if someone’s feet had sunk deeply as they’d scrambled up the hill.

“There too.” Logan indicated a thin branch that was broken but still attached. The direction of its break indicated the person who’d broken it had been moving west. Like them.

“Recent?” asked Cate.

Logan took a closer look at the branch. “It looks pretty recent. The break is still a bit moist. And see how the overturned dirt is still dark and even a bit moist in that one spot? It hasn’t completely dried out like an old track would.”

Cate made Logan move to the front of the line. His tracking skills were the best in the group.

One of the brothers may have come through here. It might not have been Henry.

Logan slowed their progress. He studied the ground and all the brush around them. And then crouched. Footprints. “There’s more than one person,” he said. “You’ve got someone in tennis shoes and someone in boots.” He frowned. “Two different boot prints.”

Henry had been wearing tennis shoes with his scrubs.

Both brothers wore boots.

The group pressed on. Twice Logan spotted dried blood on sharp rocks. Rocks that Cate acknowledged she would have grabbed at for balance if she had been going faster.

They continued upward. The soil was looser and the tracks easier to follow.

At one point Cate looked up at the towering firs and froze. “Logan,” she whispered, her gaze locked on a tree trunk. He joined her but said nothing, studying the splintered bark of the tree, its pale flesh underneath revealed.

Someone fired a gun.

“Oh, my god,” Tessa muttered as she and Isla stared at the bullet hole.

“Were they chasing him?” Cate whispered.

“I suspect so,” said Logan. “I didn’t want to say anything, but the prints indicated all of them were running. This . . .” He paused, looking at the shattered wood. “Isn’t good.”

Clearly.

They moved on, and eventually the trees thinned, and they found themselves looking out over the ocean. “Stunning,” said Isla.

But Cate was looking down. The footprints had stopped and then turned, running parallel to the cliff. “We’ve got to be almost there.” It was a far, deadly drop to the water. Below, the

waves pounded against the huge rocks. The roar of the ocean nauseated her. Usually it was a calming sound, one she'd lived with all her life. But now it was giving her anxiety.

They followed the prints, putting plenty of space between them and the uneven, rocky edge of the cliffs. Henry had been stumbling as he had run, the tennis shoe prints weaving back and forth.

Was he hurt? Had they shot him?

She should have questioned Jason more about Henry. It might be too late to ask any more questions. She had her doubts about the survivability of his wounds.

Three dead brothers. Her mind went to the parents who'd believed their sons—who'd never been in trouble in their lives—had gone on a brotherly camping trip.

Those poor people.

She nearly walked into Logan's back, her mind on the Carpenter parents. He'd abruptly stopped, and she looked past him to see what'd caught his attention. She might have walked right by it, but with Logan staring, she saw it immediately.

A section of the cliff had broken away. Long gouges trailed off the edge.

Someone had been trying to hold on as they had fallen.

"Henry." The name spilled from her mouth, rising from her heart. She stepped toward the edge, and Logan grabbed her arm.

"Stay back. Do you want to go over too?"

He dropped to his knees and lay on his stomach, scooting forward to look over the edge. "Hang on to my feet just in case," he said to Tessa. Cate lay beside him to look over the edge, too, with Isla grabbing her feet.

The foamy ocean beat against the big rocks below. Cate scanned the rocks, searching for the navy blue of Henry's scrubs. She wiped the wetness from her eyes and focused harder.

I want to see, but I don't want to see.

Logan grabbed her arm and pointed almost straight down.
“There.”

Her heart in her throat, she had to slide forward to follow his finger.

“I don't see anything,” she said.

“Closer,” Logan said.

She moved forward more. And saw him. He was pale and motionless on a small cliff several feet below them. Tears ran down her face.

“Henry!” she screamed.

16

Henry opened his eyes at Cate's scream.

I'm hallucinating.

Cate and Logan were staring at him over the edge of the cliff. He'd dreamed and thought about Cate all night. Seen her face many times.

But he hadn't dreamed of Logan.

He blinked. "Cate?" He tried to sit up, but the pain forced him back down.

"Are you okay?" she shouted at him over the crash of the waves far below.

She's real. She's actually here.

Tears threatened.

"Hold on," Logan yelled. "We'll figure out how to get you up. Might take a bit." He vanished, leaving just Cate staring down.

"Are you okay?" she repeated.

"My shoulder is dislocated," he yelled back. "And I love you." His voice cracked.

"I love you too. Don't go anywhere. We'll be right back." She vanished as Logan had.

"Very funny," he muttered. He exhaled deeply. The night had been a long, miserable, cold, and painful one.

He'd slid over the edge last night, convinced he would be dead in seconds. But he'd landed hard on his left shoulder on a small ledge. The pain and awareness that he'd dislocated his shoulder had been instantaneous.

But he was alive.

Nearly screaming from the pain, he'd rolled as close to the cliff wall as possible, worried Scott would see him and he'd be a sitting duck on the ledge. An easy shot.

He'd glued himself to the cliff wall, trying to hear voices over the ocean's roar, but he'd never heard Scott or Jason. After what had seemed like an eternity, he'd relaxed and focused on his arm. Muscle spasms and occasional numbness had plagued him. He'd shimmied out of his scrub pants and used them to immobilize his arm, tying the pants around his chest. He'd run a hand over the shoulder, recognizing the odd flat slant that he'd seen many times in the ER. He'd tried to move as little as possible, avoiding the arm pain, and worried nonstop that the ledge he'd landed on would also collapse. He'd made a feeble attempt to scale the cliff. But there were no stable footholds, and he needed two good arms.

His water bottle was lost. But he'd eaten the jerky after debating if he should save it and worrying that it would make him thirstier. He'd fallen asleep and woken a dozen times in a panic, convinced he was rolling off the ledge or that Scott had found him. He'd put his faith in Cate, knowing she wouldn't stop until she'd found him.

And she had.

He closed his eyes and tried to relax. Everything would be okay now.

"His shoulder is dislocated," Cate told Isla and Tessa. "But he seems okay otherwise."

"The coast guard copter is coming to take Jason to the hospital," said Tessa. "Maybe they can get Henry off the cliff?"

"I can do it," said Logan.

All three women turned to him in surprise. He knelt, pulling long straps, ropes, and carabiners out of his backpack.

Cate couldn't picture what he had in mind. "What's your plan?"

"I'm going to rappel down as you guys brace me and use those trees as anchors. Then I'll rig a harness for him," said Logan.

“What about his shoulder?” asked Cate. “Anything strapped around his chest is going to affect it.”

“I’ll make something like you wear for zip-lining. It’ll go around his thighs and hips, and he can hang on with his right hand. His shoulder will probably get bumped a few times, but it shouldn’t be too bad if it’s immobilized well and I follow behind to guide him.”

“Lower me down instead. I can do it,” said Cate. She needed to put her hands on Henry. She ached to touch him and confirm that he was all right.

“Cate, absolutely not,” stated Tessa with a glare.

Logan looked from Tessa to Cate. “Why not? She’s lighter. It makes more sense.”

“No,” said Tessa, holding Cate’s gaze. “I’ll do it.”

Because I’m pregnant.

Cate wanted to roll her eyes.

“What’s going on?” Logan narrowed suspicious eyes at Cate.

“I’m pregnant,” she said, turning up her palms. “Barely.”

Surprise and then elation filled his face. “That’s great!” Then he scowled. “Tessa’s right. You shouldn’t—”

“Don’t tell me what I can’t do,” Cate said firmly. “I’m going down to get Henry. I’ll be secure, right? Or do you not know what you’re doing with those ropes?”

Indecision warred in his expression. “Does Henry know you’re pregnant?”

“He will in a minute, and what does that have to do with anything?”

“Fine.” He turned to his backpack.

“Congratulations,” Isla said with a big smile. “Great news.”

“Thank you,” said Cate. “It’s still sinking in.” She’d noticed that as more people found out, the more normal it felt.

Ten minutes later, Logan and the others lowered her over the edge of the cliff. Tessa had radioed Bruce for more help, and he and the other agents were on their way to the cliff. Logan had demonstrated how Cate was to put the straps around Henry's upper thighs, creating a seat for him to be lifted up.

Her climb down took only a couple of minutes, and then she was on the ledge next to Henry, who had stood, watching her inch her way down the face of the cliff. He wrapped one arm around her and buried his face in her hair. "I wasn't sure I'd ever get to do this again," he whispered.

"That makes two of us." Cate gripped him tight, avoiding his bad arm and pressing the length of her body against his. "But I wasn't about to give up."

"I knew you wouldn't."

She pulled back, her gaze scanning the face she'd missed so badly. He was dirty, smelly, and scraped up, and his scrub top was ripped. He looked perfect to her. "Nice boxers," she said with a smile.

"They'll be going in the trash after this."

Tell him now.

"I'm pregnant." She held his gaze, grateful she hadn't been denied the opportunity to tell him.

His eyes widened, and his arm tightened around her. "*You are?*"

"Yes." She couldn't hold back her smile at the joy on his face.

"That's amazing! I'm so . . . so . . . so excited!" The exhaustion on his face vanished, and he pulled her closer to him.

"I worried you'd never find out," she said in his ear.

He trembled, and tears burned in her eyes at his vibrations against her chest.

"Somehow I would have known," he whispered.

Four days later

“I’m not going to last three weeks wearing this thing,” Henry muttered to himself as he walked toward Black Tail Bakery. The refrain was getting old, but the sling was driving him nuts. It was constantly in the way.

But he was alive.

Unlike Jason Carpenter, who hadn’t survived his injuries, leaving his parents without children. Piles of cash from previous bank robberies had been found hidden in the brothers’ auto shop. Their mother and father had been unaware the boys had taken it upon themselves to get their parents out of hundreds of thousands of dollars of debt.

Money drove all that death and violence.

Henry encountered parts of each brother in his dreams every night. Scott’s anger, Jason’s hope, Mark’s stillness. Their faces forever burned in his brain.

After Henry’s rescue, he’d been transported to the hospital, where they’d positioned his shoulder back in place. Logan had offered to do it at the top of the cliff, but Henry had turned him down. He’d wanted pain medication first. The shoulder had been out of joint for too many hours, and he’d known it would be tough to get back in place. He was glad he’d waited. It’d taken three people in the ER to brace his body and maneuver the arm. Now it needed rest for a few months.

He knew how lucky he was.

It nearly brought him to his knees each time he remembered how close he’d come to death on the cliff. For some reason he’d been given a second chance. Sleep had been difficult, and he’d resorted to sleep medication to avoid the constant jerking awake and nightmares.

Cate is pregnant.

The thought grounded him and elated him.

I might have never met our child.

He'd had a lot of time to think about their future, and now he had a plan. He took a deep breath, wondering what Cate would think of his suggestion.

A tourist held the door for him at the bakery, his gaze on Henry's sling. Henry thanked him as he went through, and his heart lifted as he spotted Cate clearing a table.

She's beautiful.

He never tired of staring at her and was excited to see the changes the pregnancy would bring.

She did a double take and immediately approached. "Is everything okay?" she asked, wrinkling her forehead. "Is your arm bothering you?"

"No. I wanted to see you."

Cate smiled, and his pulse stuttered.

"Come with me for a minute." He led her out of the bakery and into the sunshine, moving to the far end of the patio seating. He took one of her hands, wishing he could grab both of them. "I want to get married."

Her lips quirked. "We're going to."

"I want to get married today."

She blinked. "Today?"

"Yes. I applied online for a wedding license the first day I was back. I don't want to wait another day. I know you've made a lot of wedding plans for December, but I—"

"Let's do it." Her eyes lit up, and she crushed his hand with her grip. "I've got my dress, and Jane can do the ceremony. Nothing else matters. We can call or text everyone. If they can't make it, that's too bad. You're the only person who needs to be there."

"Are you sure?"

“I’m positive. Knowing we have to wait until December has been driving me crazy too.”

“Do you mind not doing it at the inn?”

“Where do you want to do it?”

He inhaled. “This is going to sound odd, but I want to do it at the Widow’s Walk. I want to stare from that height at the ocean and do something wonderful. For too many hours I was in a similar position, worried I was about to die. If we can survive what happened to me on that other cliff, we can make it through anything.”

She studied his face, her gaze searching. Then she smiled softly. “Widow’s Walk it is.”

Cate held Henry’s hand as the sun started to set on the ocean. The sky was slowly changing into beautiful shades of lavender and blue, and Jane was speaking, reading a lovely description of marriage and commitment and love. But Cate didn’t hear a word. She was focused on the man in front of her.

About twenty of their closest friends stood near them on the heights, ready to witness the vows they were about to take. A flurry of phone calls and texts had pulled the impromptu ceremony together. Cate had zipped up her dress, pleased it was too early for the pregnancy to affect the fit.

Henry wore a white shirt, matching his white sling.

Our wedding photos will be interesting.

The pictures would remind them of what they’d survived to be together.

He held her gaze, and she felt his love to the bottom of her soul. Henry hadn’t stopped smiling the entire day.

“I love you,” she said quietly to him.

His eyes lit up with a hunger that made her skin tingle. He pulled her to him and kissed her deeply.

Jane stopped reading. “Not yet, Henry,” she said, amusement in her voice.

Chuckles sounded from their watching friends.

Henry pulled back from her mouth. “Don’t care,” he said, looking into Cate’s eyes again.

“I love you too,” he whispered. “I can’t wait until we’re a family.”

“I can’t wait either.” She kissed him back, and their audience started to cheer.

Soft, happy sparks rose along Cate’s spine. A ghostly blessing.

Everything is perfect.

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Photo © 2016 Rebekah Jule Photography

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