

CHAPTER *Three*

Each one of us seemed to be holding our breath. Camila grabbed Jack's arm with both hands, her eyes wide and her mouth gaping. Jack put his arm around Camila protectively, as if the police were there to arrest her. Richard stood frozen; only his eyes moved—darting from the sheriff to Griffin.

“You can't do this.” Griffin's voice had a fierce edge to it.

“My lawyer will hear about this!” Richard whipped out his cell phone.

The sheriff stood with his hands on his wide hips. “Call whoever you want. In the meantime, we *will* execute this search warrant.”

Griffin slammed the document onto the marble counter. “The hell you will!”

The sheriff narrowed his brown eyes. “What are you afraid of us finding?”

“Nothing, because you will search this house over my dead body. Or yours.” Griffin was wound tight, like a coil ready to snap.

“Threatening a police officer? You’re lucky I don’t arrest you right now. You two, upstairs.” The sheriff jerked his head toward the pair of policeman in the hallway. “Clarke, you’ll search the basement. I’ll take the first floor.”

In one sudden movement, Griffin darted down the hall and blocked the basement door with his broad shoulders, his expression dark. “There are dangerous chemicals in the lab. You could get hurt.”

Deputy Clarke—who looked like he could have been a marine or a football player—spoke in a calm voice, but he had his hand on his belt, right next to his gun: “I appreciate your concern, but I’ll be just fine. Now stand aside, or we’ll have to take you in.”

Griffin spread his arms out and grabbed on to the door-jamb. “No! I won’t let you down there!”

The wooden molding splintered and cracked beneath his fingers, yet Griffin held on even tighter. I stepped backward. How did he do that?

Richard dropped the phone. “Griffin, let go and come here.”

“Listen to your uncle. If you don’t move, we’ll have no choice but to arrest you.” As Deputy Clarke unclipped the handcuffs from his belt, Griffin shoved the officer, sending him reeling into the wall. Griffin mouthed something at Richard, then darted outside.

All hell had broken loose.

Jack charged after Griffin, but Griffin was long gone—I’d never seen anyone run so fast. Richard and the sheriff engaged in a long, heated argument, with Richard insisting that the sheriff hold off on the search warrant until his attorney could file an emergency motion, but the sheriff was having none of it. He demanded that Richard unlock the basement door, or he was going to arrest both him and Griffin and break it down. After more shouting, Richard finally acquiesced.

Richard shadowed Deputy Clarke, Dad went upstairs to watch what the policemen were doing, and Camila followed the sheriff around the first floor. While all this was happening, I sat at the counter wondering what the heck was in the basement that Griffin didn’t want the police to find.

A couple of hours later, Deputy Clarke emerged with boxes of documents. Richard trailed after him until his phone rang. He asked me to take his place while he answered

the call, which was about the last thing I wanted to do.

“Are you a relation of the Bradfords?” Deputy Clarke asked as we walked to his cruiser.

I introduced myself and explained how Dad and I knew them.

“When was the last time you saw the Bradford family?”

I opened his car door. “Four years ago. And before you ask, I don’t know anything about Malcolm’s and Sarah’s deaths, other than the fact they drowned.”

He frowned, his bushy eyebrows almost touching, and deposited the boxes onto the back seat. “If you come across anything suspicious or unusual, it’s your duty to alert the police.” He handed me his card, with his cell phone number scribbled across the back.

“Why are you investigating their deaths? Just because they were out on the boat so late?”

Deputy Clarke’s frown deepened. “Hardly. I shouldn’t comment on an ongoing investigation, but suffice it to say the circumstances surrounding the accident are suspicious.”

I wondered what he knew that I didn’t as I followed him into the library. When I crossed the threshold, I gasped. Every framed picture had been taken off the wall, and piles of books were scattered on the floor.

“I didn’t find a thing,” the sheriff said to Deputy Clarke.

“As I told you would be the case,” Camila said through pursed lips. “Which means you trashed the library for nothing. The governor happens to be a friend of mine, and his wife is on the board of a charity I founded. He will be hearing from me, and I will see to it that you don’t get away with this. That’s a promise.”

A shadow crossed the sheriff’s face. “I’m just doing my job, ma’am.”

“What did you expect to find in the pictures?” I asked.

“Not that it’s any of your business, young lady, but people hide many things in frames, particularly thumb drives.” He shifted his gaze to Deputy Clarke. “What did you turn up?”

Deputy Clarke scrubbed a hand across the top of his dark crew-cut. “Hard to tell. There are a lot of documents to go through.”

“Finish up here and go over the security footage again. I’ll meet you back at the station.”

Camila followed the sheriff as he thundered out the door.

Deputy Clarke heaved a sigh. “What a mess. Let me give you a hand picking up.”

While Deputy Clarke re-shelved the books, I got to

work on the framed photos. Struggling with an oversized photo of the Magellans, Deputy Clarke grabbed the other end. “This group sure did a lot of traveling. Where was this one taken?”

“Madagascar. Dad said we’ll go back some day and he’ll show me the Tsingy de Bemaraha Strict Nature Reserve. He said it’s the most amazing place he’s ever been.” But even as I said the words, I couldn’t imagine him leaving New England again, let alone the country. His adventurous side seemed to have died along with Mom.

Deputy Clarke looked closely at the photograph. “My father moved to Dublin when I was a teenager to take a job as a librarian. When I visited him, I toured around the UK. Never been to Madagascar, though.”

My eyes swept across the dazzling pictures of jungles, deserted beaches, snowcapped mountains, and volcanoes, and I sighed. “I’ve hardly ever left New England.”

Deputy Clarke laughed. “You have your whole life to see the world.”

Having re-hung the photos—hopefully in the right places—I turned my attention to the antique maps scattered across the table. Deputy Clarke pointed to several with damaged frames. “Damn it, I told the sheriff not to do

that. There's no reason to come in here like a bull in a china shop, making people even more upset, yet he always does."

"I'm really not sure people could have been *more* upset," I said as I tried to guess where the reproduction of the *Hereford Mappa Mundi*—the largest Medieval map in existence—went. I had loved studying it because it not only included geography, but scenes from mythology, too. I ran my finger over the spirals of the labyrinth—built to contain the Minotaur, a bull-headed, man-eating monster.

Deputy Clarke smiled. "I believe it goes right there." He pointed. "A bit out of your reach. Want me to hang it?"

"Thanks."

"Do you know what the Bradfords were doing in Europe a few years back?" he asked as he straightened it.

"Malcolm was a visiting professor at Trinity, in Ireland, and Richard had just retired, so he went with them."

"Curiously, after Malcolm's tenure was over, the family was scheduled to return home, but they never did. In fact, I can't find a trace of where they were for almost a year. Strange, don't you think?"

I shrugged. "Not really. Dad's whole group of friends liked to travel to remote places." I picked up a map of the British Isles, but the frame came apart in my hands.

Peering over my shoulder, Deputy Clarke cursed under his breath. “That one looks like an antique, too. What a shame. I can take it to be fixed.”

“Get the hell out of my house. Now.” Griffin loomed in the doorway.

“I was just trying to help clean up,” Deputy Clarke said. “I can take whatever was inadvertently broken to be repaired, courtesy of the department.”

He left out the part about questioning me, but it was clear from the ferocious look on Griffin’s face that he wasn’t buying it anyway.

“Inadvertently?” Griffin snorted. “How about you get your hands off my things and get out.”

Deputy Clarke folded his arms across his wide chest. “I still need to look at that security footage.”

“Follow me,” Griffin said through clenched teeth.

Not long after, I heard raised voices from the foyer, followed by the slamming of a door. I went to see what was going on now—half expecting to find Griffin being led away in handcuffs for threatening the police again—but stopped dead in my tracks. Richard and Griffin were alone, and Richard was consoling Griffin.

“Don’t worry. It’s fine.” Richard put his arm around

Griffin's shoulder. "Although I think I lost ten years off my life."

Griffin's entire body seemed to exhale.

Not wanting to interrupt, I returned to the library and carefully laid the maps with the broken frames on the table. Two were reproductions, but the map of the British Isles was an original, dated 1776 and signed by the cartographer. It was itself a piece of art, with beautiful hand-drawn illustrations of ships, sea serpents, and a lute-playing merman. The map was so old the parchment had yellowed and frayed, and some of the letters had faded beyond recognition. I couldn't believe how many small islands there were: Lindisfarne, Isle of Arran, Walney Island, Rathlin Island, Hy-Brasil, Inis Mochaoi . . . there were at least a hundred.

Looking closely, I saw that the frame wasn't broken; the wood just needed to be worked back into place. I pulled on a pair of gloves I found in a tray on the table, and then I cautiously removed the map. After fixing the frame, I laid the map back down and spied faint scribbling on the back. I picked up a magnifying glass from the tray and held it over the small, flowing script.

*The Serpent Society has found me. Rest assured, I will never disclose the location of the island. If I do not join you, know that our secret died with me.*

*Yours always, in life and in death,*

*Elizabeth*

My breath caught in my throat. Next to her own name, Elizabeth had drawn the same exact symbol as Dad's tattoo. The paper below it was thin and rough, as if something had been rubbed out.

Who was Elizabeth—was she involved in the occult? What was the Serpent Society? What island?

What kind of secret would be worth dying for?