



Prologue
New York, New York
November, 2006

“So what did you think about the play, Rob?”
“I don’t know, was I paying attention?”
Juliette Macmillan nudged her husband’s arm. “No, as usual you were on the verge of snoring.”

“Well don’t tell Macy that I slept a little. I know she was all excited about her friend Katelyn having the lead in an off-Broadway show.”

“Your secret is safe with me.”

Juliette looked out the window as the people of the city scurried to get out of the wind. A little boy, bundled up like a puffy marshmallow, stopped to catch a few snowflakes on his eager tongue. His mother tugged at him, trying to hurry him along.

“I can’t remember when we last had snow this early in the season. Do be careful,” Juliette reminded Robert. “You know how greasy it is when it first starts coming down hard.”

“Greasy? I’ve never heard snow described quite in that manner, dear.”

“You know what I mean. Okay *slick*. It’s *slick* at first.”

They slowly moved along the city’s main drag, catching every red light along the way.

Juliette didn’t mind. The lights made the snow twinkle and she could take time to look into the store window

displays, which ranged from the exotic to the nostalgic. Surfing Santas sporting flashy beach fashion, brilliant, sparkly gingerbread houses with plenty of intricate moving parts, carolers in 19th century period dress giving impromptu concerts. The stores offered artificial wreaths of every shape and size, and plentiful holiday baubles for every room in the house. The displays got bigger each year and incorporated more live action.

The snow came down harder now and Robert focused on his driving, finally making it on the Tappan Zee Bridge headed for the hotel.

Juliet said, "We should have planned to go to the Keys for Christmas. I think it's going to be a heavy snow year."

"Well a nice old-fashioned New England Christmas is good to have every once in a while. Keeps us humble," Robert said.

"Humble indeed. Keeps us dependent on firewood and oil when we could be boating in the bay, is what it does." Juliette shivered a little, more at the anticipated high heating costs than from the cold. "But Macy likes to mix it up a little, just like you."

Half an inch of snow had accumulated on the bridge. Juliette looked down toward the water. The dime-sized white crystals swirled on the wind, blowing over the edge of the bridge and disappearing into nothingness. Occasionally, the lights from across the Hudson caught the ripples on the water, and only then could she tell what was below.

The front tires caught a slippery patch.

The car fishtailed first to the left, then the right.

"Hang on!" Robert yelled as Juliette grabbed the dash and armrest.

He struggled to regain control but slid sideways into the steel guardrail, the sickening crunch of metal-on-metal shrieking in the night. They hit the rail hard, then bounced away from it. The airbags exploded open. Momentarily stunned, Robert and Juliette sat.

Behind them, another car hit the same ice and smacked their bumper, then came to a stop.

“Juliette, stay here I’m going to check on them.” Robert unbuckled and heaved his car door open.

“Are you all right?” Juliette could hear Robert and the other driver conversing. The other driver’s wife and teenage son were also in the car, both of whom were shaken but fine. The son was already dialing 911 on his cell phone as Robert and the other driver surveyed the damage. A couple of other drivers on the bridge stopped to offer assistance.

Robert went back to Juliette on the passenger side. “They’ve called 911. Do we still have that blanket in the trunk?” he asked.

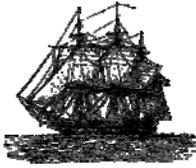
“I think it’s in the back seat here...” As Juliette turned to look for the blanket, she saw the snow plow from the westbound lane hurtling toward them. She managed a scream as the plow skidded sideways, the driver practically standing on the brakes, pumping with every pound in his generous body. The plow t-boned the car with Juliette in it, and Robert still on the passenger side. The plow pinned him against the steel barrier.

“Julie—” he croaked, before he heard the sound of rivets popping. The railing gave way to the car. During the descent, Juliette’s face contorted into fear and shock, but she could emit no sound.

“Move, MOVE!” The driver of the other car cried. He and his family tried desperately to scramble out. But the Hudson River beckoned and so informed the wind. The next gust forced their car against the railing. More rivets popped out in sequence, like dominoes. The second car plummeted into the frigid water.

Of the five victims, only four bodies were recovered.

Robert Macmillan was never found.



Chapter 1
Islamorada, Florida
August, 2007

“**W**hat in the hell was I thinking?” Macy said to no one in particular, holding the lock to the gate that enclosed the property.

Her parents bought the land when she was nine—three acres at the end of a small peninsula on the bay side of Long Key. The peninsula faced a small group of islands, the Isles of Sumter, which lay to the northeast about half a mile away. The peninsula completed the west side of a horseshoe that partially enclosed an old quarry. Macy called it “the lagoon,” and remembered many a day jumping off the rope swing into the deep azure blue water. Vacationers used to park on the side of the road to take a dip, fish, or just leisurely enjoy the picturesque view. If they were lucky, they might spy a dolphin or two swimming in the bay just on the edge of the lagoon.

There was a lot of discussion around what to name the estate. Macy remembered the last conversation well.

“How did you come up with Pirate’s Cove?” Juliette asked Robert.

“Well, it reminds me of a similar jetty in Rye, New Hampshire. Just around the corner was a restaurant called Pirate’s Cove. Great baked scallop pie. Plus, you’ve heard the locals say there’s treasure buried somewhere around the peninsula.” Robert winked at her.

Juliette smirked and rolled her eyes. She knew he had more than a just a passive interest in the pirate stories that his family told again and again.

“I must admit though, I will miss our camping days,” she said.

Macy would miss those days, too. Sleeping 20 feet from the water, listening to the ebb and flow of the little waves licking the shoreline and the water birds announcing their catch in the night shallows.

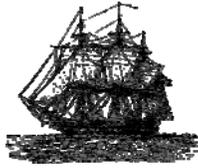
With the insurance money and the remainder of her parents’ assets she no longer needed to work. But she felt useless and idle with too much time on her hands. Now, the house was nothing more than a skeleton of rebar and concrete that stood on the peninsula like a sentry, waiting for the return of the wayfarers that would never make it home. Macy decided to take a year off and resume construction on it. Somehow, she would make Pirate’s Cove her home.

She roamed the around the lonely structure, hearing voices and whispers at every turn. She watched the sunset from the second floor of the skeleton house. The September sun dipped below the lowest cloud and painted a burnished orange arc just above the horizon. It reminded her of a child taking a swipe across a page using a fistful of orange and red crayons. The sun settled into its cozy night-nest and Macy turned to her own bed—an air mattress and sleeping bag on the floor. The roof was in place on the house but the vast open spaces allowed the breeze to dance around the rooms before exiting to the ocean side. She wept a little thinking of her parents, but being in the open air near the water made her feel closer to them.

Macy settled into her sleeping bag and grabbed a bottled water from her cooler. The only other items in the second floor bedroom were a telescope she had brought from her apartment in New York, some clothing, a battery-operated lantern, and a book about the stars. She didn’t even bring anything to protect herself from unsavory

characters. Sure, the Keys were full of unsavory characters, but dangerous ones were few and far between. Plus, she'd lived in New York City for the last dozen years, and Macy thought that about said it all.

Watching the stars had been her passion since she was in junior high. She thought about studying astronomy at NYU but opted for something that might afford her a better living—Finance. After a 10-year stint on Wall Street as a stockbroker, Macy was now hundreds of miles, and what felt like hundreds of *years* away from that life. She didn't miss it at all.



Chapter 2

The Straits of Florida

August, 1719

It wasn't the heaviness of the wind but the quality of it that made the first mate uneasy. Each gust was stronger than the next. A rat scurried across the deck in search of food and was swept away by a wave washing up and over the ship's bow.

At first, no one seemed especially alarmed. Just before twilight it was a little rough, but the sun still shone through the final clouds of the day. Now deep into the night the sudden shift and the ferocity with which the storm surged upon them forced the entire crew of the *Vanguardia* to scramble around the upper deck. The mariners pulled on ropes as thick as a man's arm to lower the sails on the ship's three masts. Even in the rain, the action of the ropes winding through the pulleys produced smoke and a stench like burning flesh.

Esperanza, why did I think it a good idea to sail her again? Captain Benito del Saliera was alone in his cabin furiously writing in the log book. Overwhelmed by an ominous feeling about this storm, he thought about his wife while trying to record the events of the present. He closed the log book, left it on the table, and got up to assist his crew. A loud noise in the aft of his cabin caused him to turn around. The water surged through the broken glass in perfect rhythm with each starboard list. The captain nearly lost his footing, but at the same time found the ship's motion

eerily soothing like a baby's rocking cradle. The water forced the remaining intact windows to pop and crack. The captain quickly genuflected and crossed himself, then ran up to join his crew.

Through the mayhem, the captain attempted to bark orders to his second and third in command. Even without plotting their current course in the past few hours, he knew full well where they were. They were where ships meet the heavens—where *la bruja del mar*, the sea witch, brews up the kind of storm that exacts revenge on all trespassers.

The winds whipped and howled. The captain attempted to turn the *Vanguardia* into the path of the storm so the broadside wouldn't be subjected to the full force of the oncoming gale. At some point, all hands realized it was fruitless to work the ship and they began grabbing and holding on to anything that was stable. They prayed, they screamed, and they cried through the unimaginable pounding force of the sea. Shortly before dawn on August 12, 1719, the *Vanguardia* ran aground on the western coral reef of the Straits of Florida. The coral sliced a port-side gaping hole, half the length of the ship. She bled cargo and bodies for a quarter mile swath. The sea witch claimed all souls.

And then the sea was calm.