

“Goodnight,” I replied.

I watched him crunch off along the gravel path into the darkness. I was glad Rosie hadn't been there for that conversation as she'd be unsettled by what had happened to Will's sister. It was the sort of thing that would nag away at her and that she'd spend too long thinking about. Resolving not to say a word to her about what I'd just learned, I went back inside.

Chapter Six

I found Dad and Kate poring over notes they'd taken earlier that day. I didn't say anything about the guga hunter. I knew Dad wouldn't like that Cailean had been out there at this time of night, and I didn't want to get drawn into a big discussion about it or be told off for talking to him.

There was absolutely nothing to do at the lighthouse in the evenings. No TV, no internet, no nothing. I was glad I at least had stargazing to keep me occupied. Charlie had already gone up to bed, and Rosie was in our bedroom, so I went upstairs to join her, only to find that Charlie wasn't asleep after all. He was crouched at the end of the landing, playing with a little wind-up toy that clicked and clacked its way out of the shadows, knocked against

my shoe and fell to the floor. I peered down and saw that it was an old-fashioned-looking tin soldier, its arms and legs still jerking stiffly up and down at its sides.

“Charlie, I’m pretty sure you’re supposed to be in bed,” I said, leaning down to pick up the soldier. “Where did you get this anyway? It looks ancient.”

“It’s not mine,” Charlie replied.

“Whose is it then?” I glanced up and froze. For a weird moment, it looked as if there were two boys lurking in the shadows – Charlie looking straight up at me and a second boy who’d turned to face the wall. But then my eyes adjusted, and I saw that it was only Charlie there.

“It’s my friend’s,” he said with a giggle, snatching it from me and then running off to his own room.

I let him go and went on to the bedroom I was sharing with Rosie. She was reading her magazines, but looked up when I came in.

“It’s going to be *soooo* boring here,” I said, throwing myself down beside her. I reached over to my bag and grabbed a packet of sweets from the journey, offering them to Rosie before taking one for myself. “I can’t believe we spent all those hours travelling

only to end up in Scotland. We could have been somewhere really hot and exotic by now.”

“I like it here,” Rosie said, turning another page of her magazine.

“You would.” I sighed. “Seeing as it’s both spooky and weird. I’m tired. I’m going to bed.”

I gathered up my things and went to the bathroom. The pipes rumbled and creaked overhead once again as I brushed my teeth and got changed into my pyjamas. When I returned to our room, Rosie was still reading her magazine, engrossed in a story about the Bermuda Triangle. I hoped she wasn’t going to stay up too much longer because the light was disturbing the bluebottle that had become trapped in there with us. It droned endlessly as it kept up a steady search for an exit, bumping against the walls and shuttered windows, and even buzzing into my hair a few times so that I had to bat it away.

“Goodnight,” I said, as I got into my sleeping bag.

“Night.”

The blow-up mattress wasn’t particularly comfortable, and the pillow smelled damp. I thought the noise from the fly and the things Cailean had told me would keep me awake, but I must have been

more worn out than I thought because I fell asleep almost at once.



It was pitch-black when I woke up a little while later. With the shutters barring the windows, there wasn't even the soft glow of moonlight shining through the glass. For a disorienting moment, I wasn't quite sure where I was. But then the distant roar of the sea filtered through to me from outside, and Bird Rock and the lighthouse came flooding back. Everything was fine. I was sleeping on the floor with my sister. I couldn't see her, but I could hear her breathing right beside me.

I realized she must be awake too because at that moment she reached for my hand and gave it a squeeze. It was a bit muggy in the room with no windows open, and Rosie's hand was clammy. I squeezed her hand back, and we stayed like that for a few minutes before I started to get fidgety and wanted to roll over. I tried to extricate my hand, but she tightened her grip – not just a little but a lot.

“Ow! Rosie, cut it out.”

I snatched my hand away, but then a voice spoke

from the doorway.

“Did you say something, Jess?”

I looked up, startled, my head suddenly fogged with confusion. Rosie was walking into our bedroom, a torch in her hand. In its light, I could see that the sleeping bag beside me was empty.

“What ... weren't you just here?” I was about to add *holding my hand*, but couldn't quite bring myself to say the words.

“I went to get a glass of water,” Rosie replied. She came over and climbed into her sleeping bag.

Dreaming. I must have been asleep and dreaming. That was the only explanation.

Rosie lay back down, and I longed to do the same, but my heart was still racing, and I needed to pee anyway. I reluctantly left the warmth of my sleeping bag, trying very hard not to think about that clammy hand squeezing mine tight in the darkness. It had felt so real...

I couldn't remember where the light switches were out on the landing so I groped and fumbled my way down the dark corridor. When I got to the bathroom, I found the electric light and flicked the switch. It came on with a buzzing sound, filling

the room with a sickly glow. The room wasn't empty as I'd expected, and I let out a cry of surprise at the sight of Charlie sitting in the bath, his knees pulled up in front of him, staring straight ahead.

"What are you doing?" I yelled. "It's the middle of the night! You're supposed to be in bed."

The next second I recalled what Dad had said about Charlie sleepwalking, but it didn't seem like that was what was happening here. His gaze was perfectly focused as he looked at me.

"I couldn't sleep." Then in a very quiet voice, he added, "There's someone in my room."

"What? No, there isn't."

I was about to send him back to bed when it occurred to me that I probably should check that there *wasn't* anyone in his room. We weren't alone on the island after all – there had been a guga hunter hanging around outside just that evening, a fact that I'd failed to mention to anybody. It would be pretty shitty of me if I sent Charlie back to bed only for him to be snatched away.

"All right, show me," I said with a sigh.

He scrambled out of the bath, tucked his hand into mine and led me back to the landing. This time I was

able to find the light switch and flick it on before we went into Charlie's bedroom. His train night light was on, softly illuminating the room, which was completely empty.

"You see?" I said. "No one here."

"He must have gone back upstairs," Charlie replied.

"Now I know you're making it up," I said. "We can't get upstairs – the trapdoor's chained up."

"Not at night," Charlie insisted. "He opens it."

"Would you please just get back into bed and go to sleep?" I asked, trying not to sound too exasperated. This was way more than I wanted to be dealing with in the middle of the night.

Charlie obediently returned to his sleeping bag and snuggled into it. I hesitated in the doorway for a minute, wondering whether there was anything else I ought to do.

"Do you need anything?" I finally asked. "A glass of water from the kitchen?"

"Can I have a ham sandwich?"

I rolled my eyes. "No. It's late. Almost breakfast time. You can have something then."

"OK," he replied in a small voice that immediately made me feel bad.

“Well ... goodnight then.”

“Goodnight, Jess.”

I went back to use the bathroom before returning to the landing. I was just passing the staircase and probably would have walked right past, but I felt a cold draught trail across my skin, like fingers. I shivered slightly and glanced up, thinking there might be a window open nearby.

And that’s when I saw it.

The trapdoor leading up to the lighthouse tower was no longer chained up. It was wide open.

Chapter Seven

For a long moment, I just stood and stared at the yawning black hole leading to the top of the tower. What the hell? *How* had it come open? It had been locked with an actual chain. Then my eye fell on something propped against the wrought-iron bannister of the staircase – it was a pair of bolt cutters. And shining on the floor beside it was a little silver football badge – just like the one that had been pinned to Will’s jacket. Had he actually been stupid enough to break into the lighthouse tower? And how had he got into the cottage in the first place? Perhaps he was the person Charlie had seen in his bedroom? I hesitated, wondering whether I should go and wake Dad.

But then I remembered how he had specifically

asked me to make sure I locked the door when I came in from stargazing, because of Charlie's sleepwalking. My blood ran cold as I realized I'd forgotten. I hurried downstairs and sure enough, the kitchen door was unlocked. I turned the key in the lock and put it up on the hook before returning to the landing. All thoughts of telling Dad about Will disappeared as then I'd have to explain how he'd got inside the lighthouse in the first place. The easiest thing seemed to be to deal with Will and get him out as quickly and quietly as possible.

So I walked over to the spiral staircase, slipped Will's badge in my pocket, put my foot on the first step and climbed up towards the trapdoor in the ceiling. The metal stairs beyond were cold beneath my bare feet and, like everything else in this place, coated in a layer of sticky salt. It felt weird climbing up into pitch-black, and I stupidly found myself thinking about pale hands reaching out for me in the dark. I *really* had to stop paying attention to talk of ghosts and ghouls. I reminded myself firmly that I didn't believe in any of that stuff. But that did not mean the thought of it wasn't freaky...

It felt cooler and mustier as I climbed, and soon I reached a small landing with a room leading off it. I paused, wondering whether I should investigate, but if Will was there surely he'd have a light on? I continued to climb, up and up. Before long, I'd gone so far that I was almost glad there was no light, as looking down would have been enough to make me break out in a cold sweat. I might not have believed in ghosts, but I *was* afraid of heights. The spiral staircase was so narrow and twisty that it made me feel a bit dizzy. Finally I reached a new level. The door leading off from the landing was closed, but a faint strip of light shone from beneath the gap. There was someone in there.

I stepped on to the wooden boards of the landing, wincing slightly as they gave a loud creak. They were filthy too – I could feel a thick coating of dust beneath my feet. The air up here smelled of saline, corrosion and rusted metal. I straightened my shoulders, marched over to the door and pushed it open. It swung inwards to reveal a small, circular room full of filing cabinets. The square objects looked odd against the curved walls, and I felt a faint prickling ache behind my eyes, as if I was

looking at an optical illusion.

On the walls were dozens of photos of the lighthouse. They weren't new pictures but old black-and-white shots, some in frames. They made the room seem like a shrine. There were pieces of paper and leather-bound books scattered all over the floor. And sitting behind an old wooden desk, a large book open before him, was Will.

He was still wearing the same outfit from the day before, which made me very aware of the fact that I was in my pajamas. They definitely weren't the clothes I'd have chosen if I'd known I was going to be confronting an intruder.

"Don't scream," Will said.

He didn't look at all guilty or startled to be caught out like this. In fact, he was glaring at me, as if *I* was the one who wasn't supposed to be there.

I rolled my eyes. "Why would I scream? I knew it was you up here – I found your badge downstairs." I took it from my pocket and tossed it over to him. "And your bolt cutters. You know you almost frightened my little brother out of his wits! He told me there was someone in his room, but I didn't believe him."

Will frowned. "I didn't go into his room. Why would I? I came straight here."

I shook my head, not believing him. He'd probably ended up in Charlie's room by mistake at some point and just didn't want to admit it.

"Why are you up here?" I asked. "My dad will go nuts if he finds out."

"I wanted to see the old logbooks," Will replied. "From the keepers who worked here. You should look yourself. It's Jess, right? These accounts prove what I've been trying to tell you – that there's something rotten and evil here. That there always has been. Even the first lighthouse keepers were aware of it, back when this place was new."

"You still haven't answered my question," I said impatiently. "If the lighthouse is as dangerous as you say, then why are you here? This is trespassing and criminal damage."

I glanced down at the desk, and a few lines from the nearest logbook jumped out at me.

Porter's been acting strangely again today. Like a different man from the one who arrived on Bird Rock a week ago. Keeps

turning the lighthouse upside down, looking for something, but when I ask him about it the craziest thing is he doesn't seem to know what he's looking for...

With a jolt, I realized that the book was referring to Cailean's grandfather – the keeper who'd fallen to his death. Other words and phrases leaped out at me from the page: *mood swings, vivid nightmares, violent outbursts, Strangers' Room...*

"What's the Strangers' Room?" I asked.

To my surprise, Will flinched. "Don't go into the Strangers' Room," he said sharply.

I raised an eyebrow. "How can I when I don't know what it is?"

"It's here in the lighthouse. You'd know if you went inside," he replied. "It's not like the other rooms. It's... Look, we shouldn't even be talking about it."

"Is that... Is it where your sister died?"

He froze for a moment, and when he finally looked up at me there was such an icy look of anger on his face that I almost took a step back. "What do you know about my sister?" he asked.

"Only ... only that she died here," I said.

"Cailean told me."

"Did he now? Well, she didn't die in the Strangers' Room, but she might as well have. She fell from the window up there and landed on the ground below."

The colour drained from my face. I couldn't imagine witnessing something like that. Just the thought of it happening to Rosie made me feel ill. No wonder Will was a bit unhinged and so obsessed with the lighthouse.

"I'm sorry," I said, even though I knew the words were horribly feeble. "What a terrible accident."

There was a hard look in Will's eyes and bitterness in his voice. "It wasn't an accident. And if you don't want the same thing to happen to your sister then listen to my warning and get her out of this place while you still can. Now would you leave me alone? I've got lots of reading to do here. You can try to drag me out if you like, but I'm pretty confident you won't manage it."

After what he'd just told me, it felt wrong to go tell on him to Dad. It wasn't like he was doing any harm there, poring over old documents, and if learning more about the place where his sister had died helped him get some kind of closure then

I wasn't about to interfere with that.

I left him to it, gathering up the chain when I got to the bottom of the ladder and holding it close against myself so that it didn't clink as I tiptoed into my bedroom, where I hid it behind my backpack. Rosie was sound asleep as I slid in next to her.

It was difficult to prevent Will's words from replaying inside my head:

If you don't want the same thing to happen to your sister, then ... get her out of this place while you still can.

I pushed his words away with an effort. It was desperately sad about Will's sister, and if something ever happened to Rosie then I'd probably go a bit nuts too. I wasn't superstitious, but ever since her illness it had been hard to escape the feeling that a long shadow hung over my little sister. That one way or another her time was going to be cut short...

I shook my head. I wouldn't let myself go down that dark path again. Otherwise I'd never get any rest. So I lay back on the mattress, closed my eyes and willed myself to fall asleep.

Chapter Eight

Day Two

When I woke the next morning, I was surprised to find that Rosie had already gone. It was only 8 a.m., and normally she would sleep in until at least ten. I got up, quickly threw on some clothes, then opened the window and pushed back the wooden shutters. Light washed into the room, along with the scent of seaweed and, unfortunately, guano. Another fly buzzed inside before I could close the window.

When I went past Charlie's room, his door was open and he was still tucked up in his sleeping bag, sound asleep. At the staircase, I saw that Will's bolt cutters were gone and the trapdoor was back in place, so I assumed he'd returned to the guga hunters' camp. I went downstairs and the smell of coffee and toast drew me to the kitchen where