



## Chapter One

*Anglesey, North Wales, 1870*

The first time I heard my house sing, I might have missed it altogether had the gulls not fallen silent at precisely that moment. I was out by the boathouse, securing my coracle against the rising tide. I have never seen the water in the strait so high. Sweeping my hair from my eyes, I happened to look up just as the strange sound came again.

Our house often takes on a menacing air at that time

of the day, but there was something different about it that evening, something that sent a shiver down my spine. As I ran up through the gardens, past the towering rhododendrons and under the weeping willows, I had the most peculiar feeling that the house was watching me – tempting me, daring me to come home.

I swung back briefly to face the water, confused by the sudden silence of the gulls. There were none to be seen. The heaving mass of water was now almost invisible under a veil of low-slung dark cloud.

The song came again and I looked up, ignoring the wind whipping at my face. It seemed to be coming from somewhere up high, from the top of the tower, from behind the battlements. The mournful lament became so intense it took my breath away.

As I reached the wide hardstanding to the front of the house, the sun slipped behind the bridge and a wave of grey swept overhead; in this strange half-light, for just a moment, the house almost seemed to sigh.

I ran towards the back of the house, under the archway, past the stables. Perhaps it was nothing, just the wind whistling through the turrets. But a bird might be trapped on the roof; I couldn't ignore that. I flung the back door open, ran through the pantry, through the kitchens, past the sleeping cats lined up in front of

the range and into the long corridor that leads to the main staircase. I didn't know what I was doing, but I knew I had to go up to the roof. If there was something trapped up there, I couldn't leave it to die.

As I ran up the stairs, the peculiar sound came again, more muffled now I was inside. It was long and low, and sent a shudder through my heart.

I reached the landing and tiptoed towards the small door that leads up to the attic. Easing the door open, I paused to listen.

Ignoring the little voice inside my head that told me to turn round, I stepped through the low doorway and climbed the steep, bare-boarded stairs up to the attic, using my hands to guide me. I reached the top of the stairs, wishing I'd thought to pull on a coat on my way up. A slim shaft of moonlight led me to the final flight of stairs that leads up to the roof. The boards under my feet vibrated as if someone nearby was beating a slow drum. With a pounding heart I climbed through the hatch and stepped out on to the flat lead-lined walkway that runs round the tower between the sloping roof to the left and the old battlements that overlook the waters of the strait. It was due to be a full moon that night, bringing with it a high spring tide. Waves were already lapping against our shingle beach, no doubt scooping up thousands of

pebbles and sweeping them out to sea.

A sudden shriek nearby made me jump, but it was just a family of passing gulls, squabbling somewhere out in the darkness.

Everything fell silent.

Even the waves seemed to still for a moment.

And then the song came again, loud and clear. This was no trapped bird, or other wild creature. The song was coming from all around, consuming me, its cool fingers clutching at me. It came from above and below, from the roof tiles, and the stone of the battlements.

I was alone on the roof of my house.

I was alone with the song of my house.

And then, with a great shudder, it just stopped. I stood motionless, suddenly feeling the intense cold, slowly coming to my senses. What was I doing up there? Had I lost my mind? I turned on my heels and fled along the walkway, tumbled through the little door, down the attic stairs, not caring one bit about the darkness as I raced to the safety of my room.