

CHAPTER 1

Lobsterman Bertie Smith put the nose of the *Laurie Hall* on the rise of land at the center of Hog Island Ledge, Casco Bay, Maine, and set a course straight for her. Nothing to it. A bit of wind had come up from the east, turning the water milky, but it was an easy run to the island. He had done it before, plenty of times, in fact, but never with such a crew as the one he had on board today. When he looked back from the wheel, pretending to check behind him, he saw six kids stretched out, half of them already green around the gills with seasickness.

“Water is a little choppy,” the teacher-boy said from his position beside the wheel.

“Guess so.”

“We’re supposed to have pretty good weather. That was the last report.”

“It’s November,” Bertie said, stating the obvious. “Be cold out on that island.”

“We’re prepared for it,” said the teacher with confidence.

“That so?”

The trip was a stupid idea, as anyone on Earth would know except the teacher-boy, Bertie reflected. You did not camp on Hog Island at the tail end of November if you had half an ounce of intelligence to begin with. It was just a long weekend, true, but pretty soon the bay would be thick as chowder and you could get a wind running over your back out there that you wouldn’t soon forget. No, sir. The island sat exposed to every wind and curl of water. Seals used it more than people did. It held a working fort sometime around the Civil War, but that day had long since passed. That fort had been ancient when Bertie was a boy.

“Hey,” the teacher-boy shouted back to the students, his voice hardly making it above the diesel chunk of the

engine. “You all ready? You ready to camp? We’re going to see some amazing birds. Puffins!”

The kids, some of them anyway, nodded. One made a little *whoo-hooooo* sound, but Bertie knew the kid was being a brat. Mostly they watched one of the boys fly a jury-rigged kite behind the boat. The boy had folded a piece of paper into a plane and put a string through its nose. Now it fluttered behind the boat, rising and falling on the air currents.

“Is that it?” the teacher-girl asked, coming into the cuddy and pointing toward the island. “Is that the island?”

Bertie nodded. The girl was a student teacher, he knew, working at the school beside the teacher-boy. He had talked to them both to arrange the transport. They made quite a pair, Bertie thought. At least the teacher-girl had the good sense to wear a wool hat for the crossing. The teacher-boy didn’t even have that much sense.

“Do many boats come out this way?” the teacher-girl asked.

“In the summer, some do,” Bertie said. “Not many this time of year. You’ve got the ferry line out to Peaks Island.”

“How about tankers and such?” the teacher-boy asked.

“They’d be farther out to sea. And the fishing trade shuts down this time of year, ’cepting for the lobster boys, and they stick closer to shore. Oh, you’ll have the island to yourselves, you can count on that.”

The teacher-girl smiled at receiving that information. The teacher-boy looked out the front windshield and went up on his toes to see the island over the curve of the sea. The island looked like an eyebrow, Bertie reflected, always had, always would.

Sam Harding watched the paper airplane flutter behind the boat. It was pretty cool. It rode the air currents and floated up and down, jerking and soaring in rhythms you couldn’t predict. His mom was big on kite making. She had even opened a small business for a while out of their basement, designing homemade kites and

huge origami swans, and just about anything else that could be made from paper. She named the business Folds, which was not a good name for a business, because pretty soon it *did* fold, and people couldn't resist making jokes about it.

“Hey, Sam, why don't you tie this on the plane?” Harry Cameron asked.

Sam looked down at Harry. Harry had his fingers held in a circle below his knee. Sam had made the mistake of looking, and he watched Harry give a satisfied smile and begin climbing toward him over the luggage. By looking at the finger circle, Sam had given Harry the right to punch him in the shoulder. It was the oldest game going, and it had circulated around their school like a virus the last few weeks.

Sam closed his eyes and leaned forward to accept his punishment.

Harry punched him hard on the shoulder, but not ridiculously hard, as some people did. After the punch Sam felt a dull ache begin in his deltoid, the muscle that covered his shoulder.