

One fateful night, not so long ago . . .

The moon was bright and full on the night of Christina Montgomery's celebration of life at the beach on Dragonfly Pointe. Nearly every resident from the town of Crystal Rock had arrived to visit with Christina before her sleepover under the stars.

Why, here?

There'd always been something rather otherworldly about this ground. And with her recent grim prognosis, Christina could identify, since she wasn't fated to be of this world for too much longer. There was something magical—almost mystical—about Dragonfly Pointe. And ever since she'd been a child, Christina had been unusually drawn to this beach.

Here was where she meant to say her goodbyes to the friends she'd been the closest to.

Echoes of laughter could be heard in the distance where most of the other teenagers had gathered around the blazing bonfire erected alongside the beach. Sucking in an invigorating breath of the crisp night air, contentedly, Christina sighed, staring up to the sky. The dazzling night sky flashed stars so bright and clear, it almost appeared, that if she reached right up, she might be able to touch them.

Keeping an arm wrapped firmly over Christina's shoulders, Kate Callahan cautiously guided her over the graveled pathway leading away from the beach. "Are we almost there?"

"Just a little further," Christina answered, reassuring her friend.

Finally, they stopped only a few short steps from the edge of the beach.

"*This* is where you wanted to go?" The formation of rocks soaring up over the lake was a popular landmark for tourists. The view from atop Crystal Rock was spectacular. Kate hesitated, staring up to the widened ledge at the base of the cliffs. "But isn't this where . . .?"

"Anna Ivers was discovered?" Twenty years before, a six-year old girl had been found brutally murdered here at Dragonfly Pointe. Doubting the wisdom of hosting a fundraiser for cancer research here at this beach, Christina's mother had attempted to discourage her when they'd begun making their

plans. Although countless rumors had circulated through the years about Dragonfly Pointe being haunted—especially since Anna’s murder, unfortunately, remained unsolved—Diane Montgomery just couldn’t say no to her daughter. With a wan smile, Christina nodded. “I’ve always felt her here, you know.”

Few people knew of Christina’s remarkable gift. Kate was only one of a handful of friends who didn’t roll her eyes when Christina claimed she could envision the past as well as foresee the future. But, undeniably, Christina’s prophecies had a strange predilection for coming true.

“Really? How, so?” Tugging the pillow from Christina’s arms, Kate tossed it up with her blanket to the ledge. Scrambling over the smooth slippery surface of the rocks, Kate spread the blanket over the dusty ground in the alcove above. Plumping up the pillow, she propped it against the far most wall. After that, she reached down from the ledge to close her hand over Christina’s, holding her steady while tugging her up into the shallow cave.

A few moments later, Christina was comfortably situated. And, wearily, she sighed as she reclined against her pillow. Carefully choosing her words, she finally answered Kate’s question. “Anna’s . . . unsettled. Her parents were divorced only a couple of years after she was murdered, you know.”

Kate nodded before reaching over and deftly readjusting the pretty pink stocking cap covering Christina’s head.

Distractedly, Christina frowned. She’d lost so much weight over the last few years. Her chemotherapy had been discontinued only a few months before after discovering it wasn’t halting the progression of her cancer. And she felt herself becoming weaker every day.

Settling back against the wall, Kate crossed one leg over the other. “Is there some particular reason you wanted to talk to me in here, Chris?”

“It was just too crowded down at the beach, Kate. And I really needed to speak with you alone.” It took a moment for Christina to concentrate—the pain medication was making her feel spacier than usual tonight. Resignedly, she realized her

mom must have upped her dosage. It definitely explained why everything she saw through her eyes tonight had taken on a hazy, dreamlike quality. “This place has always been special to me.”

Soothed by the subtle vibrations of water lapping gently over the rocks below, closing her eyes, she began to doze off. The trek along the beach had been exhausting.

Kate remained quiet as Christina took some time to recharge.

And, then, with a start, Christina finally spoke. “The Indians claim this ground is sacred, you know.”

Kate grinned. “Yeah. I think you might’ve already mentioned that to me a couple of times—or two.”

Ruefully, Christina smiled. “I’ve had a lot of time on my hands since I had to quit going to school. Once my mom bought me my new computer . . . well . . . I’ve been doing a lot of research about this town and its history.”

Kate chuckled. “You can’t fool me—you used to spend a lot of time at the library even *before* you got sick.” But then she frowned.

“That’s okay, Kate,” Christina whispered. Reaching out, she covered Kate’s hand with hers. “Wanna know what else I learned?”

“Sure.”

“Along with all the superstition, there’s some really interesting Indian folklore associated with Dragonfly Pointe.” She hesitated, before her eyes met Kate’s. “Supposedly—any death that occurs at Dragonfly Pointe actually provides strength to those left behind to mourn.” With a wry smile, she added, “Unfortunately, though, the progression of life and death is a given.”

When Kate reluctantly nodded her agreement, Christina sighed resignedly. There would be no miracle for her. Kate needed to realize that Christina had, long ago, accepted her fate. She’d always been much wiser than her fourteen years.

But she didn't want to forget everything she needed to say to her very best friend. Her brain was becoming foggier and foggier, though.

Abruptly, she began, "It'll happen with one single kiss."

Kate blinked, clearly confused. "What?"

"That you'll fall in love."

Kate snorted.

But when Kate's eyes met hers, Christina remained solemn. "You'll fight it. And it'll be several years before you're willing to accept it. But you're never gonna be able to forget that kiss."

Uneasily, Kate giggled, clearing her throat. "It's not that I don't believe you, Chris. But why was it so important for you to tell me *that*?" Kate rolled her eyes. "We both know how annoying it is when our friends begin talking about their stupid boyfriend troubles."

Christina hesitated, before her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "Did you know, Kate, that I've never even been kissed?" Hoarsely, she continued, "And, just like Anna, I'm never gonna have the chance to fall in love."

Momentarily, Kate appeared stunned. Christina knew Kate was on a short string emotionally, attempting to remain strong for her. But, it was if a dam broke loose when, unexpectedly, Kate began to cry.

Pulling her into her arms, Christina whispered, "There're gonna be some pretty devastating problems that your family will have to deal with in the future, Kate. And work's gonna be all that's important to you. But always remember that, one day, if you're ever willing to accept it, you'll have the chance to be incredibly happy. And I really *need* for you to be happy, Kate. Letting you know what to expect someday—so you don't let happiness slip through your fingers—it's the best final gift I could think of to give to you . . ."

CHAPTER ONE

Five years later . . .

Beams of misty light threaded through the denseness of fog as sunrise began to dimly light up the horizon. Along the shoreline where birdsong echoed, wildlife stirred, rustling awake with the first light of dawn.

As Crystal Rock Lake magically came to life, Kate Callahan sighed contentedly. She loved this time of the day. There was absolutely nothing more beautiful than the sunrise rising up over the lake. Inhaling an invigorating breath of the crisp morning air, she settled back in her seat and slid the key into the ignition. When the engine surged to life, she slipped the inboard into gear. Holding steady while slowly easing away from the pier, peering cautiously through the windshield, she sliced through the denseness of fog maneuvering her vessel through the murky shadows. As she steered further away from the shoreline, the fog began to mysteriously dissipate, drifting upward into swirling waves.

Finally, the fog abruptly disappeared. Blinded by the glare from the rising sun, Kate shoved on her sunglasses and lifted her face into its warmth. With the visibility clear, cranking the motor into high speed, she deftly spun the wheel steering on toward Dragonfly Pointe.

The Ivers' home. Kate couldn't remember the last time she'd been this excited. She still couldn't believe Jeff Ivers had finally decided it was time to remodel his family's long-abandoned summer home near Dragonfly Pointe.

And when her father had actually put *her* in charge of the restoration. Well . . . to say she was surprised would've been an understatement. At only age nineteen, Kate had been prepared to wait at least a few more years before heading up her own crew. With over one-hundred employees and as many as twenty combined crews operating throughout the year, Callahan Construction employed several more supervisors who were much more experienced than her.

Up high above the shore, the Ivers' manor sprawled over about a half an acre of lakefront property. Slipping the gears of her speedboat into neutral, Kate studied the dilapidated exterior of the structure. Extensive water damage due to the failing roof would require a complete structural overhaul to the home before they could even attempt to restore the interior. Plus, on her earlier tour of the property, she'd discovered signs of termite damage.

Skillfully maneuvering her vessel into the crumbling dock of the landing, Kate was startled when a familiar figure suddenly appeared. "Dad. What are you doing here today?" Standing to reach over the windshield, she quickly unwound a rope from the bow. "I thought I had until Monday to come up with my figures."

Mike Callahan grinned, reaching out and grabbing the rope from his daughter's hand. Pulling gently, he guided the boat to a more stable section of the dilapidated dock. "I know that I gave you two more days, Kate. But since your mom and I are expecting company today, I thought I'd try to get ahead of everything. I figured you've probably been working up your projections every day and night, anyway." After tying off the rope and securing the boat, reaching for Kate's hand, he hoisted her up to the dock. "I really threw you for a loop when I named you crew boss."

Kate snorted. "No kidding. You know me *way* too well," she admitted wryly. Bending down, she grabbed her clipboard and notebook from the passenger seat, handing them off to her father. She reached for the supersize thermos and coffee cups propped up near her cooler. "How about some coffee first? Then we can do a walk through."

Nodding his agreement, Cal held onto the paperwork.

Leading the way, Kate stepped cautiously along the crumbling pathway that ran into a rustic flagstone patio, strewn with weeds. As they settled alongside of each other on the low ledge surrounding the patio, Kate untwisted the lid to the thermos pouring them each a cup of coffee.

While they sipped their coffee in companionable silence, Kate surreptitiously studied her father. At age forty-four, Mike Callahan was still a handsome man. Thick, ash-brown hair showed only a touch of gray at the temples. Enhancing rather than distracting from his looks, the broken nose suffered while playing high school football had left a small lump on the bridge of his nose. Laugh lines were deeply etched into the corners of his silvery-blue eyes.

“Okay,” she finally asked. “Were you ever planning on telling me *why*?”

With pretended innocence, he shrugged his shoulders. “Why, what?”

“Dad,” she reprimanded. “You know what I’m asking. I thought I wasn’t gonna get a chance to head up a crew for at least a few more years.”

Gruffly, he answered, “I never exactly said that, though. Did I?”

Kate was taken aback. “No. I guess not.”

“All I was waiting for was the right project. And this was it. This wasn’t just my decision, Kate. Gus Lemke and John Norris brought up your name before I even suggested it.”

After a moment of silent contemplation, she asked hesitantly, “What about Luke Arnett?”

“He’s pissed, Kate. For some reason he assumed *he’d* get this job. I’m not exactly sure why—since I’d never even mentioned anything about the Ivers’ place to him in the first place.”

Kate nodded, swallowing the last of her coffee.

“Let’s go through the house, now. I’ve got something important I need to talk to you about when we’re finished.”

Because of the extensive structural damage to the house, Kate began her observations in the attic. Not only would shingles and plywood need to be replaced, but the joists supporting the roof would require additional reinforcement.

“I think we should just open up the main floor and vault the ceiling over the kitchen along with the dining room and living room,” Kate observed, when they finally made their way downstairs. Although the house was spread out like a ranch, the sleeping quarters were connected by a short row of steps extending up from the enormous kitchen. Another short row of steps led down into an expansive family room and office space.

Cal lifted a brow. “Wouldn’t that eat up a lot of our budget?”

Kate snorted. “Not with all the structural damage. We have to replace all the ceilings anyway because of the water damage. Why not modernize? Plus we’ll have to rip up the walls to replace the wiring too. It’s all knob and tube.”

Cal nodded. “That attic space *is* wasted. There’d still be additional storage in the attic over the bedrooms. What have you got in mind for down here?” Peering over her shoulder, he listened as she presented her plans for an open concept.

An hour later, they’d finished their tour of the eight-thousand square foot property. “That’s a great idea, Kate,” Cal eventually observed, studying the appliances. “I can’t see the advantage of using these old relics, myself—even though they’re in great condition. But I know there’s a demand for vintage appliances. We can probably get a good price for them.” Her father jotted down some notes on the clipboard before turning back to her. “What’s your final number?”

Digging through her notes, she flipped a few pages before showing him a figure. “I know it’s high. But with five bathrooms.” She shrugged her shoulders. “Well . . . I could probably get away with using subway tiles and ceramics. But this kitchen’s gonna be costly.”

Instantly, her father approved her figure.

And she was startled.

Cal grinned. “I agree with everything you’ve proposed, Kate. There’s a ton of structural damage and we’ll need all new windows and doors, anyway. We’ll definitely need to rebuild all three fireplaces. Hold off on ordering materials for the bathrooms, though. I’d rather use higher-end materials. I’ll

contact Jeff Ivers to see if he'll increase his budget. You should have a higher contingency fund, too. You might discover mold when you begin pulling down the walls."

"Don't forget about asbestos, Dad. With the safety issues, I should probably get someone out here immediately after beginning the demolition."

Absentmindedly, Cal nodded. "I think we should keep that distinctive knotty pine in the family room as well. I like your idea of a wall of sliding doors opening up to the lake. There're several energy efficient options available now, too. That'll bring in a lot more light and enhance the beauty of the paneling rather than making it appear as dark and dingy as it does right now." After signing off on her clipboard, he handed it back over to Kate.

Kate's voice was unsteady. "Thanks, Dad. I promise I'll do a good job.

Easing an arm over her shoulders, he squeezed her gently. "Of that, I have no doubt."

"Now, what else did you need to talk to me about?"

Cal hesitated. "Have you got any more of that coffee left?"

She smiled. "Sure. The air in here is a little musty—even with the windows open. Let's go back outside."

After settling back on the patio with his coffee, clearing his throat, Cal began, "Dan and I took stock of the warehouse, Kate. And it appears you two were right—the inventory doesn't match up with the numbers." Home from college for the summer, Kate's older brother, Dan, worked in the warehouse distributing previously inventoried building materials.

Kate raised a brow. "And?"

"For the last three weeks, we've been tracking materials after they've left the warehouse. The numbers seem to match up with our jobs here in town. So we've been able to eliminate approximately two-thirds of our employees from suspicion."

"I'd like to see that list of names."

Cal nodded. "We haven't been able to get a count on our materials going out of town, though. We've just been too busy. I've reassigned all the remaining employees who haven't been crossed off the list. Over the summer, they'll be split between our two largest jobs here in town. Hopefully, no one's become suspicious. I'll tag along and work with the crew at the new golf course."

Kate nodded. "And the other?"

"Luke Arnett's crew? I've assigned Luke to the campgrounds because the plans for each cabin are straightforward and easy to follow. And I've—conveniently—ordered the majority of his required building materials already. So it should be easier to track the materials—if they should, just so happen to, begin to disappear. I'd rather not have to look over Luke's shoulder."

"You're suspicious of Luke Arnett? I can't see him stealing from you, though, Dad—he's been with you over fifteen years! But *that's* why you made it so easy for me to move into the cabin for the summer, isn't it?" Her eyes met his. "Since the campground's right next door?"

Cal snorted. "Easy? With *your* mother?"

Kate chuckled. "I can only imagine. She's been so overprotective. Thanks, Dad—I really appreciate it. It's not that I mind living at home—our house is large enough. But I've really needed some breathing space."

Cal sighed. "In some ways, Kate, out of all my kids, you're the most like me. I know that you've needed a place to work where you can have some space and privacy. The twins are almost old enough, now, to take care of themselves when your mom's at work. And since Dan's at home for the summer . . ."

"I know. Even though it's almost been four years, now, since Lucy was assaulted—mom's just *never* been the same. I'm really glad that Lucy met Gabe. She's seems so happy, now."

"I couldn't have asked for a better son-in-law. And I instantly gained an incredibly sweet granddaughter to boot," he added, gruffly.

“Well, anyway, getting back to Luke Arnett.” Kate sighed resignedly. “You probably need me to keep track of the inventory at the campgrounds?”

“Exactly. And since our cabin is located on the edge of campgrounds, you’ll have a plausible excuse to check up on him—although it might be better if you waited until after hours or on the weekends. Are you sure you can handle Arnett?”

Kate snorted. “God’s gift to women? *Of course.*”

Cal chuckled. “Him, too, huh? I hadn’t realized. Have there been *any* of my unattached men that haven’t made a pass at you?”

“It’s the *attached* ones I get upset with,” she muttered.

Cal’s head jerked up from studying the clipboard. “Be sure to come to me with any real problems, Kate—especially since we have a lot more women working for us now.” Staring at Kate, he cleared his throat. “Did I hear it right? You broke up with Brian Lancaster?”

She nodded.

Cal sighed. “It’s hard to believe you’re only nineteen-years old. It seems to me you’ve broken an awful lot of hearts, Kate.”

Uncomfortably, Kate shrugged. “He was just getting too serious, too soon, Dad. I’m not really ready for that kind of a relationship, yet.”

“I understand. If you were, you’d know. I knew right away with your mom,” he added, gruffly. “But, seriously, Kate—just be careful around Arnett. Whether or not he’s stealing those materials, I’m coming to dislike his attitude more and more. We’ve had several complaints about the quality of his work, too. I’m not against firing him—even if he has nothing to do with our missing materials. But I’m hesitant since he’s supporting an ex-wife and daughter.”

“He does seem rather off lately. But I think he’s been distracted, Dad. It might just be *because* of his divorce.”

“Well. No matter what *he* thinks, there’s just no way I would’ve assigned this job to Arnett. You’ve had an interest in this place since you were a kid. And this job needed some imagination. I’m one-hundred percent certain you’re ready for the responsibility. I was a good friend of Jeff’s growing up, Kate. We lost touch after his daughter was killed at Dragonfly Pointe.” Distractedly, Cal stared out to the lake. “Even after almost twenty-five years, he’s still grieving. So let’s just say that I *trust* you with this job—more than I would anyone else.”

Thoughtfully, Kate nodded, as she sipped on her coffee while gazing out to the lake. With the water calm and clear under the bright blue sky, a couple of fishermen had anchored their boat nearby.

For a few more minutes, Kate and her father remained quiet observing the beauty of their surroundings. She had to admit that the lakefront property was in a prime location. The overgrown brush needed to be cleared, though, to open up the view.

When her father finally spoke, Kate realized that, as usual, his thoughts had been echoing hers. “Jeff wants me to recommend a landscaper too. I told him we should wait until after we make the structural changes.”

“Yeah. You never know what kind of problems we might dig up. Not to mention the mess we’ll make while we’re doing it. I forgot to ask. Who’s coming to visit?”

“Michael Murphy.”

Momentarily, she was puzzled. “Your district attorney friend from Chicago?”

“No. You’re close, though. That’s Sean Murphy. Mike’s his oldest son. Your mom and I are actually his godparents.”

“Really?” Turning to her father, she lifted a brow. “Have I ever met him?”

Pursing his lips, he considered her question. “I don’t think so. Maybe back when you two were kids? You haven’t tagged along with us on any our family outings to Chicago for a while, have you?”

“The Murphys haven’t visited Crystal Rock?”

Cal hesitated. "Sean Murphy's first wife was my cousin, Kate—so that's how we got to be friends. He's avoided bringing his family here because he spent a lot of time here with Anne."

She nodded. Although Kate sensed there was more to the story, it was clear that her father didn't want to get into it. "So—tell me more about Michael Murphy."

"He's been a pretty good friend of Dan's, now, for the past five years. Even though Murphy plays football, he's also studying engineering at Northwestern. He's planning on going for his master's in architecture at U of I in Chicago, so he needs to do an internship."

"Architecture? That's a first for us, too, isn't it? Most of our interns come from Northwest Community College. Although, I guess we've had a few from Wisconsin."

Cal nodded. "He'll learn more about building materials by working with us. Murphy claims the actual quality positions available for interns in Chicago are limited. Supposedly, most of the companies still accepting interns are using them for their most labor intensive work—like hauling materials and shoveling concrete." Cal hesitated before continuing, "But there's a small problem."

Kate was instantly leery.

"He has absolutely no construction experience."

She snorted. "Uh, oh."

"Exactly," Cal responded, wryly. "I thought I'd start him off at the campgrounds doing drywall and flooring, and then move him over to your crew when you begin installing doors and windows, along with completing your interior finish work. I'd like for you and Dan to keep an eye on him, though. After all—he's almost like a member of the family."

Kate sighed, rolling her eyes. "*Great.*"

Cal chuckled. "Somehow, I knew that you'd think so," he admitted, dryly.