

PART I: JAKE'S STORY

“The wizard stirs, opens his eyes, and looks at the reluctant boy. ‘Oh, you’ll get your heart broken,’ he says. ‘Is that what you’re waiting to hear? It’ll be broken, all right. But you’ll never get anything done if you walk around with an unchipped heart.’”

*~ Peter Straub, *Shadowland**

CUTTER ISLAND, MAINE: JULY 1985

WE STOOD OUTSIDE on the bow of the ferry on our way to Cutter Island. My older boy, Jake, Jr., watched the water intently hoping to catch sight of a whale or, at the very least, a school of fish. My younger son stood leaning against my leg, eyes heavy, desperately in need of a nap.

“There it is, Jake,” I said, pointing to the island as it came into view. “That’s where I was born. See that stone wharf? That’s where the ferry will tie up.”

My boy looked up and smiled. At ten years of age, this was an adventure for him—spending the summer on an island off the coast of southern Maine. For me, it was bittersweet. The last time I’d set foot on Cutter had been twelve years earlier, for my father’s funeral.

My wife, standing behind me, reached over and took my hand.

“Are you okay?” she asked. “I know this is hard for you.”

I looked over my shoulder and grinned. “Don’t worry. I’m good. It actually feels right to be back.”

She squeezed my hand in response, smiling as I once again turned to gaze at the shoreline of the island which we were rapidly approaching.

“Now remember, Jake,” I said to my boy, “once we get on the island, you be respectful. Don’t walk down the middle of the road and, for goodness sake, never cut across the golf course. Remember there are people there like your uncle to whom this island is home.”

“Enough, already!” chided my wife. “You’ve gone over this before. The boys understand. We’re not to act like *summer people*. Give it a rest, will you?”

I smiled at her, then down at my boy. “Okay, I’ll shut up.”

The ferry pulled up to the wharf and I pointed out to the boys the deckhand who swiftly hopped to shore and began to tie the vessel securely to the dock. As I watched, I noticed a lone lobster boat tied up at the far end. A young boy was helping an older man load traps aboard. The kid was skinny with ears too big for his head and I guessed he was probably around fifteen or sixteen. The man he was helping was most likely his dad or some other close relation.

The boy leaned over to hoist up a trap, but hesitated for a moment, staring at the ferry as it slid into the wharf. His eyes were wide and full of longing.

Watching, I was surprised by a profound sense of *déjà vu*—the memory of a time many years before when I was the boy who stood where he stood, staring at the ferry, with the same look of eager anticipation on my face. It was a memory I thought I’d erased years before. But now, seeing that boy on the dock, it all came rushing back in vivid detail—a stark reminder of a summer long past and the girl I feared was destined to haunt me forever.

