Chapter 1

They said our injuries would heal: Mom's air bag bruises; a lump on my brother Quinn's head; mild frostbite on my toes, because I had wandered away from the crash in a daze; but they couldn't explain my deafness. Every test proved my ears were fine. Except I couldn't react to sound. It was a weird sensation, a world of buzzing silence. My teachers would stand in front of the class, and I could see they were talking, but none of their words seeped through to me. Three months later, the phone rang, shrill and loud, the sudden sound jolting through me. My hearing was back. And the dream started, the one where I am standing barefoot in the snow on the side of a back road as my world falls apart.

I squeeze snow with my bare toes into hard curds. Fat flakes melt like tears on my cheeks and tangle in my curls. Sparse light reflects off an expanse of white. In a flash I'm in the car and something just beyond a black veil of memory has happened. Flash again and blue and red lights twirl beside a car that tilts like an abandoned toy. I splay my hand in front of my face, the thin skin between each finger pulsing red in the flashing lights. Dark shapes merge and melt through gusting curtains of snow as they swarm over the car, lights shining on it as if it were the star in this Christmas pageant. I hear only silence.

Sometimes I wish my ears still didn't work. Then I wouldn't have to hear my mother on the phone arguing with my Dad's mother, Mammo, who wants to rearrange our lives. That's what Mom screamed at her. No one talks about blame, but if I hadn't dozed off, maybe I would have seen the bridge, could have warned them, and Dad would still be here.

Mom gave in to Mammo's insistence and Quinn and I are on our way to Maine for a summer by the sea so Mom can finish grad school. It will be easier, the adults said. So early this morning we packed the car full of everything we thought we'd need for two or so months, plus a

cooler full of tuna sandwiches, bags of chips, bottles of water and a sack of apples. Enough to stave off hunger and minimize stops on the five plus hour drive from Burlington, Vermont to Orr's Island, Maine. Sounds normal enough. Except my Dad's parents have barely ever seen us, even when we moved within driving distance of Maine for Dad's last residency. It's also curious that, in spite of living only a few hours' drive away, Dad never wanted, or took the time, to visit his parents. And they never visit us. The last photo I've found with all of us is at Dad's medical school graduation, where I'm not quite five and Quinn is a toddler. The weird thing is, I also barely remember my Mom's parents. All I know about them comes from birthday cards and the one photo that I found of Mom, in cap and gown being hugged by an unfamiliar couple whose features are rearranged on Mom's face. Her eyes are like her father's but the rest of her face mirrors her mother. Me? I'm all my father's daughter, from my dark curls (Mom is reddish-blond, like Quinn) to my round brown eyes (she's got blue eyes).

I'm torn from my reverie by my annoying ten-year old brother. "Mudhead's touching me!" Quinn screeches like a miniature banshee.

"I did not you little shite," I say. Quinn can be such a baby.

"For the love of God, will you two keep quiet for two minutes? And watch your language young lady." Mom gropes through a stack of maps on the front seat. "Muirgy, see if you can find the map. I think we missed the turn."

After three hours of driving, and a stop for lunch somewhere in New Hampshire, even I can't remember all the intricate turns on our route. But I figure we must be getting close to the Maine border. I reach into the front seat and snag the map labeled "Coastal Maine." There's a reason I can't sit in the front seat. Rule number one: no one sits in the front passenger seat. And not because the air bag had left Mom with deep, purple bruises that took three months to fade

after the accident. It was because Dad had been sitting there Christmas Eve. Six months later, all I remember of that night comes in my recurring dream - I am standing in the snow, lights flash, and I am cocooned in silence and sadness deeper than any bruises.

I trace the road toward Maine. “We go through Brunswick onto,” I peer at the small print, “123, then Route One.” I smooth the map across my lap, anchoring it with my hands and gaze out the window as New Hampshire slips by in a slide show of looming mountains with a trace of snow, then a field of Christmas trees.

“Mom?” Mounded clouds pass in slow motion and green mile markers zip by as if they are in a hurry to be lost in time. “You won’t be gone all summer, will you?”

Mom squeezes the steering wheel. “I’ll try to be back for the Fourth. And in August I’ll come for a week before we head back for school.”

“I want to go with you,” shouts Quinn. “You always say Mammo is an old witch.”

“Quinn, let’s not discuss this while I’m driving. Rules, remember?” says Mom.

The rules are new since the accident.

Rule Number One: no one sits next to the driver.

Rule Number Two: no eating or drinking in the front seat, since car trips with Dad had been laugh riots full of songs and games, as he sipped a beer, which usually led to bickering.

So Rule Number Three: No arguing with the driver, because sometimes the bickering got a scary edge.

Which leads to Rule Number Four: no songs, no games, no jokes. No Dad, no fun. Mom was driving that night because Dad had had a holiday party with the other residents at the end of his shift. I remember wincing when he got in the car, at the smell. Not just his usual medicinal smell, but a staleness like the recycling bin when it was full of empty beer bottles.

Dad used to tell us all sorts of stories – of his childhood in Maine and Irish folk tales. He said they came from his father, Daddo, who was supposedly convinced I was part silkie, a magical creature that is a seal in the water but who can shed her skin and become human on land. It's a fairy tale, and like a lot of them I've read in my 12 years, it has a dark side. You can trap a selkie on land by taking her seal skin. The selkie becomes a slave to the person who has her skin. And she becomes human. The part I love about the story is that a trapped selkie never stops searching for her seal skin and her freedom. What I don't like is that, once she finds her skin, she will return to the sea and leave everything behind. Even her children.

I don't believe I'm part selkie. How could I be? Wouldn't that make me magical? I don't have any magic in me. The car accident proved that. If I were magical, maybe I could have saved my father.

I only know snatches of my parent's story. Mom met Dad in college, in Greek class. Dad thought Ancient Greek would help with medical terminology and Mom just likes to understand everything from the very beginning. Even though she settled into chemistry, it was the seminar on Irish Literature and Language they both enrolled in that resulted in me. It took them to Ireland, where Mom became fluent in Irish, found out she was pregnant, and they got married. For the last ten years, she's worked her way through a curious patchwork of graduate programs as Dad went through medical school, then one residency after another, first in general surgery and finally in orthopedic surgery, and each time we'd move to a different place until we got to Vermont and Dad became a bone man. Mom's joke. He'd bring home plastic models of joints and explain to me how they worked. Each new "appliance" as he called them – knees, hips, shoulders – fascinated him. Part doctor, part engineer I guess. Each time we moved, though, Mom had to uproot from whatever program she was in to come along with us to our next new

home. I don't understand and she doesn't discuss, the work that is now taking her away for the summer.

In a way, losing Dad set her free, because one time, during a late-night argument (it's hard to have secrets in a small house), she had yelled at Dad that she needed to be "nimble" for her career. Nimble seemed an odd choice of word, I thought, when I looked it up, because it seems to mean so many things all at one. Quickness. Agility. Sharp thought. Astuteness. A combination of internal and external movement.

Her trip this summer, and Quinn and I being left with grandparents we hardly know, also has something to do with her father, who is retired, but who is somehow part of her education. I can't fit the pieces together and she won't talk about herself or her parents. Believe me, I've tried asking but each time I'm met with a flash of silence before she changes the subject, usually moving sideways into a question about my school work or something she's asked me to do that I haven't gotten around to yet. All I do know is that this trip feels like a bandaid being ripped off the pain of our grief. Pain. Dad talked about pain a lot during his medical school and residency. Seems pain is a central feature for a bone man. I remember a long discourse he gave us at dinner one night about referred pain. Pain that is from one source, like your back or your shoulder, but that shows up in a weird spot making you think maybe you've torn a muscle or something. I've come to understand that the pain of grief is like that, too. It pops up in weird places that you don't always related back to its cause.

We moved to Burlington for Dad's ortho residency, and live in a doll-sized house one block from a park. From the attic, you can see Lake Champlain. After the accident, Dad still seemed to be around each corner, about to come in the front door. When I'd wake from one of my dreams, I often heard the whistle of the tea kettle. I'd creep downstairs to find Mom sitting at

the kitchen table, clutching a mug of tea and staring at air.

As we pass over a green metal bridge with a “Welcome to Maine” sign and an unpronounceable river running beneath, I get a jittery feeling, as if something bad is going to happen, the same one that I wake with most mornings. The pediatrician dismissed my sweaty palms and beating heart as “residual anxiety” that would heal in time. My equivalent of airbag bruises.

The sky darkens over the ocean that opens out from the passenger side of the road and day presses on. Including one stop for gas and a bathroom break (and the chocolate bar I stashed in my backpack), we’ve been driving for almost five hours. According to the map, we should be there soon. I’m nervous about meeting my grandparents. Sure, they’ve seen me as five-year-old, and Quinn as a toddler, but I don’t even think I will recognize them. Mom reminded us that Daddo is an artist, and Mammo, my grandmother, is a teacher. But that doesn’t give me much to go on. What kind of people are they?

Dad had filled me in my grandfather’s obsession with his Irish heritage, which started when he was about twenty and changed his name, Ronald Hughes, to Ronan O’hAodha, the Irish for “grandson of Hughes.” He felt it would make him stand out from the other artists. When I was born, he had declared that he would be called Daddo, the Irish familiar for granddad, and grandmom would be Mammo. They had named my Dad, their only child, Finn, after the great Irish warrior and Daddo insisted that his grandchildren have Irish names. I was named for Muirgen, a beautiful maiden who turned into a salmon, with a middle name of Niamh, the daughter of a sea god.

All of which makes me wonder what my friend Bridget is doing. Bridget, whose family is

far closer to actually being Irish than mine, is the only one who can pronounce my full name: Muirgen Niamh O'hAodha. Phonetically, it sounds like "Meergen Neeve O'HeeYou." I check my phone. No texts. I had sent her one as soon as I got the phone so we could keep in touch. That was only yesterday, so I shouldn't be too hard on her. After all, she's just about the only friend I have. Moving so much, especially landing in a new school for 6th grade, is hard on anyone but believe me, it's brutal for a girl like me. Someone who can feel lonely in a crowded room. I send Bridget a quick emoji of a smiling fish, hoping she gets the joke.

My brother got off easy. Everybody could say, and spell, Quinn. He only had to suffer bad renditions of old Beatles' songs. My Dad even called Mom Aine, the Irish equivalent for her real name, Hannah, because it was the name of the famous Finn's wife. But unlike the mythic Finn, Dad did not live forever.

The radio warns of coastal storms and high winds. Mom switches it off, complaining that weathermen only repeat themselves. The clouds mass and bunch into angry snarls and fat rain drops splatter the windows.

"Muirgy, what do I do next?" Mom asks.

"Take that exit." I direct Mom onto a road that the map indicates winds out to Orr's Island and figure we should be there within fifteen minutes. I realize we're on a spit of land jutting out into the ocean but all I see around me are trees. Behind the dense cover of pines on both sides of the road, I sense the sea surging against the land.

The heavy raindrops merge into a sheet of water on the windshield. The wipers can barely keep up, clearing one sluice before the next. We cross a small metal bridge and the water leaps into the wind. I'm straining against my seat belt, clutching the front seat as I give directions

so I can see that Mom's knuckles gripping the steering wheel are white and her neck is taut as bridge cables. Her anxiety takes me back to Christmas Eve, and snow instead of rain pelting the car. Mom had been driving then, too, like I said before, but the police said the accident wasn't her fault, just lousy weather. We should have gone straight home.

That's another missing piece. Why were we driving through the Vermont countryside in a blizzard on Christmas Eve instead of at home with our tree and presents and cocoa? Whenever anyone asks, Mom glances at me and shakes her head. I can't remember what Mom doesn't want me to say. I only remember snow and silence. I finger the rough green fabric of my backpack that Dad gave me for my eleventh birthday. I take it everywhere, have even before the accident. The police say I was wearing it when they found me, that I'd been somehow thrown from the car but without cuts and bruises, and I was standing in the snow, the back pack straps tight on my shoulders. I use my back pack to carry the treasures I find and my notebook, which I use to record interesting facts and things I need to remember. Now the backpack also holds a new cell phone.

The wipers slap away the curtain of water as we rattle over another bridge and up a hill toward a yellow bungalow with a large, wrap-around modern addition. A roadside sign announces Daddo's studio, "Dánlann Art Gallery." Mom had laughed at the name. In Daddo's Irish frenzy, he had used the Irish word for gallery so that his sign, in effect, says "Gallery Art Gallery." In a large glass window, a spotlight is trained on a sculpture of a dolphin breaching, as if it has swum underneath the gallery and burst through the floor to escape the crashing waves.

An older woman, thin and wispy with gray hair flying around her head, steps onto the porch clutching an over-sized bright yellow slicker around her small frame like a kid playing dress-up. Her brief, jerky waves seem to order rather than welcome us. This, I guess, is Mammo,

who looks much smaller in real life than in the photo albums. She's shorter than Mom and looks as if she might blow away. I was practically a baby the last time I saw her and now I think I may be her same height.

A dense gust blows rain against the windshield. Mom lets out her breath in one quick burst. "Let's get this over with," she says. "Quinn, do you have your boots? Muirgy, grab a slicker. Let's make a run for it."

Quinn and I streak toward the porch.

"Inside, quick," said Mammo, "before you blow to the four corners of the earth."

Rain sluices from us as we huddle inside. Mammo peels off our coats, gives them a quick shake and hangs them on a peg board. "Boots. Shoes." She gestures to our feet. "Off with them." I know she doesn't mean my feet, but from all the stories I've overheard about Mammo, you never know. She reaches out stiffly and embraces Quinn and I in a brief hug. Quinn squirms out from under her arm, wiping his nose. He hates to be touched by strangers. I release my breath when she lets go of me, resisting the urge to waft away the sweet sour winey smell from her breath. She steps back to look at us, head tilted to one side.

"Not that I've seen either of you much, but heavens, Muirgen, you are the image of your," she pauses, "great grandmother. Daddo will have to show you the photo in his studio of her wedding." Mammo slurs her words as if she is talking in her sleep. Mom's jaw tightens. "And Quinn." Mammo puts her hands on my brother's shoulders and he stiffens. "You have your mother's hair." She brushes at a reddish-gold curl and he turns his head away. Mammo's hand hovers in empty air for a moment before she drops it back to her side. "Hannah, dear. Are you cold? Would you like a towel?"

Mom wraps her arms tighter. "Please, no bother, Myrna. I have to get back to Portland

tonight and with the weather," she gestures outside, "I should head right back."

"I thought you weren't leaving until tomorrow," I say. "What about dinner?" I can smell something rich and fishy and realize it's been a long time since that tuna sandwich somewhere in New Hampshire.

"Yeah." Quinn takes up the wail. "It's not fair."

Mom hugs us to her and whispers into our hair, so that Mammo can't hear, "I can't stay here. It's too much for me right now. Please understand. I love you so much. But I need to finish school, you know that, right? So we can be together forever and not worry?" I nod against her embrace, wanting a world without worry, and Mom squeezes tighter, whispering, "Daddo needs you. He's lost too without, you know. And you'll be safe here."

In her hug, I feel my father, the love, and the loss. I feel my mother's loneliness as palpable as my own. She releases us and takes a step back.

"Aine!" A bass voice rumbles from the next room and I am jolted by the familiar sound, thinking Dad has come back to life. "Come and let my tired eyes get a look at you girl." Daddo comes toward us.

"Aine," Mammo's stress on Mom's Irish name sends a chill down my back, "says she has to get going." She gestures toward the window. "The weather."

"Not before she gives her old father-in-law a kiss," he says.

Daddo is well over six feet tall and broad, with a thick beard that had once been dark but now is shot through with silver. He wears a red and black plaid flannel shirt that hangs over his generous belly, and brown work pants splattered with paint. For the briefest second, I think he is Dad – bigger and older, his peaked eyebrows thicker and flecked gray. Daddo even has that same sweet sour scent of stale bottles from the recycling bin. I see Dad in Mammo, too, the curve of

her chin and her full, arched upper lip.

Daddo takes Mom by the shoulders. Like Dad, he's only a few inches taller than she is. An odd look flicks through her eyes before she disappears in his embrace. "Ah, darling, it's so good to see you. What's this about heading out into that dark night?" He releases her and looks at Quinn. "And who's this little leprechaun?" He tosses Quinn in the air as if he is still a toddler. "Quinn my boy, you're getting to be quite the man of the family." He places Quinn back on the floor. Quinn wobbles as he lands, his cheeks flushed red. "My little salmon, Muirgen. We have quite the plans for this summer." He lightly touches my cheek. "You know how to swim?" I nod. "Good girl. Aine, any objections if I teach this one how to dive for scallops?" He waits a second, his hand poised on my face. A small smile spreads across Mom's face. She is blushing, as if Daddo has brought Dad back for her too.

"No problem. She'll work for her supper, right, Muirgy?" Mom pulls me to her in one of those best friend hugs, a reddish-gold curl that has worked loose from her pony tail, still damp from the rain, flicking water on my cheek. "And Quinn is quite the little fish too. They've had their swim classes at the Y and learned a bit about boats last summer when we stayed at a friend's camp in South Hero while Fi --," She bites off the name. "Now you'll learn about the ocean." She conveys her message to us in her polite chatter. "It's not like Lake Champlain. It doesn't stay put. Watch the tides. And the seals."

"Seals? They'll be no bother," says Daddo. "They stay away from humans, most of the time. Though be careful because one might be a selkie and recognize you my girl." He winks at me. "But your mother is right – don't try to pet them no matter how adorable they look. They can be nasty bastards and we don't want them finding a seal skin for you!" Daddo sticks his hands into his pants pockets and rocks back on his heels. "You'll be able to see them tomorrow

morning, assuming they don't all blow out to sea in this fairy whirlwind." He gestures through the window. "They sun themselves on the rocks at low tide."

A heavy gust of wind moans as it tears through the eaves. A fairy whirlwind. According to Dad's story, that's how the souls of the dead make their way home. I shiver.

"I'd better get on the road," says Mom. "You two be good. You have your cell phones, right?" I reach into my backpack and bring up a thin black phone. Quinn draws his from a pocket. "I programmed in my number and all the numbers where I'll be this summer so you can leave me messages. I won't be able to take your calls while I'm in the lab or collecting data. Wait." She takes my phone. "Shit. Oh, sorry." Mammo frowns at Mom's language. "Only one bar. I was afraid of that. Do you get reception anywhere in the house?"

"Upstairs is best, in the room where Muirgen will sleep," says Mammo. "And outside at the end of the property."

"So call, or text, every day. Texts work really well and usually go through even when the reception isn't great. Plus, I can read them on the fly." Mom gives us each our own hug and kisses the top of our heads. "Thank you for going this," she looks at Daddo. "They will be far happier with you than being hauled around the country to research labs and babysitters. I really appreciate it."

Mammo pulls me away. "Our pleasure. It will be a treat to finally be grandparents."

Mom's forehead wrinkles and I wince at the deflected pain I read there from Mammo's implied criticism. "Muirgen can help in the gallery, too. She's good with numbers." She raises an eyebrow at me. I nod. I seemed to be doing a lot of nodding. "And Quinn is quite the little artist."

"Perfect! A gallery slave and a bit of competition," says Daddo. "We'll take good care of them. You have all their bags out of the car?" He looks at our duffels dumped by the door.

“I’ll get them!” Quinn dashes toward the door and I run after him.

“Back in the house, you’ll get your –” Mom bites off her sentence. She almost broke Rule Number Five. Death, and Dad’s name, are never spoken.

Mom hurries out and reappears a moment later with our suitcases. Daddo takes them from her. She raises on tiptoe and kisses him on the cheek. “Thanks again, Da,” she says and turns to Mammo. “And Myrna, I expect to be back for the Fourth of July break.”

With that, Mom disappears into the night and Mammo closes the door.

Chapter 2

All night, wind howled and waves crashed against the rocks, filling my dreams with seals and sea. But this morning, the world is washed clean and bright, the air crisp as fall, not at all like June. I ease forward so I won't bump my head on the ceiling. Without leaving the bed I pull open the lacy curtains to reveal lawn sloping to the sea, the waves that had broken my sleep, and a small island beyond. The bedroom where I will sleep this summer is set at the back of my grandparents' house, beneath the eaves, so the ceiling slopes in except where it leaves a recess for the window. A chair and my bed are tucked into the odd space created by the roof line. The walls are covered with a random pattern of flowers and the windowsill and table are crowded with photos. One picture is of my parents in Ireland. We have the same picture at home.

Mom hadn't noticed when I took the photo albums to my bedroom so I could brush my fingers against that picture of them in Ireland and remember how Dad would tell us stories as he leafed through the photo album. They spent their honeymoon on Great Blasket Island, a windswept pile of moss-covered rocks and heather dotted with the ruins of white-washed cottages straight out of a fairy tale. Dad told me I was conceived there, in a small, reconstructed beehive-shaped cottage. But I could count. I was born less than six months later, putting Mom's academic career on hold.

Shortly after I was born, Mom's parents moved from Washington DC to Tucson. Her father had taken early retirement from some vague government job. They were always off on one trip or another and the only travelling we did was from one college or another for Dad's medical education, so we never saw them. Mom had put grad school on hiatus again when Quinn came along two years later.

Mom's parents had only met Quinn through photos. Then Mom's mother fell while

hiking and couldn't get to Dad's funeral. At least, that's the story Mom told everyone. I don't think they liked Dad, but, like everything else, no one in our family would talk about it. So that set of grandparents consists of birthday cards stuffed with ten dollar bills. That's what feels odd about this summer. Mom is involved in a project that she says will lead to her final degree and a job; somehow her father is part of it. As if Dad's death is bringing about some sort of reconciliation for Mom with both her parents and Mammo and Daddo.

I slip into my jeans and t-shirt from the night before and rummage in my duffel for the University of Vermont sweatshirt Dad had bought me for Christmas. It was one of the few things they found unscathed in the accident, the shiny wrapping paper barely touched. I draw the heavy green shirt over my head, close my eyes, and imagine Christmas morning, Dad urging me to open the box, to pull on the sweatshirt. It's big enough for him and falls almost to my knees -- but he couldn't have known I would need one that would fit me for the rest of my life.

Close to the window is a large, framed maritime map that I missed in my first scan of the room. I can tell it's for guiding boats through the shoals. Not only are the water levels marked, so are the rocks that can lurk unseen at high tide. The map shows shreds of land dangling out into the ocean – the same islands and peninsulas I remember from the road map – making it look as if a large creature has mauled the shoreline. Coming closer, I trace the thin line of the road we drove. It winds down the length of the longest peninsula. It's a curious, old map, with dots for houses and buildings and, at the end, on a tiny spot of land off a place called Lands End, there is a symbol for a light house. I wonder how far it is to Lands End and if I could ride there on a bike and if there might be one in the large red barn at the back of the house.

I grab my backpack and slip downstairs. Even though I've never been here before, the house feels reassuring, full of life, even though no one else is up yet. I don't feel the absence of

Dad the way I do at home because, I suppose, I never knew him here.

Through the large glass door that separates the old house and the new studio space, looms a large pillar of black stone. I open the studio door to get a better look at the photographs of seals and posters of what look like mermaids tacked to the walls. Next to the door that leads to the gallery is a framed photograph of a woman in white leaning away from the man behind her. In the black and white photograph, the woman is seated in a long white dress, a veil flowing from her hair. A grim man in a black suit stands behind her, slightly off center, a hat held against his waist so that his elbow cocks to the side. He has a look in his eyes like a victorious hunter. The woman leans forward, her hands resting on the carved arms of the chair as if she is about to bolt. This must be the great-grandmother Mammo mentioned, the one Daddo claims is a silkie. Trapped on land by the man in black, I suppose. I snap a quick photo of the portrait, meaning to text it to Mom later.

The back of the house is wrapped with a deck. The sun porch that opens off the kitchen looks older than the gallery and studio part of the house. The windows snuggle into the sills and the glass in some of the panes looks wavy. A storm door, which curiously is not locked, leads to a small deck with steps to the lawn and a seaweed-strewn line of rocks beyond. The water has retreated to the channel – low tide – leaving trails of sand, weeds, and rocks in its wake. A large gray and black rocky mass pokes out of the water in mid-channel. As I gaze at the rocks, one moves. The small island is covered with overlapping seals, vying for room in the sun. Farther out in the channel two trees rise from a larger island, and beyond that, another, even bigger island shimmers at the mouth of the inlet.

The grass twinkles with the remnants of the rain and my sandals are soaked before I reach the water. How close can I get, I wonder, before the seals slip back into the sea. Below the lawn,

beach grass and seaweed entwine with old bottles, lengths of rope washed of whatever color they once held, and what looks like the head of a baby doll. I jump from the lawn to the damp sand, and hear the splash of a seal leaving the island. Jammed into a space beneath where the waves had battered the shore is an old wooden box filled with seaweed. I tug at it, but it is too heavy. I push aside the seaweed and see a smooth flared edge of bone. Dad had taught me all about bones as he studied anatomy and orthopedics and this one reminds me of the hip bone he showed me in one of his plastic models. His medical school skeleton was almost a member of the family, casually draped on its stand in our living room. Last Halloween, Dad dressed it in his clothes and stood it on the porch, rigging it with wire so he could move an arm to scare trick or treaters. After the accident, it was simply gone, like Dad. I flick away a piece of seaweed and place the bone at my feet. I notice other bits of bone scattered in the sand and pick up a long, finger-like knuckle. There are too many bones for my backpack so I clear the remaining seaweed from the box, put the bones inside and tuck it up above the high tide line.

"Hey Mud Head, whatcha doing?" Quinn calls from the deck. I shield my eyes from the morning sun and motion him down. Quinn runs across the grass. His nose is plastered with a thick white coating of zinc oxide. Mom had given us both regular sunscreen and the stronger thick paste. I was surprised he'd put it on himself. Guess he heard the message about being careful. You see, Quinn is much fairer than I am. Like Mom, his skin is pinkish and almost translucent while I tan easily, like Dad. He's also a tall, rather gangly ten-year-old, with a mop of unruly red-gold curls that resist taming.

"Check this out." I pick up the saucer-sized flanged bone. "What'ya think? Pretty cool, huh?"

Quinn slides down the bank and squats next to the box. He pulls out a stubby piece of

bone. “What’s it from? Some kind of fish?” He turns the bone over and holds it up to the light. “Look how it’s kind of twisted.”

“Did you see this?” I hand him the long finger-like bone.

Quinn stabs at the air with the bone. “I’ll get you my little pretties,” he screeches.

“Cut it out.” I snatch the bone back from him. “Let’s see if we find other bones. I’m pretty sure they’re seal bones. Daddo will know. We can keep them in this box. Maybe we’ll get enough to make a …” One glance at my brother tells me are both thinking about Dad’s skeleton, with its rakish grin and beckoning hand. “We’ll find the rest of the bones and put the seal back together,” I said. “Until then, we’ll keep them here, in our bone box. Let’s get started.”

We pick our way over seaweed-covered rocks, wet sand and muddy patches. Above the low tide mark we find several more finger-like bones, another flanged piece and others of various shapes. Each one goes into the box.

“This is so cool,” says Quinn. “Do you think we’ll really get enough for a whole something? Maybe it’s not a seal but a sea monster!”

“You wish. No, they’re probably just seal bones. I’ll check with Daddo’s books after breakfast. Careful with that one.” I take a small, delicate bone from him and tuck it into a corner of the box.

“Meeergun, Quinn.” Mammo’s voice rings out from the deck.

I wince at the harsh pronunciation. Maybe I should just have her call me Megan. But Muirgen, with its soft slurring Irish lisp, is the name Dad chose. I push the box back into the bank, wedging it between two boulders and out of the direct sun, but not before snapping another photo to send to Mom.