

My eyes shot open. A cold, biting breeze brushed my cheek, and I shivered at the dampness seeping into my skin. My heart pounded in my ears. My body shook, and my breath escaped in gasps.

Where am I? The question drifted through my foggy brain, my aching head.

The cramped space reeked of salt water. The floor rocked unsteadily beneath me. I blinked and tried to focus, unable to wrap my mind around my surroundings. Why am I on the floor?

I blinked again. The slightest movement hurt.

Still on the floor, I leaned on my elbows and pushed myself to an upright position. Then, lifting my hand to my head, I felt for the spot where it throbbed. My fingertips moved gingerly. The right side of my forehead, near my hairline, was sensitive and sticky.

Faint light shimmered through a shattered, rain-spattered window, dimly illuminating the area. Vague shapes surrounded me. I had no depth perception. Nothing made sense. I stared at my fingers, and though I saw no color, I knew the sticky substance must be blood.

I shook uncontrollably. My mouth was dry, and I felt nauseous. *What happened to me?*

Forcing myself to focus, I took a physical inventory. I was between two single beds, their soggy spreads dripping onto the floor. I was fully dressed, wearing a pair of jeans, a lightweight T-shirt, and a hoodie. With this grasp of the basics, my initial panic subsided a fraction. In its place came a more rational fear. *Something really bad has happened.*

I needed more light. Cautiously pushing myself to my feet, I peered into the gloom, stretching my arms in front of me to feel for unseen obstacles. I moved slowly, my hands sliding along the wall.

At last, my fingertips touched a switch. I flipped it on. Bright lights flooded the small room.

I was on a boat. But why? I concentrated hard. *What happened to put me in this place?* No longer able to keep hysteria at bay, I realized I couldn't answer that simple question. I couldn't remember anything at all.

Thundering footsteps and loud voices vibrated through my throbbing head. I felt faint, but I knew I must not give in to weakness. I just wanted to go home.

With that thought, I sank down onto one of the soggy beds with a renewed sense of horror. I didn't know who I was, or where I was, and I had no idea where home might be.

Thursday, May 14, 10:15 p.m.—Manhattan, New York

Ashleigh Taylor gasped as an inexplicable pain sliced through her heart, constricting her chest. Slowly taking a deep breath, she straightened her posture and glanced at Conrad, seated to her left in their box seats, hoping she hadn't disturbed him. She needn't have worried. Having spoken of nothing but *Hamilton* in recent weeks, he was leaning forward, totally absorbed by the riveting performance.

Ashleigh had not shared the strange sense of foreboding that had overcome her shortly before they'd entered the Richard Rodgers Theater. *What is there to tell? How can I put such a hollow feeling into words?* But here it was again—that nearly imperceptible knowledge that something wasn't right. Ashleigh closed her eyes, and gradually her breathing returned to normal. She did her best to brush apprehension aside, but even so, she willed the final curtain call to come soon.

In the lobby, as Conrad explained why “History Has Its Eyes on You” was his favorite song, Ashleigh nodded and powered on her iPhone. “That’s strange,” she said, staring down at the screen.

Conrad fell silent and raised a questioning brow.

“Four calls from April since intermission,” Ashleigh went on.

They continued to weave seamlessly through the throng of theatergoers toward the exit.

Times Square, as always, was buzzing with activity. Conrad spotted their limo to the left of the theater's entrance, and he motioned for David to remain behind the wheel while he helped Ashleigh inside. Once they were both settled, he pulled out his BlackBerry.

“Whoa. I’ve had a couple calls from April, too.” Conrad shook his head. “What could be so urgent at this hour?”

Ashleigh looked at her iPhone display. April’s first call had come in at eight forty-two. Before calling back, she checked for voice messages. There was only one.

She hit play.

“Where are you, Aunt Ashleigh?” There was a moment’s pause before April continued. “Sorry. I’m a bit rattled. Please call as soon as you get this message.”

A lump formed in Ashleigh’s throat. She heard the anxiety in April’s voice. Gripping the phone, she punched in the number.

It rang only once before April picked up. Not bothering with a greeting, she asked, “Have you heard from the girls?”

“Not since they left Southampton.” *Why would we?* Ashleigh thought. *They’re somewhere in the mid-Atlantic.* “What’s wrong?”

As she heard her own words, a sinking sensation settled in the pit of her stomach. They had known Paige and Mark Toddman’s daughter since she was four years old. April was a mature young woman who seldom came across as rattled.

“You haven’t heard? The rogue wave.” Following a quick intake of breath, April continued, “It’s all over the news . . .”

As April began to rush through the details, Ashleigh pressed the speaker button on her iPhone.

“Hold on,” Conrad broke in. His tone was calm, his words measured. “You say a rogue wave hit the *Rising Star*?”

Ashleigh frowned. Placing her hand on Conrad’s arm, she whispered, “Rogue wave?”

“At about six thirty our time, CNN reported a seven-story wave hit the *Rising Star*. There are broken windows, an inch or two of water in many cabins . . .”

Ashleigh’s throat constricted as April detailed the damage. All she cared about was the safety of their daughters. “How about the passengers?” Ashleigh blurted out.

“Thank God, there have been no deaths reported. Some passengers have minor injuries. Mostly from falls, or being hit by flying furniture

and glass. The ship wasn't disabled. They think it will arrive a day late, but at least it's sailing under its own power." April fell silent for a brief moment. "When I couldn't reach you, I called my parents right away. They suggested I keep trying to get in touch."

Pulling Ashleigh close, Conrad said, "Thank you, April. We have the emergency numbers for the ship. And there may already be a message on our home line. We'll let you know as soon as we receive any news."

Ashleigh ended the call and leaned into her husband, grateful for his warm, strong body enfolding hers.

"Love," Conrad said, "all I know about rogue waves is that they're also called monster waves, which makes sense because they're huge and unpredictable—caused by some combination of undersea currents and high winds." He flipped on the TV screen. "The experts will have far more reliable information."

Scanning channels, Conrad found what he was looking for on NBC, when a news reporter appeared on the small screen, her face frowning in concern. "In the high drama of the high seas, an eighty-foot rogue wave broadsided the *Rising Star*, four days out of the English port of Southampton, turning a luxury study cruise for college students into a nightmare. Now, you may have heard of this type of phenomenon as a freak wave, an extreme wave, a killer wave, a monster wave, or just an abnormal wave. Whatever you might call it, these are spontaneous, colossal waves on the ocean's surface. They occur far out at sea and are a threat to even the largest of ships and ocean liners. Unfortunately, these sea-serpent-like swells are not as rare as one might think . . ."

The reporter glanced down. "The seven-story wave hit the port side of the *Rising Star* between six and seven o'clock local time, knocking out the windows of the ship's restaurants and shattering several balcony doors. The floors of more than twenty cabins were left in a foot of water. Several students and crew members sustained minor injuries. However, no fatalities were reported . . ."

Conrad smiled and kissed Ashleigh on the forehead. "Be strong, love. You know our girls. They're survivors, like their mother. They're sure to make the best of the situation and come away with a boatload of stories

to tell—no pun intended. Marnie is most likely taking notes for her next short story as we speak.”

Ashleigh leaned over and kissed his smiling lips. Tension eased from her shoulders. *If anything bad happened to any of my girls, I would know.* But the newscaster’s next words sent her reeling.

Somewhere in the Mid-Atlantic Ocean

The bright overhead lights stung my eyes.

How long has it been since this nightmare began? How long have I been here, wrapped in these thin, heated blankets? Through snatches of murmured conversations, coming from every direction, I began to piece together the here and now.

I was on a ship. As I'd been carried down to this sick bay, I'd noticed more college-aged young people than older adults. But since I hadn't had much of a view outside, I couldn't guess the time of day, much less the time of year. Or what year it even was.

The only memory I could conjure up was of the cabin where I'd awakened, but I still didn't know *why* I was on this ship.

Images came back to me sporadically, of soaking wet shoes and soggy magazines scattered across the floor of the cabin. There'd been a cacophony of voices outside my room. From their urgency, I'd known I had to get out, no matter how much my head ached. But when I took a step toward the door, the room began to spin. Too weak to stand, I'd groped for something to hold on to, but only managed to plunk down onto the closest sodden bed.

The next thing I remembered was a gentle voice, and when I opened my eyes, two crewmen were beside my bed with a stretcher, clad in tall rubber boots, damp navy trousers, and white shirts embossed with navy and gold emblems. It was like a scene from the movie *Titanic*.

I felt the sickening swaying motion of the stretcher balanced between the crewmen as they carried it down a long corridor toward an elevator.

I caught glimpses of passengers in life vests. Some were huddled together and talked softly, while others cried hysterically.

The sounds echoed again now through my aching head.

I tried to orient myself, but I couldn't concentrate. My head pounded so loudly the entire band of seventy-six trombone players from *The Music Man* seemed to be marching through my skull.

I felt a gentle touch on my arm. "Marnie," a voice said, "I'm Dr. Pearson. You've had a nasty fall." A small, balding man clad in blue scrubs bent over me.

"You know me?" I asked. *Marnie*. The name did not ring any bells, but at least *someone* knew who I was. An overwhelming sense of relief shot through my veins.

He nodded. "I met you and your sister at the captain's table shortly after we began the voyage, and I saw your sister in my office just the other day. A great many people are concerned about your welfare."

It was true that several people had run up to me on the stretcher, asking if I was okay, but I had no idea who they were.

"Questions regarding the well-being of you and your sister have inundated—"

"My sister? I have a sister?"

"You don't remember?" the doctor asked. He sounded concerned but not shocked. "Given the blow you received to your head, it's not unusual for you to experience memory loss." He held up a wrinkled hand. "I'm no expert on amnesia, but I don't believe there's any cause for alarm. It's most likely temporary. Things may remain a bit hazy for a short period. I know of athletes who report being unable to recall incidents leading up to their injury, yet all their other memories remain intact."

"You said I had a sister. And she's on this ship?"

The doctor smiled patiently. "You do indeed. And without having seen your driver's license and passport, I would be in the dark as to which—"

"Where is my sister?"

The doctor's gaze dropped to the floor. "The ship's staff and crew are searching for your twin. So far, aside from her and a missing waiter, everyone else is accounted for." He paused, gesturing to the bedside

table where an oversized signature Michael Kors handbag sat. “I’m sorry, Marnie, but we had to open your handbag for identification.”

I have a twin? My stomach tightened. I prayed for my sister’s safety. Hopefully, when they found her, she wouldn’t have a knot the size of a golf ball on her temple, nor a fuzzy brain. I threw in another quick prayer: that my memory would return quickly.

Here in the hospital area, the faint scent of disinfectant did little to mask the strong scent of seawater. “What happened to this ship? Why are people in life jackets sloshing through the flooded corridors?”

Dr. Pearson filled me in with a few broad strokes. Then he focused on me once more. “Your head injury should be examined by a neurologist, but the *Rising Star*’s sick bay lacks proper medical staff and equipment. The ship never lost power during the disaster, but we still have two more days at sea before we reach port. Search and rescue has been called. Luckily, there is a Coast Guard ship only a few hundred miles from here. They have a helicopter that will airlift you to New York—Presbyterian Hospital. Your writing coach has contacted your parents.”

Writing coach? Parents? I felt as if I’d fallen down the rabbit hole. I couldn’t conjure up an image of parents, nor did I know how a writing coach fit in. *I’ll think about that later.* My hand unconsciously drifted to the bandaged right side of my head, which throbbed with pain. Strips of gauze ran under my chin and encircled my head like a doughnut ring. The bandages had already begun to itch.

I hoped Dr. Pearson was right and my amnesia was temporary. Short-circuiting any hope of relief, my mind began to reel. Why is it I understood the meaning of amnesia, and recalled an old Hollywood movie, when I couldn’t remember my name or anything about my life before waking up on the damp floor just a few hours earlier?

“Dr. Pearson,” I called out as I saw him turn to leave. “I know you are not an expert on memory, and I agree that I should see a neurologist—”

“And I am going to suggest a psychiatrist as well.”

“You think I’m crazy?”

“Not at all. Last week at dinner I found you and your sister quite intelligent and utterly enchanting. But until you regain your full memory,

you are sure to experience periods of confusion and loss. A qualified psychiatrist can help get you through the rough spots.”

I nodded, sending a jarring spiral of pain through my head. I gulped in a couple of breaths and said, “I don’t understand why I can’t remember my sister or my parents, or even my name, but—”

The expression on the doctor’s weathered face was grave. He looked exhausted. “Marnie—”

“Wait. I’m not delusional. I understand amnesia has temporarily erased those memories. What I don’t understand is why I can remember random things like a Broadway song, and what a Michael Kors handbag is, and even the rabbit hole from *Alice in Wonderland*.”

He nodded sympathetically. “The brain is a very complicated mechanism. Even neurologists don’t know all its complexities. What I do know is that there are different parts of the brain, and each store different kinds of information. So, for example, you may forget certain things while at the same time you remember others.”

The ship captain’s voice blared over the loudspeaker. To my relief, Dr. Pearson instantly stepped away and turned down the volume to a tolerable level.

The captain apologized for the unavoidable conditions and thanked the passengers for their cooperation and tolerance, and the crew for its diligence and hard work. He then announced, “To complete repairs in a timely manner, we have altered our course. The *Rising Star* will now dock in Charleston, South Carolina. For those who are anxious to get home but have no one available to pick you up, we will provide transportation. The other alternative is to await repairs and then return to Brooklyn as planned on board the *Rising Star*—albeit a few days later than originally scheduled.”

Was I anxious to get home? Would someone be there to pick me up? I had no clue.

“We’ll arrive at the Charleston terminal before noon on Sunday,” the captain went on. “After repairs are completed, the ship is scheduled to arrive at the Brooklyn terminal at five p.m. on Tuesday. In the meantime, the crew and I will make every effort to see that you’re as comfortable as possible.”

There was a long silence before the captain resumed. “Unfortunately, I now have some very sad news. Our competent safety team has spent hours searching every inch of the ship, but there is no longer any doubt. Two individuals were washed overboard by the rogue wave. God rest their souls.”

I closed my eyes and felt Dr. Pearson gently squeeze my hand.

CHAPTER

4

Thursday, May 14, 11:40 p.m.—Manhattan, New York

As the limo sailed north along the Henry Hudson Parkway, Conrad switched the TV channel. The news that one student and one *Rising Star* staff member were unaccounted for sent Ashleigh's mind into overdrive. "I—I must call Elizabeth," she stammered. "She'll be out of her mind with worry."

Elizabeth had been a trusted and much-loved treasure in Ashleigh's life for as long as she could remember. She'd met the kindly nurse in the home of her surrogate grandfather. She had been a friend and perfect companion for the iconic Charles Stuart in his late eighties and had been by his side to navigate the troubled waters of his daughter's mental illness. As the grandmotherly presence in the Taylors' Greenwich home since shortly before the birth of Juliana, she had supported and cared for the Taylors through many dramatic moments, from the kidnapping of Marnie as an infant, to her return at age eight to her biological family. Little had Elizabeth known the significant role she would play in the family—with Charles and his unstable daughter, Caroline, and with his "granddaughter" Ashleigh and her children—for decades to come.

In the limo, Conrad ran his fingers through his thick, dark, silver-streaked hair, deep creases forming on his brow. "Hopefully Elizabeth has not yet heard the news. She may not have turned on a TV or radio this evening. Otherwise, we'd have heard from her by now."

Ashleigh considered his words. "Good point. But even more reason to reach her as soon as possible."

Elizabeth's cell phone went straight to voice mail. Rather than leave

a message, Ashleigh pressed END. Almost immediately, her iPhone rang. Glancing down at the caller ID, she saw it was Elizabeth and hit TALK. “I just called your—”

“Oh, Ashleigh.” Elizabeth’s voice was whisper-thin. “I crawled into bed early and must have nodded off. I just turned on the TV.”

“We just heard it ourselves.”

“Are the girls safe?”

“I’m sure Callie and Marnie are making the best of it.”

“You’ve not been contacted yet?” Elizabeth said, her soft voice full of concern.

“We’re headed straight home to check for a message. The *Rising Star* has a swift emergency communication system in place.” Ashleigh withheld the news of the missing student.

“That’s good,” Elizabeth said. “Please wake me with any news, no matter how late. I’m praying for their safety.”

When Ashleigh ended the call, a thought flashed in her head. “Remote code,” she said, and began scrolling through the notes on her iPhone.

It took Conrad no more than a fraction of a second to grasp her meaning. “Do you have it?”

She nodded. “One, seven, zero, three.”

Conrad punched in their home number and then the code. It had been a long time since they’d needed to access voice messages on their landline remotely.

In the next moment, Conrad’s grip on the BlackBerry tightened and the color drained from his face.

CHAPTER

5

Thursday, May 14, Midnight—Bronx, New York

Conrad's organized mind faltered. *What about Callie?* He needed more information. He needed to form a rational plan. *No time for delay.*

"Love, there were two calls from aboard the *Rising Star*. They were both about Marnie." Feeling Ashleigh's body stiffen beside him, he quickly added, "She's safe. She was knocked off her feet when the ship was hit and received a blow to her head." He rushed on, sensing Ashleigh's mind was traveling the same path as his. "The first call was from the ship's administration office, and the second from Marnie's creative writing teacher—a Professor Frank Gaspar." He paused. "Neither left word of Callie."

"Callie wouldn't have been one of Gaspar's students," Ashleigh pointed out. "But the main office should have relayed news of the safety of both girls."

Conrad nodded. "My thoughts as well." His gut tightened another notch. "Gaspar confirmed the ship is en route, traveling under its own steam. It will dock in Charleston, however, not Brooklyn. And not for another three days. So the ship's doctor contacted the Coast Guard and arranged for a medevac transport for Marnie."

Ashleigh's face turned ashen.

Conrad held up a hand. "Gaspar said there's no cause for alarm, but particularly since Marnie has medevac insurance, the doctor felt it best to get her examined by a neurologist sooner rather than later. He wants to rule out any chance of swelling or bleeding in her brain."

Ashleigh's eyes closed. "Swelling or bleeding—"

Conrad hurried on. “Apparently, Marnie has a good-sized gash at her hairline, but the doctor stitched her wound, and all her vital signs are strong. Gaspar said they’re just being extra cautious. Marnie will be taken directly to New York–Presbyterian Hospital. Barring complications, she should arrive tomorrow morning.”

Conrad reached for Ashleigh’s hand. “Love, Marnie is also experiencing signs of amnesia. Gaspar said the doctor felt the condition was only temporary, but Marnie should see a neurologist. As well as a psychiatrist.”

Ashleigh straightened her posture and lifted her chin. Neither spoke for what felt like a very long time.

“That seems like a lot to leave in a phone message,” Ashleigh continued, “and yet it’s not enough. Did Gaspar leave a phone number? Can we even reach the ship?”

“No, he didn’t. But the number should be on caller ID.” Conrad drew in a breath and gazed out the window as if there were answers written in the stars. “In the meantime, we need to confirm that Callie is safe.” Shaking his head, he began to punch a fist into his open palm. He felt . . . powerless.

“How about Allison?” Ashleigh said. “Maybe we can contact her?”

When Callie had danced on the high school competition team, Allison Dee had been one of her teachers. Callie had bonded with the talented young woman, and Allison had since become like a member of the Taylors’ extended family. Allison now headed the master dance program on board the *Rising Star* and had been the catalyst for Callie applying for the semester-at-sea program in their senior year at university in Southern California.

“Terrific idea. Though it’s unlikely we’ll get through.” Conrad instantly shifted their focus to something positive, saying, “We’ll get Pocino on board. He has the wherewithal to cover more ground in half the time.”

Ashleigh nodded, hoping they could enlist the help of their friend and investigator-at-large. “But if he’s not in New York—”

“He is.” Conrad squeezed her hand. “He’s dealing with an internal situation at Jordon’s headquarters. He was still wrapping up loose ends when I left the store this afternoon—which feels like ages ago.”

Though her eyes were moist, Ashleigh forced a smile. “Since their years of dancing together, the girls have grown apart . . . their interests, their chosen careers. But they love and care about each other, and . . .” She wiped her cheek with the back of her hand. “Marnie is hurt. Callie should be with her.”

“Perhaps she is with her, love. Pocino will cut through the red tape. Even in the best-case scenario, there’ll be no shortage of *that*.”

12:15 a.m.—Queens, New York

Dead tired, with boarding pass in hand, Ross Pocino lumbered toward Gate 55A. Once seated on his flight, he planned to order a scotch on the rocks and doze off till touchdown at LAX.

His cell phone vibrated in his jacket pocket, and he was tempted to let it go straight to voice mail. But ignoring a call just wasn’t in him. Compulsively, he pulled out the BlackBerry.

Reading CONRAD TAYLOR on the caller ID, he punched TALK. “Pocino,” he answered, raising his voice above the clamor of conversation and rolling luggage wheels all around him. Then he listened.

“Holy shit. No, I had no idea that was the ship the twins are on . . . Yes, at JFK . . . Just tell me what you need. I’ll do an about-face, call in a few favors, and head to Brooklyn . . . Right, but no point in taking off for Charleston now. The main offices and communication hub are here in New York.”

Pocino headed out of the airport terminal to catch the Avis shuttle, surprised by the turn of events but determined to get to the bottom of things. Yet one fact that Conrad had shared chilled him to the bone: There had been no communication about Callie.