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# HAWKE LEADS SMALL-TOWN TEAM TO SHOWDOWN WITH PHS

*Portland Press Herald*

March 7th, 2002

AUGUSTA – With the host school's team eliminated in a double-overtime frenzy yesterday evening to the upset-minded Near Haven Lady Knights, all that stands between them and the state title are defending state title holders, the Portland High School Lady Bulldogs. The game is scheduled to be played at a neutral location, as the schools are on opposite ends of the state and the state athletics board has made an exception to keep the teams on more equal footing.

Near Haven, coached by long-time veteran Charlie White, starts four seniors and holds a 30-4 overall record (26-4 regular season). Led by starting point guard, Elizabeth Hawke (averaging 17 points, 5.2 assists, 2 steals), Near Haven has come

out of nowhere to blaze their way through the Northeast Division playoffs and to find themselves on the brink of history. It has been over ten years since a team outside of Portland, Bangor, or Augusta won a basketball state title.

Hawke, a 5'9" senior, leads the team in scoring and assists, and holds the all-time points record at Near Haven High School with over 2,000 points. She is averaging just over seventeen points a game and has received a good deal of out-of-state attention for her backcourt leadership. She currently has offers from Fresno State and Portland State (Oregon) to play at the collegiate level, as well as from the University of Maine.

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# HAWKE PICKS PORTLAND

*Near Haven Mirror*

May 2002

NEAR HAVEN – With the deadline to determine her destination nearly up, Near Haven's star point guard has selected to play her collegiate ball at Portland State University. Hawke spoke to a small gathering of reporters and well-wishers with her coach, Charlie White, yesterday.

When asked why she chose to go to college so far away, Elizabeth Hawke explained, "Some people live and die in Near Haven, you know? I want to get out, to make a name for myself, to put this place on the map. The first step was winning state; the next step is to take my game as far as it can go."

Hawke, an orphan and ward of the state, has spent the better part of her high school career living with her coach, Mr. White, and his daughter. She attributes her success in basketball to the constant immersion of strategy that she receives from being around her coach every day. Mr. White is a twenty-five-year coaching veteran who also serves on the school board since retiring from teaching civics at Near Haven High School.

Hawke will join a veteran club that plays in the Big Sky Conference and says that she hopes to make an immediate impact on the team.

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## PORTLAND 60, MONTANA 45

From Basketball Roundups

*USA Today*, January 2003

Freshman Elizabeth Hawke (5'9" Near Haven, ME) scored 17 in just twenty-five minutes of play in her Big Sky debut against rival Montana. Portland

State is currently 5-9 after a grueling preseason that included trips to Georgia, Tennessee, and Notre Dame; they are currently the favorite to win the Big Sky.



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# BASKETBALL STAR DISMISSED ON ROBBERY CHARGES, HEARING PENDING

*Kennebec Journal*  
September 2003

PORTLAND, OR – Police filed charges Saturday against local basketball talent Elizabeth Hawke, nineteen, following her arrest Friday evening. Hawke, according to police reports, is charged with possession of stolen goods and evading arrest. Portland State has officially dismissed Hawke, a rising sophomore, from their basketball team following notification of her arrest.

“We regret that we can no longer welcome Ms. Hawke to represent our community and school,” the school’s official statement read. Further comment was declined.

Hawke averaged 10 points and 2.3 assists with twenty-four minutes of playing time per game her freshman year.



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# HAWKE SONG – NEAR HAVEN’S HAWKE GUILTY

*Near Haven Mirror*

January 2004

PORTLAND, OR – Former Near Haven High basketball star, Elizabeth Hawke, was convicted in a public hearing yesterday of possession of stolen property. She is facing up to five years in prison and will be sentenced sometime next week, according to court papers.

Hawke, twenty, was arrested in September of last year after police found her loitering in a restricted area. Upon a search of her person, an undisclosed number of

watches with an estimated value of close to \$100,000.00 were found on her person. Hawke testified in court that she had simply collected them for a friend and had no idea that they were stolen, but upon cross-examination it came to light that many of Hawke’s associates in Portland possessed police records and long rap sheets. As this is Ms. Hawke’s first conviction, there is some expectation of leniency from presiding judge Martha Rogers.

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# HAWKE RELEASED ON GOOD BEHAVIOR

National Briefs  
*Near Haven Mirror*  
August 2006

OREGON – Local basketball hero Elizabeth Hawke (twenty-two) was released from prison in Oregon yesterday based on good behavior and new developments in the case. Hawke was sentenced in 2004 to serve five years for possession of stolen property and served one and a half years of her sentence before

being released. Police suspect that Hawke was telling the truth during her trial when she said that she had no idea that the property she was holding had been stolen, as several similar cases have occurred around the Portland area since her conviction in 2004. Ms. Hawke declined to comment to the press upon her release.

# CHAPTER ONE

## HOMEcoming (25 MAY, 2012)

CHARLIE DIDN'T ANSWER WHEN LIZA called him collect from a pay phone in Boston and the operator wouldn't let her leave him a message. She slammed the receiver down in disgust and stared at it for a long time before turning away and scowling at the rain-slicked bus station parking lot that she had sprinted across in order to chance this call.

It wasn't like she had much else to do. The bus to Bangor didn't leave for another hour and she figured that it was a common courtesy to call before showing up in the town whose name you've disgraced. Maybe she was just hoping for too much, going back there, but she was out of options now. It was home or nothing, with the last of her money gone, funneled into this bus ticket to Bangor.

Liza ran a tired hand through her two-day-dirty blonde hair and scowled up at the sky. The rain pelted down hard; cold droplets of water fell around her and she was growing more and more desperate by the second. She had half a mind to try calling Charlie again, to tell him that it was

Maine or nothing, and no matter what she had done to them, it couldn't be worse than what she was coming from.

Ten years later and she was still running. Liza chewed on her lip and contemplated the payphone. She had burned all of her bridges at home; she'd done that a long time ago. Now she was just trying to remember if there was anyone in that godforsaken village that would care if she lived or died. Names of former friends, teammates, and the few people she'd stayed with who weren't god-awful swam through her mind and she struggled to remember if any of them even cared the last time she was fucked six ways to Sunday and desperately needed help.

There was one name, but it was far too early in the day for him to be back at port. Liza sighed again, staring up at the rain once more. *Stupid lobstermen and their stupidly rigid schedules.*

It always rained in May, but at least in Boston there was some semblance of a spring. Liza hitched her bag further up her shoulder and scowled at the rain. The jacket she was wearing wasn't that great at keeping the wet out, but it was better than nothing. It was made of cheap, fake leather in the most obnoxious shade of blue imaginable. She had found it in Vegas, after they'd let her out on good behavior—when they'd finally figured out that Liza was just a patsy. There had been some restitution money from the state after that, and the chance to look across a courtroom and tell twelve of her peers that her asshole ex-boyfriend, Jared Dickens, was a manipulative douche who'd let her fall on the sword for him.

The judge hadn't expunged the records though, and her restitution money soon ran out when it became obvious

that no one was going to offer Liza a job with that criminal history. She had been stuck with the idea of lying about it, which she couldn't stomach, or simply fumbling her way through life, hoping there'd be someone like Charlie, her former coach, who she'd chance upon again.

Kicking a rock and sending it skittering across the bus depot's parking lot, Liza shivered. It was fifty-five and rainy, and she had spent the better part of a year in Raleigh couch-surfing with friends and working basketball concessions, as no one ever asked twice in a place like that. It'd had been eighty when she'd left North Carolina and now she was stuck in a New England not-quite-spring. She was gonna get sick.

Over the loudspeaker, there was an announcement that they were boarding the bus and Liza hurried out into the rain once more, her boots splashing water up her pants legs. She sighed when she looked down at the rainwater slicked with motor oil that now dotted her nice boots and the one pair of jeans she owned that she actually liked. Just another fuck-up, she supposed.

Maybe in Portland, Charlie would answer his phone. Or it would be late enough that she could try the second option, the one that she still wasn't entirely sure she wanted to try.

It seemed like no matter where she ended up on I-95, it would always be clogged with traffic. Central Boston was no exception to that rule. Liza shifted back in her uncomfortable bus seat and stared out over Boston Harbor listlessly, her chin resting on her palm. It had been *forever* since she'd seen this place, and it felt as though nothing

had changed at all. She fiddled with a fraying thread from the seam of her jeans and sighed.

As the bus merged at a snail's pace over to I-93 and pointed north towards Concord, she was once again lost in thought. Liza had avoided New England for so long, and hated the idea of coming back to a place where people might know her. Now though, she stared at the clouds of fog rolling in off the water and realized that she'd missed the sight and smell of the ocean.

And the bus ride dragged on.

In Manchester, Liza debated getting off the bus and trying to call Charlie again. But the layover was only twenty minutes and she knew that she would go and waste what precious little cash she had left at the McDonald's that was nestled inside the bus station and end up hungry again in twenty minutes. She kicked off her boots and curled her legs underneath her, trying to force herself to concentrate on the novel in her lap. It had been free in a bin outside the library in Raleigh and she took it knowing that it was good and long and would probably take her the entirety of the bus ride to read it.

"Whatcha reading?" asked the kid who'd been kicking her seat incessantly since they left Boston. He was half-hanging over the seat, a Nintendo DS in his hands and Mario half-heartedly paused in mid-jump away from Bowser's flames. It looked like Mario was about to die.

Liza felt for the kid, because towards the end of those games, Bowser could be a real bitch to beat. She didn't have the heart to glare at him, and just shrugged and flipped the cover for him to see.



“Mu-tin-a-y on the Bounty.” The kid sounded the words out slowly.

Liza thought that he was a little old to still need to sound out words, especially now that she was back in New England where there were actually decent public schools. Her eyes narrowed. Video games were ruining children to this day, it seemed. “Mutiny,” she corrected.

“What’s it about?” The kid was absorbed in his game again, but he was obviously expecting Liza to entertain him as the bus rolled forward and on towards Concord once more.

“Sailors who didn’t like their captain,” Liza explained. Guilt flooded over her as she struggled to force down the memories of her teammates’ adoration when she’d been captain. Once, she’d been a leader on a state championship-winning basketball team and people had looked up to her. Now she was just fallen from the town’s grace, and as the Milton of Manchester sped by out the window, Liza worried her lip and wondered if going back there was even the right thing to do.

She was returning home, defeated.

And Charlie still wouldn’t answer his phone.

The bus stopped at a Mobil station in Bow, New Hampshire, to get gas before going up the road to Concord to pick up even more passengers. Liza didn’t really understand why there were two stops so close together. She stared out the window as the Mobil station and hotels that dotted the juncture of I-89 and I-95 gave way to residential homes. This was the sort of look that she had always taken for granted in New England.

New Hampshire had always been something of a mystery to her. It bordered all of Maine and yet the people here, she reasoned, would be more at home in Alabama than in Maine or Vermont, or even Massachusetts. It was a place to start for her. As the bus wound its way up Route 13 towards Concord, the view was startling. She didn't understand why this place was so different from the rest of New England.

In Concord, Liza watched with raised eyebrows as a beat-up Chevy with a stars and bars sticker on its back dash drove down the street across from the bus station; she said nothing as the bus started to slowly empty. There was a long way to go until Portland, and then it was on to Bangor for this bus. More people would probably get on in Portland, she figured, and the bus route ended in Canada.

She sat back and continued to read about breadfruit and the increasingly harsh conditions on the ship, her mind drifting as the rain continued to fall outside. She fell asleep with her finger tucked into the book to mark her place, her hair falling into her eyes and her breathing finally even for what was probably the first time the entire trip.

Liza dreamt vividly. She always had.

She was standing in the house where she lived when she was three, just barely old enough to remember the feelings of betrayal as the man she'd thought to be her father and his tired wife drove her up to the social services office in Bangor. They had a child of their own now—a newborn, Liza's file read, and they could no longer take care of two children. Liza would be better off with a different family, and they urged the social worker to place her quickly so that there would be no bad memories. That

had not happened. Even as a child, she had been so angry at the family that had loved her so strongly until she no longer served their purposes. Now that they had a child that was their flesh and blood, Liza no longer had any value in their lives.

They'd thrown her away like trash, and the emergency placement at ten o'clock on a Friday night, just before Memorial Day, had been every bit as bad.

The place that they'd sent her to haunted her to this day. She could not escape the stale smell of that house and the oppressive weight of the air around her as she moved from room to room. She was careless, a child, and her little body tripped on a rug and knocked a vase loose from its shelf. It crashed down around Liza, so like and yet unlike the rest of her life.

And Liza ran, skittering to a halt at the stairway, debating whether to go up or down. Fear was everywhere in this memory—in this dream—and she was afraid to move.

At the base of the stairs was an older girl with dark hair in a braid that ran down her back. She smiled and her warm brown eyes crinkled at the corners when she looked at Liza. Liza reached out, desperate to get away. The girl looked away when the hand on the small of Liza's back struck hard enough to bruise.

She had broken a vase, running indoors, and her foster sister would do nothing to stop her mother's wrath.

"-land," a voice crackled through the haze of dream and memory and Liza jerked awake. She blinked, surprised to see that they'd pulled into Portland just as the growing, rainy dusk had settled more firmly into night. "Portland,

everyone out. Those traveling on to Bangor or Eastport can get back on in twenty minutes.”

There was a line of pay phones across the street and Liza heaved her bag over her shoulder once more. It cut into the skin through her jacket and the sweater beneath it, and she winced. She hadn't had a dream about that place in months now, and as she inched ever closer to where it all began, she was not sure she wanted to keep going. Portland was as good a place as any to start over.

Liza could stay here. She'd be able to find a job and could perpetuate the lie of normalcy for a little while longer. Her money was completely gone—she'd spent it on her bus ticket and she wasn't particularly keen on repeating the same process that had plagued her since she'd been released from jail. She *had* to go back home to try and sort herself out in the one place she could think of where doors probably wouldn't be slammed in her face as soon as people figured out who she really was. She needed to go back there, even though she didn't want to; it was the only place where she might have the chance to become whole again.

Charlie didn't pick up when she called, but this time the operator allowed her to leave a message, free of charge. Liza didn't really know what to say, and swallowed desperately against her dry mouth, praying for the words to tumble forth and out into the world. “Coach...” Her tongue felt thick and heavy as she spoke. “It's Liza Hawke. Look, I... I don't really know where else to go anymore. I'm on a bus headed home. I'm going to need a place to stay.” The words stretched out into silence and the answering machine

clicked off into an empty, almost ringing sound. Charlie wasn't going to do her any favors, Liza knew this now.

"Can I try one more number?" she asked. She'd hung up the phone and dialed zero one more time, and the operator had politely informed her that she could not redial the same number collect if there was no one on the other end who would accept the charges.

"No messages this time," the operator replied. Liza gave her the name of the only other person in all of her godforsaken hometown that might still give a damn about her.

She stood in the rain in Portland, squinting across the street at the bus station, making sure that the bus wouldn't leave before she was on it, as she listened to the phone ring. After the tone pulsed twice, she found herself smiling as a harassed-sounding Kevin Jaspen told the operator that yes, he would accept the charges to speak to Elizabeth Hawke in Portland.

"Hey Kevin," Liza said. She didn't really know how to ask him what she wanted to ask.

"Hawke." His tone was curt, but not without warmth.

Even over the phone, Liza could tell he was smiling, just a little bit.

"What has got you calling me from Portland of all far-too-close-for-comfort places?"

Sighing, Liza wrapped a strand of hair around her finger and watched as it curled, straw-yellow against her skin, and then fell flat and limp once more. She needed a shower and a decent night's rest. "I'm coming there." She glanced at the bus station once more. They were starting

to line up, but she was pretty sure that it was just the bus for Boston. “I want to try and start over.”

“Then why the hell are you coming *here?*” Kevin wanted to know.

Liza didn’t think there was an answer for that. It was seven-thirty on a Thursday—right before a holiday weekend. The roads were clogged with early vacationers headed to and from their homes and destinations. She just wanted to stop, to rest. She wanted, and the thought terrified her beyond all measure, to go home.

“Dunno if you’ve been keeping up, but this place is dead nine months out of the year, love.”

“I know.” She cradled the phone between her hands. “I’m getting in at nine; can I crash at yours for the night?”

“Is one night going to turn into many?” he asked. His tone was mild and not accusatory, which Liza was thankful for. She didn’t really want to have to explain to him that she had nowhere else to go. Not just yet at any rate.

Liza rolled her eyes. “I’m calling you because you were a friend, Kevin. A really good friend, once upon a time. I’ve already tried Charlie...but he won’t pick up, and I don’t dare call Nancy, not after what happened.” Liza wasn’t above asking for help, but she *was* above begging. She would find a place to stay even if it wasn’t with Kevin, and they both knew that.

He chuckled. “Nice to know I’m still playing second best to Charlie White.”

Liza could feel the sarcasm dripping through the phone and rolled her eyes once more, even though he couldn’t see her.

“I’ll be there. You can still mend traps right?”



“And man the boat if you need me to,” Liza replied. She hung up, listening to the sounds of the city streets. Portland was a nice city, and Liza had lived in enough of them to tell the good ones from the bad. When she’d been seventeen, Portland had seemed like the greatest city in the world, but then she traveled across the country to the other Portland and had found everything that she’d never wanted in a city that was supposed to represent her freedom—her escape.

Boarding the bus once more, she tried not to think about what might be waiting for her when she returned to Near Haven. She went back to reading about breadfruit and Tahiti and shit getting real on the *Bounty* and tried not to think about anything at all.

She had left Maine on a day like this in May, ten years ago. It was raining when Charlie and his daughter had driven her to Portland with only one suitcase and a new pair of Jordans in Near Haven High’s colors. Back then, Liza had stared down at their black, white, and deep purple the whole drive, a swell of gratitude welling up within her.

Charlie had smiled at her and had hugged her at the airport. Having never had a father, she figured Charlie was the closest she’d ever had. All she could think about today, despite the book and the same beat-up pair of Jordans jammed into the top of her bag, was how she’d let him down. He’d done so much to get her out—and she’d thrown it all away for the first guy who told her she was beautiful.

Liza pushed all thoughts of *that* from her mind and watched out the window, as the rainy city gave way to the thick pine forests of northern coastal Maine.



Kevin's beat-up old Isuzu pickup was still running, apparently. It was the same car he'd had in high school, bought off of his father before he'd left the town to go further south and attempt to start a carpentry business. Liza remembered driving out of town to go camping in New Hampshire with Kevin and how it rained so hard they'd set up a tarp over the truck bed and slept there, drinking stolen Bud Light and singing along to Green Day on the radio.

Liza was the only one to get off the bus in Near Haven and she didn't thank the driver when she departed. Her heart thudded in her chest and she was suddenly very grateful that Near Haven was such a small town. No one, save Kevin, who was leaning against the hood of his truck, was there to see her arrive. No one had to know just yet. Liza liked that. She liked the feeling of anonymity. Maybe this way it would be easier for her to lie to herself and pretend that this was just another place that she'd come to, like any of the places before that. This wasn't a place where she'd had endings or beginnings. If she lied to herself hard enough, she could almost believe that she was starting over here with a blank slate.

The bus roared off down Main Street, pausing at the single stoplight before disappearing into the inky night.

Liza inhaled the smell of the salt air and stepped towards Kevin, hand raised in greeting.

He raised one in return, but it was the sudden sight of the other that had Liza hissing, “*Jesus*, what the fuck happened to your hand?”

“Stuck in a pot that Billy was throwing overboard,” Kevin said. He glanced down at the prosthetic that formed his left hand. Liza’s eyes widened as he shrugged nonchalantly and pulled her into a tight hug. “I nearly drowned.”

“Shit, man.” Liza said. She let out a breath of air at the tightness of his embrace and kissed him on the cheek. Once she’d thought that they’d be lovers, but that had been a long time ago. Kevin had been an odd kid when they were in school, and Liza always figured that he’d be an odd adult too. Now he was just a face from her past, and Liza was not entirely sure she knew what to say to him. It had been a very long time since she’d felt this awkward. She shifted from foot to foot, looking at Kevin’s black leather jacket and ratty Sox T-shirt beneath it. He had on black jeans that had seen better days, and he looked a lot more like the bad boy from a boy band than a lobsterman with only one hand.

“I renamed the boat.” He stepped back, grinning at her.

“Did you now?” She raised an eyebrow. When they were kids, the boat had been named for Kevin’s mother. “To what? The *Black Pearl*?”

“Well, given that Billy’s last name is Schmee, I went with the *Jolly Roger*.” He nearly pouted as Liza threw back her head and laughed and laughed. Of course he had.

Billy and Kevin had been inseparable since childhood. Their fathers had both had lobster boats, as well as a tidy side business renting skiffs to tourists during the summer and doing island-hopping day trips on the weekends. Billy

was a few years older than Kevin; she couldn't remember exactly how many years off the top of her head. She thought it might have been three, since they'd been in high school together, but Billy had always had trouble in school. There was no telling if he'd been held back due to academics. He was a good friend to Kevin, better than Liza had ever been, at any rate.

"You got a sick sense of humor, Jaspen." She clapped him on the shoulder and grinned at him. Raising an eyebrow, a smirk playing on her lips, she added, "Or should I say, Captain Hook?"

His eyes glittered dangerously in the light of the streetlamp above them. "Speaking of *children's* films," he said glaring at Liza, "get in. I have to drop something off for a friend."

Still chuckling, Liza threw her bag into the back of Kevin's truck. It smelled like fish and the ocean and she wrinkled her nose and adjusted the bag so that it wouldn't touch the collection of rain- and seawater-wet leaves that had piled up in the bed of Kevin's truck. She hopped into the cab where Kevin was already fiddling with the radio. He produced a cassette from above his sun visor and popped it into the tape player. When the opening chords of *Blue Highway* filled the cab, Liza couldn't help but smile. Ten years later and Kevin's taste in music was pretty much the same. Somehow, she was not really all that surprised.

Kevin drove up Main and turned left on Park.

Liza peered around at the brightly-lit windows of the town as Kevin drove slowly through the streets. There was a brown paper bag on the seat beside him that moved occasionally and Liza knew that there was at least one

lobster in it. She was tempted to open it up and have a look, curious if the sea crustaceans had changed at all.

The town was pretty much the same. Liza still held her breath as they drove by the church graveyard; she very pointedly didn't look at Charlie's house as they passed it heading up the hill that overlooked the town. They moved on to High Pine Street. She still remembered this street and the time she'd spent briefly living on it when she was barely old enough to count her fingers and toes. It wasn't really all that different, and Liza was about to disregard the street when Kevin pulled up to the one house that Liza had no interest in ever entering again. Staring up at the house, Liza could feel her heart hammering in her chest as though she'd just played a full forty minutes of basketball with no break. It dwarfed all of the other structures on the street in size and prominence and belonged to the senator's wife, who'd taken over his job after he had a heart attack some five years before.

Sitting in St. Paul, Liza had been surprised to open the newspaper and read about the sudden and rather traumatic death of a Maine senator who'd had a massive coronary on his way back to his home state. She shook her head, for her involvement with that family had been a lifetime ago. Another family *had* to be living there now. Leaning forward, Liza reached for the crank handle to lower the truck's window, desperate to get rid of the smell of fish and sweaty man that seemed to cling to the truck's interior.

"Be just a sec," Kevin said. He took the brown paper bag and stepped out of the cab, then slammed the door shut and let himself into the gated yard.

From the doorway, a small figure shot across the lawn. The little boy was wearing his pajamas and was barefoot as Kevin scooped him up with his good hand.

“I have a present for you.” Kevin spun the kid around for a second.

Liza was pretty sure that this was the strangest thing she’d witnessed yet. Kevin wasn’t supposed to be good with kids. He was *supposed* to be her weird friend from high school who used to wear eyeliner and listen to Insane Clown Posse and Slipknot to the point people started to worry about him. They’d been kids in the Nineties; everyone was on the lookout for teenagers who wore all black and listened to the wrong sort of music in those days.

Regardless, being an adult wasn’t a good look on him... on either of them really.

“This little guy wasn’t going to make it if we put ‘im back,” Kevin said. He deftly opened the bag with his prosthetic and reached in to pull out a small white bundle. “So I thought that you could look after him in your tank?”

The little boy nodded solemnly and took the bundle from Kevin—it was not a lobster—Liza leaned forward and caught sight of the stark white of a shell. It was a hermit crab...had to be.

“Did you ask my mom?” the kid asked. Kevin grinned in response.

“I’m sure that your mother will understand doing a good deed.” Kevin winked and pushed himself back to his feet.

The little boy turned with carefully cupped hands and made his way back to the door.



That was when Liza first caught a glimpse of the boy's mother standing in the doorway and dressed to the nines. She didn't look particularly familiar and a wave of relief floated easily over Liza. If she didn't have to deal with *that* family while she was sorting her shit out, it would be a blessing.

Liza glanced up through her curtain of hair and caught the woman's face as she stepped under the porch light. She was *gorgeous*. She was Sofia Milton and she had aged fucking beautifully.

Liza slumped down in the seat as Kevin climbed back into the cab.

"Not hiding, are you?" he asked, with a raised eyebrow. He moved the gear shift and pulled the truck back onto the road proper. He peered over his shoulder at the house that they had just left and shrugged. "Pretty sure that she doesn't bite."

Groaning, Liza shook her head and forced her attention back out the window again. She watched the familiar houses as they passed them, running through the multitude of names of their residents that she had never been that good at recalling to begin with, trying to remember who lived where. People never left Near Haven.

Liza had been desperate to leave, and now she was sitting in Kevin's truck like she was still a junior in high school. This place had a terrible pull. "I take it she married Dave then?"

Kevin nodded and turned down Harbor Way, heading towards the house his father had built before either of them were born. It was Kevin's now, like the boat and the fishing business. His father had never made it in the

carpentry business and ate his gun not long after Liza left for Oregon. She still hated to think about that phone call, Nancy begging her to come back, to console Kevin. Liza had started against Montana that night and Nancy hadn't called again.

"Lost him too," Kevin said, as he turned into his driveway.

Lobster pots and buoys littered his front porch and Liza collected her things from the back of the truck without a word. She brushed off the wet leaves and slung the bag over her shoulder.

"Dave drowned; they were out on a sailboat—the whole family was there, even the senator—and got caught in a squall. It took the coast guard three hours to find him." Kevin shook his head and kicked a damaged pot out of the way as he crossed to his front door. It skittered to a halt against a four-high stack of them, wobbling precariously against the railing that wrapped around the porch. He turned to Liza after he'd unlocked the door, hand still resting on the handle. "There's a lot of talk in town—that it wasn't really an accident, and you know better than most how Sofia's mother is."

And Liza did know. She'd felt that wrath and knew Sofia had felt it too. It was a secret that Liza intended to take to her grave, and she made sure that her CPS records had been sealed once she aged out of the system. No one had to know the secrets of the Milton family, even if Liza was far too young at the time to know many of them at all. Still, she'd felt the sting and had endured the bruises until a more permanent solution was found. She'd done it because it meant that Sofia, all of seven years old at

the time, would smile at her. She'd smile and just for that instant, the pain would leave her eyes.

"What do you think?" Liza asked. She followed Kevin inside. The house was largely unchanged. The wide stone fireplace still dominated the living room, but Liza could see that Kevin had decorated the mantle with various things he'd found over the years. The antique glass Asian buoys—that Liza remembered helping him untangle from a truly frightening-looking piece of seaweed when they were six—were still there, but now there were a few old-looking bottles and some interesting driftwood as well.

"I haven't really ever thought about it." Kevin shrugged. "But you'd best get to bed if you're going to be helping out on the boat in the morning." He gestured vaguely towards the couch and yawned. "We can fix the pots tomorrow night."

He disappeared into his bedroom and came out a minute later with a pillow and a blanket that Liza gratefully took. She was okay with the couch; it was better than sitting on an uncomfortable bus seat for damn near two full days. She was exhausted and world weary on top of it.

It hadn't really sunk in that she was back yet, and Liza wondered if she would dare stay long enough for it to do just that.



# CHAPTER TWO

Summer (17 June, 2012)

LIZA FELL INTO ROUTINES EASILY. She supposed that her childhood had created her need for things to stay regimented. Her life had been in flux so often that the simple act of Kevin dumping rain gear on her at four thirty in the morning was the routine that she latched onto.

She stumbled into the kitchen and made coffee as Kevin, out on the porch in nothing but his boxers, scowled up at the pre-dawn sky. He was trying to determine if they should wear their raingear out to the car or simply bring it with them and put it on when they got down to the boat. The last thing any of them wanted was to spend the day cold, damp, and miserable because the freezing Maine rain had gotten into their hoodies and socks. This was a morning ritual, and after he'd made his determination, he would come in and down two cups of the coffee Liza had made, black and strong.

Mornings were usually a mixture of Kevin opening the fridge and staring blearily at its contents before slamming it shut and announcing, as he did most mornings, that they would be getting take-out sandwiches for lunch. They

never lingered after Kevin's announcement of their lunch plans and Liza's subsequent eye roll. They hurriedly got dressed and then drove down to the docks to meet Billy.

Billy usually had more coffee, and the sandwiches that Kevin decided they would have for lunch, when he met them at the docks. Liza always liked Billy because he never judged. He had a nervous personality that sometimes made her wary, but he never once commented on her being back in the one place that no one ever thought she'd return to.

When she was seven, Liza had lived with Kevin and his father for a spell while Child Protective Services attempted to work out a placement for her. The Milton family obviously hadn't been an option anymore, and there didn't seem to be many other places for her to go. Kevin's father, despite his flaws, was a good man. He had done all the paperwork before Liza had even screwed up the courage to ask if she could stay with him and Kevin while CPS sorted it out.

He taught her how to fish and how to fix lobster traps. She could sew canvas and weave a net by hand if she had to. It came in handy, as Kevin had never learned and had no money to repair the holes in his traps with anything but the least expensive materials he could buy at the Home Depot up in Bangor.

Liza told herself that she was just earning her keep, but she liked it. There was no one to judge when she was hanging off the side of a boat, trying to hook a buoy with one hand, while desperately flinging the other hand out to keep her balance. She was always good at balance drills, and she had excelled at off-balance shots when she'd played ball. Now she was just hauling in traps and throwing the

small lobsters back, keeping half an eye out for more hermit crabs for Kevin's little friend. It all seemed so simple.



It was late in the evening when they returned to shore, hungry, exhausted, and desperate for a shower. Liza usually let Kevin go first, and pattered around the kitchen figuring out what to cook for dinner while she waited for him to finish.

Cooking came naturally to her. She'd worked a good bit in kitchens as she'd traveled across the country. It had always seemed to her that most back-of-the-house employees had records of one sort or another. Liza hated that the record stuck with her, following her around, even though the circumstances of her initial arrest were so convoluted and stupid. She had always been too proud to lie about it on her application, and while some states had specific timeframes for reporting criminal records, there wasn't any sort of consistency state to state. She figured that when she was ten years removed from the incident, she could potentially pass it off like a foolish collegiate mistake—like a DUI with more jail time or something. Maybe by then she would have her shit together enough to know what she wanted out of life.

That morning, when she'd eaten breakfast, she had used the last of the milk. They needed to get more. Liza stood in front of the refrigerator in an old T-shirt that she thought might have belonged to her freshman roommate at Portland State and gym shorts, contemplating the dismal lack of food contained within the battered, old relic from

the seventies. Scowling, she pushed the door closed and crossed to stand in front of the half-closed bathroom door. She knocked and called, "I'm going to get some groceries."

The sounds of water splashing inside stopped and Kevin shouted over the still-running showerhead, "What?"

Puffing out her cheeks in exasperation, Liza reached for the door handle, thought better of it, and raised the volume of her voice instead of opening the door further. She didn't need to see any of that, *again*. "We have nothing to eat. I'm taking the truck and going to the store."

The splashing started up again, and Kevin's reply was nearly lost as the sound echoed off the thin bathroom walls. "Go ahead. Get me some apples."

Rolling her eyes, Liza retreated into Kevin's room and fished his truck keys out of his work pants that he had left in a heap in the middle of the floor. She found them after trying two pockets and hesitated for a minute before turning away from the wallet jammed into the back pocket where she'd found the keys. She had earned enough cash during the three weeks she'd worked with him to afford to buy groceries if she wanted to.

The truck, p.o.s. that it was, started on the first try and Liza couldn't help but think that this was the first time she had driven anything with more horses than a golf cart in nearly a year. The last time, if she recalled correctly, had been in Knoxville, when she helped drive some drunken college students home after a football game for ten bucks and a couch to crash on for the night. At the time, Liza had been very caught up in the injustice of it all. It had been strange to be back on Tennessee's campus, given that the last time she'd been there, she'd gotten her ass handed



to her on the court by a gargantuan guard who must've had at least six inches and thirty pounds on her, and was playing shooting guard.

Now though, she was plagued with a different sort of injustice. She didn't know what she was doing, walking into a grocery store that was sure to be full of people who hated and resented what she'd done to the town's good name. No amount of pointing out that she was released, that it was part of a bigger conspiracy, and that she had just taken the fall for a guy she was stupidly in love with seemed to work. The judgmental gazes had gotten better in recent days, but Liza could still feel the sting of their anger even now, as she walked through a mostly empty parking lot.

Even Kevin and Billy, though they avoided the topic like the plague, both mentioned that her name was no better than Sam Mud's these days in Near Haven. Despite this, Liza reasoned that she had money and it was legal tender. They were not going to turn her away from buying groceries.

Memories in a small town were stupidly long-lasting.

Though there was a chain store just up the road, maybe ten miles away, that probably boasted better prices, Liza pulled into the small lot in front of Sprat and Co. instead. For as long as anyone could remember, Sprat and Co. had been the grocer of choice for all of Near Haven. They were a local company, owned by a man named Jack and his wife. Liza remembered saving up the dimes and nickels she found on her runs as a teenager for the dollar soft-serve they had in the back corner of the store. It would sometimes take a week or more to save up enough, but she

always took her time and savored the treat like the rarity that it was.

She swung the truck into a parking spot next to a very nice older Mercedes, taking care to leave enough room so that no one's door got dinged and headed inside.

She knew the store well; nothing had changed in the years of Liza's absence, and it was easy to move through her list without feeling overwhelmed the way that she sometimes did when she went grocery shopping. They had not moved anything around since Liza was just a kid when that nor'easter and the not-hurricane had collided into the perfect storm. Back then, the store got flooded when the tide washed right over the bulkheads and into town proper. She remembered how outraged everyone in town had been when that storm wasn't named as the final hurricane of the season. It had been too late, the meteorologists said, but the people here knew better. It took the better part of two years for the town to completely return to normal.

Still trapped in her thoughts, Liza bent down to contemplate the choices of pasta on the bottom shelf. She was debating angel hair pasta over regular spaghetti when she caught sight of the small boy with brown hair from her first night in town, standing at the end of the aisle. He was wearing a bright red T-shirt, pushing a cart as his mother walked beside it. Liza swallowed, reaching out with a shaking hand to pick up the box of pasta and put it into her basket.

They were walking right behind her now and she felt woefully underdressed and smelly, given how she'd been out on the water all day. She likely had lobster gunk in her hair, or maybe seaweed. Probably both.

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# ABOUT ANA MATICS

Ana Matics is twenty-six, a long-time writer, and sometimes bank employee. When not writing, Ana enjoys running with her dog and exploring the vast countryside that her current state of North Carolina offers.

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