

Chapter One



“I hate this place!” Ian was forcing himself not to shout, but the anger in his voice was obvious. It was also obvious in the way he was pacing about the small room like a caged tiger. His mother sat silently at the rough dining table watching her son. “It might be all right for kids and hippies who don’t know the sixties are over, but not for me. I’m nearly fifteen. I’ve got a life to lead. I don’t want to spend every free moment of every summer here.”

This wasn’t working out as Ian had planned. He knew it was his father who was fanatical about spending holidays at the old family cottage on Mayne Island. He had hoped to enlist his mother’s support for letting him return to a real life back on the mainland, but his frustration was getting the better of him. He had to get himself under control. Ian

stopped pacing and forced himself to sit down at the table.

"I'm sorry, Mom," he said. "It's just that Dad doesn't seem to understand. He's so into this place and its history that he can't imagine anyone wanting to spend time anywhere else."

"This place is very important to your father." Ian's mother, Peg, was small and wiry. Her hair had been red once, but it was faded now and streaked with grey. She was used to playing the role of mediator in the sometimes tense relationship between her husband and son.

Ian was an only child and he had come along late. Peg had been thirty-four, but Ian's father, Jim, had been fifty-one. At that age it had been difficult adjusting to having a baby around, and now it was equally difficult to adjust to a strong-willed teenager who wanted to go his own way. Peg was adjusting better than Jim.

"I know he goes on sometimes about this place and his ancestors," Peg continued, "but his roots here go deep. This house has been in his family for generations and his grandmother lived here for almost all her life — and she was a hundred-years-old when she died. I think your father feels a little guilty that he left and went to have a career in Vancouver. Perhaps bringing us here at every opportunity is a way of compensating for that."

"Yeah, Mom, but it's not my guilt. I don't want to be tied to this place anymore than he did when he left. There's other things I want to do instead of sitting around here amongst all dad's old ghosts."

“Like what?” Ian’s father stood in the doorway. Even on the threshold he dominated the small room. At sixty-six, his hair was grey, but he was still a large man, broad across the shoulders and with a deep chest. One day Ian was going to be like him, but not yet. Ian had the height, already he was close to six feet tall, but there was a lot of filling out to be done before he would take on the imposing presence of his father. Ian groaned inwardly. He had hoped he could finish the conversation with his Mom before his father returned. Suddenly he felt defensive. Why did the presence of his father always seem to put him at a disadvantage?

“Go to the lake for one,” he said more aggressively than he intended.

“And hang out with those no-good friends of yours, I suppose,” his father interrupted. “Drinking and getting into trouble.”

“Dad! Just because a couple of guys in my class were caught drinking and smoking dope at a party, doesn’t mean I am going to turn into a crackhead. Those guys are idiots. Everyone knows that. Maybe I made a mistake. It was a dumb idea to go to that party, but I wasn’t drinking and, anyway, it was months ago. Aren’t you ever going to let me forget it?”

“No. Not until you show me that you are responsible.”

“And how the hell am I supposed to do that if you keep me locked up in this broken-down hut on this godforsaken island? If you don’t give me a chance, I’ll never act responsible.” Ian stood up and faced his father. His voice was ris-

ing. He didn't want it to but it seemed to have a life of its own. His father affected him that way these days. "I feel like I'm trapped here."

"Don't swear in front of your mother." His father's voice remained calm which infuriated Ian more than ever. "And don't be so melodramatic. There's lots to do on this island. Your ancestors lived here all the year round with none of the fancy gadgets you waste your time on. Your great grandmother Emily lived in this house for nearly a century, most of that time with no electricity or running water. She put up with hardships you cannot even imagine. I was almost thirty when she died and I don't ever remember her complaining. And your grandfather Donald worked all his life, through the Depression and the war to give me, and you, a decent start. I ask you to come for a few weeks in the summer and all you can do is complain."

"Why do you always have to keep throwing my ancestors at me? I'm sick of hearing how saintly great grandma Emily was and how noble grandpa Donald was. They're dead!

"She died more than twenty years before I was born and he was an old man I barely remember. He spat and smelled and scared me. I'm sorry if their lives were hard, but it's not my fault — and it's not my life. The world is different now and this is my time. It's not the world of my ancestors — they've had their time. I am me. I've got my own life to live and I don't want to do it here." Ian was shouting now. He knew he shouldn't, that somehow by doing it he had lost, but he couldn't help himself. It was all so maddening.

Ian's father's face was hard and his fists were clenched into balls by his side. A tense silence grew between the two as they stood staring at each other angrily. Ian's father broke it in a voice that froze Ian's heart.

"Until you can show me," he said, as if his son hadn't spoken a word, "that you can act like a responsible adult, and as long as you keep living under my roof, you will obey my rules and do as I say. Do you understand?"

Ian shook his head in utter frustration. Everything was happening too fast. Ian felt his emotions spinning out of control

"Damn it dad, haven't you listened to a word I've said?"

The cold voice continued, slowly and precisely, "You do not use language like that in this house in front of your mother. You will apologize right now young man."

Ian was pumped up almost unbearably. His hands opened and closed helplessly by his side. He was so angry he was beginning to shake.

"The hell I will!" he screamed as he pushed past his father, through the low door and out into the slanting, evening sunshine. He heard a shouted command to return, but he ignored it as he stormed through the trees. Tears of anger and frustration coursed down his cheeks. Anger at the unfairness of it all and frustration at his lack of control over events and his own emotions.

Ian felt trapped, imprisoned by an old man's obsession with the past. What good was the past? It was the present and the future that Ian was a part of. But he wasn't being

allowed to do anything. Why did his parents have to be so old and boring?

Ian burst through the trees, lost his footing, and tumbled down the low bank onto the rocky beach. A large rock dug painfully into his thigh. "Ouch!" he yelled. Pulling himself to his feet, Ian turned to face the blank wall of trees he had just come through. "I'll show you," he shouted, waving a fist impotently in the evening air, "I'll show you."