

**LATE JULY, 2017**  
**STORM ISLAND, MAINE**

THE FLASHING BLUE light on the top of the police cruiser cast eerie shadows on the stone walls of the old manor house. I watched as they danced about, blending occasionally with the red and white ones from the ambulance. The result was a tableau reminiscent of the fourth of July that had recently come and gone. It was both beautiful and ironic. What happened tonight in that house could by no means ever be described as a “celebration.”

A shiver ran down my spine and I wrapped my arms around myself to ward off the chill. I was standing in the shadows, in a copse of trees, watching. The rain that had started as a drizzle was rapidly becoming a downpour, and I pulled up the hood of my windbreaker as the heavy drops began to mingle with my tears. The old wooden door of Stormview Manor abruptly creaked open and I waited, knowing in my heart who and what would be coming out.

EMTs pushing a gurney swiftly exited the manse, the hoods of their slickers obscuring their faces as they tried to stay dry.

The gurney they propelled wasn't empty. A long, dark-blue bag made of thick plastic sat on top and I suppressed a scream as I watched it bounce down the steps on its way to the ambulance. The tears that stained my cheeks intensified. I knew who was in that bag and I knew I would never see him again. It broke my heart.

As the first responders loaded the gurney into the rear of the ambulance, my attention was diverted back to the old manor house as two men came through the wooden door and hurried down the steps. One was in uniform and I recognized him. It was Officer Stubble, Storm Island's resident policeman. The other, wearing a beige overcoat, collar turned up to avoid the chill of the stormy night, was, I believed, a detective ... a stranger from the mainland who would be charged with investigating this recent death.

I watched the policemen as they conferred, and then the door opened again and stepping onto the porch were two other figures whom I knew well ... my Aunt Hephzibah and her husband, Raoul. They stood on the top step, under an overhang, seeking shelter from the rain. Raoul had his arm around Hettie, holding her protectively, as she leaned her head into his chest.

The man in the overcoat spoke briefly with them and then another officer in uniform emerged from the manse. He was carrying several plastic containers ... bags that I assumed held the murder weapon and other vital evidence.

I knew now that, as much as I wanted to stay, it was time to take my leave. Slowly, being careful not to be noticed, I turned and then walked swiftly down the path that led to the carriage house, the place I had called home that summer.

Time was now of the essence. They would be coming for me soon. And, when they came, I needed to be ready.