

PROLOGUE

August 1935, Lakeland, England

Gilbert Kemp whistled as he trekked down the steep hill to Windermere, whistled as he circled the water's edge toward the boathouse. Not that he was happy about retrieving his older brother from the park tonight—Simon should have been home hours ago—but earlier this evening, Liz had said *yes*. Yes, she would marry him and stay here in this district of lakes. Yes, she loved him, just as he loved her.

The thought of Liz leaving for America had completely wrecked him, but now, with a simple question, everything had changed. They would be married in the spring, along these daffodil-spiked banks of this lake.

A sound—the trill of a tawny owl—echoed through the beech trees along the bank. He glanced across the sparks of starlight on Windermere's surface, toward the island where Simon Kemp and Curtis Sloan had sparked their own version of magic. An amusement park that thrived in Great Britain as the economy struggled to recover from its depression.

Most of the rides were hidden back in the trees, but he could see the light from the Torrid Typhoon, a wooden roller coaster that peaked

above the forest and then plunged down toward the water, the cars surfing through the waves of trees.

Tonight the park had closed for the season, most of the summer visitors returning home after their holiday, but his brother was still on the island. Maria, Simon's wife, was worried and for good reason. Simon's behavior had been odd the past month, even for an eccentric man. His park was making money, hand over fist it seemed, but paranoia had begun to plague him. Several nights ago, he'd even told Maria that Curtis was stealing from them.

Tomorrow, he'd take Simon to a doctor over in Kendal. The man, he suspected, would tell his brother to hibernate during the winter season. Then Simon would return to his typical eccentric self when he and Curtis reopened their park next spring.

Gilbert unlocked the boathouse and stepped inside. Their motorboat was gone—Simon would have it on the island—so he lowered the canoe into the water and tossed his hat inside.

The paddle cut smoothly through water and wind as he crossed the lake, the glint of starlight reflecting on the wood. His brother was a visionary who'd broken the confines of society to build his empire, never content to settle into a boxed sort of life. Like the sheep roaming in the fells above this lake, refusing to be penned.

Even if his brother would say he didn't like boundaries, he knew the boundaries were necessary. Simon was terrible at managing money and fixing things to maintain what he'd built, but he respected those who did both.

Gilbert didn't mind the boundaries of regular life. Now that he'd obtained his degree in civil engineering, he would work alongside his brother and Curtis during the winter months as well as the summer, maintaining the current rides and building new ones.

The island wasn't far from this side of the lake, about two hundred yards from the boathouse to land, but the island's rocky shoreline on the

east side was inaccessible to boats. They'd found the perfect bay on the west shore, in the harbor of a promontory that jutted out into the lake.

He rowed around the northern tip of the island, down to the private bay Curtis and the Kemp family used. Then he looped his rope around one of the posts on the landing stage, beside their family's motorboat.

The pebbles on this beach gleamed white. The electric lights were hidden back in the trees, but on nights like this, when the stars rained down their light, he preferred the silhouettes and shadows to the glare of electricity.

During the summer, visitors disembarked at a ferry platform on the south end of the island, walking up a cobblestone trail leading into a railway station with a clock tower. Lampposts flanked the elegant entrance.

There was no grand entrance on the island's west side, but the private footpath ahead of him was the direct route to the office.

"Simon," he called from the beach. His brother didn't answer, so he followed the narrow path through the trees.

Simon was probably at his desk now, bent over books containing numbers that made little sense to him. He and Curtis were supposed to hire an accountant soon to help manage their finances. Tonight, Gilbert would help him finish his work so Simon could return home to his wife and daughter. And perhaps, if it wasn't too late, Gilbert could see Liz for another hour or two.

He started whistling again as he walked; he couldn't seem to help himself. The park would be closed for the next seven months, and when it opened again, he and Liz would be husband and wife.

As he neared the small office, he expected to see the glow of Simon's desk lamp though the window, but the glass was dark; both front and back doors locked. He turned toward the midway where Simon and Curtis had built their most popular rides, the long strip ending with a boxy platform beside the Torrid Typhoon. Light from the roller coaster

trickled down on the park, but all the other grand lights that sparked the enchantment of this place had been extinguished.

On his left was the Ocean Caves, modeled after the river caves at Blackpool's Pleasure Beach, except there were mermaids and sunken ships instead of dinosaurs and a gold mine on this ride. The river looked eerie tonight, trails of light snaking through the inky black water. On his right were the Chair-O-Plane, an aerial swing that twirled passengers above the trees, and the Scrambler, for those who liked to spin.

Wind gusted up the midway, stirring up the greasy smell of fish and chips, rocking the swing on the Chair-O-Plane and the buckets on the Scrambler as he called Simon's name.

It was strange to be here alone in the darkness, though there was nothing to fear, not like in the cities. Crime in Lakeland consisted of petty thievery and the pranks of youth. And the only animal to fear was a cornered ram.

Beyond the Ocean Caves was the crown jewel of the park: the Magic Lagoon, a magnificent merry-go-round plated with gold leaf and colored glass. Instead of horses, sea creatures circled the ride, and as it rotated, blue and white lights twinkled above brightly lit murals of seahorses and seashells, mermaids and mermen, and fish swimming in coral.

As he and Liz had ridden the merry-go-round this evening, hand in hand, he'd sworn it cast a magical spell, because it had given him the courage to dream as well. In that moment, circling in this park, he'd realized that he didn't want to live a life without her.

There was a sound in the trees, a shuffle near the end of the midway that jolted him back to reality. He started to shout again for his brother when he heard another sound. A screech curled down the path, coiling up his spine.

A second owl—he told himself. Surely it must be an owl, caught in one of the trees.

But the scream ebbed into a wail. Like a person trapped instead of a bird.

He removed his hat, the brim crushed in his hands as he raced toward the roller coaster. Had Simon been injured, or was someone trespassing on the land?

His entire body was shaking when he reached the platform where the strands of roller coaster cars were stored. He could see the glimmer of metal tracks in the beacon of light, between railings made of wooden beams. Then he saw a man at the base of the hill. His brother, searching for something in the grass.

Gilbert called for Simon again, rushing toward him, but Simon didn't respond. In the dim light, Gilbert saw his brother's eyes, confused and afraid.

"Come along," Gilbert said, his arm outstretched as if he were speaking to a child.

His brother didn't move.

"Maria is worried . . ." His voice trailed off as his eyes settled into the darkness again. Simon was clutching the handle of a knife in both hands.

Gilbert stepped back. "What are you doing?"

"I only came," Simon started, his voice monotone, "came to sort it out."

"Sort what out?"

Gilbert followed his brother's gaze to the ground. Someone else was there, lying in the grass. "Dear God . . ."

"I didn't do it."

His stomach roiling, Gilbert dropped to his knees beside the body. It was Curtis, the man's arms twisted in the wrong direction, his chest completely still. Gilbert couldn't see blood in the starlight, but he could smell the tang of rust in the wind, hear the silence from a man who should be gasping for breath.

He pressed his fingers into the man's neck, but blood no longer pumped through his veins. Curtis was dead, and Simon was alone in the park, a knife clenched in hands that didn't shake at all.

Gilbert's fingers trembled when he pulled them away from Curtis's neck, sticky.

Had Simon killed him for stealing?

"Give me the knife," Gilbert commanded, his voice trembling.

Simon complied, and Gilbert dropped it into the grass, right beside the body. Then he backed away. "Let's go home."

Like a lamb trailing its mother, his brother obeyed, following him down the path that led back to their boats. Gilbert tied the canoe to the back of the motorboat.

"I didn't do it," Simon repeated as Gilbert piloted them both toward the mainland, the canoe carving the wake behind them.

He didn't say anything.

"I swear, Gilbert. I found him minutes before you arrived. He fell—"

"Fell on your knife?"

"No." Simon shook his head. "The knife was already there."

His brother was hiding something. Something important.

Simon looked back at the island. "We can't leave him there."

"I'll retrieve his body," Gilbert promised.

But when he returned, Curtis Sloan's body was gone.

And so was the knife.

Beauty is what Nature has lavished upon us as a Supreme Gift—
it is all about us to see and use.

—Louis C. Tiffany, American glassmaker
(The Art World, 1917)

CHAPTER 1

April 1958, Lakeland, England

Windermere looked exactly as her mom had described—a glittery lake dappled with sunlight and hemmed in by emerald hills. According to her guide, fifteen other lakes dotted the region, though they weren't officially called lakes. All but one was a *water, mere, or tarn*.

These waters expanded and swelled together in Jenny's mind, and she saw, even if no one else could, a palace underneath them with coral spires and towers of sea glass—a castle for mermaids and their men. And a sunlit dance floor. In her mind's eye, the mermen bowed to the ladies, each mermaid dressed exquisitely in a beaded gown and jewels mined from the hidden crevices of their world.

Jenny fingered the strap of the new camera around her neck, wishing she could capture their dance on film.

Even though she was thousands of miles from home, Jenny could almost hear her grandfather scoff at such silliness. *Ridiculous*, he would say. *A waste of a mind*.

Then the disdain of her college professors followed, the men and one woman who constantly battled against her imagination to make themselves heard. With all their silent laughter mocking her, the merfolk and their palace disappeared.

Jenny carefully framed her first picture of Windermere in the viewfinder of her camera. The needle swung from red to green on the scale, and she pressed the silver button on top. Here she was going to find beauty in the world outside her mind. These lakes, her mom had promised, would give her the opportunity to explore via foot instead of just wandering in her head.

Her mom purchased the Fujica Automagic camera from Bloomingdale's before Jenny had left America, an early gift for her twenty-first birthday. Then she flipped open the door on a cage that had surrounded Jenny for most of her life and told her to fly. At least until the first of June, when her ship sailed back to New York Harbor.

Upon her return to Cleveland, her grandfather expected her to step into the heels of a respectable lady and marry Robert Tripp before summer's end. But her mother—the most elegant woman she knew—hadn't said anything to Jenny about acting like a lady in England. Instead she'd told her to take lots of pictures as she explored the lakes and the moorland hills called *fells*.

Jenny wanted to see one place most of all. A magical park called Enchanted Isle. Her mom said it was closed now, but surely someone would let Jenny in the gates, if only to take a few pictures.

One more photograph of the lake in front of her, and Jenny lowered her camera. After sixteen more exposures, she'd send the roll of film in for development with the other two rolls she'd already taken on the ship between New York and Liverpool.

She glanced at her watch—almost three now.

The ten o'clock train was supposed to transport her from Liverpool to Manchester this morning before she caught connecting trains up to the station at Windermere. But another train left at nine, and she couldn't resist the earlier journey. An extra hour to explore on her own before her hostess arrived.

Stopping beside a wrought-iron bench, Jenny re-strapped the red buckle of her sandal around her ankle and coated her lips with a

crimson color that matched her shoes and pocketbook. Mrs. Banks may not care about things like lipstick and pocketbooks, but best to give a good first impression when she met her mom's friend.

Jenny replaced the lens cover on her camera and began climbing the steep sidewalk back up to the railway station but stopped again when she saw a bakery. Inside the window were rows and rows of iced pastries, jam doughnuts, and cupcakes. She should greet her hostess with some sort of a gift—it was the respectable thing to do. A raspberry jam tart for Mrs. Banks and two chocolate cupcakes for herself would be the perfect cure for hunger pains and restless nerves.

When she returned to the station, Jenny dug two claim tickets out of her pocketbook and placed them on the ticket counter. "I'd like to collect my two pieces of luggage, please," she said to the counterman. "Both of them teal."

He retrieved her bags and dropped them on the tiled floor beside her. "Are these correct?"

"Yes, thank you."

"They look green to me."

She looked down at the square suitcases with their brass clasps and bluish leather. "I suppose color depends on the individual."

He shrugged. "I don't put much stock in color."

Her mouth hung open for a moment, appalled at the thought of someone not caring about color. Then her gaze shifted down to the coin purse inside her pocketbook and its assortment of bronze farthings, silver shillings, and both green and blue paper notes. She'd exchanged some of her traveler's checks for cash at the port in Liverpool but wasn't sure what to make of the currency.

When she tipped the man with two of her bronze coins, he grunted in response. She opened her purse again to give him several more, but he'd already retreated behind his counter.

Tucking her pocketbook under one arm, her bag of treats under the other, Jenny tried to lift both suitcases but felt like an awkward duck weighed down by its wings, unable to fly.

“Would you like help?”

She turned slowly to see a man in his early twenties, perhaps a year or two older than her, waiting near the door. His dark hair was swept back, like James Dean’s, except Mr. Dean would have had a cigarette dangling from his mouth. A smile was the only thing that crossed this man’s lips.

“Oh no,” she protested, putting both pieces of luggage back on the ground.

The man tilted his head, studying her and her suitcases for a moment. “Clearly you’re from America.”

She stiffened. “You sound like it’s a crime.”

“No crime in a man or woman’s citizenship.” He crossed his arms over his black T-shirt, nodding at her suitcases. “How do you plan to transport your convoy?”

“It’s not exactly a convoy,” Jenny insisted. And she had seen convoys, notably the five steamer trunks filled with clothing and accessories that her college roommate had tried to stuff into their dormitory room. For this trip, Jenny had limited herself to seven outfits, eight pairs of shoes, and loads of color film for her Automagic in case she couldn’t purchase it in England.

“Very well, then.” The man leaned against the counter and watched as she secured her paper bag and pocketbook under one arm and lifted the heavy suitcases. She walked several steps before her camera strap caught on one of the suitcase clasps, and she stopped to untangle it.

She glanced over at the man, and his lips trembled as if he were trying to suppress laughter. “Is this amusing to you?” she asked.

“Quite.”

“There must not be much in the way of amusement around here.”

A light flickered in his hazel-green eyes. “There’s plenty to be found in this station.”

“From the tourists?”

He didn’t reply.

She looked for a porter, but the only people who seemed to be carrying luggage were those traveling on the next train. More than anything, she’d wanted to prove to herself that she could live on her own, without her grandfather or anyone else telling her what she must do. But now she couldn’t even figure out a way to transport two pieces of luggage to the curb.

Sighing, she pointed to one of the suitcases. “If you could help me carry one of these, I’d be grateful.”

The man lifted both cases as if they were as light as matchbooks and hauled them outside.

As she followed him, Jenny opened her pocketbook and retrieved a shilling. After he set down the luggage, she tried to press the coin into his palm, but he yanked his hand back as if the silver burned his skin.

“I’m not a porter.”

She lowered the shilling, embarrassed. “It was my way of saying thank you.”

“Words work just fine.”

“Thanks loads for helping me.” She unrolled the paper bag and removed one of the cupcakes inside. “Surely you can’t refuse chocolate.”

He thanked her, taking the cupcake before pointing to the strap around her neck. “What sort of camera is that?”

She lifted it with two hands. “An Automagic. It’s made by Fujica.”

“Nifty,” he said before taking a bite of the cake. “What’s the shutter speed?”

She glanced down as if the numbers might magically appear. “I don’t know.”

When he leaned forward to examine her camera, she smelled chocolate and the musk from his aftershave. The world around her dimmed

for the briefest moment, and then in the distance, she heard the rumbling train entering the station, its brakes screeching as people clamored through the station door.

Stepping back, the man pointed over his shoulder. "I have to fetch someone."

"Of course."

"Do you need a ride?"

"No, I'm—"

A honking horn interrupted her, and a burgundy car flew up to the curb, the woman inside wearing a peacock-green headscarf and black sunglasses, waving at her.

Jenny waved back at the woman she assumed was Mrs. Banks. "My ride appears to be here."

The man pretended to tip an invisible cap before merging into the crowd that swarmed out of the station.

"Hullo!" Mrs. Banks called as she slipped out of her car. Her red lipstick was even brighter than Jenny's. Clearly she had an appreciation for color. "Here I thought for certain I was early."

"You are early," Jenny said. "I decided to take the nine o'clock train."

Mrs. Banks reached for one of the suitcases. "You're just like your mother when she was younger, wanting to arrive before everyone else."

A twinge of homesickness pressed against Jenny's heart. "She still likes to arrive early."

The woman studied Jenny's face. "You're just as lovely as your mum too."

"Thank you, Mrs. Banks."

The woman brushed her hand across her face, the colorful bracelets on her wrist reflecting the sunlight. "Please, call me Cora."

"All right. Cora it is."

She nodded toward the station door. "Adrian wasn't bothering you, was he?"

“The man with the black shirt?”

Cora smoothed back her scarf. “He’s more of a boy, really.”

“He only offered to help with my luggage.”

Cora’s lips pressed together in disapproval before she spoke again. “Hopefully you won’t see any more of him.”

Jenny squinted through the window for one last glance of this Adrian, but she didn’t see him in the crowd. She didn’t want to debate with her host, but she actually hoped that she might see Adrian again in the next two months.

Cora’s bracelets clanked together when she waved at the car. “Let’s be off, then, shall we?”

Jenny grinned. “We shall.”

The two of them managed to squeeze one suitcase into what Cora called the boot; the other sat on the back seat. Then Jenny slipped into the passenger seat on the left side, placing her camera, pocketbook, and paper bag in her lap.

After Cora climbed behind the wheel, she nodded toward the paper bag. “What do you have there?”

Jenny pulled out the other cupcake and the raspberry tart.

“I adore chocolate.”

“Me too,” Jenny said as she handed the cake to her. “Actually, I like pretty much anything that’s sweet.”

“I believe we’re going to get along famously,” Cora said after a bite, chocolate crumbs glued to the gloss on her lips. “I’m breaking my diet for chocolate and the pudding and roast beef waiting for us at home.”

“I’m famished.”

Jenny took a bite of the tart and savored the sweet raspberries.

Her mother was correct. She liked this land of lakes very much indeed.