

**STORM YEARS ON WEYMOUTH ISLAND
ARE RECORDED AS FOLLOWS:**

1790, 1800, 1809, 1817, 1827, 1836, 1846, 1856, 1864,
1876, 1882, 1890, 1899, 1908, 1916, 1926, 1935,
1945, 1953, 1963, 1971, 1980, 1990, 1998, 2000, 2012 . . .

THE ELEVEN HOUSES OF WEYMOUTH



Cabot: First House to the Sea. Control and Power. Descendants of the People of Iron.



Pope: Second House to the Sea. Art and Defense. Descendants of the People of Paper.



McLeod: Third House to the Sea. History and Language. Descendants of the People of Iron.



Pelletier: Fourth House to the Sea. Faith and Eccentricity. Descendants of the People of Salt.



Nickerson: Fifth House to the Sea. Modern and Proud. Descendants of the People of Salt.



Mintus: Sixth House to the Sea. Medical and Macabre. Descendants of the People of Paper.



Bodhmall: Seventh House to the Sea. Piousness and Duty. Descendants of the People of Iron.



Gillis: Eighth House to the Sea. Brightness and Fertility. Descendants of the People of Salt.



Des Roches: Ninth House to the Sea. Elitist and Literary. Descendants of the People of Paper.



Grimes: Tenth House to the Sea. Militant and Clever. Descendants of the People of Iron.



Beuvry: Last House to the Sea. Secretive and Winsome. Descendants of the People of Salt.

*Our people shall not linger here, for this is a place
of death.*

—*Unknown Mi'kmaq Grand Chief, circa 1710–
1720*

Historical note by Reade McLeod: As the Mi'kmaq were primarily oral storytellers, this quote is according to local legend and cannot be verified.

Weymouth Island
30 Miles East of Glace Bay, Nova Scotia
May 20, 2018

CHAPTER ONE

The dead that wait underneath the sea are unusually loud today—or perhaps it just seems that way since I’m always walking alone these days. Either way, their howl roars like an airplane engine in the background: the ambient noise of my life.

The morning air is crisp as I hike toward the end of the island, wishing for the hundredth time that I could be homeschooled like my sister. I’ve tried begging, but Jeff says no, that I have to be here, walking to school with elbows tucked tight. He probably just doesn’t want me hanging around the house all the time asking for biscuits. My hair blows over my swollen eyes in a wild tangle of wind and curls. I didn’t get much sleep; one never does when one has a manic sister who wants to talk all night. I’m a mess this morning. The noise from the sea grows louder.

“Bloody hell, shut up!” I shriek at the dead, but they don’t listen. They never do.

At the top of the slope, I check my watch; I have three minutes before class starts, which means I’ll have enough time to chat with Norah but not too much time that I’ll have to deal with strange looks. I hear chattering voices down the hill, my peers

COLLEEN OAKES

excited to be talking, always talking. I love them—I do—but the kids I've grown up with on this island have never understood that “alone” doesn't always mean “lonely.”

Once I cross a field choked with Queen Anne's lace, the one-room Weymouth schoolhouse comes into view over the ridge. I exhale the breath I'm always holding—the one that feels like I'm waiting for something—when I see something bolt away from the schoolhouse like a bird released from its cage. It's Norah, and she's moving fast.

I'm almost halfway down the hill when Norah rushes up to me, long honey braids flapping behind her. At first, her intensity makes my heart clip. *Why is she running like that? Has something bad happened?* Norah never runs—it's something we have in common. But the closer I get to the schoolhouse, the more I can see the thrilled smile spreading across her face, the one that makes her look like she's twelve years old. I watch with folded arms as she scrambles over the low wooden fence that runs past the school, her sweaterdress getting caught on a nail.

“Dammit!” she shrieks, loud enough for me to hear, followed by a ripping sound, and I grin; it's so like Norah to not be able to wait for something as simple as untangling a dress. Her poor, sweet mother cannot mend her clothes fast enough.

My best friend moves like a hurricane of sunshine headed right at me as I brace for impact. Norah surges forward, a line of gray yarn trailing out behind her like a ribbon, still attached to the fence nail.

“Oh my God, Mabel—where the hell have you been? You will not believe what happened this morning! Literally, you're not going to believe it. No one can,” she sputters, her voice so loud. I gently reach around her to fix her snag.

ELEVEN HOUSES

“You know it’s *really* early for all this excitement, right? Is someone dying? Is Mr. McLeod out sick today?” I try to watch my tone with her, to not sound bored or judgmental. It’s not her fault; I’ve never been as excited about anything in my entire life as Norah has been every second of hers. It’s a wonder we’re friends, but I’m always grateful—true friends can be hard to come by on Weymouth. Especially when you remind them of things they would rather forget, like a dead moth lingering on a windowsill.

We’re nice on Weymouth Island, but wary. Grief is catching here.

“No, no one’s dying—it’s even better! And yes, we still have school, unfortunately.” Her cheeks flush underneath a smattering of freckles as she takes a minute to compose herself. My friend loves a big reveal, but I am running out of patience.

“Norah . . . out with it! Tell me.”

“You aren’t even ready, Mabel Beuvry, because there is a *new boy sitting in our classroom.*” That was definitely not what I was expecting, and so I pause, taking in what surely should be a lie.

“*What?* No. Norah, that can’t be right . . .” I let the sentence trail off as she frowns at me. “But *how?*” I finally blurt out, and she shrieks with joy at my obvious bewilderment.

“I know, completely against the rules, right? But it’s true!”

I shake my head. No. A *new boy* can’t be real, because a *new anything* isn’t allowed on Weymouth Island, ever. Sure, we get the occasional conspiracy-obsessed American tourist who ignores their better instincts and makes it past the Lethe Bridge, but that’s different. Besides, the second that tourist crosses the bridge, an unexplainable dread settles into their heart and they find themselves hightailing it back to Glace Bay. Their mind won’t let them

COLLEEN OAKES

stay. In all our years here on Weymouth, there has never been a new young person in town, and certainly not a new boy our age. Thoughts tumble incoherently through my brain as it struggles to connect to this new information. But there is something stranger about this news—an alarm sounding off in my heart. It feels like there is an unraveling in my disbelief.

“But—who is he? Does the Triumvirate know?”

“Who CARES?” Norah fires back, one eyebrow raised. “I’m sure the Triumvirate does know, but the real news is that he’s here, and he’s kind of cute, actually. Not my type, but yours maybe?” Norah is always desperate for romance—any kind of romance. It makes sense—our island is very boring until it’s not.

I frown. “And what is that, Norah? My type?”

She ticks them off on her fingers. “For one, he looks kind of grumpy. Two, he seems sarcastic and edgy, and three—and most importantly—he’s not from here.” What she really means is *He doesn’t know about your weird family*. Shame floods up my cheeks, but Norah doesn’t notice.

“His name is Miles. That’s all I know. Eryk is already in a snit about it, of course.”

I roll my eyes. “Of course he is. God forbid anyone draw attention away from His Majesty Eryk Pope. He’s been pissed all year.” I’m desperate to change the subject, trying hard to ignore the fact that Norah nailed my type on the first try. I try to keep a placid face to throw her off.

Norah grabs my wrist. “I see you pretending to be chill about this, but sod off, Mabel Beuvry. This could stir things up here. Just what you need, perhaps?”

“Norah, calm down. I’m fine.” She gives me a look, disap-

ELEVEN HOUSES

pointed as always with lackluster Mabel, who gives her much less drama than she wants. I'm constantly struggling to maintain strict control of my mind and heart, whereas Norah whirls through life, not unlike the winds that batter our island. I envy her, but I do not want to be her.

I figure vulnerability is pain—let her have all of it.

I *do* have questions, though. “Why did they let him stay? Where is he living? How did he even get onto the island?” I blurt them out rapid fire, my fingers rubbing nervously at the small scar that traces up past my ear, a gift of the last Storm. Norah pulls my hand away.

“You only touch it when you're nervous, love.” She brushes my brown curls away from my face as I slap at her hand, and she slaps back, and for a moment we playfully flap at each other, echoes of the children we once were.

“Come on, yeah? The bell's going to ring, and Mr. McLeod will have a fit if you're late.” Norah doesn't look back as we make our way down. “You should see the new boy's hair *and* his backpack.”

“What could possibly be interesting about his backpack?” I sigh, pulling my own like a suit of armor across my back.

“Oh, you'll see.” She grins.

“Fine, but I'm not running down there like some deranged fan. You embarrassed yourself galloping over here. Boys—even when they're new—aren't all that grand. They break your heart *and* make you watch them play video games.” She shoots me a dirty look that means *Don't talk about Edmund*, but I pretend not to see it.

The first seeds of heather crunch underneath our boots as

COLLEEN OAKES

we go. It's late May on Weymouth Island, and only a month ago this grass was laced with morning frost. But as May winds down, summer is almost here; I can taste it on my tongue. Weymouth summers taste like campfire smoke, salty lobster tails, and stolen blackberries from the Des Roches garden. Summer on Weymouth must feel like how the outside world must feel all the time, like there is a sense of possibility lurking everywhere.

The bell tower on the schoolhouse looms bright against the mottled sky. The symbol for Weymouth Island sits proudly right above the heavy brass bell: a sigil crest in the shape of a tall gate, with eleven different spears making up the bars, one for each family.

The bell tower is supposed to be this iconic thing, a relic from the Storm of 1846, "a pillar of our community," but truthfully, I've always found it gloomy and more than a little bit phallic, but that's not really what the Triumvirate wants to hear.

I duck in behind Norah as she explodes through the double doors of our school. Mr. McLeod, our sole educator and historian since I was in primary, stands near the front, his head buried in a book like *Ichabod Crane*. He doesn't look up when we enter—he never does.

Twenty wooden desks line up in front of him like weary soldiers. I see our school as if I'm looking through the new kid's fresh eyes, and I think about how strange this must all look: the old Colonial school house, the bell tower, Mr. McLeod's expensive computer humming at the front. He won't know that the warped wood under our feet was laid by the hands of my ancestors or that the quilted banners hung around the room show the pride of our eleven houses. I squint at them. Edmund and Sloane Nickerson's

ELEVEN HOUSES

banner is by far the most lavish: a quilted gray river winds up the middle, with gold on one side and ash on the other. I'm pretty sure their mother ordered real gold leaf to get the effect just right.

Also, I'm pretty sure Anjee Nickerson straight-up made it.

Cordelia Pope, my least favorite classmate and Eryk Pope's sister, is a pretty good artist herself, something I begrudgingly admit. Her banner is made up of crudely cut strips of black shale, pasted in geometric shadows that form a deadly wave. Abra Des Roches's shows a clock made from body parts; Van Grimes's banner shows a moat made of curled paper and salt, probably because the Grimeses actually *have* a moat.

At the end of the row, tucked near the back door, is mine: a badly sketched-out version of my house on a black background, and around it, two swirling ghosts drawn with smeared chalk. It really says, "minimal effort." Mr. McLeod was not impressed when I turned it in; I got a C-, which bought me an entire weekend of shoring up at home with Jeff. Personally, I felt like a C- wasn't terrible, considering I'd made it that morning from old art supplies I'd found floating around Hali's room.

Norah brushes past me as I set my backpack down and unconsciously run my hands over the carved graffiti on the bottom of the desk. It says *Isla was here*. It reminds me that once upon a time my mother sat here in this very classroom. I run my fingers over the words when I'm bored in class—which is often. I like thinking of my mom with her brown high ponytail pulled taut, eagerness shining out of every pore.

That was before the Storm.

Beyond my desk, I hear whispers echoing at the front of the schoolhouse. The girls—and a few of the boys, I suspect—can't

COLLEEN OAKES

contain their excitement about the new kid. Norah bolts up to them and begins chatting; she will not be denied being a part of the group's excitement, not even for a moment.

That's when I notice his silhouette. The new kid is hunched over the farthest desk in the corner, the one that no one has sat at since Charlie Mintus died in the Storm of 2012—the same Storm that took my dad. The new kid with terrible posture is staring at the banners with confusion, definitely wondering where the hell he is. His head tilts, and a lock of black hair falls into his face, and my heart skips a beat. *He really isn't bad-looking*, I think, but then I notice that he's looking at my banner with a look of disgust. *Oh God. It really is so bad.*

After pausing a second, I decide to go over and sit at the vacant desk next to him. It's bold and not my normal vibe, but I know what it's like to be stared at in this schoolhouse. I try not to look directly at him as I sit down casually, like I belong back here instead of at my usual desk. Norah shrieks at the front, and I think, *I'm going to kill her*, but before I can open my mouth to say hello, the new guy beats me to it.

“Hey,” he says, and everything slows.



Thomas Cabot, May 1790

I suspect that we Acadians were mistaken of our purpose here on Weymouth. The mutual expressions of animosity between families that were here when we arrived have vanished in an otherworldly storm, but I am loath to tell you that most families are gone—only eleven remain of the hundreds that came. We have all been drawn under its dreadful veil.

May the good and noble God of our former land watch over us, for we fear we have arrived on the devil's shore, and there is no mediator to save us.

Historical note by Reade McLeod: This is the first recorded instance of a Storm after the arrival of the Acadians in 1790. The document was found tucked inside a wine bottle, unearthed in the Cabots' root cellar in 1862.