**Chapter 1**

Ollie stared blankly at the digital alarm clock on her bedside table. It flashed 11:58, then 11:59, and finally 12:00. She couldn’t believe the day had come. It had been one year since she lost Adelia. It didn’t feel like a year though, partly because she disassociated for some of it and partly because she was in a coma for a few months right after the incident. Now she has gaping holes in her memory that no one wants to help her fill.

She laid back down on her bed and looked up at the ceiling and the glow-in-the-dark stars that Adelia helped stick up there the summer before. She remembered counting the plastic stars for so many nights after, trying to soothe her mind into a restless sleep.

Ollie heard footsteps lightly plodding up the stairs to her lofted bedroom. She figured it was her brother coming to check on her because she had mentioned it being the anniversary at midnight, but no one ended up coming to her room.

“Calvin?” Ollie whispered into the pitch black of the stairwell.

No one responded though. Growing tired of the emotional reminiscence on who Adelia was, Ollie tried to close her eyes to get a few hours of sleep. She would have to wake up early to help her dad open the restaurant in the morning and running on three hours of sleep every night was going to catch up to her eventually.

Ollie never usually dreamed. When she fell asleep it was just a break from her reality, and she welcomed the void of no dreams. The anniversary night was different though. Ollie had a vivid dream about the last night she saw Adelia.

The two had climbed to the top of Big Skull Rock and were laying down and looking at the stars.

“Hey Ol?”

“Yes Adi?”

“Remember the dream I was telling you about? The reoccurring one with my house

burning down and that guy running after me?”

“Uh yeah, of course I do. Why?”

“Well, I think I’ve downplayed how much the dream bothers me. I mean, I know you’ve seen me get worked up and cry about it, but those are just fast, heat of the moment emotions. It really bothers me on a deeper level. I don’t understand why I keep seeing that guy, who honestly, looks a lot like my uncle now that I think about it, and why I’m the one who ends up burning my house down in the dream.”

Ollie sat there in silence, watching a shooting star flash across the sky. She also didn’t know why Adelia was having the dream, but she didn’t want to make her feel like anything was really wrong, so she kept her mouth shut.

“I just can’t escape this feeling of impending doom. And it doesn’t make sense. I’ve outrun all of my monsters, no one can get me here on the island. No one really knows anything about me.”

Ollie rolled on her side to look at Adelina, and for the first time really take her in. She wanted to remember this moment. To remember how Adelina’s hair still shone under the stars, brightly like gold, and how her brown eyes seemed to drink Ollie in while she was talking. She was easily the most beautiful person Ollie had ever seen.

“I guess that’s true. I don’t even feel like I know that much about you,” said Ollie.

Adelia turned to face Ollie then and reached out to stroke her face.

“I know Ol. But that’s for my own safety. And yours. I don’t like to talk about my life before the island because I like to pretend it didn’t happen. That I just happened to spawn here on this beautiful island in a tiny South Carolinian town. It’s kind of like a movie if you think about it. Very girl from the big city runs away to a costal beach town to escape her problems.”

“Yeah, kind of like that blonde girl from *Safe Haven,*” said Ollie.

“Who?? Oh, wait YES I am exactly like her. I didn’t have to dye my hair blonde though; this is au natural.”

The pair laughed for a while and brought up other movies that resembled Adelia’s life. Then they both fell quiet for a while, and Ollie thought about how she actually didn’t know that much about Adelia. Not in a traditional best friend sense anyway.

She would not be able to tell someone Adi’s birthday, her middle name or zodiac sign, where she was from in New York, or what her parent’s names were. However, she could tell them that Adi’s biggest fear was funerals, not because she feared dying itself, but because she was scared that she would not die well enough and be able to miraculously rise from the dead during the service, thoroughly terrifying all in attendance. Her least favorite emotion was onism, which Ollie learned meant that Adi was frustrated she only had one body that could be in one place at one time. She said it pained her that she couldn’t live out multiple different story lines within her life.

“My mom always said I was sensitive, you know?” said Adelia, breaking the silence. “Like, not emotionally, although I definitely am, but spiritually. She actually believed me when I said I saw things no one else could see.”

“Well, if it counts for anything I believe you when you say that.”

“Thanks Ol. But you’re supposed to believe me, you’re my best friend. You’re biased.”

The dream jumped to a later scene in the night when Ollie got a phone call from Adelia. It was early in the morning, so Ollie had been fast asleep, and Adelia left her a hysterical voicemail on her answering machine.

“Hey, it’s me. I’m scared Ol. The dream tonight was the worst it’s been. The guy chasing me actually caught up to me and I could see it was my uncle. He dragged me out of the house by my ankles, but I still managed to set the house on fire before I left. But then I heard my parents screaming from upstairs…” Adelia trailed off, sobbing into her phone. “I never thought the fire was my fault, but maybe it was. Maybe everything was my fault. Maybe I’m the problem. I should’ve told you about this earlier, I --.”

The message cut off. Adelia had started to talk really fast and pack some of her clothes up in the background, and it seemed that she ended the call in her haste.

Ollie woke up in the dream, listened to the message, and felt sick to her stomach that she couldn’t have been there for her best friend last night. She called Adelia back to remind her that they were supposed to meet at her dad’s restaurant for lunch, apologized for not picking up the phone the night before, and said that she was hoping she was alright.

Ollie’s alarm blared at 6:00 AM, waking her up from the trance-like dream she was having. She sat up, sweating, heart pounding, and out of breath like she had just been running.

*Now what happened after that?* Ollie thought to herself. She could not remember anything that happened after calling the police when Adelia did not show up to the restaurant. Her dad said she slipped into a coma from shock, but Ollie never was able to fully believe it. She knew there was something darker and more mysterious at play in Adelia’s disappearance, in the entire island. When she was a little girl, another teenage girl disappeared without a trace. She remembered hearing about it on the news. Nobody knew much about her or where she came from, but she was similar to Adelia. “Flighty” and “a runaway” are what people called both of them. Some people believed the first girl was sacrificed to a monster called the Creature as a sort of penance and peace offering for the island.

Ollie heard stories of the Creature growing up, people who had lived their entire lives on the island saying the Creature did not like outsiders, and it was displeased that so many tourists and people with no ties came to the island to explore it and ruin the peace there. It was deemed taboo now to even talk about the Creature though. The girl’s disappearance scared most people into belief in the sinister monster roaming the island, and when Adelia disappeared, it solidified the island-wide fear.

Adelia was missing for weeks before they found a body. The decomposition was too severe to immediately identify who it was, but because nobody else had been reported missing on the island, everyone assumed it was Adelia, finally turned up. The cause of death was ruled to be suicide. The coroners believed that Adelia had thrown herself off a cliff and into the ocean and the only reason the sharks hadn’t torn her to shreds was because a current washed her up on the rocky shore. The police did not take the idea of foul play very seriously because Adelia was so new to the island. She must not have had any enemies, and as an outsider they assumed she must have been very lonely. Ollie knew this wasn’t the case and begged them to continue looking, to try and explain that Adelia would never do something like this, but they would not listen to her.

Ollie walked down the stairs to make breakfast before meeting her dad at the restaurant. As she was in the middle of scrambling eggs, her phone rang on the countertop. Because it was so early, she was surprised anyone was calling her and she picked it up without looking at the caller ID.

“Hello?” Ollie asked.

There was no response on the other end of the line. She heard shaky breathing and what sounded like rushing water in the background.

“Hellooo?” Ollie asked again, more impatiently this time.

The line disconnected and Ollie shrugged, resuming her egg making.

Seconds later, a text came in from Adelia’s number. *HELP ME*.

Ollie felt as if someone had thrown ice water on her. She felt alive again, like she had been holding her breath for the past year and just now someone reminded her to breathe. All of a sudden, she was running. She was running out of the house, down the street, and to the restaurant.

She kept trying to call back Adelia’s number, but her phone kept telling her the number had been disconnected.

**Chapter 2**

Ollie’s feet slapped against the pavement as she charged towards her dad’s restaurant. Halfway into the run she realized that she had forgotten to throw on shoes in her haste, so her feet were beginning to ache, and she was getting a vicious cramp in her side. Never one for athletic endeavors, this was the most Ollie had exercised in months. She was feeling exhausted until a sudden wave of relief came over her. Was this the runner’s high everyone talked about? Suddenly, the sprint did not seem so bad. Ollie let her eyes wander as she charged on. She saw the sun starting to rise up over the water, the first few orangey-pink rays of light dancing through the trees and along the path. She heard birds singing to each other and saw two flying through the air, twirling around as if dancing. Ollie had been panting for the past several minutes from the run, but now she began gasping for air, memories rocking her with every step she took.

She stopped running and threw her hands on her knees. Adelia loved the birds on the island. She used to tell Ollie that she did not have the same kind of birds where she was from, and she thought the ones here were so beautiful. One time she made Ollie wake up early to go watch the sunrise and birdwatch with her. Adelia had forgotten her binoculars at home, so when they got to the beach they sat down and kept cupping their hands around their eyes, pretending to be able to see better through their hand-binoculars. It was a small memory, but Ollie remembered how much her stomach hurt from laughing that morning and her heart sunk. Then she remembered why she was running in the first place.

*The phone call…* Ollie thought with a renewed sense of panic.

She picked up her pace again to push up the hill in front of her; she was only a few minutes away from Tikki Tikki Taco now. As she closed in on the restaurant, Ollie’s legs started to feel rubbery from the exertion and her feet were numb. Her ankle rolled in on itself and she went flying forward, gashing her head on a rock. Ollie laid on the ground for a minute before she started to feel her forehead growing warmer and wetter, and she knew she had to get to the restaurant to see the damage.

She stood up and hobbled the rest of the way to the restaurant.

*This has been the longest fifteen minutes of my life*. Ollie thought to herself.

She pushed open the front door while the bell rung behind her.

“Dad it’s just me!” Ollie yelled, figuring her father was in the kitchen prepping food for the day.

“Hey kiddo! Come back here, would you? We got a big order of shrimp in today from Dan, I guess his last fishing trip was really successful.” Ollie’s dad said, his voice carrying through the small building.

“Okay one second, I really need to use the bathroom.” Ollie chirped back. She did not want her dad to see her forehead before she had the chance to assess the damage.

She quickly walked past the kitchen door to the bathroom and locked it behind her. She looked at herself in the mirror and gasped softly. A deep cut ran the length of her temple and blood had been smeared all across her forehead and down the side of her face. Her black bangs had blood and dirt clumped in them, and the red streaked on her face made her eyes look a startling shade of green. She ran the faucet and attempted to wash the blood off of her face and out of her hair, but it was no use. The cut was too deep, and she would probably need stitches.

Sighing, she walked out of the bathroom and into the kitchen to face her dad. He was humming along to “I’m Walking on Sunshine” while butterflying shrimp for tacos.

“Hey Dad, listen, before you freak out…”

Ollie’s dad turned around to face her and his face went white as he looked her up and down.

“What happened?!”

“I just tripped while I was running over here Dad. Really, it’s not a big deal I promise. I think I might need to go see Dr. Mullins for stitches, but it doesn’t hurt and otherwise I’m totally fine.”

Ollie’s dad began shaking his head as she was talking.

“Why were you running here in the first place? You never run anywhere.”

“Well, that is a more complicated answer. And I don’t want you to think I’m crazy, because I know how it sounds.”

“So… what is it?” A hint of worry creeping into her dad’s voice.

“I got a call from Adelia this morning.”

“Ollie –”

“No let me finish. I’m being serious Dad; I know it was her.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Well initially I picked up the phone and no one said anything, I just heard some running water in the background. But THEN I got a text from Adelia’s number. And the text just said *help me*.”

“You’re sure it was her number, Ollie?”

“Yes Dad, of course I am. I never deleted her contact from my phone.”

They both were quiet for a minute before Ollie’s dad resumed cutting up the shrimp.

“Will you start cutting up that cabbage for the coleslaw? We didn’t make enough of it yesterday and had to start skimping out on the end of the day tacos.”

“Dad are you seriously going to ignore what I just told you? Adelia is ALIVE!”

“NO Ollie, she is not. I knew this was going to be a bad day for you, but I never thought you would come up with such delusions. Maybe it’s from the cut on your head, you must have hit it pretty hard running over here.”

“Dad what are you talking about?”

“I know it’s the anniversary of Adelia’s death honey… I thought it would be an emotional day for you and –”

“No, you aren’t listening to me! Adelia called me today, Dad, okay? It was her! It was her and I want to go ask Derek to help me look at her file down at the police station, but I didn’t want to flake on you.”

“Don’t you dare bring your cousin into this! You know how hard he worked to get that job. I won’t have you jeopardizing his reputation as an officer.”

“Dad that’s so unfair. If he listens to me and wants to help me that should be his decision.”

“No Ollie. You don’t know what you’re getting yourself into, poking around in places that don’t concern you. You may not believe in the Creature, but plenty of people on this island do and they won’t take kindly to you shooting your mouth off about how your friend is still alive.”

“Shooting my MOUTH OFF? Dad if she’s alive shouldn’t we be doing everything we can to try and find her? Wouldn’t you want someone to do that for me? Wouldn’t YOU do that for me?”

“Of course I would Ollie, but there’s no proof that Adelia is alive.”

“Here, this is proof!” Ollie exclaimed as she fished her phone out of her back pocket. She went to go into her call log but did not see an incoming call from Adelia’s number. In fact, she didn’t see any calls made this morning.

*Okay that’s definitely weird because I know I picked the phone up the call should have registered* Ollie thought to herself.

She then went into her text messages to find the infamous *HELP ME* with no luck.

Ollie’s dad stood watching her, arms crossed over his big belly, looking defeated.

“I don’t understand the message was just here,” Ollie said. “Dad, listen you have to believe me I had a call and a text from Adelia’s number.”

“You know honey, sometimes they recycle phone numbers if they are out of service for too long. Maybe it was just a glitch in that.”

“Yeah Dad, maybe you’re right. I was thinking about walking to Dr. Mullins’ now to get my head stitched up, if that’s okay with you? I’ll be back before the lunch rush.”

“Yeah sweetie, that’s fine. I’ll see you later.”

Ollie walked out of the restaurant conflicted on what to do next. Should she trust her gut and ask Derek to look for the file, or should she leave it alone and tell herself it was not Adelia reaching out?

*Adelia would have never given up on me* Ollie thought.

Like that one time they had to run six laps around the track in gym class and Ollie had to basically crawl across the finish line, Adelia was crawling right alongside her. Not that she needed to, Adelia could run for miles, but because she wanted to support her best friend.

Sighing and shaking her head, Ollie picked up her phone to call Derek.

“Hey Derek! How are you?”

“I’m doing well Ollie, and yourself? I know this is a tough day for you.”

*Man, does everybody know what day it is too?* Ollie thought.

“Ahhh yeah well… actually there is something you could help me out with that does have to do with the anniversary today, Derek.”

“Sure, what is it?”

“I need you to find Adelia’s case file for me. Something happened this morning, and I don’t know I would feel a lot of relief being able to go through that file and see what they said about her.”

“Ollie, you know I can’t just pluck a case file and let a civilian look at it. Even a closed case.”

“Please Derek. I don’t know if I am going crazy or what, but Adelia’s phone number called me this morning. I feel like it was Adelia on the other end of the phone, but obviously I can’t prove anything, and I don’t want to get the cops involved yet. No offense.”

“Okay Ollie… If I get the case file and you come down to the station to look at it I will give you five minutes with it. But afterwards you have to drop this, you can’t keep replaying the last year in your head.”

“Thank you thank you thank you Derek this means so much to me! I will be down in about 30 minutes; I am at Dr. Mullins’ right now getting stitches. Long story.”

“Okay, I will go grab the file now and see you soon.”

“Thank you again,” Ollie said.

Fifteen minutes go by, and Ollie got another phone call on her cell. This time, she looked at the caller ID and saw that it was Derek calling her again.

“Hey Derek, I’m just finishing up here and then I’ll be right down. Is everything alright?”

“Yeah, Ollie about that… I can’t find her file anywhere. I don’t know where it could have gone or who took it but it’s nowhere in our filing room. I checked the computers afterwards then to see the electronic version of the file, because sometimes they go missing like this, but the online version was gone too. Completely wiped. I can’t say anything else right now because there are too many ears around, but I think you may have been right about a few things. At least with how this investigation was handled. Can I meet you at your house in about an hour?”

“Yeah, that sounds good Derek, I will meet you there.”

A mixed feeling of dread and elation started to creep through Ollie. She might be right about the phone call, and right about Adelia being alive. This filled her with joy, and hope. Something she had not felt in a full year. Then, her stomach bottomed out when she thought of the alternative. Someone obviously does not want Adelia found, or at the very least does not want the case to be examined too hard and they were taking extreme measures to protect themselves. If Adelia is out there, who is she up against and where could she possibly be right now?

Ollie found herself running home again after the Doctor’s with a newly invigorated spirit ready to try and track Adelia down.