

CHAPTER ONE

THE FUNERAL



The whole of Crescent Moon Bay turned out for the lighthouse keeper's funeral. That day, not a single black garment was left to buy at the Crescent Moon Clothing Emporium. Not one flower remained at the Happy Stem Florist. Each and every bloom had been fashioned into wreaths and floral tributes. The largest of these was a tower of white and red gardenias in the shape of a lighthouse, surrounded by a swirling sea of eucalyptus.

Dexter Tempest had been a good man. As lighthouse keeper, he had played an important part in the safekeeping of the bay. Many of those now standing around his grave, their bowed necks burning in the late afternoon sun, owed their life to Dexter's keen eyes and even sharper sense of duty. Others had Dexter to thank for the safe passage of one or more family members or close friends, rescued from the dangerous waters beyond the harbour – waters teeming with sharks and pirates . . . and worse.

Crescent Moon Bay was the smallest of towns and each of its inhabitants seemed bound to the others as tightly as stitches in a piece of knitting. Such a tight weave didn't necessarily make for comfortable living. Gossip flowed faster through the bay than the rapids up at Crescent Moon Creek. Right now, for example,

there was just one topic – what was to become of the Tempest twins? There they stood, heads bowed in front of their father's grave. Fourteen years old. Not quite kids, not yet adults – the boy already blessed with the body of an athlete, the girl gifted with a rare intelligence. But truly, they had few blessings to count, not now they were orphans and – but for each other – all alone in the world.

No one in the bay had ever glimpsed the twins' mother – Dexter's wife. Some doubted that a marriage had even taken place. All they knew was that one day, Dexter Tempest left Crescent Moon Bay with an impulsive notion to see something of the world. And, one day – a year or so later – he returned with a heavy heart and two swaddled parcels containing his twin children, Grace and Connor.

Polly Pagett, matron at the Crescent Moon Bay Orphanage, squinted in the bright light to better observe the boy and girl. She appeared to be measuring them, much like an artist making a sketch. Polly was preoccupied by the dilemma of which bunks to allocate to her new arrivals. True, no arrangements had yet been discussed, but surely there was no option other than the orphanage for these two children? The boy looked exceedingly strong. He could be set to work in the harbour. And the girl was as sharp as a tack. No doubt she'd excel at helping to stretch the orphanage's ever-dwindling budget. In spite of herself, a smile crept across Polly Pagett's tight, papery lips.

Lachlan Busby, the bank manager, turned his head from the fine floral tribute commissioned by his wife (and, surely, unsurpassed in the churchyard) to better observe Grace and Connor. How poorly their father had provided for them. If only he had glanced across his bank accounts once in a while instead of

devoting so much attention to the ships in the harbour. There was such a thing as giving *too* much. This was not a mistake Lachlan Busby ever intended to make.

Busby had his own plans for the twins. Tomorrow, he would break the news to Grace and Connor – calmly and gently, of course – that they had nothing left in this world. That Dexter’s possessions – his boat, even the lighthouse itself – no longer belonged to them. Their father had left them nothing.

He glanced for a moment at his wife, who stood by his side. Dear sweet Loretta! He could see she found it impossible to take her eyes off the twins. It had been a cruel blow to them that they had never been able to have children. But now it seemed that things might have a way of working out. He squeezed her hand.

Grace and Connor knew they were being looked at. It was nothing new. All their lives, they’d been the subject of gossip. They had never escaped the drama of their arrival in Crescent Moon Bay. And, as they’d grown, the emerald-eyed twins had continued to be the subject of rumour and speculation. There is envy in a small town like Crescent Moon Bay and people were envious of the curious twins who seemed talented in ways other kids were not.

People found it hard to figure out why the lighthouse keeper’s son was so much better at sports than the rest. Whether it was football, basketball or cricket, he seemed to run faster and strike harder, even when he neglected to show up at team practice for weeks at a time. And the girl provoked equal suspicion – amongst her teachers as well as her classmates – with her unusually wide-ranging knowledge and strange notions about things far beyond her age and station in life.

Dexter Tempest, so the rumours went, had been a strange father to the pair, filling their heads with curious tales. Others went further still, suggesting that he had returned home to Crescent Moon Bay with a broken mind, as well as a broken heart.

Grace and Connor stood a little apart from the good folks of Crescent Moon Bay. And now, as the congregation at large sang a stirring hymn about the lighthouse keeper's final journey to "a harbour fresh and new", you might have noticed the smallest note of discord in the hot, stagnant air. While Grace and Connor seemed to sing along with the others, the song they sang was a different one, something rather more like a sea shanty than a hymn . . .

*"I'll tell you a tale of Vampirates,
A tale as old as true.*

*Yea, I'll sing you a song of an ancient ship
And its mighty fearsome crew."*