



*“My son,
Here may indeed be torment, but not death.”*
DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Purgatorio*, Canto XXVII

In school they told us to follow the rules.

Don't talk to strangers. Safety first, they said. *Walk, don't run — unless it's from a stranger, of course.* We were supposed to run from strangers as fast as we could, the way Persephone, the girl from that old Greek myth, tried to when Hades, the lord of the dead, came after her.

Funny thing about the rules, though. Sometimes they were wrong. According to the rules, no one in our own families was ever supposed to hurt us.

Not running from my own flesh and blood was my first mistake.

My second was running from John Hayden. He was exactly the kind of stranger they were always warning us about in school. No, he didn't offer me candy or drugs. But one look into those

storm-filled gray eyes, and even as a naïve fifteen-year-old, I could tell what he had to offer was something way more addictive than chocolate or crystal meth.

How was I to know the reason his gaze was so storm-filled was because he, too, knew the pain of being betrayed by someone who, according to the rules, was supposed to care about him?

Maybe that's what kept thrusting the two of us back together, no matter how far we tried to run. Why else would we both have ended up on an island named for the human bones that had been found there? It turns out we have more than a few skeletons in our closets.

By now the bones that have earned this place its infamous name — Isla Huesos, Spanish for Island of Bones — are supposed to have been removed. But the tendency for cruel acts of deception to be committed on Isla Huesos's tempest-tossed shores hasn't waned.

Now it's not my family *or* John that's coming for me, but a storm. I know from the weather alerts I keep receiving on my cell phone. A large tropical cyclone, “producing extreme winds and dangerously high flood conditions,” is expected to reach landfall soon on the island where my mom was hoping she and I could make a “new start.” According to the latest warning, I should proceed with caution (*walk, don't run*) to the nearest emergency shelter.

The problem is, I'm eighteen hundred miles *below* the earth's crust and the storm's projected path.

Still, every time my phone vibrates and I look down to see one of the alerts, my pulse speeds up a little. Not because I'm in imminent danger, but because I know people who are.

It's especially upsetting because, in a lot of ways, my family has turned out to be like the seawall Isla Huesos's community leaders built in order to protect its low-lying areas from flooding: They're not very reliable. Some of them, in fact, have turned out to be made from inferior material. They crumbled and broke apart instead of doing what they were supposed to do: keep their loved ones from drowning.

But maybe that's what I deserve for being trusting enough to believe the rules would keep me safe.

All that's changed now. This time, the only rules I'm following are my own.

And this time, when the storm comes, instead of running from it, I'm going to face it head-on.

I hope it's ready for me.