

## Chapter 1

### *Stone Mill, Pennsylvania*

As Rachel Mast turned off the single-lane gravel road and onto the rutted logging tracks, the trees closed in around the minivan like a dark tunnel. It was one of those muggy August days that seemed too hot for central Pennsylvania, an afternoon when not a leaf stirred and even foxes and deer crept into the undergrowth seeking relief from the heat.

Rachel lowered the window and sucked in a deep breath of the still air, savoring the primal scents of old-growth conifers, and the stillness. Her companions, who'd been laughing and chattering in the back of the van, grew quiet and watched out the windows. Sophie, Rachel's white bichon frise, ceased her excited whining to creep into Rachel's lap and thrust a black nose out the open window.

Despite the heat, Rachel suppressed a shiver. *A goose walked over my grave*, she thought, and then chuckled at her own foolishness. She had an MBA from Wharton, and should have left superstition and old wives' tales behind a long time ago, but there was something ominous about the stillness of this remote place today. She'd been feeling it since she turned off the main road onto the gravel road that wound around the mountain. "Almost there," she called with forced gaiety. Glancing down at the console, she flipped the air-conditioning up to max. "That water is going to feel wonderful."

"*Ya*," her sister agreed. Sixteen-year-old Lettie was riding shotgun and had had to contend with Sophie's nonsense for most of the ride.

“This was one of your better ideas,” their cousin Mary Aaron said from the bench seat in the middle of the van. “Good day for playing hooky.”

Rachel agreed. It had been a crazy week at her B&B. Three couples had reserved rooms for a long weekend and then canceled on Friday afternoon; then two decided to come anyway, a day later. Her computer had crashed, and she’d had to have the plumber out when one of her guests’ children flushed three washcloths and a bar of soap down the toilet. The clothes dryer wasn’t working right . . . The list seemed endless. She couldn’t think of a better escape than to go to the quarry for a swim and a picnic with her friends.

And she hadn’t fled duty and responsibility by herself—Rachel and Mary Aaron had collected a gaggle of young Amish women, most of them relatives, for a few hours’ respite from their summer chores. Rachel was the only Englisher, the only nonmember of the Amish faith, among them, which meant she was the only one with a vehicle and a driver’s license, both considered by some in the Old Order Amish to be evils. Rachel, her license, and her vehicle were all guilty of abetting hardworking females who wanted to slip away from summer gardening and canning chores for an afternoon of illicit, if innocent, fun.

They made up a party of seven, eight if Sophie was counted. Too many bodies to cram into Rachel’s four-wheel-drive Jeep. Instead, she’d borrowed her next-door neighbor’s van, which provided room aplenty for passengers, towels, and coolers of food. An ice chest full of ripe peaches, local pears, and a huge watermelon made perfect picnic fare. It would all be washed down with lemonade Rachel’s housekeeper had made fresh in the kitchen of Stone Mill House that morning.

At last they made the final downhill curve and reached the mossy clearing beside the aggregate quarry that had filled with water years before. Rachel coasted to a stop near an ancient oak tree and shifted into park. “We’re here!”

Mary Aaron and Lettie slid out, and the rest followed. No one but Rachel had worn shoes, and soon modest dresses and prayer *kapps* were cast off, leaving the lot of them scandalously clad in cotton shifts and undergarments.

“Remember that it’s deep,” Rachel cautioned as they approached the steep edge. Crystal blue-green water glistened at her feet.

“Really deep,” Mary Aaron added, looking down. “More than a hundred feet. *Dat* says they mine until they can’t keep pumping water out, and then they just move on to dig another quarry.”

Lettie’s eyes widened as she peered over the edge. She was the youngest of the group, and this was her first time at the quarry. Her *mam* had let her go on the picnic only after delivering the severest of warnings to behave herself, to listen to Rachel, and not to go into the water. Her *mam* had also wagged a finger in her face and admonished her to not allow Rachel to drive the automobile at a reckless speed, which meant anything faster than a horse could trot.

As children, none of them had ever dared to swim here; parents were adamantly opposed, besides, being more compelling to youthful imaginations, the quarry was rumored to be haunted. But most had ventured to this glen on summer afternoons every August since age fifteen, when Amish girls traditionally became considered young women.

The quarry was a secluded retreat where they could relax and set aside the strict rules of Old Order Amish dress and behavior for a few hours. Here, amid a tangle of old-growth hardwood, rhododendron thickets, and intertwined pine, spruce, and hemlock, the temperature—due to the flooded quarry—was at least ten degrees cooler than the rest of the valley.

Giggling, Lettie joined the other women as they carried blankets and coolers out of the van, all the while sharing family and valley news and bits of harmless gossip. Rachel helped spread the blankets on the thick moss and unpack the lunch baskets while Sophie ran in circles, chasing butterflies.

“Last one in is a rotten egg!” Mary Aaron dared and made a dash for the edge of the quarry.

Rachel, clad only in a T-shirt and panties, darted after her and dove deep into the shimmering depths. The icy water came as a shock, but she quickly adjusted, then reveled in the silky sensation of the blue-green water against her skin. Mary Aaron, always a strong swimmer, crossed in front of her before lazily rising to the surface. When Rachel came up for air, her cousin was floating on her back, her long sandy-blond hair drifting loose around her head and shoulders. Rachel dove under again and came up beneath her, flipping her over. Mary Aaron shrieked as she righted herself and returned the favor by splashing water in Rachel’s face. From the sheer-cut rim, Elsie, Mary Aaron’s nineteen-year-old sister, shrieked with laughter and plunged in to join them.

Soon everyone, including Lettie, was in the water. They remained there for a good half an hour before the water temperature began to temper their high spirits. Lettie was

the first to admit that she was cold. "I'm freezing," she said. "Can we eat?"

"*Ya*," someone agreed. "I skipped lunch and I'm starved."

"Me, too," Mary Aaron said. Elsie nodded in agreement, and one by one, they climbed out, threw towels around their shoulders, and made their way to the blankets. Lettie passed around wedges of watermelon that her mother had contributed, and Rachel bit into a slice. It was so sweet and delicious that she closed her eyes and groaned with pleasure.

"It is *goot*, isn't it?" Elsie agreed as she wiped at the juice running down her chin. "This was a great idea, Rachel." She spoke in *Deitsch*, the old German dialect that the Amish used among themselves.

"*Ya*." Lettie said, eager to add to the conversation. "*Mam* grows the biggest watermelons in the valley. She promised to tell me her secret when I get married."

"Rachel must know," Elsie teased.

"*Ne*." Rachel shrugged. "*Mam* never did tell me, and now . . ." She spread her hands in a gesture of hopelessness. Gardening and cooking secrets or everyday greetings, it was always the same. Her mother never spoke directly to her. Her mother hadn't spoken a word to her since, as a teenager, she'd abandoned her Amish upbringing, left home, and joined the Englisher world. Anything her mother had to say to Rachel was always passed to her through someone else. Rachel recognized it as the ultimate act of love. As awkward as it was, she knew her mother desperately wanted her to return to the safety of church and family.

"Lemonade?" Rachel poured an ice-filled paper cup nearly to the brim and

offered it. “Ada made it this morning. Tart and cold.”

Sophie, who’d been on the blanket begging watermelon only a minute or two before, let out a piercing bark from a distance. Rachel glanced around. “Sophie! Where are you?” She couldn’t see the dog, but from the sound, she wasn’t on the path that led to the quarry from the clearing but in the underbrush. “Sophie, come here!” she repeated, knowing full well that the stubborn little dog would probably ignore her.

A miniature white poodle-looking dog of about fourteen pounds would not have been the dog of Rachel’s choice. Basically, she’d inherited Sophia Loren when her dear friend had gone to prison a few months earlier.

Sophie’s barking became a low growl.

“That dog.” Rachel rolled her eyes. “Only for George would I do this.” She stood and slipped her feet into zebra-striped flip-flops. Still clutching the towel around her, she plunged into the underbrush, pushing through the thick rhododendron. “Sophie! Come, girl! Come!”

“Don’t go in there!” Lettie called. “It might be a bear.”

“Not likely,” Rachel answered over her shoulder. “Not with all the noise we’ve been making.” Branches scratched her bare legs and arms and twined around her ankles. “With my luck, you’re trapped in a thicket of poison ivy,” she grumbled at the dog. She couldn’t imagine what had Sophie in such a fuss. Maybe a snake.

Sophie loved chasing snakes, although what she’d do if she ever caught one, Rachel had no idea. The thought that the bichon might have startled a rattler gave Rachel pause. “Sophie, come here!” As much of a pest as the dog could be, she had become a bit

of a companion, and Rachel didn't want anything bad to happen to her. "Sophie!"

The growls grew fiercer.

"Rae-Rae," Mary Aaron called after Rachel. "Wait, I'm coming with you."

"Me, too," Lettie called. "I don't want a bear to eat you."

Rachel, now unable to see the girls in the clearing, forged ahead. Another ten feet and she pushed aside a thick evergreen bough to catch a glimpse of the white, fluffy bundle bounding up and down. Sophie's plumed tail was at full sail. Her protests rose to a fevered pitch as she fiercely held some perceived enemy at bay with every ounce of will.

"Sophie! What have you—"

Rachel froze. Sophie had taken her stand only a few inches from the edge of the water. Rachel stared through the braches of a massive hemlock, a tree that had grown out over the water. Beneath the intertwined roof of foliage, nearly hidden from view, forty feet from where Rachel and the others had been swimming, a body floated.

Rachel's mouth went dry. She blinked, hoping that what she'd glimpsed was only a figment of an overactive imagination. But when she dared to look again, the awful sight was all too real . . . and all too still.

Suspended facedown on the surface of the water was the body of a woman in full Amish dress, a white prayer *kapp* still on her head.

"Mary Aaron!" Rachel screamed as she took the few steps to the edge, threw off the towel, and plunged into the water. She had no idea who it was. None of those with her had been dressed in Sunday clothes.

Adrenaline pumped through her veins as she reached out. Grabbling a hold of the

woman's arm, Rachel seized a low-hanging hemlock bough and, vaguely aware of the crashing sounds of brush as help came, rolled the woman onto her back.

Her eyes were china blue. Not the blue of human eyes, but glass blue. Hard, cold, and lifeless.