

Prologue
September 2009

Jagged streaks of lightning zigzag across the midnight sky. He only counts to four before the thunder rumbles over the tree he's standing under. He pulls the hood of his fishing jacket farther down over his face as the rain falls harder. The wind stirs the waves even higher around the floating dock his fishing boat is tied to, threatening to toss it over like a paper boat in a stream.

He throws the bundle over his shoulder, grunting from the weight, and clambers across the slick dock. Feeling like a child on a funhouse ride, he loses his footing, falling to one knee, and drops the bundle half into the fishing boat.

Cursing under his breath, he kicks the bundle into the boat, pulls up the motor and then unties the boat from the dock. Another flash of lightning lights up the sky.

He counts. *One...two...*

Thunder explodes above him. The waves form whitecaps, now throwing the tiny boat around like tumbleweed in the desert. The oars feel like lead as he uses all of his strength to pull them out of the water, pushing against the wind forcing them back before plunging them back down. He clenches his teeth with each movement. His arms aching, his shoulders burning.

After what feels like hours, he reaches the middle of the lake. He positions the oars in the clamps. The rain pours down in sheets now. A fork of lightning shoots across to the forest on the other side of the lake. Two seconds later, a loud crack echoes across the night sky, causing him to jump.

A wave crashes over the side of the boat, water pouring in around his feet. He bails water out of the boat as fast as he can, then grabs his net. He rolls the bundle in the net, tying his three heaviest fishing weights to the ends. He steadies himself and lifts the bundle up to the side of the boat, balancing it against his thigh. His overworked muscles shake as he tosses the bundle overboard. It bobs in the whitecaps.

He picks up the first weight, tossing it into the water. He grunts, picking up the second weight. The bundle is tugged under the surface. She's crying now. He can hear her. Just like earlier, but weaker. He glares, a half smile stretching his lips.

The boat rocks harder, the waves throwing water in the boat. He's tossed backward, hitting his head on the seat. He feels a trail of warmth oozing down the back of his head and neck.

He struggles back up to his knees, lifts the last weight up and tosses it over the side. The bundle bobs for a second until finally submerging under the water.

He releases a sharp breath.

The rain eases up on his row back to shore. Thunder growls off in the distance, with a flutter of light sparking over on the other side of the lake in response. The worst of the storm seems to have passed. As he steadies the boat against the wild wind, the choppy water threatening to overturn the tiny fishing boat every second, he whistles, "Bridge Over Troubled Water."

It's done.

Or so he thinks.

He doesn't see the tiny rowboat bobbing in the sheltered bay not too far away. Or the black eyes seeing it all. Whispers swirl around in the wind from the watery grave as the fishing boat gets smaller, enveloped by the darkness and raging water.

Help me...

Strong hands with long, narrow fingers grip the well-used oars. The Watcher rocks, tiny ripples spreading out from the tiny vessel, mixing into the rough waters beyond. He sings his song, calling to her.

She answers. *Help me, please...*

The Watcher nods, his eyes narrowing. He stops rocking and lowers the oars back into the water. He rows backward and his boat disappears into the sheltered calm of the Bay.

Help...me...

"Soon enough," the Watcher whispers to the lake.