

Prologue

THE SEA AND I have never been friends.

We're more like neighbors who nod politely in passing while keeping a respectful distance. There was a time when the sea and I battled. It was a night lit by the flames of a burning lighthouse, when the surf was charged with an off-shore storm. It was the moment of my greatest triumph, and my deepest failure—triumph because I beat the sea, cheated death, and saved a kid's life; failure because I finally had to admit my guilt for every awful thing the Shadow Club had done. It wasn't just admitting it to others, I had to admit it to myself. If you know what happened—and you probably do, since it's no secret in this town—then you already have your own opinion of me. If you don't know about it, well, all the better, because maybe you won't judge me before you get to know me.

There are times now when I'm drawn to thoughts of what happened. When my mind is quiet, I start thinking about that day. I have this shiny seashell, about the size of

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my fist, that I found on the beach when I was little. Sometimes I'll lie on my bed and toss it up and down, fidgeting with it while I think about things I should probably try to forget. They say you can hear the ocean in the spirals of a seashell, and I used to believe it with all my heart. But now, of course, I know it's just echoes of the world around you, caught in the twisting spiral. Which maybe explains why I *do* hear the ocean when I put my ear to the seashell these days. Not just the ocean, but the roar of the flames from that burning lighthouse—two things still caught in the spiral, echoing round and round in my own world.

That's the way it was with the Shadow Club. We thought it was all over, but it had only just begun. The fires, the war against Tyson McGaw, all the dark and dastardly pranks—they were nothing compared to what happened next. In the end we had all confessed to the things we had done—we thought that by purging ourselves of the guilt, it would all just go away. Of course we knew we'd have to pay for the things we did, but even then there was relief in knowing that once we paid our debts to society, we could gather up our lives again and move beyond it. But anger and hatred and resentment—those feelings are as slippery as a greased pig: hard to handle, and even harder to catch when they get loose. Feelings like that don't die easily—they just move on to other people if they can't have their way with you.

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Like I said, we'd thought it was over, until February, when everything crept up on us, slamming into us from behind like a traffic accident.

It started, like so many things in my life seemed to have started, with Austin Pace. But this time things were a whole lot different. . . .