

Booksellers, Librarians, and all Media, please request your advanced reading copy at mycopytms@move-books.com

CHAPTER ONE

PIRATE IN THE BELFRY

There were three rules the students at the Lost Preparatory Academy for Boys were expected to follow at all times. No fighting or rough play of any kind. No climbing buildings or trees. And lastly, no leaving the dormitory after lights out. In one single evening, Thomas Hawkins was about to break all three.

He gave a low whistle as he exited his room. Along the darkened hallway, doors creaked open in response. He heard the soft padding of footsteps as his friends filed out and fell into step behind him. They crept down the carpeted stairwell, silently making their way to the dormitory's lower lobby. Tom eased open the front door and stuck his head out into the blustery March night. His gaze swung across the horizon, then he flashed a grin over his shoulder, sending a silent signal to the pack of boys accompanying him that the coast was clear.

They bounded down the steps to the green, turning cartwheels in the soft grass, sending silent salutes to those who hadn't the guts to come, younger boys mostly, too afraid of the consequences of being caught to risk the thrill of taking part.

To those not familiar with the school, the Lost Preparatory Academy for Boys might reasonably call to mind the Lost Boys, Peter Pan's gang of youthful truants who spent their days on a make-believe island engaged in mock swordplay, treasure hunts,

THE MAPMAKER'S SONS

food fights, and the occasional taunting of blood-thirsty pirates. In other words, having a pretty good time. But anyone who believed that the school and the fictional island were related had never met Mortimer Lost, founder of the Lost Academy.

Mortimer Lost had never met a rule he didn't like. Tall, perilously thin, and rumored to be nearly a century old, he ran the school with sour-faced intensity, his affinity for structure and order matched only by his affinity for bells.

Bells rang promptly at six in the morning to rouse the students from their beds. Bells told them when it was time to shower. Bells called them to meals. Bells sent them to class and sent them out again when class was over. Bells told them when to study, when to clean their rooms, when to report for inspection, and when to go to bed at night. Nobody at the Lost Academy moved, spoke, or even *thought* without first being prompted to do so by the ringing of a bell.

Tom Hawkins had entered the Academy at the tender age of five. Now, after eight years of constant clanging and clamor, of reacting to stimulus and response like a circus poodle taught to leap through shiny plastic hoops, he had reached a decision.

It was time to silence the bells.

Tom and his buddies sprinted across the manicured lawns to the old chapel building where the bells were housed.

He reached a towering sugar maple that grew beside the chapel and stopped. He zipped up his sweatshirt, tightened his shoelaces, then removed a pair of rubber-palmed gloves from his pocket and drew them on.

"You sure you want to do this, Tom?" Matt Copley, one of his best friends, sidled up beside him. "I mean, nobody's gonna blame you if you can't make it all the way to the bell tower."

Tom gave the roof, the steepest on campus, a cursory glance. "I'll make it."

"Yeah, but—"

"Look, don't worry about it. I'll be back in five minutes."

He grabbed a sturdy branch, swung himself up, then



shimmied up the tree until he reached a limb that extended horizontally toward the chapel roof. He eased across it until it started to bend beneath his weight. With one quick jump he gained the base of the roof. His friends greeted the action with a whisper-soft roar of approval.

Tom smiled to himself and crept upward. Matt Copley might be nervous, but he wasn't. Though none of his friends knew it, there wasn't a roof in all the Lost Academy he hadn't scaled at least once. Usually he'd slip out on nights like this, when storms were sweeping in, the more violent and intense the better. Some inner restlessness drove him to the rooftops whenever the weather turned foul, as though the storms carried within them some private message only he could read.

A stiff breeze sent leaves skittering past him. Thunder boomed and lightening slashed the sky. Tom turned, judging the storm's distance to be maybe twenty miles away. Disappointment coursed through him. Impossible to wait and watch it come in with his friends clustered below, eyeing his every move. Pushing the thought aside, he returned his attention to the task at hand.

The chapel roof was old, older even than Mortimer Lost himself. Slate pieces, affixed to the roof with tiny rusted hooks, rattled beneath his feet as he shifted his weight across them. A few brittle squares creaked beneath him, but that couldn't be helped. Tom was bit taller than average, but on the slim side. With his dark hair and eyes, and dressed as he was in jeans and a black hooded sweatshirt, he imagined he looked like nothing more than a shadow drifting across the roof.

Just as he lifted his knee to climb again, a sound coming from a few yards away caught his attention. The sharp snap of a piece of slate. Over the last year or so of prowling the rooftops of the Lost Academy, Tom had learned a few things about slate. It was hideously slick in the rain, unbearably cold in the winter, and it didn't break under the weight of a chipmunk, a squirrel, or even a cat. It took the force of an object his size or greater to snap a piece of slate. That could mean only one thing.

Someone was on the rooftop with him.

Tom whipped his head around. Nothing but shifting shadows and murky darkness surrounded him. Yet fear curled around the edges of his thoughts like wisps of smoke, carrying with it a faint awareness of being watched, of something dark and sinister just beyond his line of sight. An icy chill that had nothing to do with the coming storm swept down his spine.

Before he could decide what to do, he heard the shifting of bodies below and felt his friends' impatience. Mistaking his hesitation for fear, they stage-whispered shouts of encouragement.

"Do it! Don't stop!"

"You're almost there!"

"Get the bells, Tom!"

Their shouts brought him back to his purpose. "Quiet!" he hissed. He scouted the grounds for signs that a night watchman or staff member had been alerted by the noise. Then his gaze swept the roof again. Nothing. He shook off the unease that had stolen over him moments earlier.

Anxious now to reach the belfry, Tom crab-walked up the roof to the main joist beam. The bell tower sat at the roof's apex, a structure twelve feet square and twice as tall, crowned by an ornate copper cupola. Tom pulled himself through one of the arched recesses in the exterior wall and slipped inside.

A beam roughly eighteen inches deep ran around the interior of the tower. From that ledge were suspended a pair of wooden boards which crisscrossed from one side of the belfry to the other, pitched over a sheer drop of at least six stories. Laid down for the workmen adjusting the bells, Tom supposed. It would be insane to try to cross them without a safety harness. Fortunately, he wasn't even considering it. He eased along the ledge and made his way around the interior walls until he reached his objective.

The main bell, an enormous cast iron thing, hung from an axle in the center of the tower. A set of four smaller bells flanked it from east and west. Above them all were a series of gears,



which looked to Tom very much like the gears of a clock enlarged a hundredfold. His plan was simple: shove a discarded two-by-four into the central cog, jam the works, silence the bells. Quick, dramatic, and entirely anonymous — his favorite type of prank.

He reached for a length of board he'd noticed on an earlier foray to the tower, left behind after some previous refurbishment. But as he lifted the board a high-pitched squeal of protest tore through the blustery night air. Tom jerked around, scanning the space, his nerves on high alert. He clutched the board tightly and drew it closer, holding it defensively in front of him. Another high-pitched squeal — louder this time, angrier. From somewhere within the dark recesses of the cupola a flutter of movement caught his eye. A flash of red. Tom's breath caught in his throat as the shadow shifted, rose, then exploded straight toward him.

Bats. Dozens of them. Ugly, hairy, fluttery, shrieking bats, woken from their slumber when he moved the board, darted all around him. His heart hammering in his chest, he dove down low, covered his head, and waited for the swarming and shrieking to stop. As soon as silence returned to the tower, he released a shaky laugh and stood. *Bats in the belfry.* How pathetic. He'd been frightened by a stupid cliché.

He reached for the board he'd dropped when he'd been swarmed but abruptly froze, peering into the darkness. The flash of red he'd seen seconds earlier was still there. Only now it was closer. More distinct. A single red eye, floating in the shadows.

The scrape of a boot against the rough wooden ledge and the eye drew closer. Now Tom could make out more. It wasn't a floating eye at all, but a tall, muscular man dressed in black boots and a flowing black cape, his cape held in place at the shoulder by a metal clasp in the shape of a glowing red eye.

A second boot scrape sounded behind him and Tom sensed even before he turned that the man had a partner. A quick glance over his shoulder confirmed it. Shock and denial coursed

through him as his mind fought against what he was seeing. The sheer *impossibility* of it froze him in place for wasted seconds.

"We've spent two years looking for you."

Tom's stomach dropped. Terror choked off his voice. Natural questions — who were they, how they got there, why were they looking for *him* — seemed somehow irrelevant in the face of the overwhelming threat of their presence. Self-preservation took over. His eyes darted to the two-by-four he'd dropped.

The man didn't miss it. A thin smile flickered across his face. "Try it and things will go very bad for you. Worse than you can ever imagine."

