

Excerpt: RETURN TO MATEGUAS ISLAND

After they left, Karen quickly finished up in the kitchen. Feeling tired and depressed, she opened a bottle of wine, poured a glass, and took it to the living room. She stood quietly for a time, gazing out at the sea as she sipped her drink.

Maggie has Bill's child, she thought as she sat down in one of the captain's chairs that faced the window. How could Dex have kept that from me? And the house - I would never have sold it to that girl. I'd have burned it down first.

She stared at her glass of wine as memories of ten years ago washed over her, then she lifted her head and gazed out the window. It was early evening and the moon was beginning to rise in the night sky. She could hear the wind whistling in the trees as wave after wave crashed against the rocky shoreline. Feeling tired, she put her wine glass down, closed her eyes and, soon the sounds of the sea and the rustling of the wind lulled her to a restless sleep.

She opened her eyes. She was no longer sitting by the window, but somehow had been transported outside. She was standing in the middle of an old gravel road, the shoulders of which were shrouded in darkness and shadows. She glanced to her left and then to her right, but nothing seemed familiar.

Where am I? And what am I doing here?

Frightened, she began to jog down the road, not knowing exactly where she was going, but hoping she'd see the house around the next bend. She glanced down at her feet finding it difficult to see what lay on the path beneath them and worried that she might fall. The night was ominously quiet and the air hung heavy around her. She gazed ahead and was heartened when, in the distance, she saw a faint light begin to glow. Wanting desperately to reach it and put the shadows behind her, she picked up her pace, fueling her body with adrenalin.

As she neared the brightly shining light and what she thought was safety, she was startled by the soft hoot of an owl coming from somewhere close behind her.

"No!" she cried as panic and fear threatened to paralyze her. She peered desperately into the darkness on the side of the road, hoping to find a place to hide, but there were only shadows. She began to run again toward the light, with its promise of sanctuary, which was now glowing even more brilliantly. Beginning to feel a sense of relief, she forced herself to run harder, her lungs close to bursting from the exertion.

I'm almost there. I'll make it. I know I will.

Concentrating all her energy on the light and certain she was only a heartbeat away, she began to relax and slowed her pace a bit, breathing more easily. Then, from above her, she heard and felt the beating of wings and knew she was too late.

Desperately, she picked up her pace again trying to reach some safe haven, but the light that had seemed so close was now receding far into the distance, threatening to flicker out and leave her in total darkness. The sound of the wings

came closer, echoing in her ears, and the draft they created ruffled her hair. Unable to help herself, she looked up, horrified to see the creature's talons, strangely illuminated in the dark, descending upon her. Then all light went out and she screamed.