



Seven

Three Goals

Her first night in Alwyn, Clare couldn't get her mind or her body to rest—even after reading for an hour. She made it halfway through *The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise* before placing it on her nightstand with a sigh.

Although she'd slept in the same bed every time she'd come up north, it suddenly felt foreign to her. On top of that, the energy in the cabin seemed like it was tuned to a new frequency. Her mom was in the small bedroom next to hers, and Grandma Lulu and Roger were in the loft upstairs, where Grandpa Anthony had always slept. Just switching around a few people and adding in a dog shook everything up.

Even though it was late, Clare texted Olive and Emmy.
I can't relax. :(

Crossing the Pressure Line

Count some sheep, said Olive. Or blind dachshunds. Whatever! :)

You'll be OK, I know it, said Emmy, adding in a line of hearts.

Hope so. Miss you guys.

Clare listened to the hum of the crickets and the *plink* of the waves against the dock, and after an hour or two, she finally drifted off to sleep.

It felt like only a few minutes had passed before her eyes flew open. "We have to go out fishing while the moon's still out!" she cried. As she kicked off her blanket, she wondered why Grandpa Anthony hadn't come in yet to give her an early-morning wake-up kiss.

But as her feet hit the knotty pine floor, she remembered that this trip up north was different than all the others.

"Oh." She put her head in her hands and felt the loss of him all over again. It was like a tension under her ribs, a perfect crescent of grief.

She wanted to jump back into bed and yank the covers over her head.

But the birds were singing, and slices of sunshine were beginning to emerge on her rug, and Clare decided that she wasn't going to lie around and feel sorry for herself. Summer needed to be completely different than winter and spring had been. *No more staring at the ceiling and sniffing. No more being so hard on myself.*

“It’s my last day of being twelve,” she announced to her little room. The walls were painted a robin egg blue that reminded her of the sky scoured clean after a rain-storm, and the gauzy white curtains curled and billowed as fresh air wafted through. She imagined they were happy to be dancing again after being still for so long.

She padded over to the window and thought about Grandpa Anthony’s final words to her. *Make it a great year. Make it a great life.* He hadn’t blamed her for anything when he died; instead, he’d been hopeful and reassuring—her own personal cheerleader.

Maybe I need to do what Grandpa Anthony always wanted, which is to be daring and brave and accomplish everything I can, she thought. *He’d want me to have faith in myself and just go for it—whatever ‘it’ is.*

She stared out at the lake.

Maybe I need to set some goals for myself while I’m in Alwyn.

Things that I can focus all my attention on—like the crow project I did for school.

Things that will help me feel like I belong.

Things that might even help me get through my sadness.

First, Clare thought about Olive and Emmy. No one would ever take the place of her two oldest friends, but she knew they didn’t want her moping around all summer. They could text each other, for sure, but it wasn’t the same as having real-live people to hang out with.

Crossing the Pressure Line

“Goal number one. I need to make a friend,” said Clare to herself. “There must be kids my age in Alwyn. I don’t know how I’ll meet anybody, since I’ve only hung out with Mom and Grandpa Anthony when I’ve been here, but I can figure something out . . . right?” The thought of introducing herself to someone new made her feel jittery, like she’d just shoved too many strands of sugary licorice in her mouth. But she held up a hand, as if to stop her uncertainty from swallowing her in one piece.

Just make it work, Clare Burch.

Next, she thought about how she was missing swim team back in Morrissey. Without practice every morning, she needed something physical to do. “Goal number two. I will swim all the way out to the island and back”—she grabbed her phone from the dresser and did some quick math with the calculator—“in one hour or less.” That seemed about right, considering her personal bests from the pool as well as the unruly nature of lake water. “Without wearing a life jacket!”

This goal felt big and bold, the sort of personal competition her grandfather would relish. He wouldn’t be around to yell encouragement at her like he’d always done at swim meets, but she could learn to cheer for herself instead.

Couldn’t she?

“It’ll be hard, but I’ll train by doing laps every day. I can swim back and forth between the dock and the raft, which is about the same length as the pool.”

She eyed the caps, suits, and goggles that she'd brought with her from Morrissey. She was so glad she'd packed all of them.

Finally, Clare pictured the musky rod that Grandpa Anthony had bought her the year before. Unused and shiny—except for a few spider webs—it was still waiting in the garage. “I haven’t had a huge growth spurt or anything, but I think I’m a little bigger now.” She flexed her fingers and remembered how Grandpa Anthony had loved fishing for muskies, even though he’d never hooked one himself.

“Goal number three. I will catch a musky!”

She chewed her lip.

“I know it’ll be super hard. There are people who go out every single day for months and never even see one, but I have to try. I mean, what’s more incredible than catching a musky in Alwyn, the musky capital of the world?”

Clare liked the idea of striving for something important. *Three* things, actually. She hoped they would act like superglue and hold her together for the months ahead.

“I turn thirteen tomorrow,” she said. “It’s time to get started.”