

## PREQUEL: THREAD ON ARRIVAL

My last ride had been with the driver of a lumber truck from New Brunswick heading to Massachusetts, but he had several stops to make along the way. “Sorry, kid. Company doesn’t want me picking up hitchers. Besides – you want to see the ocean, and I won’t be near it until there’s a peak of it at the Piscataqua River. You’ll have to find yourself another ride from here.” He’d handed me a protein bar from a box next to his seat. “Take care of yourself, now. Don’t do anything crazy.”

He’d left me in one of those gas stations where you could buy food, just off the Maine Turnpike. But you could only buy food if you had money. The protein bar had been all I had to eat today. I wandered around the store, looking for someone who looked friendly.

No women; I was fifteen. Old enough to know women wouldn’t give me a ride. I studied the map of Maine pinned up behind the coffee pot. I’d never thought about seeing the ocean until that driver had asked me if I had. Now I had a goal.

According to the map, I needed to get off the Turnpike and head southeast. Or maybe get on route one. It was closer to the water.

“What’re you looking for, boy?” The gray-bearded man standing next to me poured himself a large cup of coffee and added three packets of sugar.

“Haven Harbor,” I said, seeing the name on the map. Nothing could go wrong in a place called Haven Harbor.

“It’s a distance,” the man answered. “Mebbe two hours. You from there?”

I shook my head. “Nope. Looking for a job.”

“Good place to try,” he nodded. “Tourist season coming up, people’ll be hiring. if you’re old enough.”

I stood up as straight as I could. “I’m old enough.”

He nodded. “I’m headed in that direction. I could do with some company. Like a ride?”

“Please,” I said.

He looked me up and down. “I was planning to get a burger and fries. You be interested in something to eat?”

I nodded. “That’d be wicked good.”

“I suspected as much. When I was your age I’d never say no to a burger and fries. Let’s eat up and be on our way.”

I followed him to the food station.

Haven Harbor. Now I knew where I was heading.