

"*Island of Lost Girls* is told in unexpected twists and turns, as if Alice had fallen down the wrong rabbit hole and lost her childhood. McMahon never flinches, but her readers will at every dark secret."

—Keith Donohue, bestselling author of *The Stolen Child*

"What happens when they go missing..."



ISLAND OF  
LOST GIRLS

A NOVEL

JENNIFER McMAHON

author of PROMISE NOT TO TELL



# ISLAND OF LOST GIRLS

*a novel*

Jennifer McMahon



HarperCollins e-books

*For Drea*

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**D**IVE, DIVE, DIVE!” shouted Suzy as she clutched the old Chevy’s cracked red-and-white steering wheel, jerking it back and forth in her hands, yanking hard on the turn signal lever to bring the ship down.

She knew it was air that made submarines rise and fall, just as she knew what she would see underwater: the octopus, the coral reef, the toothy smiles of sharks as they came in for the attack. She’d been a thousand times, and it was just like in the song her mother sang, about the octopus’s garden in the shade. But on her way to the garden, there were sharks to run from, enemy subs trying to torpedo her. She knew what it was like to go down into blackness.

Suzy had these spells, like thunderstorms inside her head—that’s how her parents explained it—where she’d black out, thrash around, and wake up confused. Seizures. Storms in her

brain. Thunder and lightning. She wore a silver bracelet with her name and a weird red picture of a twisted-up snake on one side, the word EPILEPSY on the other. She took medicine, tiny pills each day.

Suzy was not supposed to play near the old car or the pile of rotten boards out behind her grandma's house. She knew that once people rode around in the Impala with its white stripe along the side; once the bumpers had sparkled and shown reflections of the open road. The radio had worked then too. The engine had hummed. They had pulled the white top up when it rained, some kind of fancy umbrella.

Now, her parents warned her not to play there: *It's dangerous*, her parents told her. *You could get hurt. Don't play there.* But that old car called her, the octopus called her, the mice that lived in the hole in the seat called her. The little mouse babies, pink and blind, that squeaked and lived in a nest of straw between the rusted springs, called out to her, a chorus of high-pitched voices singing through nubs of tiny orange teeth. She'd pulled back the torn red-and-white seat cover and seen them wriggle like the tips of fingers. She brought snacks for the mama mouse: pieces of American cheese, peanut butter crackers, birdseed stolen from Nana Laura Lee's bird feeder.

Suzy knew what mice liked. And this was not just any mouse. This was the secret-underwater-periscope-up-first-officer mama mouse who was friends with the octopus, who told her how to outwit the sharks, who had pushed seven wormy babies out from inside her. The baby mice squeaked louder as they dove deeper into the sea, the water dark as ink around them.

Suzy pushed back her thick blond curls, the heavy ringlets, and squinted through the cracked windshield, out the side port-holes. Nana Laura Lee, her mom's mama, called Suzy "Shirley Temple" and spent hours fussing with the girl's hair. She bought her ribbons and bows, sweet little dresses that Suzy promptly got