



*The Mystery of
The Ghost Ship of
Windsor Island*

*Featuring:
Orvie, the boy who
could see into the past*

by David Drake

BOOK FOUR:
In the Orvie Mystery Series

The Mystery of The Ghost Ship of Windsor Island

BOOK FOUR

In the Orvie Mystery Series

By

David Drake

***Books 1, 2 & 3 should be read first.**

Family of Man Press

© 2014, 2017

Book 1: The Boy Who Could see into the Past

Book 2: The Mystery of the Disappearing Pine Trees

Book 3: The Mystery of the Duke's Diamonds

Book 4: The Mystery of the Ghost Ship of Windsor Island

Book 5: The mystery of the Treasure on Doubloon Island

Book 6: The Mystery of Gallagher's Ghost

///

BACKGROUND:

Orvie had been born soon after the conclusion of the Civil War in the United States – late 1800s. Due to an accident in a terrible electrical storm when Orvie was twelve years old two huge changes had taken place for him: He stopped growing older – forever to be a twelve-year-old, and he developed the ability to feel whether people were telling the truth about things in their past. He chose to use that skill to make life better for the good people he encountered. To conceal his agelessness, he had to move every year or so – in order to keep those around him from becoming suspicious. Wherever he went, he ran onto new mysteries that needed to be solved. These stories take place in the present. At the time this story takes place, he had finished seventh grade for the 112th time.

///

CHAPTER ONE: The Adventure Begins on a Quiet Note

Orvie had heard rumors about very strange things happening on Windsor Island in the far southern portion of Lake Michigan. He had previously visited there in 1922 and had come to know the island's owner, William Windsor, fairly well. He was old at the time and had died several years after that visit. As Orvie understood things, his family divided the island into ten relatively equal sections and sold them to private individuals.

This particular July – late July – found Orvie walking east along the boundary between Illinois to the south and Wisconsin to the north. He was on his way to that island where he had once spent a very happy fall. It was a tiny speck of land that earned itself a place on virtually none of the maps made of the area. It was three miles long – north to south – and a little less than a half mile wide at the center – west to east. It lay roughly fifty miles due east of that boarder he was following.

Uniquely, the time zone ran right down the middle of the island so, technically at least, its eastern half was in the Eastern Time Zone and its western half in the Western Time Zone. The water level in the lake was 579 feet above sea level. The highest point on the island was the north end, but it rose to something less than 200 feet – about as high as twenty story building. The terrain was generally highest along the middle line of the island from north to south and with a few ups and downs generally sloped to the low point on the southern tip.

There were narrow beaches all around – wider on the west – an abundance of rugged rock outcroppings, and a lush growth of trees representing a wide variety of species and sizes. Most of the residents owned only one lot – one tenth of the island. Each lot spanned the island from side to side – west to east – so included both some flatter shore line area and some of the highlands in the center.

The rumors had to do with a ghost ship, in the fashion of a three masted, old time pirate vessel, which would sail to within fifty yards of the shore on moon lit nights and fire its cannons at the island. It would then turn about and sail out into the lake and disappear into thin air before the very eyes of those who had been close enough to observe it. Now THAT was a mystery Orvie just couldn't pass up!

On several occasions since leaving Iowa to the west, he had stopped in small towns and at farms in order to earn some money. He mowed lawns, painted a fence and a garage and ended up with a tidy sum in his pocket. They were very nice people who lived along that boundary line. His goal had been to earn enough to load his backpack with a good store of food and to purchase a new sleeping bag to replace one that some bad guys had torn apart a few weeks before when he was in North Dakota (The Mystery of the Duke's Diamonds). That would still leave him enough cash to book passage out to the island on the supply boat that ran every Friday morning.

He had gotten to the dock about midnight – the midnight that separated Thursday and Friday – and had spent the night in his new sleeping bag beside the supply boat. He had learned details of the schedule from a man with whom he had shared a boxcar a week earlier.

By the time the owner arrived, Orvie was up on deck straightening things there – re-coiling ropes and washing the filthy forward windows through which the owner looked to steer the craft. Orvie liked to keep busy.

“Did I lose my baby here to you in a card game last night, son?” was the large man's opening remark.

His breath smelled of alcohol and Orvie suspected there might have actually been a blackout period involved the night before.

“Sure did, Aces over Kings in the last hand.”

They shared a smile fascinated by each other's quick wit.

"I'm Orvie – short for a name I'm not really fond of."

"I'm Mike – folks call me Big Mike. Never could figure that out."

Mike stood six six and weighed three hundred pounds. His remark was worth another set of smiles

Orvie got to the point of his presence there.

"I'm looking to find transportation out to Windsor Island and I understand you make that trip Friday mornings. I have money."

"I do make that crossing, but I'm not allowed to carry passengers."

"Who said anything about a passenger? I'm the owner of this sloop, remember."

Big Mike nodded and looked around taking in the things Orvie had done there on deck.

"Tell you what, seeing as you seem to have come aboard as a new crew member, I'm sure it will be fully legal."

He removed a wad of money from his front jeans pocket and peeled off a ten. He handed it to Orvie. That makes you an official employee. If you should decide to pay your share of breakfast – he held up a fist full of fast food sacks – I think that should just about make things even."

"I was just wondering about how I might come by breakfast, complete stranger Mike. Do you suppose I could purchase, say, ten dollars' worth of cholesterol laden early morning fare?"

"You talk more like a professor than a kid."

"Been told that before. Hope you won't hold that against me."

Big Mike acknowledged the remark with a slight nod, but felt no need to respond in any other way.

"We eat as we sail," he said, unlocking the cabin door and motioning Orvie to follow him inside. "Know anything about boats?"

"Like that's the starter, that's the tachometer, that's the rudder position indicator, and that's the depth indicator?"

"Yes, like that. I don't ask personal questions. I don't deal with personal problems, but you do seem very young to

be hangin' out here on the dock at six a.m. all by yourself."

"A good observation. When do we get underway?"

Big Mike raised his eyebrows, but didn't pursue it. Apparently, he would be true to his statements about not meddling in personal things.

"Untie us and let's get going. It's fifty miles as the crow flies straight east. This old tub only makes fifteen knots, a three-hour trip unless the motor dies and I have to mess around trying to fix it. You any good with engines?"

"Not really. Sadly, my 'professor' training didn't include that."

It was worth another smile between them.

Orvie untied the ropes and pulled them on board, the engine was started – third try – and they moved off slowly, the engine coughing and sputtering into the rising sun. That did not fill Orvie with confidence that he would actually ever arrive on the island.

Mike watched the compass and steered the craft due east. Orvie watched Mike and steered the conversation toward what the man knew about the recent happenings on the island

"All I got is rumors and gossip. Some say there's a pirate ship right out of Treasure Island [another great adventure book] that sails up from time to time and shoots volley after volley of cannon balls at the island. Hasn't really done much damage as I understand it. No good theory about why it may be happening. It's scared off lots of residents and guests from the hotel, I can tell you that. Their order for supplies out there is down to next to nothin'. Used to deliver ten crates a week. Today there are just two."

"I've heard something about a ghost," Orvie said fishing for more information.

"Some are calling it a ghost ship because of the way they say when it turns to leave it disappears right before their eyes."

"Do you have a take on it all?"

"I don't meddle. I get there about ten in the morning on Fridays. I leave by ten thirty. Never heard anything about it attacking other boats. It leaves me alone and I'll leave it alone."

Orvie had to wonder how Big Mike would protect his boat if he were attacked – probably bombard it with Egg McMuffins!

“A live and let live philosophy,” Orvie said.

“You bet. Meddlers get meddled with and I choose to live a independent life. Me and Amy Lou is all I need.”

“Amy Lou?”

“The love of my life for the past twenty years – you’re riding in her right now.”

He smiled at his little joke. Orvie returned it.

“I’m the restless type,” Orvie went on. “Anything I can do to pass the time.”

“Not really. I usually sing – can’t carry a tune in a bucket, but that don’t matter out here. Love to sing.”

“Don’t let me interfere with that. I’m not one to criticize anybody’s artistic offerings.”

“I like you, Orvie Kid. It’s young colts like you that make me wish I’d married and had kids. The desire passes in a hurry, understand, but it does enter my mind at times like this.”

“You’d have made an . . . interesting, father,” Orvie said, needing to hesitate as he searched for the best word to describe the kind of father he figured the big man would have likely made.

“Who runs the hotel, now?”

“A man named Gilmore – Bradford Gilmore. He has a boy living with him – a nephew or great nephew I think. Name’s Jerry Windsor. Somehow related to the family that built the hotel. About your age. He always meets the boat and signs the paper work for the old man.”

“Mr. Gilmore is old?”

“Just entered Social Security age – mid sixties I’d say.”

Orvie opened a new topic.

“What about the six or seven other residences on the island.”

“Sounds like you’ve been there before.”

“A few years back, yes.”

“Most of them have their properties up for sale because of the invasion that seems to be happening. The old man’s about the only one left out there. Hardly worth my time and fuel to make the run anymore. Six months ago, I was still

hauling a full load every week. Look around at my Amy Lou. Not much to see, is there?"

"Certainly, nowhere near a full load. The hotel still in good repair?"

"From what I can see from down on the dock. It sits most of the way up the hillside on the north end of the island. Can't vouch for any real detail, I guess, from that far away."

"I just remember it was a beautiful old place," Orvie said. "Opened in the early 1920s if I recall my history right."

"Might be. Way before my time. That would make it going on a hundred years old. I'd say it looks to be in pretty good shape, then."

The conversation had run its course.

Big Mike sang, loud and long and most certainly off key. Orvie sat back and thought. He loved to sit and think. They both seemed to be doing things they really enjoyed.

They arrived at the dock on Windsor Island at a few minutes before ten.

"Made really good time this morning," Big Mike said, patting the dashboard as if the boat were a living, breathing being.

As predicted, a boy was standing there smiling and waving.

"Jerry, you said, right?" Orvie asked.

"Yup."

Big Mike docked the little craft quite skillfully. Orvie tossed the front and rear lines onto the dock and Jerry immediately had them tied up. He was clearly surprised and pleased to see another boy his age – well, a girl might have been better, but he'd take what he could get. He offered a second round of waves directed specifically in Orvie's direction and had soon climbed aboard.

The boys' greeting was every bit as formal and complex as one would imagine between guys that age:

"I'm Orvie."

"Jerry."

The deed was sealed with a single knuckle bump. That was Orvie's move, but it seemed acceptable to Jerry.

"Just two crates today," Big Mike announced as if that were really necessary since there were only two sitting there.

There was a small hand powered crane at the rear. Big Mike operated it, swinging the boom over one of the crates and lowering the rope. Jerry soon had it secured. Mike lifted it, swung to a spot above the dock and lowered it. Jerry jumped to the dock and untied it.

“I can tie on the second one,” Orvie called.

That was soon accomplished and it also came to rest on the dock.

Mike tossed down a canvas mail pouch that appeared to be mostly empty.

Jerry caught it and placed it on one of the crates.

He tossed one up to Mike, equally empty looking.

Orvie turned to Big Mike.

“Thanks for the luxury cruise, operatic offerings, and the breakfast grease, Mike.”

Mike smiled and offered his hand for a shake. In his palm was the carefully folded ten-dollar bill Orvie had returned to him at the outset.

“What?” Orvie asked.

“Worth that to rent a son for three hours. It was nice.”

“It was nice. Thanks. You are a good man.”

Mike lowered his voice and bent close to Orvie’s ear.”

“Just don’t spread that around. I got a reputation to protect, you know.”

Orvie nodded and offered a grin.

“Not sure when I’ll be returning to the mainland,” Orvie said. “Maybe a week, maybe two. I’ll try to meet you when you arrive next Friday. If I don’t leave then, I should at least have a better feel for things.”

Orvie gathered his gear – his constant companions: backpack, sleeping bag, and shoulder bag – and left the boat. The boys loosened the ropes and waved Big Mike on his way.

“So, it’s Orvie, you said.”

“Short for Orville – prefer Orvie.”

“Can I ask what you’re doing way out here?”

“Heard you guys were playing hide and seek with a ghost ship.”

Jerry grew immediately serious.

“Bad stuff. The hotel is usually full with a waiting list this time of year. We haven’t had a guest for a month. The rumors

about the ghost ship scare everybody off.”

“Sorry. I’ve been known to solve a few mysteries in my day. Thought I might be able to help.”

“A twelve-year-old Sherlock Holmes? I doubt if my Uncle will buy that.”

“Then let’s not bother him with that detail. It can’t really hurt anything, can it?”

“I suppose not, but I would personally like to know a lot more.”

“In time. Short story is that I’m on my own in the world. Rather not have that widely known. Adults get all uptight when they think a kid isn’t chained to a parent.”

Jerry chuckled at Orvie’s phrase. He nodded.

“I was sort of in your shoes a few years ago. Mom and Dad died in an accident. I didn’t have anybody of my own until Uncle Bradford took me in.”

“How old were you?”

“Eight. It was a very frightening time – not having anybody. I admire you for being able to live with it.”

“You need ties. I need freedom. Neither one is better than the other.”

Jerry nodded.

“You’ll stay with me, or would that be too much like having a parent around?”

“Depends on how bossy you are.”

“Not at all. Hate giving orders. Could care less if you never wash your ears.”

“Okay then. Hello, Daddy.”

“Good to make your acquaintance, Son.”

They each privately thought things were off to a good start. Little did they know of the dangers and scary adventure that lay just ahead for them.

CHAPTER TWO: A Ghost That Hurls Real Cannon Balls

Orvie would find out there were only two well-traveled roads on the island; the one going north from the dock up the hillside to the hotel – they called it the lane – and one in the other direction just inland from the beach leading south from the dock. It ran the length of that one side of the island. There were several privately maintained lanes that led to houses and other features running east from that road.

Jerry was driving an old Ford, pick-up truck to carry the supplies up to the hotel. He got right to work, lowering the tailgate and pulling a roller ramp out, one end down to the wooden planks that were the dock. The idea was to attach a chain from a small, hand wound winch up near the back of the cab and pull the crates into the truck bed.

Orvie soon caught on to the process and lent a hand. Within five minutes the two large boxes were in the truck and the tailgate was closed.

“Room for your gear in the back, too,” Jerry said pointing.

Orvie hoisted his things and dropped them alongside the crates. They were soon on their way up the hill.

“So, how long have you been driving?” Orvie said to get the conversation going.

“Since I was nine. The road to The Windsor is only about a city block long. Not much can happen in that short a distance.”

“That’s right the hotel is called, The Windsor.”

“You know about it?”

“I was here once a few years ago.”

“Had to be more than four years; I’ve been her that long. That would have made you pretty young.”

“I was younger, for sure. (He smiled to himself – nearly a hundred years younger!) So, it’s just you and your Uncle here now?”

“Yup. He had to let the maids go. Buzz, the handyman stayed on for the free place to live. He has a two-room shack behind the Hotel. Not much, but it’s weather tight and he seems content there.”

“How many guest rooms?”

“Only sixteen. Not very big.”

Orvie nodded, mostly to himself as he remembered about it.

The hotel came into sight as they rounded a corner about halfway up the hill. Jerry stopped the truck and pointed.

“My room is up in what was originally part of the attic. See the big window with the red drapes. That’s mine. It’s huge. Uncle Bradford has a suite on the first floor just inside the front entrance – the blue drapes are his den. I lived down there with him until last year when we figured I needed a place of my own. The dining room is to the rear off the wide entrance hall where the check-in desk is. There’s an ancient elevator, but most of the able-bodied visitors use the stairs – out of fear, I’m thinking.”

Orvie smiled. He liked the boy’s natural wit.

He put the truck in gear and they finished the trip. He drove around the far side of the big, white, two story (plus Jerry’s attic) building to the rear and backed up to a raised loading dock. They got out and soon had the crates unloaded and into a storage room just off the kitchen. Orvie slipped into his backpack and Jerry toted the sleeping and shoulder bags.

“You won’t need this,” Jerry said hefting the sleeping bag. “I got two beds in my room and not those little skimpy kinds like most kids our age get stuck with.”

“It’s very kind of you, but don’t you need to clear having somebody sleep over – with your uncle, maybe?”

“Naw. He trusts me and knows I make good decisions. I pretty well run my own life. As long as he gets my school work every morning at breakfast during the school year and

gets to see my shining face at three meals a day, my life with him is hassle-free. We have great talks over meals. I always look forward to them.”

“Sounds like a fine arrangement you have.”

“It is. When I first came to live here he sat me down and told me he wasn’t going to try to replace my mom and dad because he knew he couldn’t do that. But he said he’d love me with all the love he possessed and hoped that someday I’d be able to do the same for him. That didn’t really take long. We have a very good thing between us. You’ll find he is a fine person with a great sense of humor.”

“And how are the two of you related – different last names, I understand?”

“He was my mother’s Uncle on her mother’s side – so he’s my great uncle. Not as complicated as it may sound.”

“Sounds like a pretty cool arrangement. You got a curfew?”

“That’s up to my best judgment. If I’m out after nine at night or don’t plan to show up for a meal I call him on my cell.”

“You guys cooking for yourselves now?”

“No, Lexy – I guess I forgot to mention her – has been my Uncle’s cook for thirty years and she has a forever kind of arrangement with him. I tell him they ought to get married, but he says it’s not that sort of a relationship. I’m not sure Lexy would agree with that. Girls, you know. They’d fanaticize about romance if it was them and rock. You’ll really like her, too. She’s sort of like a proxy (alternate) mom. Everybody here is nice.”

Orvie nodded. It truly sounded like an ideal spot for his new friend. Jerry did seem really isolated from other people, especially kids, but Orvie had just spent time with several other twelve year olds who managed pretty well in similar situations.

“The guests often bring kids with them?” Orvie asked.

“Sometimes. Lots of old folks come here and spend the summer. Sometimes their grandkids come and stay with them for a week or so. That’s always fun.”

“Sounds like you and your smile get along with everybody – don’t know a stranger as they say.”

Jerry grinned.

“Lexy says my positive attitude could cheer up road kill.”

It brought a full out laugh from Orvie.

“That’s a funny line. I love it. Can hardly wait to meet her – Lexy, not the road kill.”

Jerry smiled appropriately.

“It’s lunch time. You’ll get to meet her almost immediately.”

“I don’t want to impose. I have my own food in my backpack.”

“And I just expect it knows how to stay there. My uncle would be offended if you snubbed his table.”

“I always do my best not to offend folks – especially those offering food.”

The deal was sealed with set of grins.

“Lexy, this is my new friend, Orvie. He’ll be bunking in with me for a while.”

“Your parents around somewhere? I’ll need to water down the soup and add cracker crumbs to the hamburger if they’ll be here for lunch.”

It had been a joke, of course – well, the last part at least. Orvie felt he needed to deal with the parent issue. He quickly formulated a harmless fib that would cover his history.

“Mom’s taking care of my grandma – she’s sick. Dad had business to take care of in Chicago. Arrangements were made for Big Mike to bring me out here. My plan was to find a place to camp for a week. Dad and I are great for camping.”

He wasn’t sure Lexy bought it, but at least she didn’t question it.

“We need to wash up,” Jerry said. “Brought up the supply crates. Worked up a man-sized appetite. Broccoli cheese soup I hope.”

“Now, when have I not come through with one of your favorites?”

Jerry rested his hands on her shoulders and planted a big kiss on her forehead.

“I told you she was the best,” he said to Orvie, hitching his head for him to follow him down the hall.

They were soon cleaned up. Orvie took the opportunity to extend the expected soap and water to his hands on up his

arms and washed his face and neck. Jerry watched, forming a question or two, but didn't comment.

"I'll forewarn you, Uncle Bradford is quite a hand shaker. He's been known to pump a man's hand for a good three minutes."

"Thanks for the heads up."

"Uncle Bradford, this is my new friend, Orvie. I've invited him to stay with us for the week."

Jerry had been right about the lengthy shake. Most men could have died and been buried in the amount of time it seemed to take. Bradford talked the whole course of the shake and by the time he let go, he had pretty well extracted all of the life history Orvie ever shared with anybody – plus a few meaningless time fillers.

"I hope soup, cheeseburgers, fries, baked beans and a bowl of fruit will keep you young men going."

"Well, I can't speak for the squirts, here," Bradford began, kidding, "but it sounds perfect to this young men, er, man."

It was worth smiles and chuckles all around the table. Lexy joined them at the table. Conversation flowed effortlessly. Orvie eventually got around to the point of his visit – well, in a roundabout way.

"Any excitement in these parts recently?" he asked, shooting a clandestine (hidden) glance at Jerry.

Jerry would NOT make a good poker player. His face immediately broke into a grin. Bradford noticed.

"I assume you are not so subtly referring to what's being called the 'ghost ship' that's been paying us visits out here."

"Oh, I think I was very subtle. It's giggle boy over there that blew it."

"I will have to agree. Jerry's never been able to keep a secret. I never take him Christmas shopping 'til Christmas Eve or everybody would know what he got them well before he got the presents wrapped."

That comment was a bit disturbing to Orvie – working a secret mission with a kid who couldn't keep secrets. He may not have selected the best partner. The boy was good at heart; that much he was sure of. They'd have a talk later.

Bradford continued.

“It all began about six months ago near the end of last year’s tourist season. Other than the week including Christmas and New Year’s we don’t really pack them in around here during the cold weather.

“Many of the residents on the south end of the island began reporting a strange ship – like an old pirate ship – sailing in close to shore, setting itself sideways – parallel with the shore – opening its gun ports and firing several rounds at the island. It would turn back out into the lake and then disappear from view. They found small cannon balls to support their stories – at least the being fired at part.”

“So, you put stock in the stories?”

“Yes, reluctantly. Not something I wanted to believe. I’ve seen the cannon balls. I’ve even seen what certainly looks like genuine firing up at the island – flashes of light and white smoke. I have a hard time buying the disappearing into thin air part of it all. I’m guessing fog banks, maybe.”

“So, anything come of it? Damage? Injuries?”

“No. That’s one more odd part to the story. The cannon balls have come close enough to frighten folks – I mean really frighten them. A half dozen folks have left their homes on the island. I understand most of them have their property up for sale.”

“Who’d buy property whose value was bound to drop in a hurry with it under siege like it’s been?” Orvie asked.

“I suppose one answer comes to mind,” Bradford said.

“You mean somebody wants to buy this island dirt cheap and he’s the one who’s orchestrating the attacks – spreading the fear.”

“That’s the way I’m leaning.”

“Can you find out if anybody is offering to buy up the land?”

“I have my lawyer looking into it. So far all he knows that it’s some sort of a blind holding company with no people’s names attached to it – just other companies. It’s a mess of legal hide and seek, I guess.”

“Any idea why somebody would want this whole island?”

“With the right kind of money, a luxury hotel could be

built, resort facilities installed – it could be a gold mine in the long run if somebody wanted all that commotion going on around them. Take a huge amount of capital, but that doesn't seem to be a problem anymore for those who are already super-wealthy.”

Orvie detected a hint of resentful jealousy in his tone – maybe it was just apprehension (uneasiness). Bradford surely was wealthy in his own right. The hotel sat on three of the ten lots the Windsor family had sold off. He had built up a thriving tourist trade for thirty years or more. It was hard to believe he was on the verge of becoming poor – regardless of the recent downturn in business.

Everyone ate their fill. When they were finished, Jerry turned to Orvie.”

“Oh. One thing I may have failed to mention. Breakfast and lunch dishes are on the kid OR kidS who eat here.”

Orvie grinned and glanced at Lexy. She had something of a position statement to make.

“Oh, I'm happy to do them up. Lay it on big bad Bradford there.”

Bradford raised his arms, palms forward.

“Not I, said the even tempered, cuddly little pussy cat. It was all Jerry's idea.”

“Yeah. Sure,” Jerry came back. “Like a twelve-year-old boy just can't wait to get elbow deep in a sink full of greasy dish water.”

The other three grinned among themselves. Orvie figured he would never really know how the practice had come about.

“Well, I for one am happy to help,” he said. “Let's get at it, Jer.”

Lexy did a second take and addressed Jerry.

“You're friend here's not married or engaged is he,” she kidded. “I may just make a play for him, myself.”

“Just be prepared,” Orvie came back. “I have the reputation as a heartbreaker.”

“I don't doubt that for a second, handsome.”

The adults excused themselves. The boys had the few dishes done and put away in ten minutes.

“Let's stow your gear up in my room and then I'll show

you around the island.”

It was then Orvie noticed the red rash on the back of Jerry’s right hand.

“What you got there?”

“Poison Oak or ivy – they look the same. Not much of it here on the island. When we find any growing, Buzz burns it out with a torch. I never get it really bad, but it takes forever to go away. There won’t be any where we’ll be going.”

The showing around took until seven. Jerry called in AWOL for dinner. When they returned, there were sandwiches, pears and a thermos of milk waiting for them on a chair outside the door to Jerry’s room

“Pretty nice of Lexy,” Orvie said.

“Yeah. Like I told you, things are really great for me here.”

Inside his room, he began pointing out the various features – computer, television, game boxes, study area, library, even an old-fashioned pin ball machine. Orvie had grown up with them and was eager to try his hand again. That would have to wait until later.

There was a window seat between the red drapes. It was padded, was three feet front to back and spanned the eight-foot-wide window. Jerry went to it and belied down, looking outside. He motioned for Orvie.

“Come see my magnificent view. On really clear days I can see the top of the Sears Tower in Chicago – at least that’s what I’ve decided it is.”

Orvie pointed south down at the lake.

“And, it appears that on brightly, moonlit nights you can see the old ghost ship sailing into view. Got binoculars?”

Jerry was soon back with two pair. They examined the image.

“It’s heading in our direction. Never been up this far north before. Look at that. It’s turning parallel to the shore. It’s opening its gun ports. It’s firing. That first round was really way too close for comfort.”

And that was nothing compared with the placement of the soon to arrive, second round.

CHAPTER THREE: Cannon Balls and Cameras

The next round hit the front lawn kicking up dirt and grass.

“Got anything to get a good close-up picture with?” Orvie asked.

Jerry was soon clicking away with a camera that sported a twelve-inch telephoto lens – one of the longest Orvie had ever seen outside a football field.

“I got one or two while it still had its ports open, but most will be of its butt as it turned tail and went off into the mist.”

“Get any while it was disappearing?”

“A couple I imagine. I was mostly just clicking – not much time to think about quality or purpose.”

“I understand. Digital, I assume.”

“Yup. Let’s slip the card into my computer and we’ll have a twenty-four inch blow up.

They were soon scrolling through the pictures. Although it wasn’t fully dark out, it certainly hadn’t been bright. Jerry enhanced everything he could enhance.

“So, what do you think?” Jerry said at last, as if Orvie were to be the final authority on such things.

“Very good shots actually. I’m impressed. Can we print a few out?”

“We can and we may.”

“You sound like an English teacher – stop that!” Orvie teased.

They soon had prints of three that particularly

interested Orvie. They had rolled out of the largest color printer he'd ever seen. The quality was excellent. Clearly the boy didn't lack for the very best of everything.

They laid them out, side by side, on Jerry's bed.

"Sure wish we could see inside those ports. Can't really see the cannons inside any of them. It does look like an old, wooden pirate ship; I'll give the bad guy that much. Undoubtedly a replica, but really good and that probably means really expensive. This scare-away-and-buy operation, whatever it is, must be worth a fortune to somebody." Orvie said, pointing. "Look at this. I can't figure what it is. You?"

"I'm afraid I don't see anything. Sorry."

"Tell me about the lake, the wave height for example."

"Varies a lot with the wind and the time of day. We get the roughest water about this time of day and again at sunrise. Rest of the time it's pretty calm, just gentle lapping rolling in against the beach and rocks."

"Did you shoot at some super-fast speed tonight?"

"No. Figured I'd need all the light possible this time of day – evening. Fast shutter speeds cuts light way down. I just used a normal setting. Why?"

"Well, for one thing these pictures are quite clear – well focused. I'd think if a ship was in rough water it would be riding up and down so it would be really hard to get a picture without some distortion. You see what I mean?"

"Yeah. Hadn't thought of that."

He checked the setting on his camera to make sure what he had told Orvie was true. It was.

"Did you notice the ship moving up and down on the waves?" Orvie asked mostly just thinking out loud.

"No, but I was focused more on the cannon balls that were hurtling up at us from down there."

"Yes. Me, too. I guess next time we'll have some more specific things to look for."

"Next time!" Jerry said some emotion in his tone. "Yes, I suppose there will be a next time. I'll make sure the camera's ready after this."

"Speaking of cameras. I don't suppose you happen to have a video camera."

"Of course, I do. Certainly, by now you realize I'm

spoiled rotten.”

It had been delivered with a grin.

“Telephoto lens?”

“Yup! Photography is my hobby, in case you missed that. I got cameras for all occasions and some occasions that haven’t even been invented yet.”

Orvie lay back on the bed he understood was to be his. He put his hands behind his head and continued to think out loud.

“How does a ship in a choppy sea not bob up and down with the waves?”

“Got me. A projection against the mist maybe?”

“Can that really be done?”

“Sure can. It would be a really tricky and expensive set up in order to pull off what we saw tonight. And, remember, lots of nights there’s not been any mist to project against. And, again, I don’t know of any photography technology that can fire cannonballs back from a projection.”

“You make good points – stop that!”

They had a chuckle.

“You have a map of this chunk of rock you call home?”

“Windsor Island? Sure. Several. And its chunks of rocks - plural. What you looking for?”

“Just want to get acquainted. I saw the general structure from the boat as I approached – higher here at the north end and lower at the south end. Looked like a hodgepodge (jumble) of rock outcroppings. Light, dark, gray, red, yellow, white. What gives with the geology of this place?”

“Dr. Matthews says the stuff that makes up the island was once stuff the last glacier pushed down from up north. On its way, it gathered all sorts of rock and debris. Then, it all got compacted under the tremendous weight of the ice. When the glaciers finally retreated, hundreds and hundreds of years later, this glob of stuff had been lumped together as one huge mass. Then as rock formations moved around hundreds of feet below the surface, Windsor got pushed to the surface, up out of the deep depression the glaciers had formed that’s known as Lake Michigan. Our word ‘Michigan’ is close to a Native American word for lake or water, by the way.”

“And who is Dr. Matthews?”

“He’s a professor of geology at a university in Chicago. He brings summer school classes out every summer and they hike around for a day at a time. He says it’s a one of a kind structure – this island. Like some kind of geologic treasure to hear him speak.”

Orvie had taken it all in, but didn’t respond.

“Here are some maps,” Jerry said pulling an extra-large folder out from under his bed. “A topographic map that shows the heights, a vegetation map that shows, well, the vegetation, a mineral map that shows the various deposits, and a rock outcropping map that shows what kind of rocks are where on the island. See, we got the common types like limestone, basalt, quartz, and sandstone, and then the lesser abundant varieties like galena, gypsum, dolomite, calcite, agate, amber – the list goes on; pretty much you name it and we have it.”

“That is amazing. I’d say it’s a geological treasure.”

“Uncle Bradford calls it a geological smorgasbord.”

“Seems like I remember a cave when I was here before – just a little one somewhere toward the middle of the island.”

“Yeah – Waabishkaa Cave. Only one on the Island.”

“That’s right. I remember now,” Orvie said. “Waabishkaa roughly translates from the Algonquian language as white, I believe.”

“That’s right. The language by the way is Ojibwa. It was widely spoken all across the Great Lakes back in the 1500s and 1600s and even later.”

“Somebody knows his Michigan history.”

“That’s Uncle Bradford’s hobby. Hard to have meals with him and not learn more than you’d really like to.”

“Seems everybody around here has a hobby – Lexy, too?”

“I think my uncle is her hobby!”

The boys died laughing. There was something just mysterious enough about grownups romantic relationships that tended to produce nervous giggles.

“Back to that cave. As I remember, it was white inside and around the front edge.”

“You sure remember a lot for having been such a little kid back then. The cave is white dolomite. Doc. says it was formed around an unusually soft limestone core that

dissolved, leaving the cave. It's only goes about twenty feet back into the hill. Nothing really special except it's the only one we have."

"I'd like to hike down there sometime, if it's not trespassing."

"I assume it's my uncles. Nobody keeps track of who owns most of the property on this island anymore so I suppose trespassing really isn't a concern, anyway. Sure. We can go in the morning."

"Right now, I think we need to go out on the lawn and see if we can find a cannon ball or two," Orvie said. "You game?"

"I'm always game! We should use the servants' stairs – the back stairs – so Uncle or Lexy don't get bent all out of shape about us marching out into the face of danger, or some such nonsense. They tend to do that – mostly over little things."

The boys put their shoes back on – they had both shed them the minute they entered Jerry's room. It had been reason for a grin. They discovered that they both disliked wearing shoes and socks.

Fully attired, they quietly left the house through the back door and were soon cautiously approaching the front lawn.

"Did you keep track of where that last one fell?" Orvie asked.

"I think I can find it. This way."

Orvie followed and twenty yards further down the slope, there it was, a sizeable hole in the ground.

"I imagine the cannon ball will be in the bottom," Jerry said.

The hole was several few feet wide and perhaps one deep. They easily located what they were looking for.

"I thought cannon balls were heavy," Jerry said. "This one can't weigh more than a couple of pounds. It's no bigger than a baseball."

"I recall reading the standard cannon on a pirate ship fired either eight or sixteen pound balls. There was something called the rule of 200. An iron cannon, in order to be sturdy enough to contain the blast necessary to fire a ball, had to

weigh 200 times the weight of the ball it was designed to fire. That meant firing the big ones required a ship to carry a huge amount of extra weight – what would a sixteen-pound ball take according to that rule – a cannon that weighed almost one and half tons?”

“So, in order to fire a two-pounder, the cannon would only have to weigh 400 or so pounds,” Jerry said making the calculations.

“How far away was that ship from up here, do you suppose?” Orvie asked already having a good idea.

“About a football field and a half – 150 yard maybe,” Jerry said.

Orvie agreed and went on thinking out loud.

“From what I’ve read, a two pounder could be fairly accurate over 200 yards, depending on the amount of powder and how tightly it fit inside the cannon barrel. If the ship had wanted to do some real damage it could have. Clearly, it didn’t want that. I guess if you’re trying to get your hands on a four-star hotel you would take precautions not to blow it to smithereens. For some reason, they are using low powder loads. A two pounder could easily cover a thousand yards if fully loaded. It would be considerably less accurate, however.”

“A thousand yards from them to us would put them so far away we’d barely be able to see them,” Jerry said. “What would that be? More than a half mile, right?”

Orvie nodded and continued.

“Which means whoever it is, wants the ship to be seen. Plainly part of the terror tactics he’s using.”

“Let’s get the cannon ball up to your room so we can examine it.”

It was covered in dirt. They washed it up so they could see what they had. They rolled it around slowly so they could get a good look at its entire surface.

“That’s interesting,” Orvie said pointing.

“What is that?” Jerry asked bending close to get a better look.

“My guess is that it’s file marks – like somebody didn’t want us to know something about it.”

“A serial number or the name of the manufacturer,”

maybe?" Jerry said/asked.

"That's my guess, too. I doubt if anybody regularly manufacturers these things anymore. Have to Google that, I guess. I'm thinking they have to be specially made. Looks to be solid iron wouldn't you say."

"I really don't know much about things like that. I'll take your word for it. You seem to be a pirate at heart."

"Just read a lot. Stuff like that interests me. Now take photography – I don't know squat about that so you'll have to take the lead there."

Orvie thought it seemed to be a very strange terror tactic – to pose as a pirate on an inland lake in the 21st century. It had to mean something. That, however, probably wouldn't be discovered until they determined who the bad guy was.

In the meantime, there were other questions to be asked and answered. Why would somebody want the island in the first place? Maybe drug smugglers who wanted easy access to the cities along the Lake. Maybe somebody with a grudge against Jerry's uncle or others on the island. Maybe somebody who knew the island contained something of worth that the rest of them didn't know.

There were a lot of maybes. Orvie always loved that. He understood that you couldn't hope to solve a mystery (or any problem) until you asked the right question, so the more questions and maybe's there could be, the more likely it would get solved.

The island had several unique features that might play a part. It was isolated and virtually unknown – so small it wasn't even on most maps. It had an excellent small cove that was used as the docking area – protected from raging lake waters and high winds. From its highest point (Jerry's front and rear windows as it turned out) approaching vessels could be spotted some 50 or more miles away. There was an artesian spring (flowed with some force) that supplied an abundance of water and ingeniously powered the electrical generating system for the island. The island itself was merely the tiny top section of a tall, mountain sized, outcropping that extended to the floor of the lake some 550 + feet below. If that rock contained something worthwhile, there just might be 550

feet of it below the surface of the lake.

“Got a geologic chart that shows the structure of this island from the floor of the lake to the top of this hill?”

“Ask and you shall receive, kind sir.”

Jerry shuffled through the sheets in the large folder and found what Orvie had asked for.

“My! It spreads out into quite a large structure down there. What? Maybe two miles in diameter down on the floor of the lake?”

“Almost exactly that.”

“Got diving gear?”

“Not the kind you’d need to dive down almost 600 feet, if that was really your question.”

“No. Just to look at things below the shore line – maybe twenty or twenty-five feet.”

Jerry went to a closet door and opened it.

“Like this, maybe?”

“It was filled with the kind of gear to which Orvie had been referring. Wet suits, tanks, goggles, snorkels, fins – well, it was all there.

“Yes, like that, maybe!”

Orvie went to examine it. He was impressed.

“Uncle Bradford only lets me use this stuff in the cove – twenty feet deep and very calm water.”

Orvie noted the comment, but didn’t commit himself to following those guidelines. Orvie would find a way to go where Orvie needed to go even if it involved dangers, risks and threats the boy’s uncle might not approve of and with what the boys were about to face, you better believe he wouldn’t approve!

CHAPTER FOUR: The Underground

The boys slept well and enjoyed Lexy's breakfast of flapjacks, eggs, sausage and strawberries.

"Going to the cave this morning," Jerry announced.

His uncle nodded as if to say he understood. It didn't seem to imply permission. As Jerry had indicated, he pretty well ran his own life. Lexy was the one with the dependable, "You guys be careful, now!" Then added: "Want to take a lunch or can I count on you here at noon?"

The boys looked at each other. Orvie shrugged.

"Here, unless I call by eleven," Jerry said offering the best answer he could.

Orvie nodded his agreement.

They broke out one of Jerry's backpacks and loaded it with the essentials for a day of hiking and spelunking (cave exploring). There were hammers, an axe, chisels, ropes, extra sweatshirts, flashlights, lights that fit on foreheads, extra batteries, small sacks in which to bring back samples of who knew what, bottles of water and a half dozen Snickers bars in case they were attacked by an an overwhelming hunger.

At the last minute, Orvie pulled two paperbacks from Jerry's book shelf – 'Rocks, Minerals and Geologic Structure', and 'Cave Dwelling Animals and Plants' (who'd have even imagined there would be such a book?).

It was becoming clear to Orvie that Jerry preferred to use the back stairs. They were soon out the back door and heading south down the wooded, rocky slope toward Waabishkaa Cave. Its glistening white stone caught their

eyes through the trees a good distance away. Its entrance was smaller than Orvie remembered it – four feet wide and five high. Inside, it immediately widened and grew taller – eight feet in both dimensions. Humorously, Orvie thought, just inside the entrance sat a small, green, trash can with a sign, ‘Please Don’t Litter’. He doubted if that had been left over from the days of the Algonquian Indians five hundred years before. They had known better than to not take good care of their world.

He stopped to examine the container. It held an empty Cheetos package, and inside that a folded piece of lined paper from a yellow tablet. He took both and put them in a sack.

“Those are odd items for a student of geology to be interested in,” Jerry teased referring to Orvie’s recent collection. Even so he didn’t question it.

The white walls reflected what light made its way inside through the small entrance and made it seem lighter than one would have expected. The head lights (well, forehead lights, you understand) brightened the cave, remarkably.

“So, we looking for anything special?” Jerry asked.

“Seems I remember something clear at the back,” he replied making his way in that direction.

“What sort of a something? It becomes really low and narrow back there. Closes down to nothing, the way I remember. Gets crawl-on-your-belly-and-still-hit-your-head-on-the-roof low.”

“I remember,” Orvie said. Good that I still have my girlish figure (slim).”

He adjusted his head light, got down on all fours and proceeded to move back into the tiny crawl space. He was soon on his belly moving along on his elbows, arms clasped flat in front of him. He remained quiet.

“You okay in there, Mole Man?” Jerry asked.

Orvie chuckled at the reference.

“Not sure how a Mole Man responds,” he called back over his shoulder.

“A grunt now and then would be reassuring.”

“Grunt. Grunt. Did you know it turns right back here?”

“No. It’s too small for most adults to get back there and I’ve never wanted to risk wedging myself into an eternal,

dolomite coffin.”

“You use words very well.”

“It’s a skill that only surfaces when I’m terrified about what’s about to happen.”

“No need for that.”

“What, I can hardly hear you. How far does that tunnel go, anyway?”

Orvie teased: “What, I can hardly hear you?”

At least Orvie thought it was funny.

Just when he figured he’d pretty much come to the absolute end of the tunnel, he, instead, came upon a sizable opening. He slid forward to get a better look.

“You got to come in here and see this, my friend.”

He made sure he had spoken loudly enough for Jerry to hear.

“Really? What?”

“There is a huge cave in here. Stalagmites. Stalactites. Beautiful rock formations. An underground stream. Like the story about the Journey to the Center of the Earth. [A great adventure story by Jules Verne, written back in 1864.]

“You wait until I’m sure there is something for me stand on in there,” Orvie cautioned. “This opening comes out high up on a wall.”

“I’m really good about waiting. I can wait all day. I can wait until I’m 36. I wait just fine when my life may be at stake.”

“If you’re done blabbering, come on in? Push the backpack in front of you. We may need stuff.”

“Stuff!” Jerry sighed quietly to himself. He took a deep breath, took one last look outside, and got down on his hands and knees prepared to follow.

“If this gets us killed I’ll haunt you forever, you know?” he called ahead.

“Didn’t know one dead guy could haunt another dead guy.”

Jerry became quiet and moved along the tunnel. ‘Dead guy’ was not what he wanted to hear. He was some smaller than Orvie with slightly narrower shoulders and hips. It was actually an easier passage for him, although, later, he would never admit that as he would extol (praise) himself to others for his bravery in the face of great danger.

He had soon navigated the tunnel and came upon the opening Orvie had described. There was a ledge just on the other side on which his new friend was sitting.

“Wow! Where’s the light coming from – not much, but enough to see most of what’s here.”

“There appear to be a series of holes – dolomite tubes, I suppose would describe them – that allow some light to filter in from up on top of the hill.”

“The Indian Wells, I bet. At least that’s what we call them here on the island. Eight or ten of them and pretty much right above this area, I’d say. Only a few feet wide. I’ve been dropping my hiking trash down them for years. Sorry, about that, pretty cave.”

“Does your geology doc. know about this?”

“I doubt it. He’s never mentioned it. I don’t think anybody knows about it. This isn’t something you’d just keep to yourself.”

“Not unless for some reason you wanted to keep it all to yourself.”

“I get you. You think this could be connected to the problems out here?”

“Have no idea, but it seems like more promising data to add to the pot.”

“Since you wanted the backpack I assume we are going to explore a bit.”

“How could we not? Look at it! Must be thirty-five yards wide down at the bottom and twenty high. Can’t even tell how far it extends out into darkness in front of us.”

“Some quick calculations put the floor of this cave just about at the level of the lake surface,” Jerry said. “How could this have gone unnoticed all these years?”

“I guess no scrawny, reckless, foolish twelve-year-old was ever willing to risk his wellbeing and squeeze himself through this claustrophobic’s (person afraid of small places) nightmare of a tunnel before,” Orvie came back with a grin.

Jerry clarified Orvie’s position.

“Knowing lots and lots of twelve-year-old boys, I’d have to say none of them found it before or they certainly would have squeezed themselves through it. As a species, we twelve-year-old guys aren’t really known to be sensibly

cautious.”

They exchanged a knowing glance.

The ledge – nearly three feet wide – clung to the wall, running to their left for about ten feet. They stood and followed it, Orvie with the backpack. At that point there were a series of natural steps, quite uneven in height and width, but they provided a passable path down to the floor.

It took a while, partly because it was an uneven, difficult path and partly because they kept stopping to look at the various formations and outcroppings. Fifteen minutes later they stepped onto the floor.

“Drier than I’d have expected,” Orvie said indicating the rock floor.

“Chillier than I’d have expected,” Jerry said grabbing his shoulders across his chest and putting on a shiver. He opened the backpack so he could remove the sweatshirts.

“Next time jeans instead of cutoffs,” Orvie pointed out. “Caves stay about 55 degrees year-round.”

“Fifty-five? It doesn’t seem that cold to me in here. You?”

“Come to think of it, no it doesn’t. I don’t suppose you have a . . .”

“. . . Thermometer? Sure do. On the back of my compass.”

He removed it from his front pants pocket.

“Wow! It says it’s nearly 90 degrees in here. That can’t be right.”

“I just imagine it’s telling you that the temperature inside your pants is 90 degrees. Give it a minute to adjust to the air in the cave.”

A few minutes later the mercury settled in at 66 degrees.

“That’s eleven or so degrees above what we’d expect,” Orvie said.

He pointed to the stream.

“See what the temp of the water is,” Hot Pants!

Jerry swished the thermometer through the water. It immediately jumped to almost 85 degrees.

“Some source of thermal heating raising that water temperature,” Orvie said. “It’s enough to push it up

significantly higher in this huge old hole than would be expected.”

“That’s like bath water. Make for a great swim.”

“Yeah, if you wanted to turn red as a lobster.”

“I have no racial prejudices,” Jerry said, smiling.

Orvie was coming to see that his new friend possessed a strange, but fascinating, sense of humor. He would enjoy that.

“Next time we’ll come more prepared – a good kerosene lantern, for one thing. A water test kit and binoculars. And a massive lunch, for another. I’m already hungry.”

“Got candy bars, remember,” Orvie reminded him. “What time is it?”

“Not quite nine, but I’m still a growing boy. Got lots of time to get back before we’re expected for lunch.”

Jerry rifled through the backpack and found the Snickers. They bit and chewed and enjoyed the treat as they continued following the narrow stream.

“The stream has me baffled,” Orvie said.

“Well, a stream typically consists of two banks, a bottom and flowing water,” Jerry said going for the joke because he had no idea what Orvie was thinking.

It garnered a chuckle from Orvie.

“What is the source of the water? How does it get heated? Where does it flow to – there has to be an outlet? How did these strange looking reptiles – yellow lizards, those tiny white frogs – and I do know frogs are amphibians and not reptiles – get in here? You ever seen them elsewhere on the island?”

“First, the reptiles and amphibians are not features of a stream – they are occupants. But, to your point, I can’t say that I have ever seen them, and if I haven’t seen them they’re not here – well, not up there because clearly they are down here.”

“I’m just going to assume I understood that and move on. Let’s follow the stream to where it curves down there by what seems to be the end of this room,” Orvie suggested.

“Sounds like a plan.”

As they walked along, Orvie picked up several small

stones, washed them off in the stream and slipped them into his pocket. The floor was one continuous mass of jagged rock outcroppings (*up-croppings* would say it better). Some twenty feet high, but most were more like five to ten. They weaved their ways in and about them sticking as close to the stream as possible.

At the far wall the stream turned to their right and ran through a small opening – ten feet wide and three high – into a smaller room that was far darker. They could see only one source of light from above. The room was much narrower and only half the height of the first. While in the process of crawling into the second room through the small opening beside the stream, they were met by a very strong breeze – strong enough to blow Orvie’s long black hair to stand out behind him.

“There has to be an opening to the outside air back in here somewhere. I imagine it is drawn up through the ‘wells’ as you called them. Have you noticed an upward air flow out of them?”

“Not really and there wasn’t hardly any going out through that infinitesimal (the tiniest) tunnel you forced me through up there.”

“Good observation. Has to be some other outlet, then. You explored the hill up behind the hotel, I imagine.”

“Some. Not as much as you might think. The ground is littered with sharp rocks. There’s virtually no place to step on solid ground.”

“We need to put that on our list of places to explore.”

“Noted.”

He held out his phone so Orvie could see the ‘To Do’ list he had already started. The first entry tickled Orvie into full-out laughter: #1 – Get out of here alive. The new #2 was also humorous – Risk bloody feet and broken backs on ground above hotel. He had a way of skipping the activity and going right for the worst possible outcomes.

They needed their head lights as well as the flashlights to see much of anything in detail there in the darkness of the second cave. After another thirty yards the room seemed to come to an end and the stream flowed into a pool and stopped.

“Has to be an outlet in there somewhere,” Orvie said pointing at the pool. “I think there is a long, hot, swim ahead of us on our next trip down here.”

“Us? Perhaps it would be wiser if one of us stayed out so he could be a witness to the other one being sucked into some powerful whirlpool or eaten by a monster with night vision ability that’s lurking just below the surface, there.”

“That’s up to you and probably not a bad idea.”

“Really? I figured I was sounding very much like a yellow-bellied chicken.”

“Oh, you were, but I hear even yellow bellied chickens sometimes have worthwhile ideas.”

Jerry shone his head light into Orvie’s face.

“We make a very compatible pair, don’t you think – comfortable, sort of a good balance between extreme caution and senseless risk taking?”

“Was that a proposal, dear?”

“You know what I mean. I’m really glad you showed up on this old rock – for however long you’ll be able to hang around.”

“Thanks. I’m glad about that, also.”

“Think your phone will be able to get any useful picture of either of these caves – rooms – whatever?”

“Let me try. I’m pretty sure the first one will have enough light. I have a super camera on this one.”

‘Big surprise about that,’ Orvie thought, smiling to himself.

Orvie collected a few more pebbles as they made their way back to the pass-through opening and started the climb up the narrow steps – such as they were.

“I’m guessing – just from what I’ve observed about you having every device known to man – that you have a rock tumbler to polish stones.”

“Actually, that’s Lexy’s hobby. She makes jewelry. She has several tumblers, in fact, and lots of grit sizes from coarse, to use at first, to extra fine, to put on a shiny final finish. She even has a grit sifter so she can save it and use it over.”

“I suppose that will work. If we have what I think we have here, we’ll need to keep the find to ourselves for a while.”

“No problem. I’ll sweet talk her out of one and we can

set it up in the basement – they make one heck of a racket.”

“A lot like ‘somebody’ else I know,” Orvie offered with a grin.

Jerry nodded and shrugged, as much as admitting the characterization.

Before they re-entered the entrance/escape tunnel, Jerry turned and snapped several more pictures believing they would show most of the main cave. He left first. Orvie followed pushing the back pack along in front of him.

Jerry stopped and made the librarians favorite sound – Shhhhhhh! He turned his head to the side hoping that way Orvie could hear his whisper.

“There’s something or somebody out in the cave. I’ll pray while you come up with a plan. Quickly, would be really, really great!”

///

CHAPTER FIVE: Their Problem Becomes a Mystery

Before Orvie could come up with a plan, Praying Boy's face was met by the friendly tongue of Mortimer – a Labrador Retriever that had been running loose on the island since his owner left a month or so before. Lexy had been feeding it. They seemed happy to see each other.

With that life and death crisis behind them, they made it home in plenty of time for lunch. Jerry turned the conversation to the boys' concern.

"Lexy, can we borrow one of your rock tumbler thingamabobs?"

"Sure. You in need of a big or small thingamabob?"

Jerry passed the ball to Orvie.

"Small will be fine. Found a few stones on our hike I think might make pretty settings."

"He pulled two from his pocket and offered them to her in his palm. They were not the ones he was really most interested in, but were two he had selected after he and Jerry had spoken about using Lexy's equipment."

"Red granite. They will be very nice. The bigger one may come out some odd shape."

"That might make an interesting pendant then, like for a necklace."

"A good eye, young man. I'll be eager to see how it turns out."

She turned to Jerry.

"You know where the tumblers are in my workshop. Help yourselves to the grit as well. Just ask you to save it."

They were quickly down into the basement with the tumbler and two vials of grit.

“How many altogether we going to do?”

“Besides the two I showed Lexy, I have three others.”

“You’re bound to have some idea they could be connected to our mystery – oh, you hear that? Our problem just became a mystery. How great!”

“I do have an idea, but I’d rather not say quite yet.”

“Gold, silver, diamond?”

“I do have an idea, but I’d rather not say quite yet.”

“You repeated yourself. I say gold, silver, diamond and then you’re supposed to break down and say . . .”

“I do have an idea, but I’d rather not say quite yet.”

It had been a humorous exchange, at least to the two of them.

They got the machine loaded and running. It did set up quite a clatter. They closed the door and went up to Jerry’s room.

“Let’s see if the photographs of the caves are any good,” Orvie suggested.

It was soon obvious that the ones from the second room revealed nothing unless you were going for a really great picture of black. Several of the others were not bad. There was a good one of the creek taken directly below a light tube and several that were pretty good of others things – a colorful stalagmite rising from the floor and the small entrance to the second room. The last ones, taken of the entire room from high up on the wall, were only really meaningful if you already knew what you were looking at.

“When we go back I’ll take two specialized cameras with us,” Jerry said all quite serious about it. One can be set to take great pictures in low light conditions and the other is designed for underwater photography. I figure we can see what’s going on down in that pool where the stream stops and perhaps save you from being devoured (eaten) by the monster. It has battery operated, LED, lights.”

“The monster has battery operated, LED, lights? They must come in very handy. I assume he uses the electric eels to recharge them.”

Jerry propelled himself from where he’d been sitting on

the edge of his bed, flat out on top of Orvie who was again lying back on his bed. They tussled for a few minutes before silently declaring it a draw. It had been nice. Clearly Jerry was quite inexperienced in rough housing, but his grin indicated that he had enjoyed it. Orvie had allowed his new friend to pin his wrists back against the bed. (Good old Orvie!)

They lay there next to each other on their backs puffing from the encounter. Orvie spoke first.

“How about we hike up top of this old rock as you refer to it?”

“Sounds good. You’ll need to trade your tennies in for steel toed boots. The ground up there would have your shoes torn to shred in minutes.”

“Great. I am assuming you may have a pair I can borrow.”

Jerry grinned.

“Brown, black, beige, or blue?”

“I was hoping for black and blue to match the bruises you just laid on me.”

Jerry grinned. Orvie had to chuckle to himself. His own entire wardrobe couldn’t be worth more than six dollars, tops, and Jerry’s boots alone had to have cost upwards of a thousand. He just couldn’t understand that kind of . . . well, from his point of view, waste of money that could certainly be put to better use easing the misery in the world.

Jerry opened a set of closet doors.

“You’re welcome to wear anything I got. Before you leave you can pick things out you want and take them with you.”

“I appreciate the offer, but I’ll pass. I prefer to travel very light.”

Orvie smiled. Jerry shrugged. Some things about each other they would probably never understand – and that would be okay.

Orvie donned the loaners and Jerry slipped into what he called his fave’s. They were quickly down the back stairs and out the back door. Jerry pointed up the hill.

There was a low lookout tower at the highest point. It was in disrepair suggesting it was no longer in use. The open, twelve-foot square, observation deck was at the top of a short

stairway – six steps. Above that, held there on upright poles was an enclosed space, with windows on all four sides and a four-sided roof that came to a steep point. A ladder with wide steps provided access to it. Jerry explained about it, pointing, as they began their hazardous climb up the slope.

“That was a lookout station back when the hotel was built – 1920. I’ve been up there. You can see 360 degrees in all directions. Once in a while, low lying clouds cover it up. Back then there wasn’t any way to communicate with the ships that were bringing guests out here so when one was expected somebody would stand up there and keep watch for it to come into view. That way they could be ready to meet them down at the dock. Had horse drawn surreys back then for the guests to ride in up the hill. I’ve seen pictures. Some could seat eight passengers and were pulled by two huge horses.”

Orvie remembered riding in one the first time he visited the Island two years after the hotel had opened. In fact, by the end of that summer he often drove the team and picked up the visitors for his friend, Mr. Windsor, who had built the hotel.

When he had been there, that first time, there had been a wooden walk that zigzagged from the side porch of the hotel up to the tower. It provided easy and rock-free access. In the years since it had obviously been removed – perhaps it had rotted away.

“So,” Jerry went on. “What are we looking for up here – oh, yeah, a hole of some kind for the air to escape from the cave. Isn’t this a long way from Waabishkaa?”

“Yes, it is. My theory is there is some underground passageway that exits up here. To cause a breeze as strong as we experienced down there, that hole has to be really high like a tall chimney.”

“We didn’t see anything like a passage down there.”

“We didn’t see most of what’s down there, Jerry.”

“I guess you’re right. It’s beginning to get exciting.”

“Just beginning?”

“I don’t count a morning spent being terrified out of my claustrophobic skull as exciting.”

Orvie smiled and nodded.

As they came close to the top of the hill, Orvie pointed

up into a treetop that just showed above the rise on to the east.

“See that?”

“Oak, I believe.”

“I mean look at its leaves fluttering and branches swaying.”

“Oh, yeah. None of the trees on this side are moving. There’s no breeze this time of day.”

They topped the rise and stopped to take in the scene. A half dozen other trees were also in motion.

The boys moved down the slope in their direction.

“There,” Jerry said pointing. “See that rock outcropping. The air movement seems to be coming from around there.”

They moved even closer. They could see no hole in the earth and yet there was a definite, steady, upward breeze in that area. They rounded the large, brown rock outcropping and had their answer. There was an opening into a cave, which faced out toward the lake to the east – a direction from which few if any vessels ever approached the island. Its front edge met a sheer cliff that dropped forty feet. There was no way to get in front of it in order to enter it. It was no wonder it had remained unknown.

They continued to peek around the edge of the opening and into the cave from the north. A flashlight didn’t reveal much about the inside other than an irregular channel cut through solid rock. They could see that down about ten feet it turned fairly abruptly south toward the caves they had discovered that morning.

Orvie sniffed the air that was exiting the cave.

“Take a whiff of the air, Jer.”

“No doubt about it. That’s exactly the way the caves smelled.”

“Suppose a person could get down into the caves through this opening?” Jerry asked.

It’s probably technically possible. I’m thinking ladders and ropes and a whole lot more effort than we had to expend going in through Waabishkaa.”

Jerry nodded.

“Did finding the air outlet make it onto your To Do list?”

“Afraid not. What does finding it tell us?”

“One, it explains why the floor and sides of the caves down there are relatively dry – the constant inflow of dry air. Two, for air to be coming out up here there has to be an opening for it to enter the cave. That may mean another entrance somewhere on the island – probably toward the south.”

“Not enough time to return to the caves today,” Orvie said. “We probably need to make a list of what we want to do when we do go back.”

Jerry took out his phone.

“Shoot.”

“Well, determine both the water source for the heated stream and its outlet. The exit has to be from that pool of course. I’m wondering where the water eventually exits the island.”

“I’ve canoed around the backside of the island and I’ve never seen anything like a water flow of any kind. The artesian spring that powers the electrical generator runs off the south end of the island and it’s not warm – ice cold, in fact. If the cave floors are really at lake level like I calculated, you’d think the water would come out right about that level, wouldn’t you?”

“I would. If you’re sure there is not water visibly draining into the lake, then there’s really only one other way to find the outlet.”

“Diving gear?”

“Not unless we’re forced into that. Do you have any way of knowing what the typical temperature of the lake water is around the island this time of year?”

“Of course, I do. For a science project last year, I kept records of the water temperatures once a week, north, south, east and west sides at noon. I have them all recorded. The Coast Guard found out about it and asked for a copy. I have a letter from the head Coast Guarder here in Section 9 thanking me.”

“So, say today’s water temperature on the east side of the island would probably be around . . .”

“. . . 62.”

“If we canoed around the island and found a spot that was, say 80 or 85, could we surmise that might be close to

where the outflow from the heated stream might be entering the lake?”

“You’re really good. I think I can go you one better, or easier, or something. Got a fifteen-minute jog in those legs of yours?”

“I think I do,” Orvie said.

The boy had his attention.

“Then follow me.”

Jerry took off down the east slope and they were soon trotting south on what passed for a beach – a mostly rock shelf at the water’s edge which varied from two to four feet in width. Orvie figured they had passed the spot where the second cave was, but couldn’t be sure, of course.

Presently, Jerry slowed and eventually stopped. He pointed to the lake side of a six-foot-wide ledge of rock that extended ten feet out into the lake.

“My turn to ask you a question,” he said. “What do you see here that seems out of place?”

“I see it right off – moss and algae growing in 60-degree water. Not likely. You’re a genius, Jer. This has to be where the warm water comes out. Is there some way to get the water temperature?”

“Like we did before.”

Jerry walked a few feet out onto the ledge and knelt down, facing north – the mossy side of the stone ledge and the rocks along the bank. He held the thermometer down in the water for thirty seconds. Long before that, Orvie, who had also knelt and put his arm down into the water, had the answer.

“It’s eighty if it’s a summer’s day degree – I know, nothing about that phrase that came after eighty made any sense, but you’re correct.”

Ninety years before it had been considered a clever saying. Times change!

Jerry lifted the thermometer. Eighty-one degrees.”

“How about on the south side of this ledge?” Orvie asked.

They each repeated what they had done on the north side. Their conclusions matched – the water was more appropriately in the low sixties.

“We need to dive here with gear. Can we do that still this afternoon?”

It had been Orvie’s question.

“Sure. Both of us?”

“What about this? We bring two sets of equipment, but plan for you to monitor things from up here. Then, if you’re needed, you’ll have your stuff with you.”

“I can live with that. You know how to use the gear, I suppose.”

“Yes, I do. Learned while searching for sunken treasure off the Florida, Keys about seventy-five years ago.”

Jerry chuckled at the absurdity of his statement. Orvie spent a moment reliving a very exciting summer aboard the Suzanne Marie, a two-masted schooner that sailed out of Key Largo. He still carried a gold coin the captain had given him.

It took an hour to collect the gear and lug it to the moss-covered rock ledge. Orvie decided not to wear a rubber wet suit, figuring the warmer water would not require one. If it were too cold as he went deeper, they’d come back in the morning and he’d suit up.

Orvie was soon ready to slip into the water. Jerry had instructed him in the use of a small underwater camera and had a communication system arranged between Orvie’s mouth piece and the surface by way of a seventy-five-foot connection wire.

Orvie gentled himself into the water. It was warm all the way to his feet. He hoped that continued down for some distance. He wore a sealed light on his forehead and turned it on.

He sank beneath the surface. They tried the phone line knowing Orvie’s voice would be indistinct because of the mouthpiece from the air tank. Jerry could understand him well enough and let him know. He turned head down and moved deeper for several yards, examining the rock surface of the island as he went. Nothing. He continued down for several more yards. Still nothing other than rapidly cooling temperatures.

Finally, there it was. Well, not the ‘it’ he had figured he was looking for but a very interesting ‘it’ nonetheless. It was a huge hole in the side of the otherwise solid bank – another

cave, but that one was under water. He continued to the bottom of the opening and estimated it was a bit over twenty feet tall and at least fifteen feet wide.

He told Jerry what he had found and that he was going in just a few yards to get a better feel for its size, shape and other features. He also let Jerry know that the water was extremely cold after he passed below the top of the opening. He'd not dare stay down very long for fear of hypothermia [a condition in which the body's core temperature drops below that required for normal body functions.]

He swam up toward the top of the water inside the cave. The water was warmer again up there. He thought to himself: 'Hot water rises in cold water so it makes sense it would be warmer near the top'. He continued to move higher and higher in the water. Surprisingly, his head broke the surface. It was a cave, but he didn't believe it was the one they had discovered that morning. He was definitely not in that pool he wanted to explore from inside. It was dark and his light was relatively useless in what appeared to be a large area of darkness.

He submerged and left the cave. Several minutes later his head popped out of the water a few yards north of the rock ledge.

"You okay, Fish Boy?"

"Thought I was, Mole Boy."

"Not sure if moles can swim. Fish Boy will be like your secret identity."

They were still chuckling as Jerry gave Orvie a hand up onto the ledge.

"Can we leave this gear here? I hate to have to tote it all the way back to the Hotel and then all the way back here."

"I take it you intend to come back."

"I hardly got a good look. Need lots more light. I do believe one thing. It is a separate cave from the other two and that the water from the pool in the second cave drains into the one I just visited – really warm water up top."

They hid the gear in a natural depression surrounded by tall grass a few yards up the hill.

"So, how about a swim over in the cove?" Jerry said, thinking he was making a smart aleck sort of remark.

“Great. I’m already soaking wet. You say that water’s not too cold, right?”

“Right. Just sits there heated by the sun all day.”

After another twenty minutes, they were up, over and down the other side.

“Have to leave in a little less than an hour if we want dinner, and let me tell you, you don’t want to miss one of Lexy’s Saturday night dinners.”

As they approached the water, Orvie stopped and pointed some ten yards to their left.

“What in the Sam Hill is that?” he asked.

“Not what I figured I’d ever see on this island, I’ll tell you that,” Jerry said, moving backward a step.

CHAPTER SIX: The End of a Very Busy Day

They had both seen drawings of it, fourteen of them stacked into a pyramid shape – cannonballs. They were mostly hidden by tall grass.

“New ammo?” Jerry asked as they approached the find.

“I’d say used – look at them dirt, grass, filthy.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Somebody’s been collecting the balls that have been fired at the island,” Orvie explained.

“That means they are being saved to be used again, maybe?”

It had come out a question.

“My thought. May be a useful find.”

“How’s that?”

“We will come back tonight and take turns keeping watch to see if somebody comes to collect them. You take some face shots with one of your clever cameras, and we should be well on our way to solving this whole Ghost Ship thing.”

“Why tonight?”

“I doubt if the bad guy or one of his helpers would risk showing up during the day and we don’t want to risk missing whoever it is by not being here tonight.”

Jerry nodded.

“So, we still got time to swim?”

“Can’t see why not. Last one in is a flint lock rifle.”

“A what?”

It had been a holdover from Orvie’s actual childhood

days. When bullets were invented, the old flintlock guns that had to be primed with black powder, soon became obsolete (outdated). The saying was the late 1800s equivalent of, 'Last one in is a rotten egg.'

"An old saying, I read about. I'll have to find something that's more up-to-date."

They enjoyed the time in the water. Orvie was tired from his time in the lake on the other side of the island so kept to easy moves and lots of conversation.

"How long does it take for the rock tumbler to produce something that begins to resemble the finished product?"

"Finished product in two or three days. A general idea of what you have in one."

"So, by tomorrow noon we may be able to see something?"

"Yup. At that time, we'll remove the coarse grit and add a medium powder."

Orvie nodded and moved around a little more. Jerry dove a few times.

"You ever leave this island?" Orvie asked a bit later.

"Seldom. Sometimes I spend a day at Dr. Matthews' university in Chicago. I go with my uncle on business trips. Dr. M. lets me use his library pass. The kids are all older, of course, but girls are girls, you know."

"Sounds like a lonely life for a guy your age."

"I have a slew of Skype friends – like pen pals, but we talk and can see each other on our computers. That's really good. Lots better than Facebook or Twitter. I have different friends for each of my different interests. It's actually pretty cool."

"Good. I'm glad it is. I hope you'll invite me to your Skype wedding with your Skype bride and your Skype best man."

It had been intended as sarcastic, but Jerry ignored that aspect of the remark.

"I'll name my first Skype son after you."

"Better than your first Skype daughter, I suppose. Not sure I'd stick a kid with Orvie for a name, though. People ask me what my name is and I say, Orvie, and they say, 'Or what?'"

It was worth a few giggles. Jerry swam some laps and then they were ready to leave.

Back in Jerry's room they changed into fresh dry clothes – Orvie agreed to borrow a few, but only for the time he was there. They made it downstairs just as Lexy was putting the food on the table – a green salad, pork roast with carrots and little potatoes, sweet potatoes swimming in brown sugar, and peas floating on a sea of butter. There would be fresh apricot pie – double crust – with ice cream for dessert.

They were happily stuffed. It was going on seven by the time they had the dishes done. In another hour, it would be dusk. Orvie figured nobody would show up at the cannon ball site until the late night or early morning hours to avoid detection. He led Jerry outside and down the slope in front of the Hotel.

“Where do think that first cannon ball landed down here?”

“Jerry went directly to the spot. The hole was there, but there was no ball in the bottom.”

“It's what I figured. Soon after the bombardment somebody collects the balls to be used another time. Apparently, he stows them down by the cove to be picked up a day or so later.”

They walked back toward the hotel.

“Tell me more about Dr. Geologist.”

“Dr. Matthews. He's smart, seems well liked by his students, well known in his field. Last year he got a huge grant – and I mean huge-huge – to study precious mineral deposits within the Great Lakes Basin – a really large area up here – larger than England I'm told. Here's a picture of him.”

He pulled up a photo on his phone and held it out for Orvie.

“I had been wondering if he might have found that opening that we found at the rear of White Cave.”

Jerry laughed out loud.

“Yeah. Sure, Dr. two hundred and seventy-five pounds, just slithered through that tiny tunnel – NOT!”

“I see. How about any assistants or favorite students?”

“Got no idea. He's a popular professor. He could probably influence some to help him in secret. Like I said, I

got no idea.”

“You often talk with him when he’s here or when you’re at the university?”

“Yeah. Some, at least. He’s a frustrated actor – early on had hopes of being a big star. That seemed to be buried somewhere along the way. Now, he’s strictly rocks. He always seems interested in the island – how the hotel’s doing, if we still have any permanent residents, upcoming events, just general chit chat things like that.”

“Things that really aren’t very geological in nature.”

“I suppose, yeah, come to think of it. You still have him on your short list of suspects, don’t you?”

“He is my short list until your uncle’s lawyer connects a name with the land offers. Have you heard how that search is coming?”

“No. I will bring it up at breakfast.”

Up in Jerry’s room they filled two backpacks in preparation for the night out at the cove. Jerry loaded cameras and related equipment in one. Orvie took the more mundane (ordinary) supplies – food, pad and pencil, a second phone in case they became separated (at Jerry’s insistence), rope (Orvie always carried rope and twine), his axe, a hammer, a number of flashlights and batteries, and a pair of binoculars for each of them.

With sleeping bags hanging down below the backpacks, they set off for the hillside just above and to the east of the cove. They took some time selecting a spot. It needed to have an unblocked view of the stack of cannonballs as well full view of the lake beyond. That found, they spread the sleeping bags to sit and recline on. Jerry readied his several cameras, setting up the video camera on a low tripod. It was an ideal spot just behind a low rise in the terrain. Sitting up they remained hidden and yet they could peek out and view the areas on which they needed to keep watch.

The plan had been to trade off sleeping and watching every hour. Neither one was ready for sleep even though they had experienced a really strenuous day of moving around – over and under the island. It was becoming a boring stake out. Then, as ten o’clock arrived, so did a faint light perhaps fifty yards out in the lake.

“Ideas?” Orvie asked as they trained binoculars on the spot.

“A light that’s moving slightly up and down. Probably on a boat of some kind. Bobbing. Probably a low boat since there’s no profile showing above the horizon. I’d say dark in color, ideal for the night if you don’t want to be seen.”

“Remind me to ask you for ideas more often. That’s really good. You thinking like a row boat – I don’t hear an outboard motor.”

“Most likely an electric trolling motor. They aren’t very powerful and can’t propel a boat along at much speed, but they are quiet – quieter even, I’m thinking than squeaky oars dipping in and out of the water.”

“I figure if the plan is to remove only fourteen two-pound cannon balls it won’t have to be anything larger than a small row boat, would it?”

Again, it had been Orvie with the question.

“I think you’re right. A canoe, even.”

“A motor-powered canoe?”

“There are what are often called ‘blunt butt’ canoes – only pointed on the front. A motor can be mounted on the rear if it doesn’t weigh very much. A heavy one would swamp it. A narrow vessel that sits high in the water like that could move along relatively fast even with just a small motor.”

“You do know your boat stuff.”

“Got an ‘A’ in ‘Boat Stuff’ just last semester.”

They continued to watch. The light appeared to grow larger as it approached. Soon, there was no doubt about its destination. It entered the small opening into the cove and headed directly to the south-east corner – the exact location of the cannon balls.

Jerry began taking pictures. They could hear the quiet hum of the motor – electric, just like Jerry had predicted. The boat made shore no more than thirty feet from where the boys crouched. The hum stopped. A slightly built man got out and pulled the canoe half its length up on the shore. He walked directly to the pyramid of cannon balls and one at a time he moved them into the craft apparently spreading them the length of the bottom for balance. Fourteen balls, fourteen trips in each direction.

Although there was moonlight, it was difficult to see the man's face full-on because of the angle he walked back and forth and shadows from overhanging trees. Jerry felt sure his low light setting would reveal things their eyes couldn't see.

As quickly as the man had come, he pushed the canoe out into the lake, waded in after it, climbed aboard, started the motor, and turned, heading for the lake. Once in the lake it turned north – the direction from which he had come – and soon slipped into the darkness.

Once it was out of earshot they began talking about they had witnessed.

“You have any ideas about who it was?”

“Unfortunately.”

“What do you mean?”

“I didn't see the face, but did you saw how he walked with the slightest limp?”

“Yes. I did notice that.”

“I only know one guy like that – Buzz, our handyman.”

“Do you think he's capable of planning an operation like this?”

“No way. Good with his hands, but that's as far as it goes with Buzz.”

“Could his services be bought for something like this?”

“Maybe. Like I told you, Uncle Bradford had to remove him from the payroll until things pick up. I wouldn't say he feels any loyalty to the hotel. It was just a job. He's probably hurting for money. That sure might influence him.”

“Let's pack up and get out of here,” Orvie suggested.

“Maybe you should reconsider that,” Jerry said, excitement suddenly in his tone. He was looking out onto the lake.

He pointed to the south west. There it was – the Ghost Ship. It was moving slowly in their direction.

“Keep that video churning,” Orvie said.

“You handle that camera. When you pan it – move it side to side or up and down – move it slowly however much you need to in order to keep the ship in the sight – here. You can move from close up to broad view my turning this little wheel-like button. The view you see in the viewfinder is what you're shooting.”

“Got it.”

“I’ll get some good close-ups tonight,” Jerry said. “I’ll concentrate on those gun ports like you suggested.”

“And the sails. Something about them doesn’t seem right. Can’t put my finger on it.”

As was its usual routine, it sailed in at an angle from the south west, and then turned directly north exposing its long side. The five gun ports opened.”

“Incoming!” Jerry announced, a warning of what he figured was about to take place.

He had been right. The first volley produced three shots aimed in three different directions – south east, directly east toward them, and north east toward the hotel. That night there were seven volleys tossing a total of eighteen cannon balls on shore. Several went well inland, further than before. Typically, no more than six or eight balls had been fired. It seemed the Ghost Ship was stepping up its game.

“I hope those heading north east didn’t catch the hotel,” Jerry said clearly worried.

The ship turned out into the lake and headed south. A nosily boat approached at high speed from the north. It was brightly lit with a siren waling into the night.

“A Coast Guard cutter,” Jerry announced. “Go get ‘em guys!”

The cutter altered its course and was soon closing on the ship. It was at that moment the Ghost Ship disappeared before their eyes. Orvie had kept the camera running the whole time. He hoped he had captured what he was certain he had seen.

The cutter slowed and circled the immediate area several times. Jerry stood and ran along the north side of the cove toward the dock. He waved his flashlight back and forth over his head. The cutter veered west and moved in his direction. Orvie removed the camera from the tripod and followed at a trot.

The cutter pulled close to the dock and turned a spotlight on Jerry.

“Jerry Windsor, here. I’m a buddy of your commander, Jim Benton. My uncle owns the hotel and a big chunk of the island.”

Someone on the ship moved the spotlight aside so Jerry remained well-lit but was no longer blinded. An officer spoke to him.

"I'll pass your regards on to the commander. Afraid we missed it again son. I'll get a report to Mr. Gilmore like we have on other occasions. You're okay, I assume."

"Fine. And, by the way, we'll soon have the bad guys in handcuffs for you. You just wait and see."

The officer saluted and motioned for the cutter to get underway.

"So, on first name basis with the commander of the Coast Guard in this section, are you?"

"Yeah. Section nine. We go waaaay back to when I was just eleven."

He had delivered that in all seriousness.

"Now, can we leave," Orvie said joking, "or do you have some other surprise up your sleeve?"

"I think it's safe to go now. We need to check on Uncle Bradford and Lexy."

It took half an hour to stow their gear and make the trip back up to the Hotel. Everybody was fine. There had been no damage to the hotel. With that good information in hand Orvie led Jerry out the back door toward the handyman's place. Buzz was just walking up the hill approaching his shack from the east. East was the side of the island where the boys had been diving earlier that day.

"Introduce me," Orvie whispered.

"Hey, Buzz, my man. Late night walk, huh?"

"Yup. Late night walk. You too, I see."

"Showing my new friend around. This is Orvie. He'll be around for a while."

Orvie offered his hand and made conversation.

"You see the Ghost Ship tonight?"

"Yup. Hard to miss."

Orvie sensed it was a lie, particularly since he had most likely been on the other side of the island while it had been taking place, but got nothing more. He tried again.

"Are you the one who taught Jerry all about canoes? Not sure I remember all the people's names he's been throwing at me since I've arrived."

“Not me. Not a canoe guy. I prefer solid land.”

Orvie sensed it was a lie, and that having said it, Buzz felt very nervous about whatever was connected to it.

“Been wading, I see. A trapper I suppose,” Orvie said pushing his luck just a bit.

“A trapper. Yup. Minnows for fishing.”

“Well, nice meeting you. Jerry says you can fix anything. I’ll certainly remember that.”

The boys turned around and headed toward the back door. They were soon upstairs.

“Just what was that all about?” Jerry asked.

“The lower foot of his jeans was wet just like they’d be if he had been the man getting in and out of that canoe tonight. I’m a pretty good reader of people. I really doubt if he even has minnow traps and he certainly did not see the ship tonight; he was on the other side of the island when it showed up. He is really a slender man – like the one with the canoe. Did Buzz ever meet Dr. Geology – Dr. Matthews?”

“I’d never made the connection before; we always just call Buzz, Buzz, but his last name is Matthews.”

///

CHAPTER SEVEN: The Cheetos™ Connection

They slept soundly and by seven were up and ready to face another exciting day. After breakfast, they were back in Jerry's room.

Orvie searched through his backpack for the material he had found in the trash can at the Waabishkaa – White – Cave. It was a Cheetos sack and a folded piece of paper from a yellow pad. He smoothed out the paper against his upper leg. One thing became immediately obvious. The person with the orange hands from eating the Cheetos left a great orange fingerprint on the piece of paper.

“You know any Cheetos eaters?”

“Dr. Matthews is a junk food addict as is probably reflected in his size. Can't actually say I've ever seen him downing the orange tiger's favorite food, though. What's on the paper?”

“Haven't looked yet. Let's see.”

They sat together on Orvie's bed. It was mostly a drawing with a few hand-written sentences at the top.

Orvie began reading what was written.

Cave system on Windsor Island. A chain of four caves, only two of which have direct access to the outside.

“Four,” Jerry said. “The fourth one must be the one you think you found that opens out into the lake on the east side.”

Orvie nodded and read on.

Thermally heated stream, unique animal specimens, multiple kinds of valuable rocks and minerals. Estimated value if mined, \$100 million dollars. Estimated value as a

tourist attraction over forty years is between a half billion and a billion dollars.

Jerry gulped. Orvie put the paper on his lap.

"I'd say the person who knows all that just might have motivation to get his hands on this island."

"I'll say! Uncle Bradford already owns a couple of hunks of it."

"A couple?"

"He owns the three lots up here surrounding the hotel – the northern third of the island. Ten years ago, he bought the strip that includes the cave – Waabishkaa. He wanted to make sure it's historical significance was preserved. Somebody was bidding on it to put up a second hotel."

"Historical significance?"

"It was the seat of healing used by some of the greatest Algonquian Medicine Men in the history of the tribe. Something about the cave was thought to have mystical healing powers. The story goes that sick people stayed here for long periods of time, beginning with months of fasting. They'd almost always leave completely cured. Not much more is known about the treatment. It was inhabited by them almost continuously for over three hundred years."

"You can bet they knew about the tunnel and where it led," Orvie said.

He lifted the paper and they studied the drawing – a map as it turned out. It showed White Cave, the crawl through tunnel, and the two caves the boys had explored. It also showed a third large cave on to the south. The wall shared between it and the second, smaller one, looked to be no more than twelve or fifteen feet thick, and the pool seemed to have a waterway connection under the wall and into it. It was the cave that Orvie had been in briefly. On the map, it was nearly as large as the other two combined.

Jerry reached for the paper so he could get a closer look at some of the details. Orvie made an astonishing discovery.

"Hey. The back of your right hand. The rash is gone."

Jerry looked it over.

"Well, I'll be. Never left that soon before. Only it got it on Wednesday. What do you suppose? If it's the dishwasher,

DON'T tell Lexy."

That was worth another mutual smile.

"Besides that, what is the one thing you have done recently that you have never ever in your whole life done before when you had ivy?"

"I don't know – wrestled with you? What are you getting at?"

"You put your hand in that warm stream water. Look here."

Orvie pointed to the side of his own right thumb.

"I've had a little wart there for nearly a hundred years."

Jerry smiled at what he assumed was another exaggeration.

"It's gone. See the small white spot left behind."

"You're saying the water has healing properties."

"I'm raising it as a possibility. Tell me, what would happen to a person who fasted for a long time?"

"They'd lose a lot of weight for one thing. Oh, fast, lose weight, be able to crawl through the tunnel be able to bathe in the warm stream. You really think that's possible?"

"I seldom believe anything's impossible. Some things are far less likely than others, of course. At least so far we have no evidence our bad guy is aware of that.

"Why not just bring the water out of the cave to the ailing people," Jerry asked.

"No idea unless for some reason it is more than just the water. Maybe it's something about the water and the strange smelling air combining in some healing manner. We just don't know. Anyway, we need to stay focused."

"On who is trying to run everybody off the island, you mean."

"That's what I mean. Let's get a look at the pictures we took last night."

Jerry soon had the cameras set up and they began scrolling through them. There were over a hundred still shots and nearly twenty minutes of video.

"Let's look at the video first," Orvie suggested.

"Camera screen or computer screen?"

"As big and distinct as possible. You choose. Clarity is really important."

They had both pulled chairs up to the large computer monitor. When they got as far into it as the place the ship had presented its long side to the shore, Orvie spoke.

“Now, watch the sails.”

“What am I looking for?”

“The water was choppy, like you said it gets at night. The leaves on the trees along the shore are fluttering in a significant way. But look at the sails.”

“I see. They aren’t moving at all,” Jerry said.

They watched for several more minutes and still there was no sail flapping.

“It’s like they are billowed toward the front of the ship at all times – permanently,” Orvie pointed out. “Fast forward to just before the cutter showed up.”

“Well, look at that,” Jerry said. “They are still billowed out toward the front of the ship and by that time it was moving into the wind. Something is fishy and I don’t mean the lake. What do you make of that?”

“The sails are made of some solid material – probably molded out of plastic to resemble fabric sails.”

“And that would be to accomplish what?”

“Give the illusion it is moving under air power when it actually has some other power source. Take us back to where we were just before it started firing,” Orvie said.

He looked more closely.

“Can you enlarge just the ship any more than that?”

“I have some dandy close ups on still shots. Will that help?”

“Let’s take a look.”

“What are we looking for?”

“What kind of surface should an old, unpainted, wooden ship have?”

“Not sure what you’re getting at, drift wood color, what?”

Orvie continued to examine the photos as Jerry slowly scrolled through them.

“Stop at that one. Look there. See that spot of light. A reflection of moonlight off the hull. What dry old wooden ship hull would reflect anything?”

“I see. So, if it’s not wood . . .”

“Again, my guess is plastic. Now, back to the video. Look at the marker buoys just out beyond the dock – I suppose they are there to mark the docking route.”

“Right. Exactly,” Jerry confirmed.

“What are they doing that the ship isn’t?” Orvie asked.

“I see it now. They are bobbing up and down in the waves, but the ship doesn’t seem to be effected in the least. That, I really don’t understand.”

“I don’t either, but I think our answer is down in the fourth cave. I need to get back in there. I’ll need lots more light. What you got in that department?”

“A half dozen water and pressure proof spots. Each one has self-contained rechargeable batteries. Only have a life of about two thousand hours and I’ve probably already used twenty-five - minutes.”

Jerry was going for a joke. Orvie barely acknowledged it.

“I think they may do just fine. I also think we’re getting close to putting the Ghost Ship Fable to rest, my friend.”

“You have it figured out?”

“I didn’t say that. But, I’ll bet by this evening we’ll be really close.”

Orvie went back to reclining on his bed.

“Would you know Dr. Matthews’ handwriting if you saw it?”

“No. I’ve never paid any attention to it.”

“That mean you have seen it?”

“Sure. When I go in and use the library he writes me a note giving me permission to use his pass.”

“And the librarian takes them and files them I suppose.”

“Did at first, but now that I’m something of a regular I can get in on just my good looks and sparkling personality.”

“Would you just happen to have one of this notes laying around someplace?”

“Oh. I suppose that would be helpful. Maybe in the fanny pack I wear when I go into the city.”

He went to still another closet. There were eight doors along one wall that each seemed to lead into a deep closet filled with things that Orvie doubted the kid even knew he had. He soon returned with the pack. He sat on the edge of Orvie’s

bed and began going through it.

“Ticket stubs from the planetarium, a snickers wrapper and, oh, an actual unopened snickers bar.”

He held it out as if offering it to Orvie who declined.

“Here’s a Burger King straw and a magnifying glass and a compass and a pack of Juicy Fruit. Here’s what we’re looking for – one genuine library pass in the good doctor’s handwriting – with his signature.

That got Orvie’s attention and he sat up beside Jerry.

“Let’s compare.”

They sat in silence for a few moments. They looked at each other and nodded. The two documents were definitely from the same hand – a large scrawl, irregular along the base with missing dots over i’s and the cross for t’s floating above the upright stroke.

“So, what does that really tell us?” Jerry asked.

“First, that Dr. M. made the map, which means he has knowledge of the big caves, which means – since he’s obviously way too big to pass through the tunnel – he has a slender accomplice. Assuming he is behind all this, that accomplice would seem to be Buzz, who sports a body build a whole like us – narrow hips and shoulders, although he’s taller by a foot. Wish we had one of Buzz’s fingerprints to compare with our Cheetos print.”

Jerry’s eyes danced.

“Remember, that could be the Cheetos Tiger’s print. He clearly has fingers.”

Orvie reached behind him, grabbed his pillow and pummeled (hit repeatedly) his friend. It was over in a few seconds, but did cause smiles to sprout across two sets of twelve-year-old cheeks.

“Uncle Bradford has prints of all his employees in his file. I think he said it’s a requirement of his insurance or some such thing.”

“Can we gain access to them?”

“Haven’t you learned anything at all about me since you’ve been here? Of course, I can gain access to them. Give me five minutes. You stay here.”

Orvie shrugged and went back to the computer to go through more of the still shots. The more he studied them, the

more he became certain he knew how the disappearance had to be rigged. Proving it might be another thing – another dangerous thing.

Right on time – 5 minutes – Jerry walked back through the door.

“Got great phone pictures of all ten of his finger prints.”

“I should have told you that I’m very sure it’s his right thumb print.”

“Luckily, that just happens to be one of the ten I got. Let me pull it up on the monitor. In fact, let me take a shot of the orange print and we can blow them up side by side.”

Two minutes later the two fingerprints were staring back at the boys from the screen. The orange print came out blurry and smudged when enlarged.

“I can fix that,” Jerry said.

He soon had it re-cast as a black and white print, which was much sharper.

They studied them intently with great focus and concentration for all of three seconds.

“Can’t be any doubt about it,” Jerry said. They are identical.”

“So, Buzz is the Cheetos junkie,” Orvie said. “That really does tie him to Dr. Matthews and to the knowledge about the caves. Can’t understand why he would have put that the map into the Cheetos bag and thrown it away, but maybe that will become clear later.”

“It might have been a mistake,” Jerry suggested. “I lose stuff that way all the time – one thing inside something else.”

“You could be right.”

Orvie had another question.

“Is there any way to find out more about that grant, our Dr. received, like from where and for exactly how much – maybe some progress statement or accounting of how the money is being spent?”

“Let me talk to Alex.”

He picked up his phone.

“Alex?” Orvie asked having to smile at the kid’s efficiency and self-confidence.

“Uncle Bradford’s attorney.”

Jerry sweet talked a secretary for a minute or so –

seemed like they were old buddies – and he was soon on the line with Alex. Jerry spread around the appropriate amount of small talk before getting to the crux (bottom) of the matter. He motioned for the yellow pad and a pencil from Orvie and proceeded to take notes on what he was being told.

“Thanks Uncle Alex. I owe you.”

“Another Uncle?” Orvie asked.

“Strictly unofficial. Close family friend. My godfather actually. Means I have him right here.”

He held up his little finger and grinned.

“So, you seemed to learn something.”

“Mostly just places to go to on the web to find out the kinds of things we need to know. If it’s a government grant it will be public record.”

“Okay, we can do that later on without sunlight. We need to get tracking. Sooner into the new cave again the better. I think I’ll wear a wet suit this time. It really got cold deep in the water inside that cave.”

They had left most of the necessary equipment near the site. Jerry packed the LED spotlights and a few Snickers from his private and apparently never ending stash.

They were soon down the stairs and on their way up and over the hill.

“How long did I use that air tank before?”

“Fifteen minutes, tops.”

“That’s about half of the supply, then right?”

“About. If I were you I’d wear both of them today. Start with the one you’ve used from and then switch to the other if you need it. Kids our size can usually make a full tank last closer to 40 minutes so there may be almost a half hour left.”

“It’s not my intention to be down there that long. What camera shall I use?”

“I’m going to suggest you use the cell phone I gave you. Can’t get any better resolution under water and it’s compact and it has a feature that will stream what you’re shooting to my phone in real time and then periodically erase your card so you can keep shooting. I have mine set to forward anything I receive directly to my computer. That way I can keep close track of your every move down there.”

“Sounds good. I’m sort of familiar with that technology.

Came upon it a few months in another situation. Probably saved my life, in fact.”

“That’s not what I want to hear – needing to have your life saved.”

“Just making conversation. Sorry. One question. Will this phone really transmit signals through the water and the rock walls of the cave?”

“No. But I’m thinking the light wells may provide the access we need. The phone will keep trying until it finds a way out. Nothing for you to even have to think about.”

At that point Orvie welcomed anything he didn’t need to be thinking about.

Twenty minutes later they were at the rock shelf and had uncovered the equipment. Orvie got into the wet suit, donned the air tanks and fins and made sure he knew how to operate the phone/camera.

“You’re really sure this phone is waterproof at depths of thirty or so feet?”

“Absolutely. Uncle Alex doesn’t spring for anything but the best.”

Orvie held up his little finger. Jerry grinned and nodded.

///

CHAPTER EIGHT: Would the Boys Live to Be Teenagers?

Orvie adjusted his mask and slipped into the water. He carried the spotlights in two plastic sacks fastened at the sides of his belt. He also carried a six-inch knife in a scabbard, an axe slipped through his belt, and a twenty five foot coil of rope. Since he knew where he was going he wasted no time entering the cave.

He was able to make more accurate estimates of size. The top of the mouth of the cave was no more than twelve feet below the surface of the lake. It was something less than twenty feet wide and nearly thirty feet from top to bottom. How such a huge opening could have remained undiscovered for so long puzzled him. However, the vast majority of the activity on the island was on the other side where there were several nice beeches and more natural docking sites. The east side, where the boys were, dropped off near the base of the hills and continued straight down for as far as Orvie had ventured. There was virtually nothing there to attract the attention of middle-aged and senior-aged tourists and hotel guests.

He paused at the cave entrance to prepare several spot lights. They produced a huge amount of light for their size – about four inches across the square lens in front and two inches deep. He slipped the phone into a shallow pocket on the chest of his wet suit. It allowed the lens of the camera to remain open to the world. With the streaming video between them, the boys had decided the line phone set up wasn't necessary – assuming, of course, that the video actually streamed. He began with some footage right at the

entrance.

A few minutes later he moved on inside and soon had his head above the water line inside the cave. The air was stale and felt heavy in his lungs, but sustained him very well. He slid the mask down around his neck. There was some something of great bulk just ahead in the water, but the darkness kept it from easy view. Perhaps it was nothing more than a rock formation.

He swam to a rock ledge a few yards to his right and set up three of the spot lights, aimed in a spread configuration back across the water. Suddenly, the mystery of the Ghost Ship became far less mysterious.

He received an incoming text from Jerry.

“Very poor transmission after you entered the water. If you’re in the cave, find a hole in the roof.”

Orvie noted it, but had things to do.

Ahead of him was a vessel – a very strange vessel. It was actually a vessel on top of another vessel – a huge plastic pirate ship on top of a mini-submarine. Suddenly it all fell into place. It didn’t disappear. It submerged out of sight. It had been one of Orvie’s hypotheses, but he hadn’t been able to take the idea as far as the piggy back ride on a sub.

The pirate ship was collapsed like a miniature model ship ready to slip in through the mouth in a wine bottle before it was erected in there ready to amaze all viewers. Orvie figured that was how it traveled under water to cut down resistance, which would still be significant. When it surfaced the masts and such were somehow pulled up into an erect position. The process of collapsing it as it sailed off toward the horizon would provide the perfect illusion of disappearing. Its final submersion as people on shore looked at the back of the sub would cap off the illusion.

He swam toward the front of the contraption. The little sub was no more than twenty feet long and eight or so wide and high. The Pirate Ship extended ten feet out in front and ten feet back behind the sub for a total length of only forty feet. It had appeared larger than that when he had viewed it on the lake. The strange combo looked to make a very unstable craft. Although part of why it only came out on moonlight nights was certainly so it could be seen, that also meant there

would be generally clear weather and calm water. Rough water would certainly pose problems of stability. He figured that as little as a twenty-five mile an hour wind might topple the pirate ship over into the water, forcing the sub onto its side – not the ideal way to navigate underwater.

As he approached the front of the sub, he detected a stream of filtered light entering from above. Another ‘well’ as Jerry had dubbed them. Almost immediately a text arrived.

‘Great signal. Don’t move.’

Orvie smiled wondering how he was supposed to explore the area without moving. Apparently, the hole in the roof was allowing transmission. He did take time to sweep pictures of the ships and the cave right to left from that spot.

The sub lay in the water mostly submerged – only the top two feet above the water line. Near the top on the right side, which was facing him, he saw what he assumed was the way in and out – a round portal with a metal ‘door’ that had a steel wheel – looked like an iron steering wheel – which he assumed was used in opening and closing it from the outside. There were running lights fore and aft and small windows – one across the front and one on each side of the rear. The interior was dark.

The top foot of the water there in the cave was warmer than that below it. He turned his attention away from the ship(s) to the area behind him (north) where, according to the ‘Cheetos Map’, there should be some connecting water way to the pool in the second cave he and Jerry had discovered earlier.

After only a few minutes of investigation it was clear that was not a stream flowing on the surface of the rock ledge. At that point the relatively flat rock floor extended some forty feet out in front of him – north toward the wall separating it from second cave. If the stream were not on the surface, then it had to be a subterranean (underground) stream under the floor – the ledge.

He repositioned his mask and breathing tube and took one of the spotlights with him as he sunk below the surface of the water in search of an opening. During his hundred and twenty-five years of living and learning, he had developed good instincts and his instinct said the waterway had to be just

below him. It was.

He first lit the area inside with his light. It was irregular in width and height averaging perhaps three feet in both dimensions. There might be a problem, however because in about ten feet it seemed to narrow considerably. He hoped that only amounted to a few feet and then widened out again. He entered and moved on inside. It was, of course, filled with water from top to bottom and he had to be cautious so his head and air tanks did not scrape against the rock. One collision and his breathing apparatus could be destroyed – good-bye Orvie.

It was a long, relatively straight, rock tube. He managed to slip through the narrow point finding that it only remained that way for a few inches. He swam on. After what he estimated had been almost forty feet, the channel disappeared around him and he assumed he had at last entered the pool in the second cave. He cautiously moved up in the water. He had been right. When he surfaced that's where he found himself. He pulled himself up on the ledge that surrounded the pool and moved to a position under one of the light wells. He stood in one spot and turned around completely allowing his camera to get a 360-degree panoramic (wide view) shot.

The text he was hoping for arrived.

'Awesome!!!!!!!!!!!!'

Orvie smiled. Nine exclamation marks just might be the all-time record awesome ever delivered.

The gauge on his first tank showed he was down to what he figured was about five-minutes' worth of air. To make maneuvering easier he removed that tank and left it on the ledge. They could come back later and pick it up.

He slid back into the pool, enjoying the warmth, and returned through the warm water in the tunnel back to the southern cave using the second air tank. The blast of cold water that greeted him there was momentarily unpleasant, but he shook it off. He surfaced and collected the lights before submerging a final time to make his way out of the cave and up to the surface.

"Didn't like all those blackout periods," were Jerry's first words as Orvie's head appeared above the surface."

“I apologize for the thick rock walls. I’m sure they are terribly sorry they interfered with your emotional comfort.”

“Lots of great pictures, really.”

Orvie lifted his tank up to Jerry, who presently offered him a hand up out of the lake. He was soon out of the wetsuit and back into his cutoffs. They talked as they stowed the equipment back into its hiding place in the tall grass.

“I assume you plan another dive since we’re hiding the tanks and stuff.”

“You assume right. The imp (little troublemaker) in me has a small surprise planned for the ghost guys.”

He shivered.

“What time is it?”

“Won’t you ever learn to look at your own phone for the time?”

Orvie was still amazed that a phone could be used for anything but having static filled conversations with somebody no further away than across town.

“Going on ten.”

“What do you say we go back to your place and look through this video? I can fill you in on the blank spots so we’re both up to speed on everything. I also want to take a look at what’s happening in the rock tumbler.”

“Easier to do that in reverse order – basement when we get there and then upstairs,” Jerry suggested.

Reverse order it was. Jerry tuned off the tumbler, opened the little door and reached in, picking up several of the rocks. He held them out for Orvie to inspect. He went right for the one that had clearly already been affected the most, indicating it was the softest. Its edges had rounded into an almost perfect oval about an inch long. Its surface, though not yet polished, shone with a dark red luster that seemed to change in hue as it was moved about, almost as if it possessed some inner light source.

“Looks like you got something special there. Do you know what it is?”

“An opal – a big beautiful, nearly pure specimen of a red fire opal. This one will bring somewhere between one and two thousand dollars depending on its eventual brightness, clarity, and such. It is a very rare find here in the United

States. Almost all of these types are from Australia.”

“And you know that from your reading or because you worked the Australian opal mines back in 1949?”

He grinned. Orvie gave him a response.

“It was the Nevada mines here in the USA and more like 1956 I’d say.”

They exchanged smiles. (The reader will understand the private nature of Orvie’s comment.)

“So, opals are the minerals that were referred to on that piece of yellow paper?”

“At least opals. Who knows what else? Since the two caves that we were in are both beneath the section your uncle bought a few years back he could become a very wealthy man.”

“He’s already a wealthy man, but he could care less about it. He says being healthy, happy and helpful are the only things that really matter in life. He says that unfortunately often until you have lots of stuff you can’t understand how useless most of it is. I’m thinking that revelation is still ahead of me because I can’t really understand it yet.”

“You will, in time, I’m quite sure of that.”

They rearranged the grit, returned the stones to the tumbler and turned it on.

“It does produce an annoying, grating, noise, doesn’t it,” Orvie said.

“Oh yeah! If I were going to torture somebody, I’d include that some way.”

“Well then, I hope I never get on your, “To Torture List”.

Upstairs they viewed the video on the bigger screen of the computer monitor. In all, there turned out to be less than ten minutes of useable picture, but what there was, was stupendous (Jerry’s word – means ‘astounding’).

“Isn’t it about time to begin sharing this information with Uncle Bradford?” Jerry asked.

“Soon. We still need to do a few things that I’m quite sure he wouldn’t allow if he knew about them ahead of time.”

“That’s reassuring. On a scale from 1, being only slightly perilous, to 10, being absolutely and entirely perilous, just where will these still-need-to-be-done- activities fall?”

Orvie offered his wonderful grin.

“Somewhere between 12 and 14 I’d say.”

“I should probably go on line to that legal site and make out my will before we go any further,” Jerry said, hardly joking.

“I’ll take the risks. You’ll be the lookout. You’re risk level will seldom exceed, oh, maybe 11.”

Orvie thought it was hilarious. Jerry smiled, but his reaction was considerably more restrained.

“We need to make some prints of several frames – the side view that shows the top ship attached to sub, and the detail of how the top ship is collapsed.”

“What will we do with them?”

“Put one in an envelope and send it to your Coast Guard buddy with a short explanation. The other set will go in another envelope to be mailed to your Uncle. Mail goes and comes just once a week with Big Mike, right.”

“Wrong. It also leaves on Monday in Percival Artimin’s pontoon plane.”

“You’re pulling my leg, right? Percival Artimin?”

“That’s his name. A retired bush pilot who spent fifty years flying cargo and people around Alaska. Handles UPS and Fed-X packages out here and takes out any early-week mail.

“So, we could get the envelopes out tomorrow?”

‘Yup. I don’t understand the plan. Why the mail thing?’

“We need to get those folks the information by Tuesday or Wednesday, but not before. In this case hard copy seems best. Mail seems the ideal way to do it.”

“Okay. I see. So, it appears you don’t expect us to be available to pass the information along in person.”

Suddenly Jerry wondered just what he had gotten himself into: opals worth millions, healing waters, secret caves, bad guys with a submarine, a collapsible pirate ship, regular cannon ball invasions coming ever closer to his home, and a boy who claims to be extremely cautious, but who continually risks their well-being – if not their lives.

He really had hoped to live long enough to experience life as a teenager.

///

CHAPTER NINE: Good Stuff/Bad Stuff

“I’ll need some tools this afternoon,” Orvie announced as they arrived back in Jerry’s room after lunch.

“Like what?”

“A huge adjustable wrench – like a monkey wrench or a lock wrench.”

“How about an adjustable slip nut wrench.”

“Don’t know the term. I’m not sure the size of the nut I’ll need to unfasten, but I’m guessing somewhere between four and six inches.”

“Got you covered.”

“And a pipe about three or feet long into which the handle of the wrench will fit.”

“To increase the leverage, I assume.”

“Right. The longer the handle the easier it is to turn a wrench. Better go for the four-footer.”

“I’ll also need a compact, small toothed saw.”

“Got it.”

“Then, one heavy duty, underwater, jack hammer.”

Jerry looked puzzled before his face quickly cleared.

“Gotcha! Just kidding, but I think I had you going there for a few seconds.”

“I must admit you did. All the stuff you need is down in the shop in the basement. I assume you’re planning a bit of sabotage.”

“A little. It should delay any more damaging attacks if that’s where their recent escalation (rise in intensity) is headed.”

By one thirty they were back at the warm water slab at the bottom of the hill on the east side of the island. Again, Orvie opted to wear the wet suit for warmth. The new tank still held more than enough air for a prolonged stay underwater if that's what it would take. They decided Orvie should take the phone along, but it would only be used in an emergency. Jerry chose not to think about what that could be.

Entry into the cave was becoming routine for Orvie. He went right to work, swimming up to the propeller first, which sat eight or more feet under water. It was about thirty inches in diameter and consisted of three blades. The two nuts – one after the other to lock them in place – that held it to the drive shaft were six-inch hex nuts. He clamped the wrench in place on the first nut and tried to move it without using the pipe extension. Nothing! He slipped the end of the iron pipe over the wrench handle and laid all of his weight far out on the end. He had made one miscalculation. In the water, he didn't weigh anything so his weight had no effect.

'Plan B', he thought.

He had soon positioned himself so one foot was against the drive shaft between the hull and the propeller. With the wrench in a vertical (upright) position he could push against the shaft with his legs and pull on the pipe. He was actually surprised how easily it turned. It took several minutes to remove each of the two nuts. He dropped them out of sight. He wedged the pipe between the propeller and the hull and soon had it loose. With some more effort from directly behind and holding the propeller against his chest – looking a lot like he was dancing with a bear – he was able to dislodge it from the shaft and it sunk to the bottom of the cave. That sub would not be going anywhere soon.

Then, in what he thought was a sudden, out of the blue, stroke of genius, he tightened the wrench around the threads at the end of the drive shaft onto which the nuts had been screwed. He moved the wrench back and forth, retightening it several times. It flattened the threads so nuts could no longer be spun onto it. That probably increased the time delay by a huge amount – the drive shaft would have to be replaced.

He then moved up to the surface of the water and pulled down his mask. There was a metal ladder attached to

the hull. It led up to and then above the round entrance hatch. Orvie climbed it and managed to gain access to the top of the sub. From there he pulled himself up onto the deck of the pirate ship and began using the saw to cut the thick ropes – those that held the masts in place and those that were used to pull the upper section of the ship into an erect position.

He had severed more than a dozen before his arm gave out. He had hoped to chop down a mast or two, but they were metal. So much for that!

Feeling very good about his accomplishments he re-entered the water and prepared to leave the cave and surface. A few minutes later he was back at the mossy ledge anticipating a dozen rapid fire questions from Jerry. However, there was no Jerry. There was Jerry's back pack, but there was no Jerry.

Orvie's first instinct was to call out for him, but he caught himself and decided against that in case something had gone badly wrong. And, Jerry would not have left his post unless something really had gone badly wrong.

'What have I gotten him into?' he wondered to himself. 'With half a billion dollars or more at stake, the bad guys have plenty of motivation to become really bad guys.'

He submerged and made his way underwater thirty yards or so to the north where he figured he could surface with less chance of being seen if there were prying eyes somewhere up on the hillside. With that soon accomplished, he removed his tank and goggles and dragged them with him a few yards up the hill into the brush and trees. Then, he began edging himself back toward the ledge. He kept a good lookout in all directions for anything that seemed out of the ordinary. He saw nothing.

Eventually, back at the bank by the ledge he searched for some indication of what happened. He picked up the back pack. It was then he spied Jerry's phone. It may have been that he had slipped it under there for some reason. Orvie picked it up. There was a text message displayed, but it had not been sent. "Il bdgs tkng jw – phps fr rnsn."

Orvie set it down and began thinking about what the letters might mean. For one thing, whatever had happened, had taken place in a hurry because he hadn't even had time to

press a button and send the message.

Orvie fought his way out of the wet suit – he hated those skin-tight uniforms. They reminded him of big, binding, plastic socks, and he'd given up socks a hundred and thirteen years earlier – except for weddings and funerals where he figured they were required.

He sat back against a tree trunk and stared at the message. He noticed that no vowels were included. That suggested a way of decoding it. Try adding in vowels every so often until words appeared.

The 'll' at the beginning didn't seem to fit that pattern so he moved on. As he stared at 'bdgs' it came to him out of the blue – badguys, for some reason written as one word. He figured the 'ng' was probably part of 'ing'. The first vowel he tried to fit in between the 't' and the 'k' was, of course, 'a' – 'taking' jumped out at him. The next was easy – what had been taken? 'JW' or Jerry Windsor.

"So, something badguys taking Jerry Windsor."

He skipped the 'phps' because nothing came to him and moved on to 'fr'. There were limited possibilities – far, fir, for, fur. Fir and fur seemed unlikely. In the last word, he again began trying an 'a' and put it between the 'r' and 'n' – ransm. It said itself when pronounced – ransom.

'Okay, something badguys taking Jerry Windsor far/for something ransom.'

The 'phps' suddenly became 'perhaps'. With the rest of it decoded the first two letters seemed obvious, Roman Numeral II.

"So, 'Two badguys taking Jerry Windor – perhaps for ransom."

There was no way to keep it from Bradford any longer. It became a choice between immediately finding Jerry's uncle or immediately trying to find a trail to follow before it might grow cold.

He walked the bank both north and south, but found nothing. At that point, the 'shore' amounted to only three or so feet of a solid rock slab. He found no footprints or other telltale signs of three people walking in either direction – or had he?

He had seen something as he walked north. He bent

low as he retraced his steps. There it was, a small blue thread – jean thread. He moved forward another dozen or so feet. A second short blue thread. Jerry was loosening threads from the tattered bottom of his unhemmed cutoffs and dropping them to leave a trail.

It might not tell Orvie anything other the general direction they were heading because if they took off up the hill the possibility of finding threads among the brush and trees and leaves seemed relatively small. Unfortunately, that happened almost immediately. There were no more threads for the next fifteen yards. He had missed their turn off. He thought, as he made his way back up the hill toward the hotel.

One thing that came to Orvie's mind was texting the information to Bradford so he could continue his search in the four hours of remaining daylight. In the process, he looked at his own phone for the first time. He had a message waiting for him. It was a text message – from Jerry – one Orvie had missed. It had been sent just before the one that was 'stuck' in his phone. It had not been coded. The message was clear.

"Dr. Geology approaching with Buzz. May be trouble. Doc is not scheduled to be out here until next month."

Orvie had both phones, which he had been carrying – one in each hip pocket. Little good they would do them at that point. If the bad guys were smart they would get Jerry off the Island in a hurry. The kid knew the island better than anybody in the universe. If he saw a good chance to make a break for it, he'd be gone. Doc was so large he couldn't win a foot race if he were driving a pickup and with his bad leg, Buzz would be no match for a twelve-year-old boy. Orvie knew Jerry would know all of that. Doc would, also, however and a man as smart as he would surely take precautions – rope, handcuffs, gun, something.

When Orvie entered the back door, he went immediately into the kitchen. As he had hoped, Lexy was there. It appeared she had been crying. For the moment Orvie would have to ignore that.

"Where will I find Mr. Gillmore?"

"In his study."

She walked to Orvie and put her hands on his shoulders.

“Jerry has been kidnapped. A note was just attached to the front door with a dagger. Mr. Gillmore is on the phone with the authorities. I knew this whole mess was going to blow up in our faces. Poor Jerry.”

“Orvie’s first thought was, ‘more likely, poor bad guys,’ but he didn’t voice it.

“I’ll be back. Things will be okay.”

He left the kitchen heading toward the front of the hotel. It hit him that at that point since they already knew of the new problem he probably didn’t need to reveal most of what he knew. None of it appeared like it would be of any help in finding Jerry. He entered the den – the door was open. Bradford was still on the phone. He motioned Orvie to him and pulled him close, his big arm around the boy’s shoulders.

Orvie remained right there, listening to one side of the conversation. It was apparently with the Coast Guard and the subject was the abduction. Bradford put the other person on hold.

“Orvie, I assume Jerry is not with you.”

“No, sir. I was diving over on the east side and when I came up he wasn’t there.”

It had been the truth and gave whoever the investigative authority was some place to begin.

Bradford returned to the conversation. It was soon over and he hung up.

“I guess you got the message – Jerry has apparently been kidnapped. Here’s the note.”

He pointed to his desk.

It had been printed rather than written in cursive, so Orvie had no way of knowing if it had been the handy work of Dr. Matthews.

“No ransom demand yet, but the note says to be looking for it. I suppose it’s related to the land grab, but I can’t figure it out. Anybody forcing me to sell by threatening my nephew would be making it pretty obvious who it was.”

“Unless they had absolute confidence that the series of holding companies could never be traced.”

“You know about them?”

“Jerry and I have done a little research, yes. I’ll say one thing, it smacks of rank amateurs.”

“What makes you say that?”

“A daylight abduction on a tiny island with no way of escape except by boat and any boat leaving the island would be stopped before it could get anywhere near the mainland. They have to still be here and there are only so many places they could hide.”

“Like?” Bradford asked, beginning to wonder if he were speaking to a kid or an experienced super sleuth.

“The abandoned homes on the south end of the island come to mind. Any boats left behind, either any still moored in the lake or lifted out onto land. If the Ghost Ship appears tonight they might have some way of hooking up with it in order to leave the island.”

“The Coast Guard is sending a cutter to stand by. We slip between law enforcement jurisdictions out here since we’re the only island in the southern half of Lake Michigan. The lore is that there are no islands down here. This is the first time in my life that I can remember us ever needing anything like a policeman. It has always been fully crime free.”

“Jerry and I have a very well founded theory that encompasses most of what has been going on out here: the ghost ship and the land grab. I’m thinking the holding companies may be so deeply buried that they’ll never be found by traditional legal means, but I believe we can start from the other end – just find the bad guy and it should all unravel.”

“I declare you can’t be a kid.”

“I should tell you that Jerry and I have been talking with Alex, so much of what I just rattled off is probably more him speaking than me.”

“I see. Well, what do you suspect?”

“Oh, it’s a good deal more than suspicion – we can prove much of it. We are certain the main bad guy is Dr. Matthews, the geologist, and, sadly, his on-island henchman is Buzz. I can produce evidence to that effect. Problem is we can’t yet attach the bad doctor to the land sales or the ghost ship.”

“So, you’re saying you have nothing.”

“But we are close. I found the ghost ship and can

explain most everything about how it operates. Jerry was on the trail of finding who owns it and who's funding the whole operation. There are two sides to the motivation. This island is the massive mantle of three very large caves and at least two of them are crawling with opals – not just lowly commercial grade, but top of the line opals. I have one polishing in Lexy's tumbler as we speak.

"We know of two estimates of worth worked out by people who should know about such things: The mining of the gems alone could be worth many, many millions. Using the caves as a central attraction for a tourist center is estimated to be worth a minimum of half billion dollars over the next forty or so years."

"Promise me one thing, Orvie; not a word of those things to anybody – the caves, the opals, none of it. It stays among the three of us: you, Jerry, and me. Do I have your word on that?"

"Absolutely, but what will keep the bad guys from blabbing it around?"

"That will be your next assignment. If you've figured all these things out, I'm sure that will be a piece of cake."

"Okay. I'll get working on it. Sounds like we need to keep law enforcement types at arm's length for a while, agreed?"

"Agreed."

"May I ask you one very personal question?" Orvie asked. "I understand that my asking does not require you to answer."

"That seems like a fair arrangement. Ask away."

"Your ring. The setting is a red fire opal. You have known all along about the caves and the vast wealth you are sitting on haven't you?"

"I don't know who you are, Orvie, and I will never ask, but you are an exceptional person. I assume if my answer were, 'yes I've known,' I could count on you to again keep that among the three of us."

Smile met smile. Hand met hand for a solemn shake. The deal was sealed and the secret would be forever safe.

"None of that is as important as finding my nephew and having him returned safely."

“I certainly agree. One thing I should probably pass on to you at this point,” Orvie began, “the ghost ship is at least temporary incapacitated (disabled). You need not be concerned about further bombardments for some time. By the time it could again be seaworthy, this whole thing will be over.”

“This ‘thing’,” Bradford said.”

“My first choice was, ‘adventure’, but I thought you might frown on the positive connotation (meaning) of that considering the current state of events.”

///

CHAPTER TEN: Orvie Solos

Orvie needed to check on Jerry's research into the status of Dr. Matthews' grant. He kept it on his computer and it was password protected. Orvie tried several until he found the right one – Cheetosjunk. It had clearly been established prior to some of their later discoveries.

He read down the categories Jerry had established. One called, 'Grant Status' caught his eye. He opened the file and quickly moved down the entries. It was the last one that caught his eye – Grant Withdrawn. He read the summary his friend had written.

Due to inconsistencies and unverifiable use of funds, the grant has been suspended pending further verification of purchases. It had been a two-million-dollar grant. There seemed to be two expenses that had brought the budget into question: one million for transportation (about the cost of the little sub, Orvie figured.) and another one hundred thousand dollars for miniature mock-ups (sounded a lot like the plastic Ghost Ship to him).

There were a series of four payments for the first entry to a firm indicated by the initials: U. V. inc. There were also four payments to: P. M. inc. It took some doing, but eventually Orvie found two businesses that seemed to qualify: U. V. inc could have been Unique Vessels, incorporated – the sub was one of their specialties. P. M. inc. he figured could be a company he found in Chicago named Plastic Models, incorporated. Their website boasted no special project was too large or small. He sent Alex a text message asking him to

see if Dr. Matthews or anyone connected to the grant had done business with those companies.

With those things accomplished, he set out to search for Jerry. He had several ideas. He borrowed the truck and was soon at the far southern tip of the island. On his way, he passed several mansions that were set back into beautiful settings with broad sand beaches that unfolded down to the lake. His initial plan was to search each of those six structures.

Then he remembered – ‘the denim threads’. He was sure Jerry would have continued leaving those clues for as long as he could. So, rather than take the time to complete full searches, he decided to examine the areas around the entrances to those buildings first. If he found something, it would be a huge time saver. If not, of course, he would have lost a lot of time moving from place to place only to have to go back and begin searching all over again.

The first home was a sprawling one floor, native stone, house with lots of windows and a roof that slanted severely from very high in front to low in the rear. There were six outside doors. None of them showed any trace of what he was searching for. He drove to the next place north. It was a repeat of the first place. The third gave up no clues either.

He repeated that search at each house, but found nothing at any of them. It had seemed like such a good idea, too. The sun was setting over Chicago, across the lake to the west. Darkness began to creep across the island. If Orvie had been one to panic – which he wasn’t – he would have begun panicking, right there and then.

The island was covered in trees and bushes. If they were keeping Jerry outside, there would be a gazillion spots into which they could disappear. There was one place that hadn’t come to mind before – Buzz’s shack. He drove back to the hotel and parked in the rear near the loading dock. What sun was still visible shone directly in his eyes as he moved toward the shack. There were no lights on inside. There was no smoke coming from the chimney, which Orvie had observed had been the usual case by that time of evening. Once the sun was down, a chill always set in.

With due caution, he peeked into the nearest of the

three windows. It was a single room. A cast iron, wood burning stove sat in the center of it all at the opposite end. There was a cot off to the left and a table with three chairs to the right. A sink and small cupboard occupied the right side of the far wall and an open closet to the left of the stove. There was, however, no Buzz and no Jerry.

He lit his flashlight and searched the ground by the only door, which was on the south side. Jerry had been there! Three threads led from the door back along the hillside. The question was, had he left them as he was coming or going? Either could have been true.

Orvie continued south in the direction the thread trail seemed to be headed – if the threads had, in fact, been left after visiting the shack. He would proceed on that assumption. He soon lost any trail there might have been among the bushes and debris on the ground.

What was in that direction? Waabishkaa Cave, of course!

He picked up his pace. With a bed of dead leaves and pine needles covering the ground cushioning his steps, he made very little noise even at a trot. Still, it was a good fifteen-minute trek. As he approached it, he slowed. When it came into sight, he stopped and crouched, wishing he had changed into jeans. The ground got moist at night and the air was downright chilly. He focused on the opening to the cave. There was no noticeable movement. No light. No shadows playing against the walls. It certainly appeared to be empty. He hoped Mortimer the friendly dog was not in the area ready to lope us and disclose where he was.

He trained his binoculars on the ground leading up to the cave not knowing if they would really help magnify things at such close range. They did. Not only that, they magnified something very important, several short, blue, threads. Jerry had been there as well.

Several questions came to mind: Had he been forced there by the bad guys? Had he gotten away and left them as clues anyway? Would Orvie find him huddled inside if he just moved on ahead and looked? Had he torn so many threads off his cutoffs that he was moving around the island in his birthday suit? [Just kidding!]

Suddenly a faint light came on inside the cave. Its source seemed to be far back toward the rear. Although he had not considered it before, he imagined the air back there might be at least somewhat warmer at night than the outside air – with some of the warmer cave air exiting through the low tunnel. He wasn't sure how that entered the equation, but tucked it away as a potentially useful piece of data.

He inched forward hoping to find the source of the light. He did. Well back into the cave on the floor sat a large figure – Dr. Matthews, he figured. He was facing the south wall so wouldn't see Orvie, unless he turned or moved. Beside him was a flame lit lantern, set to burn with a low flame. Orvie could see nobody else.

He risked moving even closer to a point more directly in front of the cave hoping to be able to see deeper into it. He could. The lantern provided just enough light to illuminate the severe, declining angle of the ceiling back there as it lowered and narrowed and formed a funnel-like structure leading into the tunnel. There was no one else in the cave. Matthews sat on the floor with his legs curled beneath him, drinking something from a can – beer from the color of the label – eating chips, and chain smoking cigarettes.

'Atta boy, doc. Drink, smoke, and overeat. Your days on this earth are certainly numbered.' Momentarily, it seemed humorous that a geologist was there sitting inside a rock. He let it pass.

So, if Jerry and Buzz were both gone, and the threads suggested Jerry had been there, where were the two of them? Matthews, of course, couldn't have fit into the tunnel if a bulldozer had widened it for him. The most plausible (believable) answer involved the two of them crawling back into or through the tunnel. Orvie wasn't sure how that would play out. It certainly would have hidden Jerry in a place Matthews believed nobody else knew about.

Since Bradford had pledged Orvie to secrecy regarding the caves, he couldn't suggest that a squad of narrow shouldered Coast Guardsmen, crawl to the rescue. It was all going to be placed on his own narrow shoulders – so to speak.

Several possible plans washed across his mind. He could find a three-foot-long hunk of a tree limb, rush doc and

knock him silly. That probably should not be plan 'A' – the man might well have a hand gun and who knew how thick his skull may have been. He could go back to the warm water ledge on the east side, re-enter the third cave, and make his way up to the inside opening of the tunnel from White Cave. Even if he managed to remove Jerry, there would remain the problem of getting him back through the water with only one air tank available. Plan 'B' seemed to offer no better chance of success.

Other questions arose in Orvie's mind.

How had Dr. M. returned to the island without being detected? Perhaps in the dark of the night before, Buzz had canoed out to meet a ship standing some distance off shore, picked him up, and returned him to the island. That seemed like the most reasonable answer, given that was the only really silent form of water transportation he had found on the island. That also brought to mind the question of where Buzz hid the canoe. The only part of the island Orvie had not really examined was the far northern end – the shore area below the side of the hotel.

His thoughts were becoming scattered. His first priority had to be Jerry. With the amount of beer Doc was consuming, Orvie figured the man would soon have to find a place to relieve his bladder. That might give him a window of opportunity to go up and at least look into the low tunnel and see if Jerry were there. He'd have to count on the man having a very large bladder to give him the time necessary to do that. It would be risky.

In just a few minutes, Orvie's prediction came about. Dr. M. struggled to his feet. Orvie flattened himself out in the underbrush really, really, hoping the man chose some other spot to take care of his business. He did; quite a distance down the slope actually.

Immediately, Orvie made his move. Since the tunnel made a hard right he understood that he had to squirm his way at least inside it that far to see anything worthwhile. He hurried on to the spot where he could see into the turn into the final leg of the tunnel. He was met by an unexpected sight. The well-worn soles of two men's sized work boots, attached to two men's sized feet and legs.

Orvie poked at the right foot. There was no response. He grasped the boot and turned it back and forth. There was no response. The man was either quite soundly asleep or in some other way rendered unconscious. He could see his back moving up and down, suggesting he was breathing.

Orvie removed his belt, slipped it around the man's ankles and cinched it up tight. When the man awoke, he would be unable to reach the belt to free himself and he hoped it would make it difficult for him to move.

Orvie began backing up and was soon at a spot wide enough for him to turn around so he was facing the entrance out into the larger room. There was a problem – it could be called a BIG problem. Dr. M. had already returned. The good thing was he was facing the entrance so had his back toward Orvie. The bad thing was that at the point where he was sitting the cave was so narrow there was no room to pass him on either side. A mad dash around him was not in the cards. The ceiling was so low he couldn't jump over him. It presented a conundrum (difficult problem).

Although Orvie couldn't see the man's legs from that angle, he had been sitting with them curled under him before. Working on that assumption, Orvie formulated a plan. He would assume a crouched position and rush the man from behind. If he landed with all his force high up against the back of the man's shoulders, he figured his should fall forward and escape would be possible across his back.

Orvie focused on the spot he needed to hit – high and dead center. He braced his feet against the rock floor. He flexed his leg muscles and charged. It was like a lineman attacking a tackling dummy at football practice. The big man rolled forward like a gigantic bowling ball and soon flattened himself out forward, face flat against the floor.

Orvie ran like he had never run before. He was outside and enveloped by the dark of night well before the huge man could even begin the difficult process of righting himself. He was sure doc hadn't seen him. If any explanation came into doc's mind, Orvie hoped it would be that in some way Jerry had managed his escape.

With his henchman unconscious in a tunnel, which a man of doc's size couldn't enter to determine, doc would have

a multitude of unanswerable questions to contemplate (think about). If he panicked, he would want to get off the island in a hurry. It meant Orvie needed to find that canoe in an even bigger hurry.

He trotted north, illuminating his path with his flashlight. Even so, in the inky darkness of night there below the thick, overlapping tree tops, the going was slow. He reached the rear of the hotel and kept going. The hillside remained fairly level north from the hotel for another forty yards before beginning a fairly steep, almost cliff-like, incline down to the lake. That became rough terrain and slowed his progress to the level of having to thoughtfully pick the placement of almost every step he took.

When about half way down the embankment – which rose some two hundred feet bottom to top – he paused to survey what he could see of the shore line. The moon was just on the downside from being full, so it lit the area fairly well. There was virtually no shore at all down there. The hillside just emptied itself straight down into the water.

He moved further down the incline to within twenty feet of the waterline. He was near the east to west center of the island so could have moved either direction from there. He chose east, and picked his way along the rocky area with great care, stopping every few yards to search the area below for any indication of a canoe or a place to hide one.

At the point where the perimeter (outside edge) of the island began turning back south he saw an inlet. It was a small, deep crevice in the rock no more than six or eight feet wide filled with water at the level of the Lake. He moved lower and approached close enough so he could look down into it from the top. It narrowed and then seemed to widen as it entered the hillside. It appeared it was going to be splash-getwet-and-shiver-something-terrible-time. The only way he could see into the opening was through the water. He chose a spot along the top of the crevice and, hoping the water was at least six feet deep, jumped in, feet first.

“Uncle Fester, that’s cold!” he said aloud as he surfaced shaking his head like a wet dog.

It was, thankfully, quite deep. He moved cautiously through the water in a mostly upright position. The crevice

only continued into the island for about ten yards. It was then that two things became obvious. On the opposite wall from where he had stood to jump in, he saw a set of steps that had been carved right out of the rock. It gave access from up above to a narrow ledge less than a foot above the water level that ran its length back into the opening. Second, there, nestled against that innermost area of the ledge was the canoe.

Again, several possibilities crossed Orvie's mind. He could cut a sizable chunk out of its bottom and sink it right there making it completely unusable. He could cut several very narrow slices through the hull just inches above the water line so when somebody got into it, and the sides sank under that weight, water would begin to dribble inside. The canoe might be fifty yards off shore before it contained enough water to sink it. Doc would make a whole lot of fish food! In the end he pulled himself up into it, removed the looped rope that held it to a large rock, and paddled out into the lake, heading west – the area he'd just come from. Five minutes later, cold and shivering he pulled in close to the bank, jumped onto the low lying, more nearly flat area below the front of the hotel, and pulled the canoe ashore. It was an area of low bushes and tall grass and made an ideal place to conceal it. He tossed the only paddle into some brush forty feet away.

If doc had panicked, and if the canoe were really his only way off the island, and if he were able to make the trek all the way from the cave to the crevice, he was going to be one unhappy Dr. Dude. There were a whole lot of if's there and Orvie understood that.

His first priorities at that moment were to get dried off, warm up and slip into some dry, warm duds; electrically heated, fur lined, really thick, polar bear approved, duds, he was thinking.

He trotted the road up the hill to the hotel, rounded it on the north side and entered through the back door. He dripped and shivered his way up the narrow stairs and went immediately into Jerry's bathroom. There were heat lamps in the ceiling and huge, plush, bath towels, all just waiting there to provide him with the comfort he needed. He dried off, enjoyed the heat from above and wrapped his middle in a

towel.

He left the bathroom in search of warm clothes. He flipped on the light – something he had skipped in his earlier, hasty quest for warmth.

He couldn't believe what he came upon there in the bedroom. It was amazing! It was astounding! It was fully unbelievable! Not in a gazillion years would he have expected to be facing it!

///

CHAPTER ELEVEN: Sausage Stuffing and a Tree Pruner

“Jerry! How in the world? I – we – have been so worried.”

It was reason for a rush into each other’s arms and a lingering bear hug.

Orvie pulled back keeping his hands-on Jerry’s shoulders.

“Give!”

“Stop slobbering all over me and I will.”

“Do your uncle and Lexy know you’re safe?”

“Yeah. They also seem to approve. I must say, however, that the strenuous hugs I’ve received since returning home have done far more damage to me than anything that happened while the bad guys had me.”

They shared a long smile and sat down on Jerry’s bed.

“It was great the way you left a trail of threads - and the stuff with your phone, by the way. I set it there on the table. Oh, I see you’ve already retrieved it.”

“I feel absolutely nude without it. So, you want to hear the most exciting tale in the history of exciting escape tales?”

“Haven’t you been listening?”

Jerry grinned and began recounting his story.

“Well, soon after you submerged I saw doc and Buzz walking toward me from the north end of the island. You probably know that from the text I sent. Wasn’t sure it would get through not knowing if you were under water or under a well.

“Doc said, ‘You’re coming with us. Finally, you may

actually be worth something.’ I quickly keyed in a cryptic message so if they found it they’d have no idea what it meant. I was sure you’d figure it out. Then I leaned down pretending to tie my shoe and shoved the phone under my backpack. Buzz put a noose around my neck and he held onto the other end.

“With doc in the lead we slowly made it back north and eventually to Buzz’s place. I declare doc had to stop and rest every twenty yards. We just stayed there long enough for Buzz to retrieve an envelope for Doc – not sure what it was, but it seemed important.

“Anyway, then we left heading through the woods and down the hill toward the south – Waabishkaa Cave I suspected, still having no idea what to really expect. That noose didn’t fill me with confidence about my future, I can tell you that.

“We entered the cave and with the noose still around my neck, I was ordered to crawl into the tunnel at the rear. Buzz followed hanging tight to the rope. It became confusing. He prodded me along until I was right at the opening into the first big cave with the warm stream. Then, he told me to stop, saying something like, ‘we’re gonna hide out here ‘til dark’.

“I figured I had Buzz and doc right where I wanted them.”

“You had them right where you wanted them?”

“Yeah. This is the Jer-Man, you know! I called back to Buzz saying the noose was so tight it was choking me. He said the way we were stretched out there wasn’t anything he could do about it. I suggested that if he would move a little closer to me that would help. Buzz and I have always gotten along fine. I was puzzled how he would be taking part in my kidnapping in the first place. Doc may have something on him.

“Anyway, when I felt the rope go lax I knew he had to be very close to my feet, which I had drawn up under me as much as I could there in that confined space. I braced my hands against the walls and reared back and kicked as hard as I could kick. He didn’t react so I figured I’d been successful in knocking him out. I pulled on the rope and it was loose. I crawled on out to the ledge and looked back into the tunnel. It

was hard to see in there, but I could see enough. His head was bleeding and although he was breathing he was out cold. I moved back inside with the rope, just far enough to tie his wrists together with the end he'd been holding. Back on the ledge I tightened the noose loop around a large, loose, rock and then lowered it over the side of the ledge. It was pulling against his arms – enough I hoped that if he came to and moved on out of the tunnel the weight of the rock would slow him down if not pull him over the edge of the ledge.

“Then, I made tracks down the steps, really having no specific plan in mind. The noose had rubbed my neck raw. When I got to the stream I remembered about its apparent healing property. I knelt down and ran handful after handful of water over the wound.

“That reminded me of where the stream ended up – the pool, and what you had discovered about how it flowed out of the south side of the pool into that tunnel that entered the third cave you found – the Mini-Sub cave. I figured all I had to do was dive to the bottom of the pool, swim the length of the tunnel under water and then make my way to the surface beside the warm water ledge.

“I realized that would be an impossibility, of course, but I kept walking until I came to the pool. Thank you, by the way.”

“Thank you – me – for what?”

“For leaving that air tank behind beside the pool. I examined the gauge and figured it had a good ten minutes of air in it for a guy my size. I was wrong about that, but that's another story. I figured a way to hold it against my chest so my mouth could reach down to the orifice where the air tube from the mask was supposed to attach to the tank. All I had to do was hold the tank in place underneath me, submerge, find the tunnel and swim the length of it into the third cave.

“I soon discovered there was one problem with that plan, while holding the tank close to my body I would have no arms and hands to swim with. My mind went back to the old mental drawing board. It took some time and several lame brained ideas before I found one that would work.

“I removed my belt, thinking it might be long enough to encircle my abdomen and also the tank. It was about a foot

too short. With my pocket knife, I cut strips of cloth from the legs of my cutoffs and tied them together. It took most of the denim I was wearing, but in the end I managed a combination of the belt and the fabric strips with which I was able to bind the tank to my body. With only one strip the tank was way too unstable to be carried under me. The tank would slip out.

“My next brilliant idea is what really saved the day. I was ready to make my escape. I put my mouth around the air hole and turned the air on low. I knew I didn’t dare waste any of the air. I sucked it in through my mouth and exhaled through my nose. I entered the pool and let the weight of the tank help me sink to the bottom – I kicked my legs double time.

“When I found the opening to the tunnel I rolled over onto my back balancing the tank on my chest and belly. In that configuration the strap I’d made worked well enough to hold it steady. I swam the tunnel in that position. The tank weighed just enough to hold me well down into the water. I increased the air flow once because I was not getting enough to sustain me. At one point, I rammed my head into an outcropping of rock, but managed to survive it. I still got a headache and a good bruise on my scalp.

“When I ran out of tunnel I figured I was into the third cave so I surfaced.” I turned off the air to save what little I figured was left and rested for maybe five minutes, breathing that stale heavy air you mentioned. There was just the hint of light coming through a hole in the ceiling, but it wasn’t really enough to allow me to see anything in detail. I think I saw the form of the sub straight ahead of me, but that wasn’t really my concern or interest at that moment.

“Continuing on my back across the surface of the water, the tank and I made our way to the outside wall. Again, the top of my head conveniently helped me find where it was. I couldn’t remember how far down from the surface you said the entrance was. I rolled over onto my stomach and dived like I had in the pool, letting the weight of the tank help me sink. I kept one hand on the wall figuring I’d soon come to the opening. I was right. There it was. At that same moment, the air supply ran out.

“I turned the valve wide open and sucked out one last

lung full. I discarded the tank, pulled myself through the opening and headed for the surface. I seemed like an eternity was passing. I knew I didn't dare inhale, but every fiber in my body was telling me I had to. My chest felt like it was going to explode. Just as I was sure I was a goner my head split the surface. I was exhausted and gasped for breath then turned again onto my back and laid there in the water for some time, enjoying the fresh air like never before in my entire life. I have no idea how long that lasted, but I soon got to the place I figured I had the strength to pull myself out of the water.

"I decided to stay way south of Waabishkaa so went straight east up and over the hill. I got to the road and was able to trot myself up to the hotel lane. I must admit I walked up that slope even though I seemed to be regaining strength with each step.

"It was just getting dark. I went directly to Uncle's den. I told him the story, came up here and waited for you to return. Where you been, by the way? I was becoming pretty annoyed because you weren't here and were taking so long to return."

Orvie filled him in on what he'd been up to: following threads, Buzz's place, his trek to the southern end of the island, finding doc, sneaking into the cave, belting the ankles of the still unconscious Buzz, bowling with doc, locating and hiding the canoe, freezing his tail off as part of his effort to save Jerry, and warming himself under the heat lamps.

"Quite a story. I guess we've both had some kind of an adventure today. At least one similarity that I can see," Jerry said.

"And that is?"

"Neither one of us is going to be able hold his pants up – we both lost our belts."

"Hey, at least this towel makes me decent," Orvie said kidding.

Jerry looked himself over.

"I only regret that I have but one pair of cutoffs to give for my country!"

"We're not done yet," Orvie said. "We still have to connect doc to the land grabbing. We can bet his finger prints will be all over the inside of the sub. I'm sure Buzz will talk if he ever wakes up – alive. Between the two us it seems we

have him stretched out like sausage stuffing down there in the tunnel.”

It had been a clever line and they both enjoyed it. Orvie continued.

“I think I’ve found the two companies that doc paid with the grant money – one who provided the sub and the other the ghost ship. I’m still not sure how they fired multiple rounds from cannons that were sopping wet – probably some sort of waterproof powder containers that were detonated remotely. Did I tell you each cannon actually had three barrels that could be rotated into position? They would all be loaded ahead of time, I imagine. When one barrel was fired, it could be remotely rotated out of position and another loaded one into position. I feel certain that we will find a money trail for those babies as well.”

“So, what’s next?” Jerry asked.

“We either get you into a new pair of cutoffs or a towel.”

It was worth a prolonged giggle session.

Jerry opted for a towel and they got back to the computer.

“I assume your uncle notified the Coast Guard that you are safe if not sound.”

“He did.”

“That reminds me we have at least two loose ends to clear up very soon here on the island.”

“Doc and Buzz?”

“Right,” Orvie said. “You can bet doc headed for the canoe. Not finding it I have no idea what he might do. Certainly, *not* try to swim to Chicago. He’ll be here on the island somewhere when it’s time to find him. Buzz, however is actually in some danger, the way you tell the story.”

“Yeah. Looking back on it, that hanging rock thing probably wasn’t such a great idea. Shall we go get him? I was just so irritated with him, you know?”

“Well, irritated would seem like a pretty mild reaction to me: annoyed, angry, exasperated, mad, furious, enraged, irate – I could go on.”

“I thought you just did go on.”

“Sometimes the thesaurus (book of synonyms) within me just erupts.”

Jeans, hoodies, dry shoes and caps, a few specialized tools and they were ready for Operation Buzz. They were down the back stairs and on the trot south.

“So, what are we going to do with him once we get him out of there?” Orvie asked.

“I got that all figured. Just wait and you’ll see.”

Orvie accepted that and followed Jerry through the woods. They slowed as they approached. The light was gone from the cave. Orvie figured doc had taken the lantern with him as he made his way to the canoe and his planned escape route that couldn’t happen. With their flashlights, they lit their way up the incline to the cave entrance. A noise was coming from the rear of the cave.

“Drowning cow or Buzz?” Orvie asked.

“I’ll put my money on the second option. In most ways, I’m happy to hear he’s okay. I really pounded his head. I may have made it appear that I accomplished the knock out with a single blow. Actually, it was multiple blows. When I finally looked back at him from out on the ledge I was relieved to see he was still breathing. While I was having visions of dangling by my neck over the side of the ledge I suppose I sort of lost my head.

“So, did he – at least gouges of it – the way the new story reads.”

Jerry managed a smile and raised eyebrows.

Buzz was emitting alternating groans and cries for Dr. Matthews.

Jerry entered the tunnel first. Orvie followed with the equipment.

“Just remember, I’m behind you. Keep your feet to yourself up there. I promise not to dangle you from the nearest yard arm (ship mast).”

“Buzz old man. Jerry here. Came to get you out of this pickle or sausage as might be funnier.”

“Jerry. Sorry, pal. Doc forced me to help him.”

“We’ll get into that later. First things, first. I’m going to reach across you with a tree pruner on a long handle and try to cut the rope out front of your hands. Understand?”

“Yup. Careful a my fingers.”

“Having a full set of digits is the least of your worries. I

just imagine you can learn to make license plates in prison without a full set.”

“You’re tongues on fire tonight, Jer,” Orvie said. “Where have you been keeping all the witty sayings?”

“In my witty sayings keeping place.”

“Oh, well, that explains it, of course.”

Orvie could see his friend laughing. He was amazed anybody could laugh after what he’d just been through.

It took two tries, but the rope was eventually cut. They heard the rock smash against the floor of the cave.

“Ouch!” Jerry said. “Really glad that wasn’t you, Buzz. I got a little carried away.”

He drew the long handle of the pruner back behind him, passing it off to Orvie who laid it down out of the way. Jerry began talking again.

“From here I can’t untie your wrists. Can you work the rope loose?”

“Doubt it. You tie a mean knot.”

“Okay, then, here’s the deal. We’re going to pull you out backwards by attaching a rope around your ankles. Understand?”

“Yup.”

“You may want to hold your chin up off the floor of the tunnel or you might not have one by the time we get you to the entrance.”

Buzz had no response. Jerry attached Orvie’s rope and the two of them backed up. They alternated pulling and backing. Old Buzz was heavier than he appeared to be.

It took nearly twenty minutes to complete operation Extract Buzz. Once out into the main room Orvie checked the rope around his wrists. It would remain tied for the trip back to the hotel. Orvie removed the belt from around his ankles since the man would need to travel under his own power. Jerry used his rope to tie a loop around both ankles leaving only a foot of rope between them. That way he couldn’t run. Orvie tied the other end around his own waste as a little insurance.

They arrived back at the hotel. At the kitchen table Buzz dictated his confession implicating Dr. Matthews in the ghost ship activities and Jerry’s kidnapping. Before coming to

the island, Buzz had been convicted of drug trafficking and doc – his uncle – threatened to make that known to Bradford if he didn't help. The threat extended to any job for which he might apply in the future. The envelope he had retrieved from his shack and handed over to Dr. Matthews was something Matthews was having him hold for him. Buzz didn't know what it was. Orvie fantasized it may have been a manual titled, How To Operate a Mini-Sub While Giving a Piggy Back Ride to a Wayward Pirate Ship. It was worth a chuckle.

Buzz had no details about the land grab operation. He did relate that in college his uncle had been in the drama club and had failed to get the lead in a play about pirates. He had let it become an obsession, at one point trying to ruin the career of the boy who had beat him out. In the process, he had caused an accident and crippled the boy for life. His role in the incident was not known to the authorities. In an attempt to get Dr. M off his back, Buzz had acquired affidavits from two of his uncle's college roommates confirming his role in it. That would be Orvie's key to making Matthews keep his mouth shut about the opals – one word and he'd face the additional charges of aggravated battery.

After Buzz signed the paper Orvie turned to Jerry.

"So, where is this holding cell you have in mind?"

"We're going to tie him to a chair, and tie the chair to the sewage pipe, in the shop – the shop where the tumbler is turning and turning and turning and turning, hour after hour after hour after hour."

"Torture?"

"Absolutely! In fact, I may keep him there for a week before I turn him over to the authorities."

It had been meant to be humorous, of course. He would be released into custody as soon as Bradford decided who the proper authorities were – the FBI, Orvie figured, since kidnapping was involved.

///

CHAPTER TWELVE: The Cavalry Has Many Looks

The boys talked with Jerry's uncle and brought him up to speed on what they had accomplished. Bradford agreed that the FBI seemed to be the agency of choice and placed the call. Agents would be there first thing in the morning – they would have come immediately if things had not apparently been so well under control. He also called the Coast Guard to alert them of the possible attempted escape from the island by Dr. Matthews. A second cutter was dispatched so both sides of the island could be patrolled simultaneously.

The boys downed a feast Lexy prepared for them – well, a feast as defined by most twelve-year-old boys: peanut and jelly sandwiches, milk, potato chips, bananas, with homemade double chocolate cookies and ice cream for dessert and dessert and dessert!

“Thanks, Lexy,” Jerry said planting a kiss on her forehead. “That should hold us until midnight.”

Lexy looked at the clock.

“I would hope so. It's now 11:45.”

There were smiles, but no promises that she might not hear two large mice in the kitchen in fifteen minutes.

They returned to Jerry's room ready to turn-in after an exhausting day. With lights out, they were both immediately asleep.

At a few minutes after three, Jerry's phone rang. It awakened them both.

“Hello.”

“Jerry this is your uncle. Sorry to bother you at this time of night. I need you two in my den immediately. I assume our Lexus is ready, but keep it in the background for now. And this time, don’t bring Cheetos – my carpet is still orange from the last time or I’ll have to lower the boom - powy! Get here in a hurry now. Sometimes you’re so slow I think the Windsor will sink back below the lake before you arrive.”

“Clearly a hidden, private message there,” Orvie said.

“And,” Jerry added, “since it’s cryptic (disguised) it must mean our BIG bad guy is with him and holding him against his will.”

“What’s the reference to sinking the island?” Orvie asked.

“Not the island. Windsor is also the name of our yacht. He wants it disabled so doc can’t use it for his getaway.”

Donned in boxers for sleeping, they made their way down the back stairs to Lexy’s quarters and let her know something bad was up and that she was to be held in reserve. She understood.

Back out in the hall, the boys quickly worked on the code. Lexus was not, of course, a reference to the car, but to Lexy – which they had already handled. Cheetos was a clear reference to Dr. Matthews according to the stories the boys had passed on about him. Boom and powy probably indicated there was a gun involved.

Orvie had what, later, would be considered a stroke of genius. He shared it with Jerry.

“Call your uncle and tell him I chose to camp out tonight and you’d put in a call to get me here as soon as possible. It will take a half hour or so for me to arrive. That will give me time to disable the yacht and get back up to the hotel.”

The call was made. Dr. Matthew could be heard raging in the background. Jerry hung up before anybody on the other end could respond. He gave Orvie instructions about finding the boat in a locked dock house at the bottom of the lane.

“Here’s my set of keys. One of them fits the padlock. Go!”

Orvie’s absence would, also, buy some time – they hoped.

Orvie was back upstairs in a flash for shoes, pants –

cutoffs were the only kind handy – and a hoodie. Three minutes later he was out the back door.

Since the den looked out on the lane, Orvie had to make his way through the brush and trees just north of it. That would have slowed most human beings, but Orvie set a remarkably fast pace and stuck to it regardless – dodging trees, hurdling low bushes and logs, and running on the crouch below low hanging pine branches. The zipper on the hoodie was broken, but that seemed minor at the moment.

By the time he reached the dock house, his shins were scraped and bleeding as was his chest from the fly open hoodie. He was oblivious to (unaware of) the fifty-five-degree temperature. There were six keys. Only two appeared to be for padlocks. The first one worked. While he had been running, he had also been spinning ideas about how to sabotage the boat. He really didn't want to sink such an expensive toy.

The one and only car he had ever hotwired for a woman in distress had been a Model A Ford back in 1928. He hoped all yacht's, under-the-dash-wiring, was similar. Inside the wheel house he reached around under dash. It was enclosed. He felt for a release button that might open it. He found none. If he only had his knife! There was a stool with long legs – for the captain to sit on while steering the craft, he assumed. He picked it up and began ramming the enclosure with one of the legs. He had hoped to make a hole in it. Instead, it popped open.

“Hooray for dumb luck?” he said out loud.

He knelt beneath the wheel and felt up inside the dash. There were lots of wires there. He tugged at them. One by one they snapped – in the end over a dozen. Of course, they might have just been to functions such as running lights and cigarette lighters – he hoped they controlled something more important.

One of the keys on Jerry's key ring was large, flat, and fancy. On a hunch Orvie tried slipping it into the ignition. A quarter turn and the dash board lights lit up. A half turn and the cabin lights came on. He hesitated to turn it further, but felt it was necessary. He eased it a bit more to the right. The engine gurgled as if about to come to life. He turned the key

back to the off position. His tampering up inside the dash had not disabled the ignition.

“Ah!” he said, again out loud as a new idea came to him.

With the key still in place, he began working it back and forth – bending it a bit more each time. It grew hot. Finally, ‘SNAP’. The end of the key was broken off and lodged inside the keyhole. That should slow things down if it came to the use of the boat.

He relocked the padlock on the outside door and began his return to the hotel. That time he used the front lane, figuring it would seem more realistic if a returning camper would take the easiest, out in the open route.

By that time, Jerry had been in the den for some time. He and his uncle were facing the barrel of a very ugly looking hand gun.’

“Call the other kid again and see where he is. Keep it on speaker.”

Jerry placed the call.

“Hi, pal,” Orvie said, panting, as he answered. “What’s going on?”

“Just checking on how close you are. This meeting – with a capital ‘M’ – is urgent.”

“I’m coming up the front lane as fast as I can run.”

Orvie understood that the ‘M’ verified that doc was there.

Dr. Matthews walked to the front window and looked out. He nodded.

“I see him. Good.”

A few minutes later, Orvie entered the hotel from the front door and strolled into the den, cool as a cucumber.

Matthews shoved him into a chair between the other two. Orvie managed a very surprised look.

“You three the only guys who live here, now?”

It had been asked as if he expected they would actually tell the truth.

“Yes, we are the only guys who live here,” Bradford said.

It had been the truth since technically Lexy was not a guy and Buzz didn’t live there. The boys fought to hold back

smiles at Bradford's quick thinking.

"We are going to go down to your yacht, now, and you will take me to a ship anchored three miles off the eastern coast. I know the Coast Guard is out there. I've seen their ships. Call them and tell them if they interfere I will kill the boys. I will take your nephew with me on the other ship.

Orvie raised his hand as if in a fifth-grade classroom.

"I think you are making a very big mistake, sir."

"And why would that be?"

"My grandfather is Walter Piccone. You've heard of him – a billionaire many times over. If you want to escape and make a hundred million or so on the side in ransom, I'm your choice, not Jerry, here with his virtually bankrupt uncle."

The other two took it all in, but remained quiet. Neither had ever heard of Walter Piccone – but then neither had Orvie.

Orvie continued.

"Since my grandfather is the primary share holder in, Midland Trusts, one of the holding companies you are using to disguise your real estate offers here on Windsor Island you can bet that whole deal is dead in the water. When he dropped me off here a few days ago, from his yacht, I overheard him and Bradford discussing how they were closing in on you."

Dr. Matthews turned to Bradford.

"How can that be true? I paid a brigade of lawyers, who assured me there was no way my offers could be traced. Are you sure that's true?"

Again, how naïve can a highly-educated man be!

"I guess Orville has spilled the beans. Walter and I were fraternity brothers at Yale a few decades ago. You know Frat Brothers – they'd do anything for each other. I can give you his number if you'd like to speak to him. I believe he's in South Africa now, isn't that right, Orville?"

"Yes, sir. Johannesburg. He's about to close a deal to buy a diamond mine down there. His staff has been negotiating for it for several years."

Jerry was about to burst because of the spontaneous goings on between his uncle and Orvie – Orville at that moment. He managed to contain himself by thinking back to

his close encounter with the noose and the real possibility of dangling over the edge of the ledge by his neck. It worked.

Dr. Matthews was considering all the information. Bradford offered him his phone. Matthews waved it off. For a 'book smart' man he was more the fool in most other ways.

"Down to the yacht!" He announced at last.

Apparently, he would continue with his plan while he considered the sudden array of new options.

In a move that seemed way too bright for the bumbling Dr. M. he had Orvie and Bradford remove their belts. Orvie was to belt his left leg to Jerry's right leg just below the knee. Bradford's right was similarly attached to Jerry's left leg. It would prevent them from being able to easily run. The three captors assumed the man knew how to pull a trigger – though none would have probably actually bet on it.

Orvie began removing his shoes.

"What are you doing?" Matthews asked.

"My feet are well calloused. They can take the walk. Jerry's a tenderfoot – his feet will be bleeding and leaving a trail of flesh behind after five minutes out there."

It had been an attempt to help keep his friend's feet warm, being so scantily clad as he was.

Matthews provided only the slightest shrug, and motioned with his gun for them to go ahead. Orvie had more thing to say.

"The kid here will freeze out there – can't be much more than fifty degrees. At least let him drape that afghan (colorful knitted blanket) over his shoulders. I really can't believe a sane man would make him go out in this weather."

Orvie was a master of planting confusion and doubt in other people's minds. Dr. M. had clearly become infuriated. He allowed the afghan as well as the shoes, then shoved them in the direction of the front door.

At exactly four o'clock, Bradford's phone rang.

"Ignore it or else!" came doc's order as he brandished the gun in his face.

Bradford winked at the boys. They didn't understand, but took it as some sort of positive sign and went along.

It was even colder outside than Orvie had predicted. Inside, he had managed to keep his hoodie closed by holding

it with one hand. He didn't want to have to try to explain the bloody chest and was surprised doc hadn't inquired about the other scrapes and scratches.

Every twenty yards they were ordered to stop so the big man could catch his breath. It took some time to reach the dock house. Jerry's legs were turning blue and his shivering was uncontrollable. Bradford opened the padlock and they entered. It was somewhat warmer inside out of the night time breeze.

No one but Orvie, of course, knew about the broken key.

"We'll all get on board the boat," doc said.

It only amounted to stepping from the dock onto the deck of the boat – all at the same level by design.

Dr. Matthews entered last.

"The key!" he demanded.

Bradford took his time removing the key from his ring.

"On the floor on your faces," doc instructed.

They complied, although it was a difficult maneuver being connected as they were by the belts. Orvie and Bradford automatically moved close to Jerry hoping to warm him some. Doc went to the dashboard and moved the key into position. It would not enter the slot. He tried again. Again, it refused to slip in. He then bent down to take a closer look. He discovered the problem.

He turned toward the other three with fire in his eyes. He understood the yacht would be of no help to him. He backed to the edge of the deck, ready to step back onto the dock his gun raised clearly ready to fire at his three captives.

In the next few seconds the three on the floor were to come to understand there was nothing quite as great as holding their Lexus in reserve.

"BAM!"

Doc fell to his knees and then forward on his face. Behind him stood Lexy, her largest, iron, frying pan still swinging by her side.

Almost simultaneously with the boat-rocking thump of doc's body hitting the deck, four Coast Guardsmen entered the door, with flashlights focused and side arms drawn. The leader of the group was no run of the mill Guardsman – it was

Jerry's friend, Commander Jim Benton.

Jerry turned his head and looked up at him from his position on the deck.

"Hey, homie. Imagine meeting you here. Thanks for dropping in."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN:

After Jerry spent fifteen minutes warming up in a very hot shower, they gathered back in the den. Several stories unfolded.

Lexy, having been told she was to stay in reserve had taken the role seriously. From the hall, she had overheard the conversation in the den. When they began the walk down the hill she followed, with every cook's favorite weapon. The rest of her story is history.

The Commander told of the arrangement he and Jerry's uncle had made earlier in the evening. He would call Bradford on the dot at the top of every hour. If there was no answer, it would mean there was trouble. The Commander's cutter had moved under darkness to within yards of the dock so he and his men could hit the island within seconds. They had.

The Commander turned to Lexy and tipped his hat.

"Ma'am. I am quite certain this is the first time in the illustrious history of the United States Coast Guard, that we have been beaten to the punch by a cook with a frying pan."

"I'm willing to consider a short-term commission if the pay scale is good," she joked.

It received chuckles all around.

Bradford moved to her and put his arm around her waist. He looked into her face and then back at the others.

"I'm afraid there is no Coast Guard commission in this fine lady's future. I have asked Lexy to accept a commission as my wife – that will be a long-term commission and she can set her own pay scale.

* * *

Whether or not to mine the opals would eventually be up to Jerry when he inherited the island – his uncle ended up buying all the other property making it again a unit like it had been back in the old days.

Reservations at the hotel immediately picked back up to the *pre-Ghost Ship* level.

Orvie managed a twenty-minute soak in the warm underground stream and his scrapes and cuts healed remarkably fast.

A few weeks later, after he and Jerry served as Bradford's' groomsmen at the wedding there at the hotel, Orvie said good-bye, hopped aboard Big Mike's boat to a bevy of waves and good wishes from shore, and set his sights on his next adventure.