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Crap.

Anderson pulled the shift into neutral and stumbled up the step onto the gunwale and across the widening gap to the wharf, grabbing the stern line from the well deck behind the wheelhouse as he went.

The small pontoon barge he had been towing had not wound up where he had wanted it to be. A gust of wind at the last moment had caught the barge and taken it away from the wharf, so instead of coasting gently around the end of the wharf where he could grab the towrope and tie it up properly, the barge was now drifting slowly away and offering to take the 37-foot launch with it.

Murphy's Law never fails, he thought, hurriedly putting a hitch on the dock post before stepping back onto the launch and retrieving the loose end of the towrope from the small afterdeck. *Every effing time ya come into dock, the effing wind blows – wrong!*

Anderson spent the next ten minutes putting all the floating things back where he wanted them, securing the launch, and pulling and shoving the barge around the end of the wharf by hand and along to the shore where he could put down the ramp and eventually unload the baby trackhoe, leftover cement sacks and miscellaneous tools.

Back onboard the launch, he checked the engine gauges and shut down the diesel before he went forward into the small cabin and poured the dregs of lukewarm coffee from his thermos

into his travel mug. He wedged his six-foot frame onto the bench at the little table and filled out the bill for his services: (1) dig trench for footings for cottage porch, and (2) make forms and pour concrete for footings. He had thought the cottager would also want him to at least ferry the lumber for the new porch down the lake, but Mr. Jorgenson had decided to save a buck and take his two-by-sixes across in the little fishing boat he used to access his cottage. *Whatever.*

After slipping the bill into an envelope, grabbing his thermos and locking the launch cabin, Anderson limped down the dock to his old Ford Ranger. As he got in, he quietly cursed his left foot which was sore as hell where the trackhoe had partially run over it a couple of days ago when he was loading it onto the barge. That was on him, he realized; it's usually thought of as stupid to pull the control lever on a powered machine when you are standing beside it. Doc had said there wasn't much he could do to help the foot - he was just to stay off it for a couple of weeks.

"Stay off it. Yeah, right!" he muttered as he turned the truck's ignition key and started off up the road. His house, shop and rather untidy yard were only a couple of hundred yards up from the dock, but he had things to do in the village and didn't feel like walking the two blocks from home to Main Street. Besides, he wanted another cup of coffee and felt too lazy to make it at home.

In Spirit River, it was, in fact, morning coffee time. Typically, it was coffee time from after breakfast clear through to lunch when everyone went home until afternoon coffee, but things did speed up at the Zoo around 10:30 every morning. And this morning, it seemed even busier than normal.

There was still a place at his usual table near the back (he tried to avoid sitting by the window because the glare from the sun made it hard to see the faces of the table rats). "Hey guys.

And gals," he said, in deference to Marion who had joined her husband at the table this morning. She and Arnold were always together, but usually not at the coffee shop, since they ran the gas station together and were loath to shut it down for a break on a weekday morning. Maybe that's got something to do with so many people here this morning, he wondered.

"A couple cops are hanging around this morning," said Arnold, as if in answer to Anderson's unspoken thoughts. "Anita's missing, or at least she hasn't been home for two nights."

The young guy who drives logging truck for the sawmill passed his cup to the waitress for a refill. "Well, not like it's the first time she's done that." He added, "Maple Falls is only half an hour away, and we all know she hangs out there a lot, dancing up a storm usually; maybe she found herself a temporary squeeze."

"Well, yeah, maybe," Marion commented. "But the cops say they've talked to all her friends and they say they haven't seen her. No texts, nothing; Fred and Georgina are beside themselves this time."

Fred Antoine worked at part-time and casual jobs around town. He was sought-after as a loader and forklift operator and sometimes filled in at the mill. He was also a skilled welder, but he was mostly interested in trapping and fishing. His wife Georgina worked most nights at the Spirit Inn Lounge on the shore of the lake, where the tourists and some of the young cottagers play on summer evenings. Their 23-year-old daughter Anita was pretty and well-liked by everyone in town, but she had a reputation as a party-girl.

"Can't be at all easy for Georgina." Anderson had a soft spot for Anita's mom, although he kept that a secret from her and everyone else.

Marion glanced sideways at him, before continuing the conversation: “Not sure if it’s a good thing or not that Fred’s home from the bush; he’s not much use to Georgina when there are problems that can’t be solved with whiskey. And with Anita, he’s always yelling at her when he gets a skin full; makes you wonder if he’s not part of Anita’s problems. It’s like she doesn’t want to grow up.”

Arnold took the last mouthful of his coffee and stood up. “Come on Mum,” he said to Marion, “time to go earn a buck; I have that cottage lady’s old Accord to fix and I’m pretty sure I don’t have the parts.” He held the door for his wife, then turned back: “Anderson – wanna drive to Maple Falls with me on a parts run?”

“Why not... I need to pick up some fuses for the trackhoe anyway. Maybe I’ll get a real haircut too – haven’t had a decent one since I shaved off my winter beard, and that was months ago.”

“Okay. I’ll go check for the parts, and if I’m going to town I’ll come back here and pick you up. Shouldn’t be more than ten minutes.”

The half-hour drive to Maple Falls was uneventful. Anderson mused to himself about the Anita situation a little, but he knew enough about her to figure she was likely off on a little love adventure (or maybe the world’s biggest hangover) and would eventually turn up at home.

His thoughts turned to the lake and the Protected Shorelines committee that he sat on, along with his chauffeur beside him. “Hey, Arnold,” Anderson spoke up over the screech of the wind from the old crew cab’s badly-sealed windows. “How did last week’s meeting go? I was finishing off some concrete at the Jorgenson place and didn’t get back in time.”

“It was okay, I guess.” Arnold shifted in his seat, got out his pack of Number Sevens and selected a cigarette. “It’s nice that those university guys have offered to help, but sometimes I think they forget that we, too, actually live here along with the birds and fish. The conversation gets a little off-track, in my mind anyway.”

Anderson handed him his lighter. “Yeah, they certainly mean well, and some – especially that gal from New Brunswick – know a lot of stuff. Of course, the cottagers, who don’t really live here either, take in every word they say as some kind of new-found gospel and forget that people have hunted and fished Awan Lake for over a couple hundred years before they showed up. When’s the next meeting?”

“Third Wednesday of next month, as usual. They want to do a public meeting with some guest speaker from the west coast that the university folks admire, but our local gang isn’t all that happy about it. Jeremy, for one, thinks we’re not ready for that yet, and I agree with him. Time ain’t right yet.”

Anderson chuckled. “Definition of an expert is someone with an airline ticket and a briefcase in one hand and an invoice in the other.” He sighed. “To keep everyone happy, we’ll probably have to let that happen, though maybe we can put it off until next spring. Maybe I can get Barker to find a corporate sponsor to pay for it – he seemed happy with the job I did out at his island a couple of months ago and apparently he has lots of bigwig connections.”

Arnold took a quick drag on his smoke, and broke the conversation: “Say, Frank, have you any thoughts on this Anita thing? Knowing her, it seems a little early to worry much, but I keep seeing stuff on the news that makes me realize the world isn’t always a friendly place for young girls even in the bush land of little old Canada. Especially for girls with a little colour.”

“Mmm. Frankly I’ve been sitting here pissed off about the grief and hassle that little chick causes her Mum all the time,” Anderson admitted. “And it’s hard to know where to start when it comes to looking for her. Have the cops talked about a search yet?”

“Not that I heard this morning. I guess she’s now officially a ‘missing person’ but I think most of the searching has been on Facebook and texting with friends.” Stubbing out his cigarette and closing the side window against the light sprinkle of rain that had just begun, Arnold continued: “Perhaps you and I should stop in at the cop shop in Maple Falls and let them know we want to help. Maybe they’ll tell us something.” He pulled into the Napa parking lot and shut off the engine.

“Sounds like a plan,” Anderson responded. “Let’s get our stuff and go do that – just before we stop for a quick beer at that pub Anita hangs out at when she leaves Spirit River and hits the big lights. Maybe we’ll learn something.”

The search for parts was more or less successful. Anderson had to buy a different fuse holder to accommodate the only fuses they had in the store. “The joys of owning old machinery,” he had muttered to himself. Their visit to the police detachment was even less fruitful. The officers had no new information (that they would talk about anyway) but they did take down the two men’s names and contact information in case they wanted help in the Spirit River area where Anita lived.

The visit to the pub was no more productive. Although Arnold and Anderson had been there before, it had been seldom and nobody recognized them. Even the most general question or comment was met with silent shrugs. Anderson felt acutely aware of his away-back-when Métis roots, but nobody knew – or would have cared – in that place, so he didn’t play that card. “I must

be getting old,” he grumbled to Arnold. “Places like this were a lot more fun when I was twenty... now that I’m pushing a half-century they just make me feel tired.”

The men left after one beer. stopped at Timmy’s to grab a “I’m so hot you can’t drink me for at least 20 minutes” coffee and a portable chicken burger and headed home. The conversation drifted to speculation on whether the Ottawa Red Blacks would be able to repeat their Grey Cup win a couple of years ago, and when the city fathers of Toronto would try – again – to destroy the Canadian Football League by replacing the Argonauts with an American team and an NFL franchise.

By the time they arrived back in Spirit River, the drizzle that had begun earlier had settled in and the surface of Awan Lake was living up to its indigenous name – foggy. Arnold dropped his passenger off by the Zoo where he had left his little truck and went down the street to rejoin Marion at the garage. Anderson dropped the invoice he had prepared earlier into the post office and drove the two blocks back to his house and workshop near the docks.

Anderson’s house was more than a little strange, many folks thought. It had been built somewhat over a hundred years ago, as a small boat-builder’s workshop. It was perhaps thirty feet wide and seventy feet long, with a big set of hinged doors facing the street where the old builder had brought in his lumber and rolled out his beautifully-crafted wooden boats, gleaming with varnish and brass and boasting the shiny black classic gasoline marine engines of that time. Boats from Awan Lake used to be found on the canals and lakes of cottage country all over the province. These days, there were still a very few left, lovingly restored by craftsmen with endless time and deep pockets, who showed them off at boat shows in Toronto and even down into the states.

Anderson had bought the building for a song some twenty years ago. It was perfect for him, and while he was a good hand at fixing stuff, and he deeply admired the work of the old craftsmen who had gone before, he was inclined to favour more modern materials: he liked his boats made of aluminum or fibreglass or even steel, because he was not particularly fond of endless sanding and painting and re-jointing planks and caulking seams.

He had taken over the back thirty feet of the building as his house. From the outside, the house part was only identifiable by a single door on the side and a few not-very-big windows on the sides and back. The workshop part was comfortably messy, as might be expected of a single male as its inhabitant: "I know where everything is," he would tell visitors, "but it's a good thing I work alone." Although there was room in the shop for his work launch, he had never put her in for the winter; he left her down by dock where she was lifted out for winter, and worked on her there. His shop was always full of small boats, or machinery like the trackhoe, and perhaps the occasional engine or two. Wooden workbenches lined the walls; they were pretty much all covered with "stuff".

The house part, though, was a different story. When the door from the workshop (or the "front" door) closed behind them, visitors found themselves almost in a different world, and not one they might have expected from the big craggy-faced man who lived there. Pine walls and open-rafter ceilings, broad clear-coated hardwood plank floors, warm scatter rugs, a couple of paintings on the walls, a cozy small kitchen, and off to the side what was obviously a bedroom, except it was really just another space, not a closed room. There was a long built-in desk and bookcases along one wall, with a computer at one end. There was a substantial wood-burning space heater on the other side of the room and a couple of easy chairs; the main piece of furniture was a gigantic old plank table with a variety of twice-as-old wooden chairs. The table was full of

PETER KINGSMILL

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newspapers, magazines and engine parts (except at the kitchen end where there was typically a coffee cup and the plate left over from Anderson's breakfast).

It was not a woman's house. But Anderson didn't really care, because he had everything he wanted there and a live-in woman was not one of the things he wanted.

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When he got back from his trip to Maple Falls with Arnold, the late afternoon was too soggy, foggy and depressing to go and off-load the trackhoe from the barge, walk it back up the street to the shop, and service it, so Anderson opted to open his second beer of the day and potter around in the shop. He called it cleaning up; most would have called it re-organizing the chaos. He worked distractedly; his thoughts turned to the missing Anita, her rather useless (and maybe worse) father Fred, and of course, to the long-suffering mother, Georgina. Anderson, like everyone else, had more questions than answers.

At about 1800, he shut off the lights in the shop and went into the house where he made a fresh pot of coffee and a couple of fried eggs on toast. He pawed through the morning's Ottawa Citizen while he ate, then took his coffee to the computer and checked emails and his Facebook account. His computer time clock said 1910 when his doorbell rang.

Anderson went to the front door and opened it without hesitation. Even though he had email and a smartphone, most of his neighbours and clients still just came to the door if his boat

was at the dock and his truck was nearby. “Hi,” he said cheerfully, and “come in out of the rain, please!” as he stepped back from the door.

His visitor was forty-ish, well put-up, athletic with blond hair tucked up under a green ball cap. And she was really very pretty. But he didn’t have a clue who she was. “Can I pour you a coffee?”

“Well, no thanks, not at this time of day.” She seemed nervous and a bit out of breath. “But a glass of hot water would be nice... I paddled across from our island and it’s a pretty cool, dank evening. I’m a bit chilly.”

“I’m surprised you could even see where you were going with that fog.”

“The fog sort of comes and goes,” she replied. “And besides, I do have a little handheld GPS – two actually ‘cause there’s one on my phone. I won’t be hanging around long because it’s a forty-five minute paddle home and I want to get back long before the sun sets. Not that it’s shedding much light anyway.”

Anderson put some water in the kettle and set it on the gas stove before clearing off some table space and pulling over a chair for his new guest. “Name’s Frank, but mostly people just call me Anderson. How can I help?”

“I know, Mr. Anderson; your name precedes you, which is why I am here. Actually, I had tried to call the police first, but they seem pretty tied up this evening. All I got was their voicemail and my cell connection wasn’t very good. So I came here – they tell me everyone comes to you when they have a lake problem.”

“Please, call me anything but Mister Anderson. And yes, the police have other things on their minds today but – why do you need help? Why the police?”

“I think I found a body in the water.”

Anderson didn't answer. He walked across to a cabinet beside the fridge, took out a small flask of brandy, took a small mug off its hook over the sink, poured in a couple of fingers from the flask, and filled the mug with the now-hot water from the kettle. This he delivered to his guest, who did not refuse it. “And what's your name, may I ask?”

“Marjorie. Marjorie Webster. My sister and I have a cottage on the little island off MacLean Point. And thank you; this will go down well.”

“Ah... Now I know, exactly,” Anderson nodded. “You moved out there a couple of summers ago, and I've probably passed you on the lake, but we've never met.” He settled into a chair across from her and took a sip from his coffee cup. “I guess you should tell me what you think you have found, and where.”

“I'm not really all that sure. I have a kayak, and less than an hour ago I was paddling slowly along the shore just east of town, watching the late afternoon birds come and go. Suddenly my paddle caught something – felt like a clump of weeds, but more solid. I didn't think anything about it as I pulled my paddle away, but then I thought...” she shuddered visibly, “I though I saw a face in the water.”

“Geez. That'd be a shock to the system!” Anderson tried to sound somewhere between comforting and practical: “Are you sure? Was it right at the surface? Did you see it again?” The questions poured out a little too fast – in spite of his better judgement he was being more practical than comforting.

“No. I sort of looked around, not wanting to see it again but, well, you know. I had to try to focus a bit. All I was really able to do was paddle away a couple of hundred feet and try the

phone. When that didn't work, I paddled straight into the village. Pulled my kayak up on your dock and ran up here."

Anderson got up and topped up his coffee. From a drawer in the kitchen he took out a beat-up pack of cigarettes and some matches and walked back to the table. "Hope you don't mind," he said.

"Not at all. Actually, could I have one too?"

He lit her cigarette, then his, before sitting down. Time to get practical, he thought. "With this overcast, it's going to be almost dark in less than an hour, and we should sort of retrace your route before you forget where you were when you saw... what you saw. Then we can try the police again with possibly better information. Is your sister home on the island?"

"Yes."

"Have you told her about this?"

"No, her cell must be off. We only have one charger and mine had just been plugged in when I left the house."

"Okay," said Anderson, carefully getting his thoughts organized. "We'll finish our coffee (and hot water) and go down to my boat, load up your kayak, and run along the shore until we get to where you think you found something. I can mark the spot with a float, as well as on the marine GPS, then quickly run you home to the island before it gets dark. Make sense?"

"Yes. Makes sense, and I would certainly appreciate the lift, and the company."

They sat in silence for a few moments. Anderson's mind started to fill with thoughts: Just outside the village; Anita gone for as much as three days; gotta get in touch with the cops –

tonight; have to assume there will be a water search, no matter what, but oh God, how do we handle it with Georgina, and Fred, and everyone else?

“It’s going to be a long night, Marjorie, but I’ll try to keep the police from bothering you until tomorrow. If you’re done with that brandy, we’d best be going.”

She nodded, and gulped down the last mouthful. Anderson dumped his coffee into a travel mug, grabbed a jacket for himself and a blanket for Marjorie, guided her out the door and walked with her quickly down to the dock.

It didn’t take long to fire up the main diesel and the small diesel generator he had installed a couple of months before. He was proud of that little “genset”; it gave him lots of household current for tools and lights when he was working for clients out on the islands, and carried some of the load from the boat’s electronics. He checked the navigation lights and radar, loaded up the little kayak and strapped it down in the well deck with a couple of tarp straps. Within minutes he had cast off the mooring lines and was easing the boat out of the little harbour. He turned to his passenger: “Marjorie, there’s no point in my filing a sail plan tonight because there’s really nobody to receive it. However, I am going to call Arnold from the garage and tell him I’m out on the water and that I want to connect with him when I get back in. Okay?”

She nodded. “If you can reach him from out here.”

There was nothing very modern about Anderson: old boats, old house, old engines, old machinery, old pick-up trucks. However, perhaps because he worked and lived alone, Anderson did place a high value on communications technology, and he had equipped his boat with a cell-booster as well as good marine radio equipment and GPS. He had even installed an old citizen band two-way radio – even since the advent of cellphones, most of the island cottagers still used

CB to talk together, especially with their sailing club. “No problem,” he told Marjorie. “I have a cell booster.”

Which he used, catching Arnold at home. “Hi there! Sorry to bother you but I have Marjorie Webster with me from the little island off MacLean Point, along with her kayak, and I’m giving her a lift home. I’ll call you when I get back in; perhaps you could come by my place after. There’s stuff we need to talk about tonight.”

“Okay. Don’t stay out there too long with those pretty ladies, Anderson. Dangerous ground!”

Anderson glanced at Marjorie. The cell system was on speaker, and she was chuckling at him. Obviously he had neither heard her chuckle nor even seen a smile since their introductions half an hour earlier, and the smile was nice to see. And yes, she was pretty. “Sorry about my friends. And my speakerphone,” he added somewhat ruefully.

It didn’t take the converted lobster boat long to retrace Marjorie’s kayak route. When she told him they were getting close to where she thought she had seen the body, Anderson cut the throttle away back to just steerage way, and edged in closer to shore. The depth sounder was reading about seven feet when she said, “I wasn’t any closer to shore than this, I’m pretty sure. And you see that rock outcrop with the funny tree on top, over there? I was pretty close to that when I stopped to try to call for help.”

“So, a couple of hundred feet beyond?”

“Close as I remember. I was pretty spooked.”

The lake bottom here was pretty rough, and the sounder was reading between five and eight feet. The launch drew two-and-a-half feet unloaded and flat, and bronze propellers do not

get along well with granite; Anderson's eyes hardly left the sonar screen's bottom scan as they made a couple of passes. "This is pretty shallow; we'll have to bring a skiff over here tomorrow," he mused to himself. To Marjorie, he said, "I always keep a little red float with an anchor attached; I'll turn and make one more pass, and when you think I'm close again I'll stop and throw it over. Then we can take you home."

She nodded, and stared unhappily at the shore – and the water – as he made the turn. After a couple of minutes, she said – almost shouted – "Here". Anderson took the transmission out of gear, stepped quickly out of the wheelhouse and threw the small anchor and the little red float – almost like a heavy balloon – overboard, anchor first. He returned to the wheel, carefully put the gearshift into forward, and edged offshore. He knew the lake well; once his depth sounder was registering about 12 feet he relaxed and pushed the throttle lever forward until the launch was making about eight knots.

He swung her nose southeast, and headed for what he (and only he, perhaps) called Ship Island because against the sunrise the silhouetted trees on the island looked like the rigging on a far-off ancient sailing ship. The rest of the trip was silent, each of them with their own thoughts. Anderson was glad to have his launch back on open, deep water and obviously Marjorie was just glad to leave behind that piece of shoreline, including what it may contain. They would both have things to deal with tomorrow, but tonight was, thankfully, over.

It didn't take them long to reach the island. Anderson knew there was a little bay with a dock and a boat shed on the south side, and he swung east to go around to the bay. "I'm going to signal your sister," he commented. "She can meet us at the dock. I trust it's deep enough to get the bow of this old tub up to the dock, or do we have to get you back into your kayak?" He levered off two long blasts of the horn as he rounded the end of the island; by now his navigation

lights were showing brightly in the late dusk, so he knew Marjorie's sister would see them coming.

“We have an outboard tied up on the left side as we'll be coming in,” Marjorie responded. “There's at least four feet of water halfway down the dock on the right, so you should be okay. I'm sure Wendy will be down at the dock to help us in.”

“Thanks – perfect.” Anderson had already eased the throttle back and carefully approached the dock. Sure enough, he could see another person stepping up to meet them.

Between the two ladies, mooring lines were passed and tied to the rickety wharf. Introductions were made. Understandably, the probably younger and slightly plumper Wendy had been worried, probably very worried, so Marjorie kept the explanation to a minimum, just something about the foggy evening near the village and losing her bearings. More would come later. Anderson quickly took his leave, after receiving a gentle squeeze on the arm from Marjorie and one last flood of thank-yous from her sister. They cast off the lines for him; he backed away from the dock, turned out of the bay and back around the island, heading northwest toward the barely-visible lights of Spirit River.

Of course, he had known the night was not even close to being over. Anderson called Arnold when he was about fifteen minutes from the village, and suggested he warn Marion he was stealing him for a beer – at home, not at the pub.

When he pulled into his berth, he could see truck lights at the dock. Arnold was there to take his lines and help him tie up. Anderson made some quick notes in the log before he shut

down the genset and the main engine, and tonight he did not forget to lock the wheelhouse and even put the padlock on the heavy security chain he sometimes used when he was away. Tonight he felt uneasy – not a feeling he normally entertained.

Arnold drove him up the block to the house. Once settled at the table with beers in hand, Anderson filled him in on his evening with the lady from the island, what she believed she had found, and what Anderson himself feared. “Somehow, I can’t believe that – if indeed it was Anita – she would have surfaced so soon, but it is possible. What have you heard in town, and especially from the cops?”

“Almost nothing. Certainly nothing beyond speculation. I think pretty well everyone who knew her at all has been contacted, and at least informally questioned. With nothing to go on at all, and given the distances between where she was last seen and her home and friends around here, there is still no talk of a search.”

“Well, what happened here tonight may well change everything.” Anderson went on to speculations of his own: “Of course, this may have been a case of a nice lady with a big imagination having a bad experience with a clump of weeds, but she’s awful level-headed, considering what she thinks she saw.”

“Know what?” Arnold said slowly. “I think we need to reach the cops tonight, and get them going on a body search as soon as possible in the morning.”

“How do we do that without lighting panic fires all over the place?”

Arnold nodded. “That’s going to be tough, but we’d better start working on a plan, and doing it now. I know nothing at all about body searches but I bet they are tough enough to manage on land, let alone in the water.”

“Okay,” said Anderson. “Let’s pull the trigger. It’s almost ten o’clock; why don’t you get the gendarmes on the phone... they always think I’m kinda weird (unless, of course they need to get out on the water when the weather’s bad). They work away better with you tow-truck jockeys!”

Arnold sucked down a mouthful of beer and retrieved his phone from his jacket. “OPS” was on his speed-dial – there was no local police force and the Ontario Police Service served the communities in the area. A water search would probably wind up involving the Mounties and even perhaps the Coast Guard, but the OPS was where to start and he knew most of the officers and support staff anyway. Arnold and his tow-truck would likely be on their speed-dial too, and he hoped that at this time of night he would reach the local office and not be shunted off to a 911 dispatcher from lord-knows-where in the province.

He got lucky: Sergeant John MacLeod from Maple Falls picked up immediately. “Evening John, it’s Arnold at Main Street Garage in Spirit River. I have some information that may tie in with the Antoine disappearance.”

There was a pause. “Okay, I’ll wait.” Arnold looked up at Anderson and said, “he’s put me on hold. I hate that!”

Anderson wandered over to the sink, cleaned out the coffee pot and started to brew a fresh pot while they waited. Just in case it would be a long wait, he popped open another couple of cans of “Blue” and brought them back to the table. “I thought this might be a long night. If we’re gonna meet with those guys tonight – which we should - they can come here; probably not a great idea to arrive at the cop shop with a couple of beers under our belts.”

“Hello? Yes, John,” Arnold broke in. “I’m here at Frank Anderson’s – yes, the boat guy – and he thinks there may be a body in the water just outside of town. Huh? Yeah, his instincts are pretty good about that stuff, but in this case it’s from a third party. Why don’t you talk to him...” and he handed the phone across the table.

“Hi Sergeant, Anderson here. Yeah, been a weird night so far. Yes, one of the cottagers was out kayaking around east of the village and thinks she snagged a body with her paddle. She paddled into town in a bit of a panic and wound up at my door. About 1900 hours. Panic? No, I probably shouldn’t have put it that way. Pretty calm actually – shock maybe. I gave her a warm brandy and water, then drove her out to where she thinks she saw this in my boat. Took her and her kayak back to her home after. Marked the spot with a buoy. Huh? Just a minute...”

Anderson took the phone from his ear and asked Arnold, “Did Anita ever hang around the docks or the beach? I don’t think I ever saw her around there at all.”

“Nah, I think she was more interested in fast cars and faster men. Even when she was a kid she never seemed much interested in the lake.”

“Sarge – did you get that? Yeah, it seems unlikely but you never know. And it is also seems a little early for a body to rise. Huh? sure, okay. Come on by. You know where I live? Yup, that’s the place. See you in a few minutes.”

Anderson clicked the phone off and handed it back to Arnold. “John’s at the edge of the village in the patrol car – the local office number was forwarded to his cell and he’s out driving around. He’ll be here right away.”

They polished off the beer cans and Anderson put them in a box by the kitchen waste bin before grabbing three coffee mugs. He filled two, set them on the table, and took some paper and a couple of pens from the desk before he sat down.

They didn't have long to wait; they could see the headlights as the Sergeant swung his cruiser around to the door. Actually, it wasn't a cop car at all – it was a nice new OPS-branded Escalade SUV. Arnold went to the door to welcome him in. “Nice ride, John. You're gonna have to give me more than two bits to cover my share! You two know each other?”

“You bet,” said the Sergeant, sticking out a huge paw to shake hands. He was a big man – classic middle-aged cop with a few extra pounds but still looking like he could hold his own in the corners. “We had you take us out to the Johnson place a couple of years ago. A break-in, as I recall. And that was before I got my new stripes.”

“I see the stripes, Sergeant John: congratulations!” Anderson took the paw and gave it a brief shake. “Coffee?”

“Please. Black. And guess what, this cop brings his own donuts and some to share!” He put the Tim Hortons box he had been carrying on the table. “And Frank, this is a really nice place – like a man-cave without the hockey posters. A person would never guess by looking at the outside, (no offense, but with the workshop and all!) I could settle right into a place like this.”

“Thanks – and thanks for the donuts – I could use one!” Anderson said as he poured the coffee. “Supper was more like breakfast and seems like almost as long ago.”

Munching down a couple of glazed donuts and slurping more coffee, Anderson gave the two men a more detailed account of the events earlier in the evening, while the sergeant wrote at length in his notebook. “That’s about it,” Anderson said when he got to the part about dropping Marjorie back home with her sister. “I called in Arnold, and here we are.”

John put down his notebook, took another mouthful of coffee and said, “Any bright ideas, gentlemen, about where to go from here? I do know we can pull in a cadaver dog from Sarnia, but I’d kinda like to take a more low-key look first. Do you have any high-techie stuff we could use right away – I mean, in the morning?”

Anderson sat quiet for a moment. Then, “well, yes, I have a low-tech side scan sonar unit on the boat, but it really is pretty basic and I don’t really have the right transducer to get the most out of it. If we’re gonna go that route, there’s a guy in Kingston who has a really good piece of kit and specializes in this kind of stuff. He ain’t cheap, but he’s good.”

He paused. “Actually, I have in mind a really really low-tech approach to start with. The wind has been almost non-existent this evening, and the forecast says it will likely stay that way until later in the day tomorrow, when it will start blowing from the northwest – and offshore, which will not be a help. But, a few folks with rowboats and canoes could cover that whole area right up to the shore; if that body is sitting at the surface, which seems likely from what that lady told us, we might just get lucky if we did it right after first light. That’s where I would start.”

“We might have to wake some people up to make that happen,” interjected Arnold. “It’s getting late.” He thought a moment, then, “Y’know, Anderson, the Protected Shorelines group has a couple of summer interns gettin’ around with canoes and ATVs... I could make a call and

ask ‘em to help out. I’m sure they would be happy to take a break from water-sampling and frog-counting.”

The sergeant thought for a moment. “I kinda hate getting civilians involved in finding dead bodies, but I guess if I brought along a couple of our folks from the detachment – we do have two 3-man inflatable boats – and Frank, if you could bring your big boat and shadow us just off the shore, we could cover the area almost before anyone knew what we were doing. I could stay on the beach and look too, but mostly be there to answer questions if anyone curious shows up. Those interns of yours could help too, on an ‘unofficial’ basis. Arnold, you could be ‘officially’ in charge of your interns and work from the boat with Frank. Anderson – you’re not saying much...”

Anderson had sat quietly through the discussion, but responded right away: “I like it. It’s simple to make happen, and if we don’t find anything, we haven’t wasted very much time. Let’s make some quick phone calls; Sergeant, dig up your guys to make sure they are available and Arnold, better track down those interns; there’s just the slightest possibility they are over at the Inn, in which case you’d best keep the details out of the conversation. Just tell ‘em to be at the dock with their canoes at, say, zero six hundred. Sorry... six o’clock; sun’s up around five thirty.”

It took less than twenty minutes for the two men to line up their personnel and equipment over their phones. The police officers were given a sense of what was going on, and the interns – who were indeed still at the Spirit Inn – didn’t have a clue, but that was just as well. Anderson spent a little time finding a close-in satellite image of the whole search area and he colour-printed enough copies for all the expected search participants.

PETER KINGSMILL

SUNSET AT 20:47

By the time they were done, the coffee pot was drained, the donuts had vanished and the men were tired. Arnold and the sergeant left for home, and Anderson rolled into bed with the latest copy of McLean's. He got about three paragraphs into the lead article before he drifted off to sleep with the bedside light still on.

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Anderson's cellphone alarm went off at 0500. On days when he didn't have early-morning plans he would just roll over and shut it off, but of course, not today. Dawn was breaking, still overcast but with pink sunrise streaks in the eastern sky. He rinsed out his thermos, travel mug and the coffee pot from last night and started another full pot. While coffee was brewing he made a quick breakfast out of a couple of pieces of toast with peanut butter, then filled his thermos and mug before heading out the door with the maps he had made last night for the team. This time he walked to the dock, assuming there would be lots of cop cars and other gear needing places to be parked close to the water.

As he stepped off the dock into the launch, he had a moment of thinking that he should have brought his little truck anyway, because it carried his diesel tank to re-fuel the boat. He unlocked the wheelhouse and grabbed the yard-stick from its hook on the bulkhead behind the operator's seat and found a rag inside the engine room hatch. He opened the fuel pipe cover and dipped the tank; no worries about diesel: sixty percent full, and that would be lots for today's

adventures. He wiped and replaced the measuring stick and noted the reading in the log, then used the same rag to check oil in the main engine and the genset.

He decided to leave the engines off until after people started to gather. He stashed his thermos by his seat and took the maps and his mug to the little map table on the port side of the wheelhouse, to the left of the three steps down into the cabin. In the process, he slopped some coffee onto the maps. He mumbled to himself as he snapped open the elegant aluminum briefcase that sat on the map table: “one of these days I am going to have to start actually carrying this damn thing.” A couple of years earlier the folks who hung out at “The Zoo” had gotten together and given him the briefcase for Christmas, because he was legendary for always having his papers crumpled, greasy, and – covered in coffee. And he never had a pen. He had been touched by the gift, but somehow the case had never left the wheelhouse. “Maybe it’s time I grew up and pretended I’m a big corporate CEO,” he chuckled.

At that point, he remembered he had locked and chained the boat last night. As he was opening the lock and releasing the chain, a provincial police SUV pulled into the small parking area and swung around to place the trailer it was towing closer to the inner end of the dock. Two patrol officers got out and stepped around back to untie the two small inflatable boats that were rather haphazardly held on the trailer with small Canadian Tire ratchet straps. Anderson stepped off the boat onto the wharf: “Good mornin’, folks. I’m Anderson, and I’m the first one here. Maybe bring those things over to the boat and we’ll load ‘em on deck... they’re not the kind of outfit you want to row down the lake for half an hour before we even need ‘em.”

“Makes sense to me,” said one, and with Anderson’s help they quickly got the inflatables down and across the dock and into the well deck, making a third trip for oars, lifejackets, and

personal gear. With that accomplished, all three stood together along the dock: “Hello sir, I’m Constable Andy Bathgate and this is Corporal Marie Beauchemin. She’ll be our lead with the small boats; Sergeant MacLeod is right behind us with an ATV. He told us he would be staying along the shore to assist from there – and deal with the public. All of us will have radio contact.”

Anderson shook hands with the officers and gave a brief outline of what was planned. He thought to himself that – in military or even police terms – this was hardly a carefully-planned exercise, but he hoped he came across as more-or-less organized.

If, so far, everyone seemed to know what they were doing, that illusion all fell apart in about a minute and a half when the PSP science interns arrived with the Program’s beat-up old Ford 150 and a canoe piled on back and roped down with quarter-inch yellow poly rope. They quickly stepped out and headed to join those already on the dock. The driver was very tall, athletic, and very black, dressed in slacks, expensive sport shoes, an open-necked shirt and a Greenpeace ball cap. His passenger was short and blond, dressed in jeans that fit everywhere they touched, a Spirit Inn sweatshirt and long hair gathered up and stuffed through the strap on her plain ball cap. “So, what’s all the excitement this morning?” she asked, eyeing the cops as though she had a joint stuck in her hatband.

Anderson, of course, knew them both. “Hi Cyndi, good morning Adumbi! Glad you could make it. Our uniformed friends here have a couple of inflatable rowboats with them, and together we have a bit of a search to do. Andy and Marie, please meet Cyndi Johansson and Adumbi Jakande. They are here as summer interns for the Protected Shorelines Program, so they are pretty familiar with observing the water from their canoe. Perhaps we can get that thing off the truck and tie it alongside the dock – on this side – and loaded up with the gear. Then we can

gather back at the boat and go through the search plan together... I see that Sergeant John is just joining us, along with Arnold from the garage and all of you know him.”

The four younger folks headed for the old pick-up. Anderson chuckled to himself as he watched briefly; Constable Andy and Intern Cyndi were go get ‘em types, immediately busy untying the canoe, turning it over and carrying it down to the water, while Corporal Marie and Senior Intern Adumbi were obviously slated for management positions, basically being helpful without doing much. Anderson waved at Arnold and the sergeant as he headed for the launch, where he stepped into the wheelhouse, fired up the engines and turned on the instruments and radios.

It was almost full daylight by now. There was no sign of yesterday’s rain although there were still lingering clouds. And thankfully, no wind. “Morning guys,” Anderson greeted Arnold and John who had unloaded themselves from Arnold’s old pickup and joined him on the boat with – notably – a large Tim Hortons box. “Glad you live in Maple Falls and were able to pick up some breakfast rations for us troops.”

“Yeah, but they’re yesterday’s, I’m afraid. I picked ‘em up before closing last night ‘cause I thought Timmy’s might not be open so early this morning. Turns out I was wrong; I saw they were open when I drove up the highway but I already had these. Is what it is, I guess!”

“They’ll work for me,” said Arnold. “Thanks! Frank, have you had a chance to let everyone know what we’re gonna do?”

“Nope. Actually, we haven’t been here long enough, and in any case I kinda wanted you two here to remember whatever I left out. Which is mostly everything important except that it’s Zero-Dark-Thirty on Thursday and I have lots of fuel onboard.”

“Chicken-shit!” John teased him. “It was your idea, I seem to recall... Okay folks,” he spoke loudly down the dock, “let’s get together over here and make a plan.”

The OPS officers and the young interns joined Arnold, Anderson and John, standing in the boat’s well deck or perched on the wide gunwales. The sergeant continued:

“Folks, we’re going to spend a couple of hours – along the east shore over there – looking for what we believe may be a body – a human body. Yesterday afternoon, a lady was along there with her kayak, had her paddle catch on something which disappeared under the water. Not a big deal except – she thinks she saw a body and particularly a face as it went under.”

The lazily lighthearted mood suddenly went serious. In the case of the PSP interns, the mood became very serious; obviously this was not the kind of thing that had been written into their Program job descriptions – ever. The ever-polite and well-spoken Adumbi was the first to respond: “Sir, of course we are willing to help in any way, but for myself – and I am sure the same is true for Cyndi – I have absolutely no training to prepare me for this. The first time I was even out in a canoe was in May when we came here. How is such a thing done?”

“It’s not a big deal,” threw in Constable Andy. “you just paddle along and keep you eyes open.”

The sergeant shot the young constable a hard look. “Actually, it is a big deal, in many important ways. You are right, it’s all about keeping your eyes open, but there’s more: things like this are upsetting for all of us, even for those of us who have done it before.” Turning to the interns, he continued, “we are grateful you are here to help, and I assure you that not one of us will forget this morning, whether we find anything or not. It can be upsetting, and you will continue to experience the adrenaline rush that you feel right now. But it is, after all, just a

process, and I'm going to ask Mr. Anderson to lay it out for us because – although three of us are police professionals, Mr. Anderson is the water guy and fully understands what we have to do for the next few hours.” He smiled kindly to the interns, and then nodded to Anderson.

“Time to talk about things we can understand,” Anderson thought to himself. “Hang on folks, let me get out some maps we printed off last night.” He quickly stepped into the wheelhouse, scooped up the maps and most importantly the box of donuts John had brought. He passed the box to the Corporal to distribute, and the maps to Arnold. “I have some hot coffee inside if anyone wants. Now, Arnold will give you each a map – nothing fancy but it gives you an idea where we are going. The location starts along the shore to the east and Cyndi and Adumbi can get there in about 20 minutes; I have seen them paddle and they do it well – and if the donuts are any help – fast. Arnold and I will be in this boat, and will carry Marie and Andy and their inflatables (which are slow) until we get to the general area where we will put them in the water and begin a search pattern, three little boats about ten feet apart starting very close to the beach. When we get to the end of the search area, you'll simply turn around and go back the other way, but a little further out from shore. And so on – we just repeat that process several times. Paddle slowly, eyes wide open like Andy says. The Sergeant will keep pace along the beach, and Arnold and I will stay well off away from you, but ready to help. John – I am hoping you brought enough handhelds for the three boats, for you, and for us – that's five? I can't pick up OPS radio signals from this old tub.”

“Glad to hear it!” chuckled the Sergeant. “Yes, I have the radios... here...” and he unloaded the contents of a backpack he had brought and handed each person a small portable radio. “Mr. Anderson has pretty well covered it all, but there is one important thing I need to say:

do not (I repeat, do not) touch anything you see. Stop paddling immediately, hold your position, wave your hands and call in on the radio.”

“Okay,” said Anderson. “If there are no questions, then it’s time to get going as the sun is well above the horizon now. It’s still nice and calm, but we want to finish before that changes. Adumbi and Cyndi – you start down the shore with your canoe first, then I’ll get us off the dock and catch up. John, I assume you will drive down the shore road and unload that ATV somewhere?”

“No, I’ll just unload it here and drive it down; it’ll be quicker.”

“Okay everyone, let’s get at it. Take care and don’t hesitate to call on that radio if you need anything.” Anderson turned to clear his spring lines and asked Andy and Marie to get ready to cast off the bow and stern lines. He waited for Arnold to get back onboard after helping the Sergeant unload the ATV from his truck, looked to make sure the canoe was well out of the way, and called for the lines to be cast off. He pulled the launch away from the wharf and headed out of the harbour and along the shore behind the canoe. The OPS officers stood outside the wheelhouse gazing into the water as if already searching, while Arnold joined him in the wheelhouse.

Once well out of the harbour, he punched a course into the autopilot that would take the boat to the last waypoint he had set last night, well on the village side of what he supposed to be a search area, and set the throttle at a little less than half, moving them at about five knots toward the waypoint. “Arnold, got a smoke?”

“Early in the day for you ain’t it?”

“Yeah, well, it’s feeling like one of those days... thanks.” He lit the cigarette thoughtfully, then asked, “I had been thinking I should let Marjorie – the lady from last night – know what we were up to, but I didn’t want to involve her in this morning’s adventure. Waddyathink... should I give her a call?”

“Hmm. Yeah, probably. And in any case, John’s going to want to interview her, one way or the other, and he’ll probably want to do that this morning, after this little search is over. I’d go ahead.”

Anderson took out his cellphone and found the number she had given him last night. It rang twice: “Hello, Marjorie? It’s Frank Anderson, the guy who gave you a lift home last night... yes, I did – and I hope you managed to get some sleep too. Mmm, ya, I can imagine it wasn’t a great night. I’m calling because I wanted to keep you up to date. Right now, we’re out with the OPS from Maple Falls, and three small boats covering the shoreline where you showed me last night. They thought that was the best way to start, and I know they will want to interview you, sooner than later. The boss’ name is Sergeant John MacLeod, and he’s a really good guy – Arnold and I have known him a long time. He even brought us donuts this morning! What? No, not to worry. We can do this preliminary look without getting you involved but – like I said – he will want to interview you. When I find out his timing, do you want me to give you another call and then bring him out to your place, or do you want to run in here with your outboard?”

There was a brief pause, then, “Okay, that’d be fine. I’ll call you with a time and you and Wendy can run in and meet him at the village. At the dock, or at my place, or? Okay, my place it will be. I’ll give you a shout.”

He clicked off the phone and checked out the GPS chart. He punched off the autohelm and reduced speed a little; the canoe crew must be tiring because he was gaining on them. They were over half way there anyway. He turned to the police officers (who had joined Arnold and him in the wheelhouse) and explained, “That was the lady who started this whole thing by thinking her paddle had made contact with what might be a body. Your Sergeant has a whole bunch of notes from me, but as I told the woman, he’ll probably want to visit with her himself, and pretty soon.”

The Corporal had pulled out her notebook, but thought better of it and tucked it back into her uniform jacket. “Oh yes, I am sure he will, sooner than later is usually how that happens. I’m surprised he didn’t go out and find her last night!”

“Well, I’m pretty sure he realized she wasn’t going anywhere from her island in a fog in the middle of the night,” Anderson said with a lopsided grin, which the Corporal did not see. Arnold did, and laughed out loud.

END OF THREE CHAPTERS