

ALONG THE DARKSOME ROAD

Based on a true story

By J.J. Maxwell

Published by Reviresco at Smashwords
P.O. Box 179
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32004.

Copyright 2018 by J.J. Maxwell
All Rights Reserved, including the right of reproduction
in whole or in part in any form.

If you would like to use material from the book (other than for review purposes), prior written permission must be obtained by writing the publisher.

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return to your favorite ebook retailer and purchase your own copy. Thank you for your support of the author's rights.

Any references to historical events or incidents, names or characters, businesses or places are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual events, places, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Photographs in the book are of items owned by the author and are
Copyright 2018 by J.J. Maxwell

This book is available in print at most online retailers.

...along the darksome road, thither whence they say no one returns.
- GAIUS VALERIUS CATULLUS, ROMAN POET

PREFACE

Very old books are often an adventure in and of themselves. Their look and feel compel you to treat them with regard, somehow conveying a sense that care and appreciation should be taken when handling them. When a very old book is pulled from amongst its peers and opened, a wonderful aroma of musty mystery wafts out, igniting a sense of excitement and discovery at what knowledge, romance, or adventure might be contained within its yellowed pages. Changes in writing styles and language use from one decade (or century) to the next can be profound. Slang and meaning that at first seem quaint and old-fashioned soon becomes unexpectedly familiar and less of a distraction as you read along. Best of all, though, are the lucky little surprises you might find inside. A slip of paper with a note jotted down by a previous owner, a store receipt or post card from long ago used as a book mark, maybe some writing in the margins or the underlining of a sentence on a dog-eared page that gives you an inkling of the owner or the times. The best places to find old books, of course, are at estate sales, antique shops and rare book stores.

One autumn not long ago, our family was in Boston, the last stop on a weeklong driving vacation visiting different cities in the Northeast. If you've never been to Boston, it's one of the perfect American "walking" cities, with great restaurants, shopping, and museums from one historically significant block to the next. On our last day there, we were walking back to our hotel to freshen up before dinner, with plans to pack our suitcases afterwards so we could just load up the car and start heading home the next morning. As we walked along the Washington Street portion of the Freedom Trail, we spotted a sign for a used book store with an arrow pointing down a little alley. Since we're a family of readers, my wife and daughter immediately suggested we go down the alley to find the store and see what old books they might have.

We spent a good couple of hours in that store, and in the end my daughter purchased a yellowed and worn Bobbsey Twins book published in 1915. Inside the faded front cover of that book, a young girl named Jerane Ibershoff had penciled in her name and address. One evening after we had gotten back home we did a search for her name on the internet on the off chance that we might learn something about the girl who owned the book so long ago. To our surprise, her name came up a number of times, and as we clicked on each link, what had started out as an entertaining search descended into a swirl of dismay as newspaper articles from almost one hundred years ago drove home the terrible fate of a young Ohio woman in a beautiful Swiss valley.

That book became heavy in my hands, with the woman's name and address written in the front from when she was just a child, and now knowing her brutal end as a young adult. I felt a curious need and then, mysteriously, an obligation to keep researching, looking for every article and scrap of information I could find. I made extensive use of Google Translate to understand the articles about the murder written in the French and German newspapers of the time, in addition to scouring American newspaper archives from the period. Eventually, I gathered all those notes and began organizing a timeline of what had happened, plotting the location of each event where it had taken place on a map of the valley. In the end, that stack of research to understand Jerane Ibershoff's last day on earth and her sisters Helen's anguished overnight search for her became this book.

CHAPTER 1

A Delightful Little Book Store

Spring Lane is the oldest street in Boston (it was named in 1630 when the Puritans first settled in the area and procured water from a spring that is now long gone). Today it's a pedestrian only walkway that runs east and west about a block north of the Old South Meeting House in the downtown area. Turning off of Washington Street and onto Spring Lane is almost like entering a Harry Potter movie; it's just a little brick alley with a few old store fronts caught between tall, modern office buildings.

Nestled on Spring Lane is the Commonwealth book store. The front of the Commonwealth is a combination of two old store fronts, one made of wood and the other of ornate cast iron. Over the cast iron store front is a long black awning that reads "Books & Old Prints" with a giant Victorian era street lamp mounted on the wall just to the right of it. A sign is taped inside the glass of that door with the words "Please use other door" with an arrow pointing to the left. Just to the left is the beautifully finished wooden store front that is the actual entrance to the book store. Inside the Commonwealth you'll find polished wooden floors and vacuumed carpets, clean shelves, cabinets with sparkling glass doors to protect the more valuable books and prints, and of course thousands of antique books. It has a wonderful juxtaposition of the smell of a clean store and the aroma of old books.

The White family had found the bookstore at the end of a long afternoon of walking along the Freedom Trail, which meanders through Boston from Boston Commons to Bunker Hill. Intrigued by the little brick alley, they walked down Spring Lane and went right into the Commonwealth, getting happily lost among all the old books. After a while, surprised that they had all spent almost two hours looking through the books, Mom and Dad White were ready to check out, while their eight-year-old son Bobby and fourteen-year-old daughter Stephanie hurriedly tried to decide which book they wanted to buy.

"Look at all these books Mom, how can I make up my mind which one to pick? Can't we pick more than one?" Stephanie said. Her mom looked at her sympathetically. "I know Steph, but you still have all your school reading to do." She raised one finger. "Just one."

Stephanie gave an exasperated sigh, flipped her hair, and put down one of the three books she was holding and stomped towards the front of the store. Her mother watched her walk away with two books and looked at her husband, who raised his eyebrows and smiled in acknowledgment.

Bobby had a book in his hands, but as he walked towards the cashier he stopped by a table and picked up a faded blue cloth covered book and opened it. "Whoa, this one is really old. The Battleship Boys at Sea. It says copyright 1910. Cool!"

He put down the other book he was holding and ran over to the counter to join Stephanie as she was looking at the two books she was holding. She opened one, a book of girls' fashions. The girls pictured were dressed in Victorian era finery, with large hats, bows in their hair, and dresses and coats below the knees, almost all of them wearing black ankle boots. She closed it and opened the front cover of the other book she was holding, The Bobbsey Twins on a Houseboat.

THE BOBBSEY TWINS
ON A HOUSEBOAT



LAURA LEE HOPE

Penciled inside the book was a name and address. "Jerane Storrs Ibershoff," she read the address out loud, "Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Oh cool!" Stephanie hadn't seen that when she looked at the book the first time and was instantly intrigued, saying out loud to herself, "This one!" Her parents joined her and Bobby at the counter. "Oh Mom, look at this!"

Stephanie showed her mom the inscription in the book. Dad leaned in to take a look also. "She must be the girl who owned this book." Mom said. "When we get back home we can look her up on the net and see if she's mentioned anywhere."

Bobby strained to see between them. "Hey, let me see the copyright on that one." He grabbed the book and opened it to the copyright page. "1915? Ha! Mine is older!" Stephanie pulled the book back from Bobby and put it on the counter and then grabbed her little brother's book.

Bobby poked her in the ribs and started to pull his book back from Stephanie, but before things escalated too far their dad stepped between them. "Oops, excuse me you two."

He took Bobby's book from Stephanie and gave his credit card to the cashier. As she was ringing up their purchases, Dad handed Bobby back his book. "Do you know who was president in 1910?" Bobby rolled his eyes and looked annoyed. "Oh, I don't know, who?" Dad smiled, "Teddy Roosevelt!"

Stephanie piped up immediately, "No Dad, we just learned that in history last year, it was William Howard Taft." Their dad thought about it for a second. "Was it Taft? We'll look it up later. Anyway, let's go everybody!"

They left the store and headed down the lane toward the Freedom Trail. "We don't have to look it up," said Stephanie, under her breath, "It was Taft." She leafed through her book as they walked, Mom and Dad following behind, as Bobby ran ahead of them all, out of Spring Lane and back into the modern world.

7.00
1851-JOV 4

Jerane Storro Ibershoff
Stillman Pool
Cleveland Heights
Ohio.

CHAPTER 2

From Excitement To Dismay

Back home from Boston and settled in after all their travels, Mom was busy in the kitchen, Bobby was reading his new book on a chair by himself, and Dad was sitting on the couch watching TV with Stephanie next to him surfing on her tablet.

Dad turned his head towards the kitchen, "Want me to help with anything?" Mom called out from the kitchen, "No thank you, just watch your show. It takes twice as long when you help." Dad looked and sounded relieved. "Whew!" he exclaimed, happily turning his attention back to the TV.

Mom called out from the kitchen again, "What are you doing Stephanie?" Stephanie didn't even look up from the tablet. "I'm just trying to look up the girl who owned the Bobbsey Twins book." She typed in the name "Jerane"; hit enter and then swiftly swiped her finger up the tablet, over and over again, driving down through the results. Nothing. Then she thought of something else and swiped her finger in the opposite direction, back up to the search bar and typed in "Taft". Quickly swiping and scanning the results as they zoomed by, she turned to her father in triumph as she typed swiftly on the tablet and started swiping again.

"It was Taft, Dad." Her dad took a moment to pull his attention away from the TV. "What?" "The President in 1910 was William Howard Taft," said Stephanie, "I told you!" Her dad leaned towards her to look at the tablet. "Let me see." He started to take the tablet to read what Stephanie found. "It's already gone Dad. Oh my gosh, why can't you just believe me?" Her dad looked startled for a moment. "Geez, Steph."

Suddenly Mom called out from the kitchen, in a warning tone, "Steph!" Her dad let go of the tablet, "Sorry Sweetie, I believe you; I just wanted to take a look. 1910? William Howard Taft. OK. President Big Belly."

Bobby looked up from his book. "President Big Belly? What, Dad?" His dad smiled, "Nothing Bobby, President Taft was a big man that's all. That's what I remembered about him from seeing his picture in school." "Oh," Bobby was satisfied with that answer and went back to his book as his dad returned to watching his program.

Stephanie was swiping and tapping on her tablet, then stopped and looked over at her Bobbsey Twins book on the coffee table. She took a picture of the cover with her tablet, then opened the front cover and took a picture of the words penciled inside. "Jerane Storrs Ibershoff," she said quietly, "Stillman Road, Cleveland." She posted the two pictures for her friends to see, and then carefully typed the whole name into the search bar and hit enter. To her surprise and delight, this time the search came back with results.

"Oh my gosh Mom, the girl's name is on the net a couple times!" "Isn't that amazing," Mom called back, "She was a girl back in 1915 and her name is listed on the internet? She must have done some things when she grew up!"

Stephanie clicked on one of the links and began to read. As she was reading, her mood darkened and she was getting very visibly upset. She read, swiped and tapped, then read again. All of a sudden, she sucked in her breath. "Oh no! Oh no!"

Stephanie dropped the tablet on the couch, leapt up and ran into her bedroom. Mom came running out of the kitchen as Dad jumped up from the couch and they both ran into Stephanie's room. Bobby dropped his book and ran in after them.

“Stephanie, what's wrong?” Mom was looking at her intently, checking to see if she had gotten hurt somehow. “What’s the matter sweetie, what's wrong?” said Dad. Stephanie was on her bed, her head in her pillow, crying. Her mom touched her arm. Stephanie pulled it away and buried deeper into her pillow.

Seeing that she wasn’t physically hurt, her mom spoke a little more sternly, though she was still concerned, “Stephanie what is it?” “She's dead!” said Stephanie, her reply muffled by her pillow. “What? Who?” said Dad. Bobby chimed in, “Who's dead? What happened?”

“Stephanie what are you talking about?” said Mom, “Who died?” “The girl who owned the book.” said Stephanie, “She died.” Her dad looked relieved. “Well, she was a young girl in 1915 Steph, she grew up and got old and then she died.” Stephanie shook her head. “No Dad, she didn't grow up, she died.”

This was too much for Bobby. “What? She didn't grow up? She died?” Stephanie cried harder, her mom was beginning to get annoyed with the drama, and Bobby began to get upset. Finally, Dad chimed in, “Now wait a minute, let's take a look at this and see what's going on.”

Dad left the room, followed by Bobby, and they headed over to the couch. Dad picked up Stephanie’s tablet and sat down to read the screen. As he read along, he began shaking his head. Bobby looked at his dad, a worried look on his face. “What is it Dad?” Dad pointed to the couch next to him. “But Dad...” Dad gave him a look and Bobby sat down on the couch, quietly leaning in to see the screen.

Mom came out and looked at the tablet over her husband’s shoulder. “Oh no, the poor dear, the poor thing.” “Who?” Bobby asked, standing up on the couch, “Stephanie or that girl?”

“Bobby!” Dad’s warning tone made him sit back down again. “It's a little late now,” said Mom, “he saw all the commotion. Can you bring up the rest of the article?”

Bobby stood up on the couch again and leaned over his dad as he scrolled down the article.

“Wow,” Dad said, “September 1932.” Bobby read the headline out loud. “Young American college student murdered.”