



Someplace Different

By
George G. Story



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Gloucester, Massachusetts

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Acknowledgments

So many things can go amiss during any writing project. Sometimes you simply need someone to help bounce thoughts and ideas off of and someone to let you know if, in their opinion, you went too far or not quite far enough. This time around that someone was Lorraine M. Tempone, whose help was the perfect help to keep me on track and excited about the work. *She says she cried!* I am grateful to her for her time and effort.

Also to my wife, Ann, her voice is the one I hear. She always finds the little things I miss in thinking a scene through; *big difference between 'was' & 'were'*. She keeps me honest, true to “real” sentence structure and she never messes with storyline. I always fear that red pen; however, I am continuously thankful for it. Without her patience, encouragement and support nothing would ever get written.

For
Marilyn Ruth Story
A Beautiful Granddaughter

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Chapter One

Sixteen year old Cooper Hayden, Coop for short, did not want to be in Gloucester, Massachusetts. He felt his parents could have very easily allowed him to stay on Long Island with his father and his friends from school. But no, they were not having any of Coop's thoughts on the matter. So, for the sixteenth time he was going to spend his summer on Cape Ann.

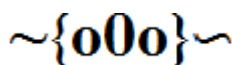
The peninsular that is Eastern Point in Gloucester, Massachusetts ends at the Eastern Point Lighthouse, and the half mile long Dog Bar Breakwater lying directly west of the lighthouse. The Breakwater, made up of local Cape Ann granite, is a huge jetty or wall protecting Gloucester's southwest harbor from severe storms and drastic tidal effects. Most important thing about the breakwater is the little red light at the end of the rocky wall that keeps mariners from wrecking on the huge stone barrier. It is well marked on coastal charts.

At one time all that information about Gloucester and that massive stone edifice mattered to Coop, but now he just did not want to be in Gloucester. It was summer and he was forced, again, to vacation with his mother and a new addition to the family, his ten month old baby brother, Bobby, at his father's family home on Eastern Point. All the while his father would remain home in Port Jefferson in the Long Island section of New York State working.

Jonathan Hayden, Coop's dad, is a lawyer in a fairly small, but very busy, law office in downtown Port Jefferson. "Port Jefferson," his father said in an effort to appease and defuse the situation, "is too busy with tourists and the huge numbers of people coming and going via the ferry for me to be worried about you all summer. Next year, when you are seventeen, you can get a summer job and stay home with me for most of the summer." That was the end of the appeasing, the defusing and the discussion. Coop desperately hoped that the next twelve months would fly by.

Alone, Coop walked and climbed the shoreline of the area mostly known as part of the Back Shore located on Gloucester's easternmost southern edge. This is where his grandfather's house was located. Cooper Hayden, the First (Coop was the second, named after his grandfather), had been a lawyer, as well. Jonathan Hayden is as good a lawyer as his father was, and Cooper Hayden the First was very proud of his son. The elder Hayden hoped the tradition would continue on with Coop.

The last thing Coop wanted to think about, or be, was a lawyer. He was holding out and hoping for an infielder's position on a major league baseball team. Dreams of big league play followed him almost everywhere he went, and during the summer he lived around baseball schedules. However, as it turned out, his sixteenth summer on Eastern Point, in Gloucester, was going to be taken up by something altogether different.



Cooper Hayden, the first's, Eastern Point home is not directly on the water, but inland, set well back from the rocky shoreline by some five or six hundred feet. The walk to the water is not very far, nor very difficult,

just along a dirt road ending directly in front of a large freestanding boulder on the very upper edge of the rocky shore. No one knows, with certainty, how this large boulder was deposited there. Most people are quick to say they believe a huge ice glacier that crawled over the Northeastern United States some one hundred and twenty thousand years ago had simply left it standing there when the ice finally melted away. This boulder is at least a fifteen foot gray and brown irregular surfaced stone sphere.

In the past Coop would sit on top of the huge rock looking out to sea. From this vantage point he can easily watch fishing boats round the point and go in and out of Gloucester Harbor. The entrance is not far around the tip of Eastern Point, with the lighthouse and the massive stone breakwater standing guard there. No matter, Coop had hoped for more this summer.

At the right time of the tide, the surf pounds the rocky shore, and at other times the sea is as calm as a small goldfish pond. No matter, the one constant with the ocean is its tides, so much so that they can be predicted easily and relied upon (if you pay attention). Bored as he thought he would be about all this, Coop has never lost interest in watching the ocean, whether the sea was angry or calm.

Coop rode all over Gloucester with his grandfather and had come to know the city well. Grandpa Hayden, to break up his own monotony in life, drove into town nearly every day, and to beat the boredom of his own singular existence, Coop, more often than not, tagged along.

Khaki shorts and varying colored tee shirts make up Coop's summer uniform. Unless he was riding with his grandfather going somewhere, his sneakers rarely found their way to his feet.

No matter how hot the summer days get the ocean water so far north in the Atlantic Ocean seldom touches sixty degrees; in truth, it rarely ever tops fifty-five degrees for any length of time. However there are pools of trapped water when the surf crashes up far enough to reach the rocky crags. These pools warm up, in some cases to almost seventy degrees, bathwater in comparison to the ocean. One cannot really swim very far in most of these shallow pools; they are not very big, and some are mere puddles. Others, however, reach almost twenty-five feet in diameter and the deepest, Coop has ever found, is four feet deep. The bottoms of these deeper puddles are very rocky and a bather needs to be very careful. Jumping into such a pool would be foolish and everyone living in the area knows that. There have been many horror stories told about broken limbs and even worse over the years.

Coop knows of one such pool, but, unlike the other pools, the water always seems the same temperature as the open ocean. The only thing Coop could think of that would cause such an effect is that there must be a fissure in the stony shoreline allowing seawater to circulate and flow freely with the tide. In Coop's mind that explanation seemed clear.

Coop was careful, but he knew that there were no sharp rocks in the very middle of this pool of water. It being so hot out, Coop jumped feet first into the pool. When he hit the water, it was so cold that he nearly went into shock. This time the water was more than extremely cold. Coop felt his foot touch the bottom of the pool. This was deeper than he had ever known this pool to be. He had never simply jumped in before.

When his foot felt the bottom he felt something else, something odd, there seemed an undertow, a surge, something pulling at him and he was drawn along into a very wide opening in the lowest part of the pool. He tried to swim against it, but was not strong enough to make a difference. He held his breath, but only a few seconds later he felt himself pushed to the surface by the raging torrent.

It was black, as dark as Coop had ever experienced. At that very moment, however, he was thankful there was fresh air to breath. He reached out in front of him and felt a rocky ledge. He held the ledge, pulling himself up by his elbows.

He stretched out his arms in an effort to hold himself in place. He caught his breath and tried to calm down. He closed his eyes for a moment, taking in deep breaths of air and trying to collect his thoughts. The thought about what may have happened in that few seconds was not tops in his mind yet. Coop was just hanging there, holding on and taking stock of his body. Was he hurt? He thought a moment and calmly assessed his body. He did not think he was hurt. He felt whole and he was in no pain whatsoever.

It was so black he was not certain his eyes were even open. His outstretched hands felt nothing within reach. He pulled himself up, working very hard to gain the top of the ledge so he could rest just for a moment. He rolled over, closed his eyes and breathed deeply. When he opened his eyes again he was facing upward. In the

distance he could see specks of streaming daylight coming in from a few narrow cracks between two large stones well over head. The longer he lay there the better his vision became. There was light enough to see around him, but little more than that.

Chapter Two

He felt around, there was a shelf, so it looked to Coop, some three feet off the stone floor. On the shelf, laden in dust, lay some oddly shaped items. Only the dark made the items seem oddly shaped, once he touched them, Coop knew exactly what they all were. The first thing he noted was a very fat and tall white candle, hardly used at all. Lying right beside the candle was a box of kitchen matches. He shook the box, and it seemed to be about half full. He slid the box open and found a match. He struck it on the side of the box, and Coop was surprised when the match sizzled into life. He did not hesitate at all and lit the candle.

The candle did not give off brilliant light, certainly not enough to read by, but it did allow Coop to see every corner of the small cavern-type room. Exactly in the middle of the room, and he did not know how he missed tripping over it, was a little boat, a canoe really, covered over tightly with an oily tarp. He did not know what the canoe was made out of. The small boat seemed to take up a lot of space; it was easily ten feet long.

After taking stock of the boat, he looked back at the shelf and saw a pair of binoculars, a sheathed bone-handled hunting knife, and a compass. What role any of those things played in this situation, Coop could not have imagined. In the opposite corner of the cavern Coop found a stack of material exactly the same as the boat was made of, also wrapped in an oily tarp. He did not know what this was. The stack had to be made up of nearly a dozen pieces of whatever it was. What they could be used for he did not know, maybe to build another boat? Coop looked the whole cavern over, while at the same time trying to think his situation through.

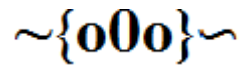
Coop could read his digital watch easily in the darkened room. He had been there just an hour looking at everything. It was obvious to Coop that whoever put these things there did not live there. Also, they had not been disturbed in a very long time, by the looks of the amount of dust on them. “Okay, this is only a rest stop. From here you must have to travel by boat,” he said out loud to himself. “But, which way and where will it lead?” he added.

He needed to think clearly. It was then he noticed there was nothing in the room to sit or lay on, confirming to himself that he was right, this was just a place to leave these things so they could be of use. The questions, how and why, kept creeping into his mind. “More questions than answers,” Coop muttered to himself.

He was fully rested now, and it was time to think about going back the way he had come. The current that drove him there had been very strong and he knew he could not swim against it. Current, he thought, movement of water. What would cause that kind of strong current or undertow? Circulation kept that pool cold like the ocean water. The tide would have been going out at the time he took his swim. He looked over the side of the ledge and he could see that the action of the water seemed calm.

He had grabbed the ledge as he was being pushed from his right so, when he got back in the water looking at the ledge, he would have to swim to the right. He had not needed to hold his breath very long, so wherever he had come from could only be a very short distance away, mere feet if his thinking was correct.

Coop blew out the candle, dropped gently into the cold water and, facing the ledge, swam only a yard or two before he came to a rock wall. Water seeks its own level, he knew, so, he would have to dive to find the hole to get back. He took a deep breath and dove to the bottom as far as he could and felt around. He found what appeared to be an opening. There was no resistance, and he swam through the hole and daylight greeted him in seconds. He swam to the surface. He was back in the light of day.



Coop walked toward home. An underwater cavern, a secret underwater cavern, he found a place no one else knew about, except the person who left those things on the shelf and built that boat. No one had been there for a long time, Coop could tell that. So, I can go there anytime I want, he thought to himself.

Dinner that night was quiet. His mother had her usual number of questions about his day, and Coop answered what he could, even while daydreaming about the day's amazing adventure.

Chapter Three

In his bedroom that evening, Coop lay on his bed staring up at the ceiling, trance-like. The dark secret room had his full attention. He simply could not get the cavern, the canoe, and the other things left there in storage out of his mind.

Moreover, Coop had never had anything in his life that was just his. He did not have to share this discovery with anyone, if he did not want to. He had never known about something that no one else knew about.

He fully intended to go back there the next day. More questions haunted him, however. What should he do next, what made the most sense? If he were to add to the things on the shelf, what would he need? Also, though he was not thinking about it in these terms, somewhere in his mind he was thinking, “What good can I make of this place? It is too dark to simply hang around in all day.”

Coop started to wonder, was this really a good thing after all? Someone had used it at some time for something, but what? The canoe and the other things were there for a reason, but what? Every time he thought he was making headway on one thought, another question came along.

The canoe was there for a reason! Obviously it was to take someone somewhere. It was pretty dark in there. Did he want to follow the dark passage and take a chance at getting lost in the dark? Reason somehow made its way into his brain. Someone had already done it and not gotten lost. The canoe was there; if that person had gotten lost, the canoe would not have been so neatly stored and preserved on the stone ledge.

The canoe is an invitation to go – where? There would only be one way to find out.

That morning the high tide time had been early, 5:27 a.m.; he had gotten caught in the rushing flow of that cycle of the going tide at about 10:30 a.m. He was able to easily ride the returning tide an hour later, very near slack-water time of the bottom of the tidal cycle.

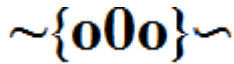
Logically he could go into the dark passage with the tides, but because the rush of water through the hole at the bottom of the pool is so strong, one can only return with the coming tides. Going was when the tide goes out or falls and coming tides are when they reverse, come in or rise.

So, if you were to go there during a going tide, this would mean there was no coming back until the tide turned and started coming. He took the thought process just one step further and realized that the same could hold true for the dark passageway. Once you started off in the canoe to follow the passage, the rush of the tidal effect just might mean there was no turning around until the slack-water of the turning tide.

More questions, but was Coop willing to take the chance? He would need to watch the time closely and give himself plenty of latitude for the return trip. The coming tide might keep him from getting lost in the dark.

The next day the going tide would begin at 6:45 a.m., making it impossible for his return before 12:14 p.m., just after noon. Considering he would have the whole time period of the coming tide to return, he could easily have twelve hours to explore what was there. Coop needed to remember that he could not stay beyond 6:52 p.m. and still get back without a 6 hour delay, which would make it well after midnight before he could swim through the hole to get home.

A delay like that would trigger a search for him, and he knew everyone in the neighborhood would be out looking for him. “Not a good way to start an adventure,” Coop said aloud to himself. The logic of it all started to get a little fuzzy as the night wore on and Coop drifted off to sleep.



Coop had remembered to set his alarm clock before he drifted off to sleep. He was ready to learn more about that dark hole when the alarm buzzer woke him at 6:00 that next morning.

The candle on the stone shelf did illuminate the cavern, but not very well. He would have to think about that in greater detail later on, but now he was anxious to go.

He quietly left the house walking down the dirt road headed for the huge glacier deposited boulder. The sun was well up by three fingers. His grandfather had taught him that every finger between the horizon and the sun measures fifteen minutes, so the sun had nudged its edge up over the horizon forty-five minutes before Coop walked out of the house.

The ocean was calm that morning, but Coop realized that it did not matter all that much, the pool would still be freezing and he braced himself for the shock. All the bracing in the world did not help, the splash instantly numbed his whole body.

He had told himself the night before, just before falling to sleep, that he needed to note everything he saw, felt and experienced. The first observation of the morning was, "boy is that water cold."

Just like the day before, when Coop got to the bottom of the pool, he noted a current. However, this time the current was not as swift. It takes time for the current to get rolling after the tides shift; he had not thought of that, observation number two.

Without the violent rush of the water at this stage of the tide, Coop found it much easier to gain the top of the stone ledge. He groped around in the dark until he found the candle and the matches. Nothing had changed since the afternoon before.

Coop needed to inspect the little boat more closely. With the candle in one hand, then the other, Coop looked at every inch of the little boat. The inside frame of the boat looked to be tied together with the some kind of rawhide lacing. The framing was all intact. Coop did not know how long the little craft had been in storage, but it looked perfect.

Inside the boat Coop found a paddle to move the canoe along; the paddle looked almost new, and if it had not been for the layer of dust on it, he would have thought it was placed there only a week or so ago. Slowly and carefully Coop slipped the canoe into the water and gently lowered himself into a kneeling position toward the back of the canoe.

Coop pulled out the paddle and moved along gradually with the slow motion of the water. He had not gone more than a minute or two into his travels when he noticed a bright light ahead of him. He paddled on for another ten or so minutes and he found himself out in the open. Shear rock walls were on each side of him, but not more than twenty feet above him he saw bright sunshine.

At the end of the fiord-like waterway, he found himself in an open area, a large bay of some type. To his right he spied more land and a rocky beach and coastline, however on the other side it looked like the open ocean. There was shoreline all around him for at least three quarters of the circle. This baffled him. It did not look like anyplace he knew.

Coop had called it correctly; the current created by the fall of the tide had gotten stronger, and there was no way he was going to be able to move the little boat back into the dark passageway until the tide turned.

Just to his immediate right there was a small pebble beach. He pulled for the beach and grounded out the canoe, pulling it up onto the beach quite some way. He did not want to take a chance that the canoe could drift off. As he stood taking in the scene, Coop looked at his watch and did some quick math. It had taken him under an hour to get this far. He went into the pool just at 6:30; it was then 7:20 when he pulled the canoe up on the beach. This would mean he had only three hours to look around. If he wanted to test his theory about the tides correctly he needed to be back at the mouth of the stone passageway no later than noon. That would give him time to be ready. If he was right, the coming tide would help carry him and the canoe right back where he had started.

So for the next three hours he would explore. Being new at this, he decided to keep the beach in sight, just in case.

Coop climbed to the top of the rise. There was nothing to see except natural undergrowth; bushes, wild flowers, blueberry bushes, tall trees, and wildly growing grass. There were no houses, no well-maintained lawns, and no signs of people anywhere. The body of water he had just come from was clear and clean, and most importantly, there was nothing on it. There were no marker bouys, no boats and no signs of commerce. The only sound that reached Coop's ears was the sound of the wind as it blew through the trees, the ruffling of leaves and the whistle of the wind blowing around the swaying limbs. The smell of the air was different. It smelled very good, there was a strong scent of wildflowers.

It was time for Coop to paddle back to the opening of the cavernous passage. He had not walked very far, keeping the beach and the canoe in sight. It was now 11:30; if he wanted to be ready to slip back the way he came, he had better get started, he thought.

The canoe was light enough for Coop to move around without trouble. When the canoe was in knee deep water, Coop climbed back into it and started to paddle toward the opening. The paddling was easy enough, and with little effort at all, Coop was in position at just the right time. He could feel the current help move him through the water, into the passageway, back into the dark cavern.

It took Coop just a minute or two for his eyes to adjust to the darkness. The sun and sky had been very bright, but his eyes did adjust, and soon he was moving along beautifully.

Coop slipped right up beside the shelf and climbed onto the rock floor, with the tide down it was higher and harder to climb onto. With little effort at all, Coop lifted the canoe and set it back the way he had found it. There was no sense waiting; he jumped into the water and dove to the bottom and again he found the opening easily. He swam through it and surfaced on the other side. He quickly climbed from the water. The sun was high in the sky, and the warmth of that sun helped Coop recover from the cold dip.

He made his way past the large boulder and onto the dirt road. It was lunchtime, and he was as hungry as he had ever been.

Chapter Four

That afternoon, after devouring two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, two large glasses of milk and a fairly big piece of angel food cake, Coop rode with his grandfather on his daily jaunt into town. He asked his grandfather if he would buy him a flashlight; not a little one, but a beam that could illuminate the darkest dark. It was a large dry cell type, and his grandfather bought a few extra batteries for him, as well.

Having had a pretty full day and an ample supper his mother had prepared, Coop retired to his room and lay on his bed scribbling down everything he could remember about his journey. Unknowingly, this was the start of a journal, a journal that would later become very important to him. There seemed nothing alarming about where he had gone. It was pretty enough, but it was certainly odd.

Coop wanted to know more than he did. The next morning's high tide was at 7:25 a.m. He would not need to rush. He could have a good breakfast before he went. He either had to eat well before he went to the pool or think of a way to take provisions with him.

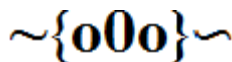
His thoughts turned to reasoning out a way to take his new flashlight and the extra batteries and some food so that it did not get ruined in the dive through the hole at the bottom of the pool.

Water tight, air tight plastic food bags would do the trick for some small things, but anything of any size would require more thought. Having some dry clothes to change into would be nice, he thought. A dry towel would be especially helpful to warm him after that frigid dip.

A large plastic food container would work. Even though it would only be underwater for a short time, he could tape the cover in place to keep the moisture out.

A change of clothes and a towel or two was a different matter. He supposed it would not be a bad thing if the clothes had to dry before he could wear them.

While all of this thinking was going on, Coop did not notice that his body was definitely winding down. Slowly Coop drifted off to sleep, still in his khaki shorts and tee shirt not having even turned down the bed.



The alarm clock went off just as he had set it the night before, at 6:30. Coop was surprised that he had slept all night without changing his clothes or slipping under the bed covers.

Nonetheless, Coop needed to stay focused and get moving; he had a pool to jump into in just under an hour, and he had things to do before that.

He opened his bottom bureau drawer and found about five more pairs of Khaki shorts and a whole array of multi-colored tee-shirts. He took two pairs of shorts and four tee-shirts and set them on the bed. Coop did not think his mother would miss a couple of beach towels, so he pulled two out of the linen closet and slipped the entire stack into a large trash bag. He added to his cache on the bed plastic jars of peanut butter, strawberry jelly, four bottles of water and a loaf of bread. He knew he needed to squeeze out all the air he could, or the satchel would not sink with him when he jumped in.

Coop double folded and burped the bag, then carefully squeezed it and burped it again and finally, with one more little burp; he sealed the whole packet with almost a whole roll of duct tape. He hoped that would do the trick. A large plastic food container held his new flashlight and the extra batteries. The container was the item he knew his mother would miss. She was always saying she did not have enough of these containers, and Coop

would be in trouble if she found that he had taken it and not returned it. The container would find its way back onto the shelf that night.

By the time he got it all together and ate something, it was 7:10. He had not seen a soul moving about the house; all was quiet. He then closed the back door behind him and headed down the dirt road. As he walked, he was going over in his head his timetable for the day. The tide would be high at 7:25 a.m. which would mean he could not think of returning until 1:13 p.m. at the soonest.

It was 7:15 a.m. and Coop had ten minutes before he could take the leap into the pool, he wanted to take full advantage of his time. He was in thought and even muttering to himself out loud as he walked. So engrossed in thought was he that he did not hear her when she fell into step beside him. "Hello, Cooper Hayden," she said.

She nearly startled him to death. Jolted back into reality, he calmly said, "Hello."

"Where are you going, Cooper Hayden?" she asked. She did not give Coop time to answer. "What you been up to? I haven't seen you since you got here."

Sandy Madison had not spoken to Coop for at least five years. At one time they had been close playmates; she lived year round next door to his grandfather, but that was when they were so much younger and Coop, only being a summer resident on Eastern Point, had not been able to compete with Sandy's year round friends. She had a social life that Coop could never have kept up with.

"Hello, Sandy. I've been fine, how are you?" Coop said coldly.

Sandy did not hear, or pay attention to, Coop's cool barb. "Yeah, I'm good. A little bored, seems all my friends have gone off doing summer things with families and stuff."

Coop just nodded his head and said, "Well, good to see you again. Gotta go! See ya!" Coop turned to go, but Sandy stepped in front of him. "What are you in such a hurry for? The water will be there forever." she said, walking backward as Coop kept moving.

He noticed that Sandy had grown up quite a bit. She had become a very pretty young lady. Her shoulder length light brown hair made her beautiful brilliant blue eyes sparkle in the early morning sun. She dressed in a colorful halter-top and Khaki shorts exactly like the ones Coop was wearing. She, like Coop, was barefoot. She was not carrying anything.

"Sandy, I'd really like to be alone right now. Could we catch up, like maybe, this afternoon? I think I'll be home about two o'clock." Coop did not wait for an answer, he only had a few more minutes before the tide completely turned and started going. He stepped around her, quickening his pace to the pool. He looked back at Sandy and saw her head off toward her front porch.

Coop got to the big boulder, walked around it and lowered his bundle so he could take one last look before going further. Everything looked okay so he, again, braced himself for the shock to come and stepped out into space gripping all that he had taken with him. He hit the water, found the passageway and swam through it and came up on the other side of the wall. He found his ledge and climbed onto it. He quickly shook off what water he could from the packages and set them down. First he opened the plastic container with the flashlight and turned the light on.

He slit open the bundle and started to unpack his packet so he could change into dry clothes. A voice behind him said, "Nice place you got here. Little dark, don't you think?" Coop knew at once, without turning around, who it was, and that Sandy had, in fact, followed him after all. He did not know what to say. He turned and looked at her, and her smiling face looked back at him. "Won't you ask a guest in? Where are your manners, Cooper Hayden?"

Coop knew what this would mean. The tide had turned and the rip in the tidal current was now such that she would not be strong enough to swim against it to get out. Whether he liked it or not, she was here and there was nothing he could do about it. "Sandra Madison, did you know this was here?" he asked.

"This is the one pool on the point no one would swim in, too cold. No, I didn't know this was here. I've never heard anyone talk about it." she said.

"Well, you have no idea what you've just gotten into." Coop replied.

"Nope, what have I just gotten into?" she asked. When she said it, the sentence sounded like she had left out the words 'smarty pants.'

“Well, first off, we cannot swim back the way we came until about 1:13 p.m., that’s after lunch.” She did give him the ‘smarty pants’ look after that comment. “Tide starts to turn then, and we can get a lift swimming back. Secondly, you’re wrong, someone does know of this place. All this stuff, except these few things I just brought in, was here when I found it two days ago, by accident.”

“What is this place?” she asked.

“That is what I want to know. Yesterday I took the canoe and followed the water passage out that way and came to someplace I’ve never been to. I was going to go again today, but I don’t want to leave you here alone.” Coop said.

“Then don’t! I’ll go with you,” she returned.

“I don’t know the boat is kind of small.” He said, flashing his light on the canoe. “There is only one paddle.”

“That boat’s not so small.” Sandy said. “We can both fit in there with room to spare if we both kneel.”

“It seems kind of old, I don’t know if it will hold us.” Coop said. “It might break apart.”

“Oh, come on, we won’t know unless we try,” she said. “Can I borrow one of your towels, it is cool in here.” While they had been talking; she had been climbing onto the stone ledge looking all around.

Coop finished opening his bundle and handed her a dry towel, a dry tee-shirt and a dry pair of shorts. “You can change over there. I’ll turn out the light.” Coop pointed into the farther corner of the cavern.

Coop was not happy. He had not wanted to share his secret, but now it was a moot point. Sandy was here, and there was nothing that could be done about it. However, he did not have to like it. He went ahead and changed in the dark, as well. He then went to work trying to find a place on the canoe where he could attach the rope that he had brought. The day before he had been worried about losing the canoe by leaving it unattended, and at least he would take this small step to assure himself it would not drift off on its own.

Sandy stepped out of the corner, using one of the towels to dry her hair. Coop was neither stupid nor blind; he had seen and watched Sandy Madison from afar for a long time. Sandy stood about five or six inches shorter than his five feet ten inches. He could tell she was a powerhouse, she was well developed with the arms and legs and build of a competitor. Sandy was easily the prettiest girl he knew, even though they had not been close for a long time. He also felt that he was out of her league completely, but it never kept him from thinking of her.

“Coop, do you have a comb?” She asked. This was a step up, he thought, she had most always called him by his proper name, Cooper, and most generally she said, Cooper Hayden. It always felt to Coop as if she was making fun of his name, but she never laughed or made it sound snide, so Coop did not get mad when she did it.

“Yeah – sure – okay.” He reached into his back pocket and handed her his black pocket comb. She looked at the comb through the beam of the flashlight, decided it was okay to use and started disentangling the few knots the water had left her. It did not take her long and she handed the comb back to him.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“I’m just trying to put my mind at ease.” He went on to explain what had happened the day before and what kept him from exploring beyond the beach.

Sandy nodded and pointed and shot her thumb and finger at Coop and said, “Gotcha, how you making out?”

“I don’t want to put a hole anywhere something could unravel, if you know what I mean.” Coop allowed, simply focusing on the boat and not looking up at her.

Sandy understood what he was saying, and though Coop could not see her, she nodded all the same as he spoke. “Maybe there is a way to slip it around something on the inside?” She said when he had finished.

Coop shrugged and changed his focus to the inner part of the little boat, feeling around the edges near one of the pointed ends. There was a small gap between the outer material and one of the wooden supports. He slipped the end of the clothesline rope in and around it, and then made a very crude knot that he hoped would hold properly. Coop was no sailor.

When Coop moved off to do something else, and Sandy knew he would not see her, she stooped and reached for the line and quickly untied it and made a simple Bowline knot. She had been sailing her whole life, and her father had taught her well how to make the four knots, which, he said, were the only knots a sailor needed to know: a bowline, a square knot, a half hitch and a figure eight (a sailor’s stopper knot).

Coop finished sorting out the things he had brought with him and laid out their clothes so they would be ready when they got back, dry or not, it did not matter. He stowed away the food and water he had brought and carefully slipped the canoe into the dark passageway. Slowly they both eased into the canoe; they pushed away from the ledge and the current started moving them along while Coop helped the movement by paddling and steering the little craft as best he could.

Maybe the current was not as strong as it had been the day before, maybe it was the weight of the canoe now that there were two bodies in it, but this time it seemed to take a little longer to reach the end of the tunnel and the bright blue sky above. Coop paddled out into the body of water a ways and swung the front of the boat to the right and made for the beach he knew was sheltered around the back of the big rock. From the beach, the opening of the passage was out of sight.

They hopped out of the canoe when they were still in knee deep water and guided the vessel onto the beach. They then picked up the canoe and carried it to a nearby tree and Sandy tied it. She just did it before Coop had a chance to grab the rope. She knew at some point she would teach Coop how to do it right.

Sandy stood up and looked all around her. She did not say anything. She just took in the view. She noted as many things and more than Coop had the day before. She started a file in her brain as they made their way to the top of the knoll above them. When they gained the top, another look around took a while for Sandy. In fact, she was trying to catch up with Coop in assessing the situation.

“See, no houses, no roads, no big chimneys anywhere, nothing. It is just like I said. We have not gone all that far that we should not be off the point and in someplace we’ve never seen before,” Coop said to Sandy.

“Ah – huh,” was all she replied. Sandy looked around and she was as baffled as Coop. She did not know what else to say. She stood thinking a moment and finally she eased out, “I don’t think we’ve gone anywhere, but you’re right, it’s all wrong.” She pointed into the distance, to a spot more west than south and said, “That looks like Mt. Ann to me, but everything around it is different.” None of this made even a little sense to her. Her face got a blank look on it and she turned to Coop and said, “Coop, tell me we can get home from here.”

“I have gone through the hole in the pool to here three times. Yesterday I came out here. So far, I swam back through the hole twice without trouble,” Coop replied and finished with, “I am hoping that will not change today.”

“When we come back,” Sandy started to say.

“When we come back? So you’re thinking we’re coming back here again?” Coop said.

“We have to. Look that way.” She turned and pointed, “If I’m right, we live over there and an old big red empty paint factory is over there,” Sandy turned around completely and kept talking. “There should be a lighthouse out that way,” she pointed to the south and toward the ocean beyond, “and there should be little lighthouse on that small island over there.” She finished by pointing inland to the north and put her arm down, “Where are they?” Coop shrugged, he did not know what to say.

“Which way should we go first, how much time do we have?” Sandy asked.

“Well,” Coop started, “I have gone back, so far, within the first few minutes after the tide changes. If my theory is correct, we ought to be able to swim out through the hole the whole time the tide is coming.”

“So,” Sandy said thinking more out loud than anything else. She picked up Coop’s hand and turned it so that she could read his watch. “Theoretically, we could stay, if you are right, until a while after 7:00 tonight? Is that what you are thinking?”

“If I am right, yes we could,” Coop replied. “I had not thought I would try that right away, though. I was thinking more about baby steps, here.”

“That’s good thinking,” Sandy said. “Maybe six hours is enough, until we have more knowledge about what’s going on and feel a little more at ease.”

“Well?” Coop asked. “Ladies first, which way you want to go first?”

“Before we go too far we have to remember we are on foot and we are keeping a timetable, so it is best we keep that in mind, first and foremost. While we’re keeping all that in mind, we need to pay attention to everything we see and hear. Next time we bring the binoculars and the compass I saw back in the cavern and a notebook, we don’t want to forget anything,” Sandy said.

Coop looked at her and without a hint of anything in his voice added, “We stay together, Sandy, that’s first and foremost. We do not go off on our own, no matter what. There is nothing to be gained by that. There is safety in numbers.”

“You’re right, Coop, no argument there,” Sandy agreed. “How far do you think the distance between here and our houses ought to be?”

Coop thought a moment and said, “I don’t know, maybe one lap of the high school track, give or take a little.”

“A quarter of a mile,” she said looking at Coop, smiled and added, with a wiggle of her hand back and forth, “give or take a little.” Coop just nodded. It was obvious that Sandy was tracking something in her head, and he did not want to interrupt the process. “I seem to remember from math class that the average human-being walks at four miles per hour. Some really ‘in shape’ track people might double that for a while over a flat surface. So, let’s say we’re average, and we’re in that mile-every-fifteen-minutes group, and we might encounter uncertain terrain, which will, without a doubt slow us down a little, let’s say fifteen minutes one way, hang a little bit to look around, say another half hour more and back again is an hour.” Looking back at Coop’s watch again, she continued, “it is almost 9:00 now, it would be 10:00, or so when we get back. With the time left I would think we could follow the shoreline back to here, adding another hour, let’s say, and still have time enough to get back up the passage and get ready for the tide change.”

Coop followed her reasoning and added, “Sandy, we can’t even paddle into the passageway until the tide turns, but as long as we keep our eye on the time we can always cut back a little to the north if we have to.”

Sandy nodded and turned toward the sun and headed out. As they walked they noticed that the bigger trees thinned out a bit. Long grass grew everywhere that had soil on top of the rocky ground. The rocky granite ledge was so close to the surface that bigger trees could not take root very deeply. There was a lot of evidence of trees that could not root deep enough and wind would simply blow them over when they got too big.

The way was rocky, and it did slow them down, but without roads to help guide them they could not always be certain that they had not shifted off course. Once they gained the center of the peninsula it was easy to see the ocean on one side and the harbor waters on the other. As they walked east and the shoreline became more visible, the one object that stuck out was the huge boulder at the end of the dirt road where they lived. There was no road, there were no houses and the deep pool seaward of the boulder that both Coop and Sandy had jumped into only a few hours earlier was only about a foot deep.

“Coop, I’m just not getting this. Where are we?” Sandy asked. It was easy to see that she was shook. “Coop, if we are here and all alone, where are our families?”

Coop did not know what to say to her about all this. He was as dumbfounded as she. As they stood looking out to sea Coop did see something that was very familiar. “Sandy, look,” he said pointing to the south of where they were standing, “Mother Ann’s here.”

Sandy turned to look where Coop was pointing, and sure enough there was the rock formation well known to the locals, which had at one time been a natural oddity that drew people from far and wide to see it. From the right angle the rocky shoreline showed the profile of a woman that some said guarded the entrance to Gloucester Harbor; she is known as Mother Ann. “Okay, so we have found two things that are here that are also where we live, as well,” Sandy said. “We at least know where we are, we just don’t know how or why we are where we are. We also don’t know why we are alone.”

“I’m sorry, Sandy. I don’t have any answers, wish I did. I really didn’t know until now where we really are,” Coop said. He had been looking all about as they walked, and he had not taken notice of anything out of the way. While he was talking to Sandy, though, he had taken notice of something. Sandy was wrong about one thing; they were not alone. To the north almost as far as Coop could see he, had seen a wolf, or at least a dog of some kind. The canine stood well away from them, just watching. It did not look as though it had intentions of coming their way. Coop decided to keep this news to himself and see what progressed. It was apparent that the animal wanted nothing more to do with them than they wanted anything to do with him. Coop reached out and turned Sandy to the south and started toward the southernmost point of the harbor, which really, at this point was only a big cove. In another life it was a harbor, a very big and well known harbor.

Without incident they walked around the point and followed the shoreline back to where they had started. They skipped stones, stood and watched the waves break over the Dog Bar Shoal. There were no worries about the shoals; there were no boats anywhere to ride up onto them. He had heard that in some tides, before the breakwater had been built, people could occasionally walk out onto the shoal during the lowest of tides.

They walked over the top of the opening of the passage down to the beach and the canoe resting there. It was just 1:00 p.m. when they got to the canoe and by 1:13 p.m. they had the canoe in place and rode right into the dark passage back to the inner cavern. It did not take them long to stow the canoe and change into their other clothes, jump into the water and find the hole in the wall and swim back into the pool.

Sandy was happy to see houses, she was happy to see the dirt road, she was happy to be back. As she was walking she recalled something Coop had said, "I was thinking that it was a place, a secret really, that no one else knows about. I was starting to think of it as a place all my own."

Chapter Five

This feels very weird.” Sandra Madison said to Cooper Hayden, as they, still soaking wet from their swim back into the pool, walked down the dirt road toward their homes. “What would happen if we told somebody about all this?”

“I had been thinking about how great it was to have a place that no one else knows about. A place where I could go and explore, maybe even find out more about the place. Now that I know that there is something familiar about the place, I’m wondering what to do now, as well,” Coop said.

They stopped at Sandy’s front porch and sat on the middle stair. Coop opened his plastic food container and asked Sandy if she wanted a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. She did not answer; she simply started to make the sandwiches. “I wonder what else is there,” Sandy said idly. “It’s a pristine place; even the air smells so much cleaner, the water is as clean as it can be this far north, and the beaches aren’t littered at all. There is not a man-made thing there.”

“Do you really want to go back?” Coop asked.

“I guess maybe I do,” she answered. “I kind of like the idea of knowing something others don’t know, too. It’s like seeing Gloucester before people.”

“If that’s the case,” Coop said, “I think we should take some things to defend ourselves. I saw a wolf, or maybe it was just a big dog, today. It stayed well away from us; at least now we know that there are animals there.”

Sandy handed Coop a sandwich and said, “Let’s find out what else is there. We only walked and looked around the very tip of the point. Maybe the summer won’t be so boring after all. What did you have in mind for weapons? That is what you were talking about, right?”

Coop nodded back, “There’s a hatchet in Gramp’s shed. I could borrow that, and the hunting knife in the cavern has a sheath, we could take that.”

“I’m an archer,” she said, matter-of-factly. “I won the archery competition at camp two years running. I have a pretty decent fiberglass bow I’ve had for a long time and about a dozen aluminum arrows in a nice leather quiver. I was thinking about giving them away, but now I think I have a better use for them. Of course, they’re for target shooting, but they would slow down anything long enough so that we could get away. There is a hunting knife and a leather case in my dad’s shed, too. I’ll borrow that, as well. I don’t think he’ll miss it.”

“We need to find a better way to bring food and water with us, at least until we find a freshwater source,” Coop said. “It is a lot of work wrapping everything like I did today. It’s also a huge waste of duct tape and plastic bags.”

Sandy took it one step further with, “What if we want to bring something back with us?” It was then the two of them sealed a pact. They would explore and see if they could figure this out on their own. In truth, neither one wanted to give up this secret to anyone. They both wanted this to be theirs and no one else’s. They would try to go ‘Over There’ or ‘The Other Side’ (they were not sure what to call the place) every day. Neither one would go there alone, that was rule number one. With wild animals and such, they would need each other to do this now.

The next day was Saturday. The tide was high at 8:27 a.m. and the next low would be 2:14 p.m. Eventually there were going to be days that they would not be able to go. Their families would worry about them if they did not get back in time for dinner. As much as they would have liked to have stayed for longer, staying after

dark was not wise and they knew it. It became obvious to them both that they would have to make up new rules as they went.

Finally it became obvious to them that Sundays were family days. There would be no way they could get away for very long without being noticed missing. So, they made Sundays planning and rest days. The next day they were going to stay an hour longer and test Coop's theory about the tides more closely. They would wait until 3:15 p.m. before returning. If there was going to be a glitch in the plan it was better to find it early on.

They parted for dinner, but after dinner they found their way back to each other in the connecting back yards and more planning took place. They gathered things they wanted to take and realized they could not take it all at the same time. Pocket notebooks were found and lists were made and items stashed away. Sandy and Coop spent more time together in that one day than they had in ten years.

Chapter Six

That next morning was Saturday. In the past Saturdays and Sundays were both days of rest for Sandy. She would lounge and linger in bed most of the mornings. However, due to her excitement, Sandy was certain she had not slept at all that night before. While Sandy tossed and turned thinking about ‘Over There,’ Coop, on the other hand, slept like a baby and was only woken when his alarm went off at 6:30. By that time Sandy had been up and ready to go for an hour.

Still, in all that thinking and bed tossing and turning, Sandy was able to keep her thoughts focused and on task. She reasoned, rightly so, that defense and food were the two most important things to think about at the moment. Once she had that figured out, she would go onto the next problem.

She was also good at being sixteen, “very” sixteen. Sandy’s time during the school year was pretty much full. She had dance classes one afternoon each week. She had just become part of the lacrosse team, only because so many of her friends had tried out. In the end she found out just how difficult the sport, the training and gymnastic-like moves were. She had also become one of the computer graphics artists for the school newspaper. However, most of all, she loved the mall and fashion. She had an eye for how clothes were made and how some styles went together or did not go together, how they would fall on a person, and how colors worked with one another. Most importantly, she also had an awareness of what she looked best in.

Being sixteen, she rarely went anywhere without her cellphone. Like most teenagers, she had her closest friends on speed dial, but this summer her friends and her friends’ families were all playing it strict. New family awareness and rules regarding texting and phone usage were in effect. It seemed almost as if her friends had fallen off the planet. Now, with all that was going on with her and Coop, another thought hit her. Maybe, she was the one falling off the planet.

Sandy was nervous and at the same time excited about going ‘Over There’ or to ‘The Other Side.’ She thought it would certainly be better when they finally came up with a proper name for where they were going to go that morning. Nothing, even remotely, had ever happened to Sandy like this. She never had adventures. Her life, as far as she was concerned, was boring and uninteresting. Like most teenagers she thought that everyone else’s lives were so much more remarkable, than hers.

Coop certainly was more relaxed about where they were going. He had not thought about what to call it, had not given it any thought. Coop had noticed Sandy like many girls he knew seemed more detail-driven. It mattered to her that they get everything right and that nothing be left to chance. Coop needed to take things as they come. He did want to over-think things. Things were what they were, and he did not think for a second that he controlled much.

The first stash of items going with them was ready, and when it came time for him to meet Sandy, he left the house as quietly as he could. Sandy was already standing in the road when he stepped out of the house.

“Hi,” he said to her as he approached her from his yard. “How are you doing?”

“Hi,” she nearly whispered back. “I’m a little tired, didn’t sleep very well. I just couldn’t shut my brain off. You have to admit, this is different, wouldn’t you say?”

Coop grabbed Sandy’s bundle, and using the strap Sandy had attached to it, threw it over his shoulder and started to walk toward the big boulder and pool on its seaward side. “I think you’re going to have to try and get all the sleep you can.” He smiled at her, “No roads, no cars, no hitchhiking!”

Sandy smiled back, nodded and said, “I’ll work on that.”

Coop tied the bundle to himself, making it easier for him to swim using both hands and in that way he would not lose it in the current. They stepped off the edge and sunk right to the bottom. It did not take but a moment for them to make the rocky shelf and climb on top of it. In mere minutes they were wrapping themselves in the beach towels. They quickly changed clothes and without too much effort got the canoe into the water, and taking everything they thought they needed, made for the passageway's opening on 'The Other Side.' At 9:30 they pulled the canoe onto the pebble beach, secured it to the same tree and started off.

According to their plan, they would explore the western side of the peninsula northward first. They would follow the shoreline for about an eighth of a mile and then turn to the east cross the peninsula just about midway to the mainland. When they reached the rocky shore on the eastern side of this narrow portion of the point, they would then turn south and follow the rocky pathway to the large boulder, then turn toward the beach. It seemed a simple plan.

Keeping their eyes and ears open for anything, they moved along slowly. They had agreed they would try to stay as quiet as they could until they were certain of their situation. It was hard going; in places the underbrush was thick and in others the rocky terrain made it difficult to walk. In reality they were hiking in a large circle. This time, however, neither one of them saw any wildlife. A few times Coop was fairly certain he had heard something in the brush, but they did not see anything that day.

They got back to the beach very near 2:00 p.m. and took full advantage of the remaining time to rest. They just were not in as good shape as they thought they were. When it came time to go, they boarded the canoe and found that Coop's theory was, in fact, correct. They entered the passageway with the tide at just 3:13 p.m. and found the way easy going.

During that day's outing they had not been able to add anything significant to their accumulating pile of data. While there, when they reached the higher ground, Sandy noted a large rocky formation to the southwest of them. This rocky mass was what they knew to be Norman's Woe, and it was easily in sight. From that same vantage point they were able to make out the nearest of the three islands in the large cove. That island they knew as Ten Pound Island. As long as those two points remained visible, Sandy took sightings with the compass and noted the degrees in her pocket notebook. The binoculars and compass were not the best quality, but they were better than having none at all.

That night Sandy and Coop pored over a nautical chart of the area, and using the bearings they had taken and then drawing those same angles on the chart from those two locations, the intersections of the lines showed them where they had been standing each time they took the sightings. The information was not enlightening. They still had more questions than answers.

Chapter Seven

Sunday was their self-proclaimed day of rest and planning. They both wished they could go ‘Over There,’ but they needed the time so that they would not call attention to their comings and goings. They had no intentions of telling anyone anything. They really wanted this place, whatever it was, just for them.

Monday took its time to come around. The tide would not be right for them until 10:28 a.m. They would not be able to return until 4:23 p.m. that afternoon. The morning tides during this cycle were getting later, but the low tides in the late afternoon and evening were getting later, as well. Every day the tide came and went about an hour later than it had the day before.

The tides would become too late in the day for them to follow without being very obvious about what they were doing and where they were going, so the following week they could only make their way ‘Over There’ on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. After that it would be five days before they could comfortably go back. Though a lot went on over that four days, it was on their ninth trip to ‘The Other Side,’ on that following Wednesday, that two very big things happened.

Over the four days when they could still go, they noted many things; however, what was most obvious to them were the things that were not there. There was nothing there that had not been manufactured by nature. They saw nothing that man had a hand in developing. Sandy and Coop had to admit that nature had done its job well.

Each day’s exploration took them further away from the tip of Eastern Point. Each day they would follow the shoreline in their tiny canoe just a few hundred yards north into the sheltered cove. On the seventh day of exploring they paddled past an island that they knew as Rocky Neck. Nothing surprised them now. Nature had not made a causeway between East Gloucester and the island, so there was no way to get to the island without a canoe. Rocky Neck was grown over with thick brush, and in patches large trees were able to root, mostly on the northern point. The East Gloucester they saw now was nothing like the East Gloucester that they knew. It was cleaner, prettier and so very quiet. That was the one thing they noticed most about nature, it was quiet.

As long as they stayed on the peninsula, it was easy to explore from the shoreline of the protected inner harbor by walking to the eastern rocky shore. By keeping track of where the sun was and keeping a close watch on their time, they walked in a large sweeping circle back to where they started. The summer days were very warm and Sandy and Coop now thought they knew what true explorers like Magellan, Leif Ericson, de Champlain and Columbus felt like as they searched the unknown. Because neither Coop nor Sandy even entertained the idea of telling anyone about their secret place, the hours that they spent there were completely their own.

They were not fools, however. They knew quite well they were merely visitors there and that nature was far stronger than they were. Hawks, Eagles, and Seagulls flew freely. They had found half-eaten deer and raccoons and smaller animals. But the carcasses did not last long; nature cleans up after itself. They came to realize quickly that they were not the masters of this domain. Though they did not speak of it, they became very aware of the nature all around them and how they could quite easily become part of the food chain there. It might have been part of why they wanted to experience this whole place.

It had been on the sixth day that they came upon a huge herd of deer roaming and grazing on a very large open grassy area overlooking the Atlantic on the easternmost section of the point. There were more deer than they could have counted. They thought that there were easily a thousand deer within sight. If that was the case,

how many of these animals had they missed seeing? They felt safest and most comfortable when they were in sight of either the harbor or the open ocean.

It was on the seventh day when they saw a pack of wolves traveling together in the distance. Because they had come to understand their place in the food chain, they had learned to keep their eyes open and their wits about them all the time. They quietly moved off in the other direction, careful to stay downwind of them.

On the ninth day they had made the canoe fast and headed up the rocky grade toward the top of what they knew as Banner Hill. From this height, they searched for known natural points to take sighting off of. Ten Pound Island, Tablet Rock, Norman's Woe and Mount Ann, to name just a few, were so much different than they remembered. It was hard sometimes to pinpoint a large rock or the tip of an island. The head of navigation within the harbor itself looked nothing like they knew it. Water points were of no value to them, even beaches were not the same.

From the top of Banner Hill they watched the harbor. It mesmerized them completely. Even though there were no boats or any sign of human influence, the activity within the open bay was enormous. Nature sure was busy; they both thought and commented on this to each other. They had been around this harbor all their lives, and if they did not know with certainty that this place was Gloucester, Massachusetts, they could never have just picked it out. The landmarks they knew so well were man-made landmarks, and those landmarks were not there. The natural shape of this cove, as they knew it, had been so altered by man it was amazing to compare. Nature did things in a gradual way, while man did things in a very abrupt manner. Within the Gloucester they knew so well, massive granite walls were everywhere, loose fitting fieldstone walls lined borders of people's property, large filled-in wharf areas jutted out into the harbor, and in other places, parts of the harbor had been dredged, and others filled creating barriers and causeways to reach islands, like the areas they knew as Rocky Neck and the State Fish Pier.

Sandy pointed toward the east side of the open outer harbor and said, "In 1602 Samuel de Champlain, a French mapmaker and explorer, and his crew sailed into that area. They dropped an anchor, and de Champlain pronounced this to be 'Le Beauport,' Beautiful Harbor. It had to look just the way we are seeing it now. Over there on that beach," she pointed to the far right just south of Tablet Rock all the way across the cove, "that was where a few Pilgrim families first settled after breaking away from those more historic Pilgrims in Plymouth." She turned her attention to Coop, who had been listening closely to what she was saying and continued, "I always found it odd that they did not settle further into the harbor where they would have been more sheltered from the ocean. That spot, in a southwesterly storm would be very exposed without the breakwater," Sandy hesitated and pointed toward Eastern Point and finished with, "that isn't there." Coop could not tell from her manner whether he read sadness or just plain interest in her voice.

They eventually turned toward the east and walked further into the wooded area toward the ocean. It was not long before they had the water in sight again. It was starting to get late for them, and they knew they needed to start their loop to the south and back to the canoe. As they hiked along, they talked very quietly with one another. They spoke of everything their conversations were not always restricted to their present situation. As time went on, they learned more about each other.

They were talking, not loudly, but loud enough so that one could hear the other. Suddenly they both stopped, their instincts awakened. The natural quiet was quiet, but not completely silent. They noted the wooded area they were walking through suddenly got so quiet the silence was deafening. Something was wrong. They both suddenly heard a low growl from somewhere to the left of them. Because of the silence around them, the low growl was very clear and obviously close by.

Sandy and Coop knew right away that they had to move, and fast. They knew something was behind them. Neither one turned to look as they ran, they just made tracks. Coop was behind Sandy and he was easily keeping up. Boy, that girl can run, he thought. Sandy ran; she leaped over huge downed trees; she shook her way through bushes that before this would have seemed impenetrable; Sandy found trails that just were not there, and she cleared everything in her path. Coop stayed right behind her and he, too, negotiated every obstacle in his way.

At one point Coop was able to take a quick glance behind him, it was a wolf, for sure, but only one. There was no pack; if there had been, Sandy and Coop would not have been able get this far, he was certain of that.

This wolf was not hunting them, it was chasing them off. Coop saw the beach come into view and he saw Sandy get to the canoe, untied it and pushed it off the sandy pebble bottom in an instant and pushed it away from the shore. When Coop got to the edge of the water he did not hesitate, he ran through and quickly dropped into the canoe. He had not heard a splash behind him, so he thought the wolf had stopped chasing them at the water's edge. Sandy already had a paddle in hand and was pulling away from the shore. The wolf stood there watching them, but did not give further chase. It also did not follow them along the shoreline. The wolf seemed content to watch them move away.

They paddled away from the Banner Hill side of the cove and made for the island they knew as Rocky Neck. Only when they were a hundred yards away from the wolf and that stretch of beach did they stop to catch their breath. They were both breathing hard and leaning on their paddles and resting. They were certain they could be heard breathing a mile away. They were very lucky to have gotten away.

Sandy twisted herself around so that her legs were stretched out in front of her, and she used her paddle as a back rest. Breathing hard she looked up at Coop and said between breaths, "That was close."

"I could go a long time before that happens again," Coop answered.

"Same here, let's not do that again," stated Sandy, still breathing hard. They looked at each other for a long moment and suddenly, for no reason, they began to laugh. "Did we just learn anything from that?" she asked, still laughing so hard.

"Oh, I hope so," answered Coop. He was still laughing when he looked up and saw a different look on Sandy's face.

She stopped laughing and pointed back in the direction they had just come, but beyond where they had been. "Look," is all she said.

Coop twisted around and looked where Sandy pointed. There was a trail of smoke, not a huge bellow like a forest fire, but like a smaller campfire. It was a thick white smoke. It slowly drifted into the air further along the shore, quite close by.

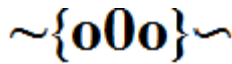
Chapter Eight

Coop steered the canoe toward Eastern Point and tried to hug the shoreline. It was one thing to be careful and watchful of animals; it was a whole different matter entirely to be careful and watchful of human-beings that they had not known were there. They had found no signs of human habitation anywhere they had traveled. They had purposely watched for people, and after seven times going there, they had become fairly certain no people were there. The place gave away a little bit of itself every day they went there.

Coop watched Sandy. He could see the gears in her head churning and whirling. Coop quietly paddled the canoe and let Sandy rest. They had some time before they could slip into the passageway. The only trick now was not to be seen.

Sandy did not speak all the way back to the passage. When they got where they needed to be, it was nearly time. Coop lined up the canoe to the passageway, and at just the right moment the canoe slid forward and into the dark.

It was just 6:45 p.m. when they climbed out of the pool and headed for home dripping wet. This was the latest they had ever stayed 'Over There.' It was not terrible; the sun would not set until 8:24 p.m. They said goodnight as they left each other. It was strange how this one factor changed them and their thinking. They both had something to eat, and though the sun was still in the sky when they fell onto their beds, they both fell asleep right away.



There was no reason to rush; the tide would not be right until 1:12 p.m. Coop was awake early and in those early morning hours he dragged himself around the house aimlessly. His brain was everywhere at once. Finally Coop had some breakfast. As he ate, he saw Sandy through the side window sitting on her porch, so he made for the door. He walked out onto the front porch and slowly and quietly walked down the steps, crossed the lawn and sat down next to Sandy on the same step. Without their knowing it, or even discussing it, they had become partners, partners in a secret that neither one wanted to reveal. They knew they would do anything to protect the secret they felt was theirs alone.

Why was it they had been allowed to discover this secret? It was, after all, a secret that no one else seemed to know about. But that was not true. Someone other than the two of them knew about it. Sandy and Coop just did not know who that someone was. From the looks of the cavern it had been a very long time since someone other than the two of them had been there. Was there a reason for this? Was there something about 'Over There,' 'The Other Side,' they should know? The more they thought about it, the less sure they were about any of it.

Coop said nothing for some time. Sandy just sat thinking and staring into her hands. Coop, too, sat thinking, and after what seemed an hour and a half, which was really not longer than a few very long minutes, his head in his hands, he tipped his face her way. "Well?" he asked almost in an exhaled breath.

"Well, what?" she answered very quietly, looking where she had been staring all that time.

"What do we do, now? Are we going back?" Coop had his head in his hands, almost like he had a headache.

Sandy eventually loosened up and leaned back on her elbows and set her gaze toward the early morning sun. "What do you think?" She whispered with difficulty.

“This development is bound to change things. If we go back, we are really going to have to be very careful. No matter what, we just don’t know enough. We haven’t heard or seen people anywhere. Maybe the Point,” he motioned all around them, meaning Eastern Point, “is too far out there for them, too isolated, too much the end of the trail. Maybe it is not as sheltered as where they are now. Maybe they don’t live there at all and are just passing through on their way somewhere else.” Coop stopped speaking for a moment to catch his breath. Coop did not move off the step or get very animated all the time he was talking. He sat looking toward the boulder at the end of the dirt road. “Maybe it’s not a they or them at all, but one person.”

“We still haven’t seen people, we’ve only seen smoke,” Sandy said.

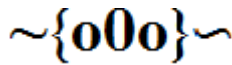
“Where there is smoke, there is fire, and I know animals can’t make fire,” he answered.

“I guess the real question is will it be safe for us to go there again? Could we simply just avoid them, stay out of their way?” she asked, and then finally added, “Are we too scared to go back?”

Sandy had hit the nail on the head. Were they too scared to go back? Did they have the courage it would take to go and find out more? They sat silent for over an hour, neither one saying anything. Finally Sandy stood and looked at Coop. “I want to go back, how about you?”

Coop sat looking up at her and simply nodded his head, YES! “We have to keep a better watch than we ever did before, agreed?”

Sandy nodded her agreement and the two stood on the bottom step. “1:12 tide change,” she said. “I’ll see you here at 1:00?” Coop nodded and they parted company and rushed off to do what they needed to do before going anywhere.



They met in the middle of the dirt road at 1:00 p.m. Quietly they walked to the end of the road, around the boulder and without thinking, they leapt into the pool and swam deep into the middle and found the opening to the passageway.

They had planned it. They had worked out a system for everything. Once they got to the stone ledge, each of them had their own jobs. They both quickly changed into dry clothes and then they made ready to leave. Before too long they were set and underway for that spec of daylight at the end of the passageway. They did not stop after paddling into the open air. They had learned to work together paddling the canoe, and they followed the shore closely, skirting huge stone ledges and beaches alike. When they got to Wonson’s Cove, they paddled directly between the East Gloucester mainland and the island they knew as Rocky Neck.

The tide was high but they easily found a small inlet between two very large jutting ledges. The small beach was not very wide, maybe only twenty feet, and the depth of the beach itself could not have been much more than eight feet from the water to the stony cliffs. They tied the canoe to a downed tree and started to climb up the grade toward where they had seen the smoke drifting into the sky the day before.

One of them kept an eye out at all times. They did not talk unless it was necessary, and even then it was in a whisper. They reached the top of Banner Hill and slowly made their way north. There were no paths anywhere they traveled. At least they had not entered a busy thoroughfare. In some places there were open spaces that were easy to negotiate, while in other places the thicket was so dense they were sure even small animals like squirrels could not get through

They walked over the top of a rise and stopped dead in their tracks. Both dropped to the ground and inched their way back the way they had come. They laid on the ground watching. Over the rise, and not more than two hundred feet away, was a group of people building what looked like shelters. The shelters were built out of the same material as their little canoe; long ago they had come to realize that the material was deer hide. They had even thought about building another canoe just like the one they had already.

Sandy had the binoculars to her eyes and she looked at everything. Her brain was a whirl, taking it all in. She did not miss a single thing. “Come on,” she said quietly and without emotion, after some time had gone by. “We need to get out of here,” she whispered into Coop’s ear.

They slid back the way they had come, and when it seemed alright for them to stand up and move, they did it very rapidly. They started to run, and they made it back to the canoe far more quickly than it had taken to arrive at the rise. They boarded the canoe and moved along as fast as they could make the canoe move.

Once they were back at their beach near the passageway, they pulled up onto the beach, climbed to the grassy spot above the beach and laid down to rest. "They use spears, pointed sticks really" Sandy said. "The spears look very straight and very well made; a lot of work went into each of them. They dress in clothes made of deer hide. They're primitives, but like us, not like Neanderthal primitives." Sandy was excited; it was easy for Coop to see this. "The girls, women, are beautiful and the boys, men, those I saw, were handsome. It looked to me like they are setting up a camp."

Sandy stopped, she lay there another moment or two thinking. She rolled onto her stomach and looked into Coop's eyes. "We have a lot to do. It is obvious we can't come back here dressed like this." Coop did not understand her thinking. Sandy saw the look on his face and explained her thought process. "They only have what colors the deer have, mostly differing shades of brown. We have to be careful not to wear any bright colors. Bright colors would be way too easy to be seen, even from a long distance. If they do see us from a distance, we want them to think we are just like them, members of their group, tribe, well whatever, so we better look the part."

Coop lay back as well. He needed to think, too. Sandy always seemed to be a beat ahead of him. Were girls really wired this much differently than boys? Coop did not know, and he intuitively knew it was not a subject he wanted to talk over with Sandy.

Coop had just turned on his side when the afternoon sun glinted off of something on the rock not more than fifty feet away. He got up and walked in that direction. He got to the base of the rock and looked more closely. There was something hanging there. It could not be more than five feet off the beach, on Coop it was about shoulder height. It was a metal ring. A thick and heavy ring looped through a very beefy eye ring or bolt that had been driven into a crag or crack in the ledge. He reached out and looped his finger under the ring and gave it a pull. It was imbedded into the rock solidly. He pulled even harder, but though the ring itself moved in the eyebolt easily enough, the eyebolt, the base to it all, did not move, it would not budge. The metal was a little tarnished, but not rusted. The surface of the eyebolt and ring seemed rough and caked with some heavy kind of coating.

Coop turned to look at Sandy. She was not paying any attention to him. She was in her own world, doing what Sandy did best, thinking, planning their next move. This eyebolt and ring was the first metal, obviously man-made, item he had seen there. Everything else he had seen was made of deer hide and sticks, like the canoe, and now, of course, the shelters he had just seen the people building. Now that they had found these things, he was sure they would find more.

Coop decided to keep this discovery to himself for now. He wanted to investigate more closely, before sharing his impressions with Sandy.

Chapter Nine

Over the next five days the tides would only be right at all the wrong times of the day for Coop and Sandy to go ‘Over There’ and get back before people, their families, would start to worry about them. It did not matter, over those next few days both of them would be busy enough.

Sandy and Coop had been ‘Over There’ exploring ten times. What they had not noticed was that they had not been spending any of their free time on anything else, like their computers, other friends or going into town to see a movie. Something of much more interest and of greater importance to them was taking place and they wanted to learn everything there was to know.

Though they did not bring it up in conversation, they knew at some point they were going to want to stay there longer than one half of a tidal cycle. They would want to stay overnight and maybe travel further than they had so far. They would like to go up the Annisquam River to Lobster Cove and out into Ipswich Bay, see what lay there. In this, time was not their friend.

Something else was happening, too. They were working as a team and they relied on one another, they began to trust each other. The years they had not been together in the summer months melted away. As they traveled through their secreted ‘Over There’ they had become more confident in themselves, even though they both still got scared at times of the unknown.

The first day of their five day break Coop spent the morning alone hiking along the rocky shoreline of the western side of Eastern Point, the harbor side. There was private property all along the roads and trails throughout Eastern Point. It would not be easy to find rights of way without getting arrested for trespassing on someone else’s acreage. He had gotten quite used to walking anywhere he wanted to on ‘The Other Side.’ There were no boundaries there.

Just like Sandy, Coop had studied the maps and charts of Gloucester and Gloucester Harbor. As he walked along the shore starting at the Eastern Point Lighthouse, he kept an eye out for just the right spot. It was not all that easy to walk this rocky shore. In some places the ledges fell directly into the water and in others the rocks simply washed into the water. Coop felt more like a mountain climber, or mountain goat, than a hiker.

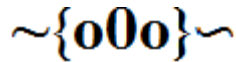
He thought Lighthouse Cove on the chart seemed most likely to be the area he and Sandy always stopped to rest before returning. They thought of the spot as their beach. He was looking for that very place now. The shore and shoreline was different. The Dog Bar Breakwater protected the western shoreline of Eastern Point. Nothing looked the same. There were no landmarks to go by except Norman’s Woe, Ten Pound Island, and Tablet Rock. He tried to put himself in just the right place. At one point he jumped down from the top of one rocky outcropping and slipped onto a coarse rock and pebble beach shadowed above by high shrubbery, Privet and Forsythia. Tall, well-manicured evergreens filled in the hole in the wall of nature. When man put his hand into the works, things changed rapidly, while nature hates to be rushed. Coop was becoming more mindful of nature’s rhythms.

Coop had dropped onto a very small pebble beach. There, right at eye level, was the ring and eyebolt looking exactly the same as it did on ‘The Other Side.’ He gave it a tug and it felt just as it did on their beach ‘Over There.’ It was very odd, but they were beginning to think of ‘The Other Side’ as theirs, their place, theirs alone to explore.

That thought had changed with the discovery of human life there, however. Coop had a sense of loss about that. Coop sat on the hard-packed beach to rest. He was watching small waves wash up onto the beach ten feet

away from him. The waves, he thought, are not this gentle on our beach. This section of the point is more exposed to the open ocean. There is no breakwater near our beach to protect it.

He had just settled back on one elbow when he noticed something on the rock directly below the ring, but a little above the tidal high water mark. It was covered by growth of some sort and Coop found a stout stick and picked at the vegetation, pulling it away from the rock. The numbers 1 - 9 - 4 - 3 stared back at him. Each number was at least six inches high and half as wide and had been deeply chiseled into the solid rock. Every number was perfectly aligned with the others and ornately worked. It seemed obvious to Coop that these numbers had been hammered into this large ledge a long time past. Someone had put a lot of effort into this display. Coop wondered what the numbers could mean. Someone had thought it important enough to carve them into this rock. There was nothing fresh about them, the edges were rounded, worn, but by no means were they fading away, they were chiseled that deep. There was no telling how long they would last there.



What next, thought Sandy. Her thoughts were far different from Coop's. What would make sense for them to do next? Sandy was all over the disguise aspect of their journeys 'Over There'. It was almost the first thing she thought of as they were paddling back to their beach; they needed to make certain that they would not seem out of place if they were seen. Her brightly colored clothes would have to go and brown, no matter how she thought she looked in it, needed to become their basic camouflage color.

The people living there wear deerskin. She easily fathomed out the patterned cuts of the shapes she saw, she just knew with certainty how to set about making what she had seen. However, she was not going to run down a poor defenseless deer for its hide. Sandy had already come to the realization that she was no hunter or huntress. She knew she could never kill any living being. She understood that it was an everyday common event for the people she had seen there. They needed to hunt to survive, she and Coop did not. Sandy and Coop's family bought clothes to wear and meats, fish and fresh vegetable foods to eat. They neither needed to kill nor forage to survive.

Sandy also wondered what form of communication these people used, what language was theirs. They had been too far away to hear any conversation between them. Sandy just knew there was no way they would understand English; that was certain. There would be no way they could make themselves understood if they came face to face with any of them. They would just have to avoid them as best they could and hope that if they were seen from a distance they would merely think she and Coop were part of their clan, their group, their family, their tribe.

Sandy had brought two very soft deerskin flats that had been stored in their little cavern. Being a clever girl, she had also snatched two of Coop's spare shorts. She shortened his shorts as well as she could and then, along with many pairs of her panties, secretly and exhaustedly dyed them all as dark brown as she could. Khaki and white would stick out and could easily be seen from a distance. She then needed to concentrate on her outer apparel. Girls dressed differently than the boys there, she had noticed. Soft and skimpily cut deerskin tops hung purposefully from those women's necks. The garbs then strung crisscrossed and tied supportively with rawhide-like loops around their neck and back. The skirts or waist cloths draped or, more accurately, tied tightly around their hips. These skirts were worn very short and clung tightly.

The men, Sandy noticed, wore simple waist drapes, like Tarzan's loincloth in the movies. Since it was summer the men were bare-chested, and everyone went barefooted. Young children and babies all ran naked. In Sandy's mind that was as simple as it could get. Sandy also understood the reasoning behind this type of dress. Practicality and unconfined movement absolutely rules their lives, while modesty seemed secondary. Within their group, living as they do, shyness was simply not possible, even if they knew and understood what modesty was. It was certainly different than the way Sandy and Coop knew or lived.

When she finished her deerskin outfit she looked at herself in the mirror. It was a perfect likeness of what she had seen on those women. What would her mother say if she saw her right now? She thought for a moment, smiled shyly, what would Coop think and say when he saw her?

Chapter Ten

Coop slowly and carefully hiked back the way he had trekked, along the shoreline. When it looked as though he could easily cut through a path along the way, surprisingly, he did it without getting arrested. The roads on Eastern Point, most all, go in a circle, looping back onto one narrowly-paved main thoroughfare. With stone pillars and bordering rock walls, street signs and telephone poles with lights perched atop them as landmarks; it was easy to find his way back home.

It was nearly three in the afternoon before he arrived at the house; it was late for lunch, but he was nowhere near hungry. It is amazing, he thought, when you have a problem to solve, time passes without any awareness of hunger. He sat at the kitchen table and out of habit, not need, he pulled an apple from the bowl in front of him. Biting into the apple, he slipped into deeper ‘Over There’ mode. He had found that metal ring, mostly by accident, but there was no denying that the ring was there on the same stone outcropping (even though it looked a lot different) ‘Over There.’ To Coop that was baffling.

He went into his bedroom, flopped down on his bed, and dragged out his journal deeply hidden in his bed between the box spring and mattress. He turned to the entry from the first time he had gone there, the one, and only, time he had been ‘Over There’ without Sandy. His tome noted that the skies were clear and sunny in both places. He also noted that on the third and fourth times he was there, there had been low-lying fog that burned off over the time they were there. On the seventh trek to ‘The Other Side,’ Coop’s notes reminded him that an afternoon cloud burst and thunderstorm was taking place when they left, during their trip back, and the unsettled weather was still going on when they surfaced in the middle of the pool upon their return. He did not know what all that meant yet, but he was confident that he would figure it all out. Until then, he would take notes of the weather more carefully, and keep his eyes open for more signs of life.

~{o0o}~

During their first daytime not journeying ‘Over There,’ Sandy and Coop did not see each other. They were each busy with things of their own related to their explorations. It was not until the end of the day that they found themselves together. Unacknowledged by each, they had missed one another’s company. They had a common task, a partnership that could not be ignored.

They sat in Sandy’s back yard. The evening was warm, and the night sky was bright with stars. They talked for a long time, well into the evening. Over time the conversations drifted to other matters in their lives, and the solitary street light on the road had been on for at least three hours when they parted. There was still a lot to talk about, but it would wait until the next day. They were going to Niles Beach, Rocky Neck and East Gloucester Square to explore.

~{o0o}~

“You haven’t been around much,” Coop’s grandfather said to him teasingly at the table next morning. “Noticed Miss Madison’s kept you pretty occupied.”

Blushing, Coop just acted as though he was not paying attention to Grandpa Hayden. “Could Sandy and I hitch a ride to East Gloucester Square this morning, Gramps?” he asked shyly.

“I suppose I could do that. You want me to plan on picking you up later?” he asked.

“I think we’ll walk back, if that is okay with you and Mom,” Coop answered.

His mother looked at him and said, “Why should things change, now. You both leave early, you come back late and you’re rarely where anyone can find you. It must be a great place to go, wherever it is you two get off to every day.” Coop just sat and smiled, thinking, I like it.

Coop knew Sandy was up, he had seen her through the kitchen windows earlier, and he ran to get her. “I got us a ride one way,” he said, almost out of breath from running.

“Great!” she exclaimed. “Mom, I’m going with Coop. Be back later.”

They ran back to the side yard as they both heard her mother’s reply. “Behave yourselves and don’t land in the hospital, or the police station, for that matter.” They heard her laughing all the way across the yard as they jumped into the car and Grandpa Hayden started the car and headed off.

East Gloucester Square, at one time, was like a real downtown area. If you look closely, you can see where storefronts once stood. Most had been rebuilt, but the rooflines tell the story well. This little business hub had seen grocers and dry goods retailers, ship’s chandleries, shipyards, livery stables and stage coach stations, all within a very small town block. There had been a city horse trough right in the heart of the square. It had been many, many, years since that kind of commerce had taken place in the square. Now it was only a crossroads to someplace else. All that was left of the square was a small restaurant and a Laundromat.

Both thought this was where they had seen the people two days before, ‘Over There’. Try as they might, there was just no way that they could simply go into people’s yards just for the sake of looking around, trying to get a better angled view on things.

Slowly they walked around the side streets and finally back along East Main Street. Every once in a while they would stop and look hard at a rocky mass or formation, or a group of trees and bushes. It was a hopeless cause. The area was just too built up. There were too many stone walls, huge granite breakers and long wooden piers.

“This is not helping, is it?” Coop asked when they had walked as far as Rocky Neck Boulevard and the man-made, man-filled, causeway.

Looking toward Ten Pound Island from the beach of the causeway, Sandy was staring at a huge boulder in a short uneven line with the island. She tapped Coop on the shoulder and when he turned, she pointed. “Look familiar?”

“We paddle inside that rock!” he said. He stepped forward and pointed toward the huge rock and made an arcing motion with his arm. “And the water runs all the way in there. That rock stands at least two hundred feet from shore. We breeze right through there. You can’t do that now.”

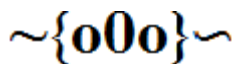
“Look at Ten Pound Island,” Sandy stated. “It’s significantly smaller on the inner harbor side.”

Coop could not take his eyes off the outer harbor. “Nowhere as pretty as our harbor,” he said idly. When he realized what he had said he turned to Sandy and just looked at her.

“I know,” she simply and quietly replied. Sandy stood and watched the water and waves. “Our harbor?” she asked.

“Well, you know what I mean,” Coop said.

“Yup, I do. I think of it as our harbor, too,” Sandy answered.



There was no way to see where their island, Rocky Neck, and this little peninsula known as the Rocky Neck section of Gloucester started or stopped. At the very tip of the Neck stands the oldest marine railway in the United States. This railway was built for repairing ships of all shapes and sizes, both steel and wood. Their Rocky Neck, Sandy and Coop thought, is covered with mostly brush but in places, very big trees, and it is also completely surrounded by a continuous sandy beach. When they stood on the causeway, Coop thought that the

angle from which they had first seen the smoke was very close to the parking area on the mainland side. Still, he could not be absolutely certain.

By noon they had visited East Gloucester Square, walked all over Rocky Neck and would soon see what they could see of Niles Beach. They were not very hopeful that any of that would help them at all.

The area directly across the harbor known to them as Stage Fort Park and Half Moon Beach was similar to the Stage Fort and Half Moon area. Similar is not perfect.

Never had they thought about Gloucester the way they did then. Gloucester had always been Sandy's home and Coop's summer vacation getaway. Unlike Coop, however, Sandy rarely left the city for any length of time. The best malls are "up the line" as the locals call traveling south along State Route 128, about eighteen miles away, a twenty-five minute ride without traffic.

It was very true that Sandy and Coop were seeing Gloucester through a completely different light, so to speak. Their Gloucester was so much different; if you do not take in and study the lay of the land the way they had, you would not recognize it. They liked their Gloucester better.

Chapter Eleven

Never had three days passed so slowly. Over that next three days they walked over every nearby street and road and pathway branching off of East Main Street from the entrance to Rocky Neck traveling southward. Now they paid attention and were in awe of everything they saw. They had never thought before to docket so much information about where they live as they did during those three days. The paper tide chart Coop worked from was so impatiently man-handled over those days of waiting that Coop needed to eventually replace it.

Sandy and Coop agreed in the beginning of their adventure that day light hours were the time safest for them to travel 'Over There'. They were both eager and excited that last night of their involuntary hiatus. "You know," Sandy said, "quarter to five is not too early for us."

"That means dragging out of bed at 3:45 a.m. to get ready and get to the pool," Coop hesitated a moment and then continued. "Our parents haven't said anything about the early morning hours we keep or, how late we have been coming home. They have to know we leave early, and if we push the envelope any further than we have, they might just want to know more about what's up with us or, even worse, establish a curfew."

Sandy listened quietly and with an agreeable look on her face, she said, "Yeah – they do leave us alone, don't they? Normally my mother would need to know the Who – What – Where – When and Why of everything, not to mention, the How of it all, as well."

This time Coop was the agreeing party, and after a minute or two of thought answered "I hadn't noticed, but you're right. Normally my mother would be the same way, and my grandfather would take his lead from her."

Nodding her head in response, Sandy added, "Best we leave well enough alone and not ripple the waters any more than we have."

They had a large water and air tight plastic-wrapped packet ready to go with them the next morning. Sandy had told Coop about her working on their garbs, but he had not seen them yet. Sandy was getting anxious, maybe even a bit self-conscious about her new deerskin outfit. What would Coop think? Had she gone too far in copying the garments she had seen on the women in the settlement or camp they were building? She was nervous. She also hoped Coop would be okay with what she had done to his clothes, as well. When she cut his khaki shorts just before dyeing them, she had purposely left ragged and uneven ends just as she had done with her own deerskin skirt and halter top. She had gone so far as to have made a matching pouch or satchel that slung over her shoulder. It held a lot of what they would take with them.

Sandy had tried to wear a pair of leather sandals her mother had put in a recycle bag. They fit her perfectly, and she thought they went well with her new deerskin look, but she remembered the wolf incident. She tried to run in them, but no matter how well or how tight she made the straps or reinforced the ankle bands, they slowed her down significantly. Over the weeks since their summer began, and their exploits became so important to them, they had been walking barefoot, and the soles of their feet had toughened, so much so that they could run on a rock filled beach full tilt and not feel it.

They slept well every night in part due to the long daily walks. They also dreamed. Their heads were filled with wonder and a real need to know more. No one could ever have understood their excitement over their harbor, and they were selfish about their discovery. They still would not share this with anyone.

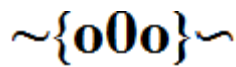
Coop's alarm went off at 4:45 a.m. It did not matter, he had been wide awake for over an hour thinking. He knew exactly what he would do first when they got there, look for the metal ring again and search below it for the chiseled numbers, 1, 9, 4 and 3 carved into that rock. He had not yet shared this discovery of the ring with Sandy. Coop was hoping he would have more to share when that time came.

That same moment Sandy lay anxiously awake; she missed their secret adventures so much. When her alarm sounded, she had already been dressed, ready to go and just lying on her bed for some time. As the month of June passed, the mornings warmed earlier, and the days stretched to reach the longest day of the year; the sun rose earlier each morning and set later each evening. Now that they were well into July, the shift back was taking place, but it did not seem to happen at the same fast rate. The average temperatures, then, ran in the mid-eighties, an odd day here and there spiking into the nineties. There still had not been a heat wave yet, meaning ninety degree weather for three days or longer. Summer still had a way to go.

Like Coop, Sandy had been starting to take notice of the similar climates in both places. She still did not know what it meant. As she lay there waiting, all of those thoughts ran through her mind. Finally she got up from her bed and made her way to the kitchen where the night before she had made a lunch for them. Tomorrow it would be Coop's turn for that chore; equal opportunity exploring and adventuring, you know!

When Coop left the house, as always, Sandy was standing in the middle of the dirt road waiting for him, today's bundle in her arms. "Been waiting long?" he asked.

"Five days," Sandy replied. Coop smiled and nodded back, and they made their way to the deep pool behind the large balancing boulder.



They stood on the edge of the pool looking down, "No matter how often we do this, I know it's going to be cold, and it's going to hurt."

Sandy turned to look at Coop nodding in agreement, and clenching her teeth, she exasperatedly replied, "Oh Yeah!" They took each other's hand, and before they could think about it anymore, they stepped and pushed off the ledge into the middle of the tidal pool. Nothing changed since their last swim in the water; it was still freezing cold, but with the flow being right, they dove deeply and quickly made it to the ledge and then climbed onto the cavern shelf.

Sandy, kneeling on the ledge edge and shivering, said, "It never gets any better or easier does it?" Coop quickly recovered and found one of the towels. He snapped it open and placed it around Sandy's shoulders. Sandy looked up into his face in the dim light, smiled and said, "You know, Coop, you're always a gentleman."

Coop did not know what to say. No one had ever called him a gentleman before. People had referred to him as a 'right,' 'okay' or 'good' guy, but never had anyone used the word gentleman. Finally he blurted, "What makes you say that?"

Sandy shook her head, turned and sat down, getting off of her knees and making it easier to dry herself off with the towel. "You always cover me with a towel first before getting one for yourself, if I stop paddling to catch my breath or to rest in the canoe you never say anything, you always open and hold doors for me and, most importantly, when we change clothes here I never get the feeling you are trying to peek – you never take advantage. We're partners in this adventure of ours and you always make me feel like neither of us is the boss; we share this load evenly." She stopped speaking and worked to stand up so that she was standing closer to eye to eye with Coop. She added, "And what makes you a true gentleman is that you never seem to think about it, you just do it. I trust you, Coop, I feel safe with you." She reached out and touched his arm. "Makes me wish we hadn't lost the last five or six years, my fault, Coop, I know that, I'm sorry."

Coop was tongue-tied; he did not know what to do or say. It did not matter, she did not give him time to respond, she grabbed her bundle and made for her darkened corner of the cavern. "Hey Coop, catch," she said, tossing him his khaki shorts that were now very dark brown. "I made some alterations so we better blend in with the neighborhood. Also, we both need to get a little more tanned, so go without a tee-shirt, okay?"

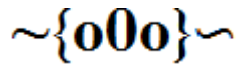
Coop did not answer; he simply shrugged, even though she could not see him, and put on his shorts. He was able to appreciate what she had done and he was fine with it. Sandy always seemed to think of little details he did not.

Coop was standing next to the stone shelf gathering things they wanted to take with them. He had the dry cell beam in his hand, and when he turned to place the items in the little boat, the beam found Sandy in her new

deerskin skirt and halter-top standing not more than five feet away from him. His eyes went wide, he took a gasping breath, and before he could stop himself he whispered, “You’re beautiful!”

A warm blush started at her bare feet and traveled all the way up her body to her surprised face. The light was such that Coop could not see the pink rush all over her body. She shyly smiled and breathed back, “Thanks.” They stood there for a few more seconds and Sandy finally shook herself back on track and said, “Are we ready?”

Coop still stood statue-like for a few long moments and then said, “Oh – yeah! I mean, sure, let’s go.” They snapped into life and went to work filling and launching their craft.



Without further delay they were underway making for the dot of light at the end of the passageway opening. Into the sun they paddled and headed for their beach. Coop headed directly for the metal ring looped through the eyebolt. At this stage of the tide Coop was standing in water up to his knees. He reached out and hooked a finger into it.

There was thick green growth all over the granite surface. Coop ran his hands down through the growth directly below the ring and probed around with his fingers. He pulled at seaweed and periwinkles at just about the same spot as on the rock at home. He felt an indentation and pulled and wiped at the growth; within seconds he had found his mysterious numbers, 1, 9, 4 and 3.

Sandy was filling her new satchel, it held her notebooks, pencils and pens, their lunch and other odds and ends. Coop caught her attention and waved her over to where he was standing, “Come see what I’ve found.”

Sandy waded through the water and she knew Coop was watching her closely. He had said she was beautiful, she thought to herself with a happy smile on her face.

“The last time we were here I found this steel ring,” with his finger he flipped it and it sounded out sharply as it hit the stone. “The next day, on just a hunch, I tried to find this very spot at home.”

“How’d you make out?” she asked.

“Well, this place – right here – is so very different, if I hadn’t found the ring there I wouldn’t have stopped.” He stopped talking, stepped aside and peeled back the green sea growth, “I found this while there in exactly the same spot. I haven’t an idea what it means.”

Sandy reached out and traced each number one by one. Coop could tell Sandy’s head was a whirl, running over everything she knew to consider. After a moment she looked at Coop and said, “A year? 1943?”

Coop shrugged, he had come to notice he shrugged a lot since they had been exploring there. “Could be, that’s as good an answer as anything I’d come up with.”

Sandy turned and looked out over the water of the harbor. “Boy I’ve missed this place and all its mysteries.”

“Maybe whoever put this ring here did it to identify the place?” Coop stated.

“Or just to see what would happen?” added Sandy, idly looking around.

After a quiet minute had passed Coop said, “Okay, madam, which way do we go? We kind of want to avoid some people, right?”

Sandy pointed across the water, “Half Moon Beach, that way,” she added, pointing westerly, directly across the harbor.

Coop did not flinch at this answer; he had known it was going to come at some point, he had been expecting it. It made sense that sooner or later they were going to want to go that way. “It’s just a mile straight across the water, maybe just a shade more. Now’s the time to do it, calm winds, the harbor surface doesn’t seem too rough, there is a constant swell, no waves breaking, nothing terrible.”

They boarded the canoe and pulled for the western shore of the harbor. The paddling went easily enough; as they gained the middle of the harbor, the swells helped them move along. The wind was not a factor, but the current was, and it drew them along toward the more northern part of the western shore, not southern where they wanted to go. Coop found himself steering more than paddling.

Sandy taught Coop how to use these swells to their advantage by zigzagging one way and then turning after a little ride with the wave. It worked nicely, and before too long they were crossing out of the swell's current, passing between two mountainous ledges and grounded on the well-protected beach away from any wave action. "When we leave, Coop, we won't be able to simply reverse what we just did, but it will be similar, but not quite backwards." Sandy was standing on the beach and Coop was pulling all the things in the canoe out and putting them on the sand before lifting it to move further away from the water's edge. "It has to be a year, 1943, Coop. It's the only thing that makes sense. Whoever did it wanted to leave a mark; what better than a date, it's easy."

"Doesn't shed any light on who could have done it," Coop replied. "It wasn't one of the natives, that's certain. That ring and eyebolt was brought here, not made here."

"No matter, that person wanted to be sure it would be here for a long time to come; those numbers are deeply carved, or chiseled, into that ledge," Sandy said picking up her pouch and the rest of the items on the beach and followed Coop to the furthest point on the beach away from the water's reach.

"That makes sense," Coop replied as he walked carrying the canoe as far as the landscape would allow. Putting down the canoe, he then tied it to a small tree for safe keeping. Though the southern side of the beach was steep and rocky, it was climbable with a lot of effort. The rocky side walls on the east and west sides of the beach were sheer rock walls and could not have been climbed by either one of them. Up they climbed that southern face. There were good footholds and many well rooted bushes and small trees to help along their way.

Once they gained the top, there was a huge area devoid of growth other than sparse blotches of course grass, and even that grew in the smallest of clumps. It was obvious to them that the whipping lofty winds kept the area free of soil enough to allow anything to take root there, except those small obstinate tufts of grass.

The view took their breath away, it was so beautiful. Sandy had the binoculars out so quickly and up to her eyes. She scanned from her far left, the west, and slowly moved to her right, easing eastward. It seemed to take her the longest time to make the circle, eventually finding herself facing absolutely due south. Of three hundred and sixty degrees of the compass she easily took in two hundred and seventy degrees of it. Everything was of interest to her, even two smoky campfires a bit northeast of where they were standing. Though from that distance, the campfires seemed close to each other. Understanding the illusion as they did, they both agreed there were two camps involved; one of them seemed further away than the other.

When it became Coop's turn he also took his time and tried to take in as much as Sandy, but he knew she would see and register far more than he would. Later, he knew, she would be able to tell him everything she saw and where it was located. What they knew as 'The Fort' part of the Gloucester waterfront was a low lying sandy-covered plot of land. So low, in fact, was the narrow finger of land, they were sure at the highest of wind-swept and storm surges, the tides would roll completely over the whole area. This would totally drop it under water. Harbor Rock was the next thing he noticed. It really was quite far from shore, where in their home of Gloucester that huge rocky obstruction was covered by the Harbormaster's pier and one of the town landings. Five Pound Island was very visible further in the harbor. They had not gotten that far before discovering the people living in the area nearby. Maybe they could approach it from the western side of the harbor at some time.

The location of the beach to the south of them and at the base of the hill they were standing on was nowhere near the beach they knew was located. The Gloucester they knew had been first settled right below them, where water now ran to the shore. They climbed down that side and found themselves standing at the bottom of a massive rock. At home this rock was known as Tablet Rock. The bronze memorial attached to it commemorated the settling of the first settlement in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. This huge rock did not look any bigger than their rock at home, but it looked very bare without that bronze plaque and bordering stonework.

Coop stood looking at the area furthest in the cove and said quietly, "I miss the ice cream stand."

Sandy smiled and looked sideways at him and said, "Me, too, but that's about all."

They walked around the inside area of the cove and stopped at the higher ground there. It was then Coop first saw what must have been the remains of a small encampment. He bent down and picked at the charred pieces of wood in the fire pit. He looked all around them hoping they were not being watched. "This is not very old," he said. "This pit should be filled with water from rain, or nature should have washed sand back into it."

“It certainly wasn’t a permanent village.” Sandy allowed, also looking around them. She picked up Coop’s hand and looked at his watch. “Nearly noon,” she said. “We should start back.”

“Yeah,” Coop agreed, “We’ll be beating against the tide for a little while. We should eat on our way, Okay?”

Sandy nodded and they started for the beach and the canoe well over the hill from where they were. The hardest part of their return trek was climbing down onto Half Moon Beach. Once there they dispatched the canoe and headed for Eastern Point. Sandy was right; working the swells back across the harbor was different, but not a horrible effort for them. One hour and twenty minutes later they paddled into the passageway, into the dark and reached their storage cavern.

They did what they always do, it was becoming routine. Once everything was where it belonged, they changed back into their still very damp, ‘Home Clothes’. Coop was standing on the edge of the shelf waiting for Sandy. Before she could set to jump into the water he reached out his hand and said, “Deerskin does something for you.”

Sandy smiled brightly, leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. Just as she jumped into the water she said, “Race you back.”

Chapter Twelve

Weapons, as Sandy had so aptly labeled them, were now always carried by Coop and Sandy. Coop carried his hatchet in a sheath on his belt at his right side, and a hunting knife hung from his left. Sandy carried her bow and a leather quiver holding a dozen target arrows over one shoulder and her deerskin satchel on the other. She, too, carried a hunting knife, but she knew it was mostly for show or to cut something; it made her feel better to know it was there. In truth she would not have thought to even practice drawing the knife from its sheath. Though they practiced with their weapons, they had not needed them, and as a result, they had become somewhat complacent.

As time went by they noted that nature, for the most part, ran away from them. All small animals knew they were there long before Coop and Sandy arrived in an area. It was rare that they saw anything of them, unless something larger had already found it for food. Deer did not run, but did seem to move away slowly to avoid them. There was a moose that they walked right into on the eleventh morning there. With the amount of noise Sandy made when she pulled back a thick bush and walked right into it, you would have thought the moose would have retaliated. The moose seemed unworried by their existence, nothing seemed to disturb him. He turned his head to look at them and slowly moved off in the direction he had been heading in the first place.

They had not forgotten the wolf chasing them. They were convinced that the wolf had not wanted to catch them; it just wanted them to be somewhere else. Ever since then, they had learned to walk more carefully and watch more closely where they stepped. They both really felt that running was a much better defensive weapon than anything they carried.

Though Sandy and Coop went ‘Over There’ the next three days, their tenth, eleventh and twelfth treks, those days slipped by faster than any days either of them had ever experienced. Sunday was their resting day, but they got very little rest. They only wanted to be back exploring, their fascination was so great.

They went back to Half Moon Beach directly on their tenth outing. They were troubled about the camp they had found only the day before. They explored all over that area and found no other signs of an encampment, permanent or otherwise. It rained that afternoon, but the sun was out before they returned to the cavern.

On their eleventh day there they traveled toward Pavilion Beach and explored “The Fort” section of Gloucester. They did find evidence that at one time there could have been a small settlement there; thankfully they found no people. They caught glimpses of wolves, fox, badgers, beavers, squirrels, chipmunks, deer, and, of course their very good friend, the moose.

On that side of the harbor there seemed to be more fresh water, so the animals gathered in that area. Birds were everywhere. Eagles and hawks and osprey were plentiful, so were the many gulls they saw. They also noted a lot of sea-life. Striped bass and blues were much larger than Coop and Sandy had ever seen. There were tuna inside the harbor and some of them were bigger than Coop and Sandy could imagine. The inner harbor was definitely alive, like a clear saltwater aquarium.

On their twelfth trek ‘Over There,’ they pushed themselves to follow the inner harbor to the absolute head of navigation on the northern side of the harbor, well past the innermost island, Five Pound Island. From a great distance they saw hunters from the camp, but were sure they had not been seen. Huge harbor seals assembled on Five Pound Island; they seemed to be everywhere. Like all the animals, they avoided Sandy and Coop and their craft. They dove from the canoe, always keeping their distance. Had man, somehow, had a negative impact on these creatures?

It was their thirteenth jaunt there when things changed again. This time they paddled the canoe well behind Five Pound Island and pulled it up on the shore as far as they could; securing the boat to the base of a stout bush. They then camouflaged the boat by laying limbs and greenery all around it. It was not perfect, but a passing glance might not reveal its presence.

From this angle they knew that the villages were to their east, so they did not follow the water's edge too far before they headed more north in the hopes of avoiding the people there. Forty-five minutes brought them to a rise overlooking the ocean, which appeared to still be quite far away. Similar to the Stage Fort area they had reconnoitered five days earlier, only tough clumps of grass were hardy enough to cling to the rocky terrain and withstand the elements.

From the top of this hill they could see well to the north and south on this eastern shore. The islands north of them, Salt, Milk and Thatcher's Islands; were in perfect sight. Coop pointed to Thatcher's Island and said, "Looks weird without the twin lighthouses."

"Milk Island has a sand bar running all the way to the mainland," Sandy said looking through the binoculars. She was idly passing the glasses to Coop when a blood-curdling scream came from somewhere behind them.

They turned, and without thinking, sped off in the direction of the scream hoping the wind and rocky terrain was not distorting the sound. They had run about three hundred feet into the thicket and heard another scream; this time, however, there was a loud growl accompanying the scream. Coop pushed through a ring of blueberry bushes and saw a little girl, not any older than six years old lying on the ground. Atop a rise about fifteen feet above was a wolf glaring down on the child. Coop did not even think, he leaped forward calling back to Sandy to warn her. He jumped, reached the child and pulled her along with him, the force of his momentum keeping him moving through the air. Coop braced himself for the coming attack. He hugged the child and rolled her with him as he tried to gain his footing.

For Sandy it was one slow motion move. She saw what Coop was warning her about and with one sudden movement, she dropped her pouch, fell to one knee and with a fluid motion, she did not know she possessed, drew out an arrow from her quiver, strung it in the bow in her hand, took a deep breath and took aim on the center of the wolf just as the wolf started to bend its legs to spring at Coop. The arrow flew through the air, for what seemed to Sandy, a full minute, but could not have been more than a second. Before the wolf left the ground the arrow struck and the wolf collapsed on its side, slipping down the knoll, almost in front of her, with blood spattering everywhere.

Coop did not hear a thing, but when the guttural growl stopped, he turned to see the arrow sticking through the wolf just behind its shoulders. The arrow must have pierced the animal's heart. The wolf was dead before it hit the ground.

Coop recovered first and quickly loosened his hold on the naked girl. Coop assessed her wounds. It was obvious she had been swiped by the wolf, the force of the clawing propelling her down the incline. The girl lay wide-eyed looking up at Coop, but was not responding to him at all. Coop put her down on the ground and turned to Sandy, who had not moved since taking the shot. Coop knelt down in front of her, and taking her shoulders in his hands, turned her toward him, and forced her to look at his face.

She lowered her arms and let the bow fall to the ground. She exhaled, deeply looked straight into Coop's eyes. "Is it dead?" she asked.

"Yes it is, good shot," Coop replied. "Thanks, I owe you one." Coop smiled at her and patted and rubbed her arms trying to reassure her.

"I've never killed anything," she whispered. It took a second or two for her to process what had happened. She had only heard Coop's warning. Later Coop would say he did not remember what he said, and Sandy could not tell him. She only remembered grabbing at an arrow. "I must have done it without thinking. Is it that easy to kill something?" Sandy started to cry; she leaned forward into Coop's arms and let herself go completely.

Coop turned and saw blood coming from the child's wounds. Gently he helped Sandy to the ground and pulling Sandy's bag with him turned to the little girl. There were three deep claw marks starting just above the girl's left hip, traveling down about four inches to her left thigh. Coop needed to think, that main artery, the one he could not remember the name of, was high on the inside of the thigh, he hoped that was the same for smaller

children as well. He looked through the bag, and he found the extra white tee-shirts Sandy had taken with her in case it got cool. With his hunting knife he ripped one of the shirts from top to bottom in strips about two inches wide. He next took the other shirt and cut it in two. Cutting each piece into four, he then folded the pieces so that they could be applied as absorbing pressure bandages. He wrapped it all up and hoped for the best. That was about all he knew to do. I've got to take a first aid class, he thought to himself.

Sandy slowly sat up. She was still visibly shaken, but color was coming back to her face. This would be in her dreams that night for certain. "Coop, how's the girl?" she asked when she was finally in a place to speak.

"I think I have the bleeding controlled. I think she's in shock; I can't find anything broken. I think she got banged up pretty good. The shock must be a reflex action; she was defiantly staring at that wolf and getting ready for the strike. So was I, matter of fact. You're pretty handy to have around."

"Let's not do that again, too," she said taking a huge breath and exhaling deeply.

Chapter Thirteen

“Well, what do we do with the girl?” Coop asked.

“We can’t very well leave her here. There may be other wolves, not to mention other critters hanging around, and she has a fresh open wound.” Sandy said. Thinking only a second she added, “We’re going to have to take her to her family.”

Coop did not hesitate; he picked the girl up, and holding her like he would any child, in a sitting position in the crook of his elbow with her head on his shoulder, he started to walk. Sandy picked up everything else and fell into line.

They did not make very good progress; there were no trails to follow, and Sandy eventually had to take the lead. Without road signs and stone pillars to go by, it was nearly an hour before they found the group they had seen that day so long before. The girl was asleep now, her breathing was regular, and her body temperature seemed normal to Coop, though he was no expert and despite being man-handled a bit while they walked, Coop observed that the bleeding from the deep wounds on her leg had stopped.

They stood at the top of the hill looking down at the settlement. It had changed considerably since they first saw it. There were more deerskin shelters grouped in a circle around the central fire pit. People also milled around that center of the camp. Sandy and Coop started down the hill. They purposely made noise as they walked, so they would be noticed. A small group gathered and watched them cross the clearing to the central part of the camp. They stopped in front of the group, Coop with the child in his arms and Sandy standing right beside him. This scenario was counter to their original plans, which had been to follow the ‘Star Trek’ Prime Directive and not intervene in these people’s lives.

One of the people stepped forward and looked down at the child. He turned her face first one way and then the other. The man seemed to understand what was going on, but neither he, nor anyone else, reached to take the girl from Coop’s arms. Sandy whispered under her breath to Coop, “I’m not sure I understand what’s happening.”

Coop stepped forward one more step and said, “We found her, and we are bringing her back to you.”

The people obviously did not understand what he said. He lifted the girl as though to pass her to the man. He placed his hand on the sleeping child’s head and smoothed back her hair. Finally he looked up and pointed eastward. Sandy said, “She is not part of this family. She must be part of that other group whose campfire we saw, when we were at Stage Fort. Come on, we better get her to the right people. Want me to take her for a while?”

“Okay,” Coop said, as Sandy put down her things and took the limp child in her arms. Coop picked up their things, and they turned to leave. When they left, however, they were not alone. Almost all of the people in that encampment followed behind them. At one point one of the men ran forward and pointed to keep them on track when Coop seemed to be heading the wrong way. A half hour later they were walking into the other hamlet. These people were not so passive. One young woman ran forward and took the girl from Sandy. A man that had stepped forward with the woman looked at Coop and Sandy. He started to speak to them in a language they could not understand. One of the men from the first group stepped forward and started to converse with the man. First he looked at Sandy and then Coop and back to the man speaking.

The man who was with the woman looked at the child’s wrapped leg and then looked at Coop. The eyes Coop looked back at could not have been much older than Coop’s, and the woman with the child was obviously younger than Sandy. Sandy stood about three inches taller than the woman, apparently the mother of the child.

Sandy pointed to the girl's leg. She thought a second and then, looking at the young woman, made a growly sound and then showed three fingers like a claw, made a swiping motion and then pointed to the leg again. Sandy pointed to Coop and then herself, she pointed to her eye and finished by pointing to the child again. Sandy hoped that told the story well enough.

Coop proudly stepped forward and looked at the young man, pointed to Sandy and then made a motion like throwing a spear and dropped both hands toward the ground. The man's face lit up as he started to understand what had gone on. Sandy, without thinking, reached over to Coop's hand and looked at his watch, this drew attention. "We better get out of here. We've been here too long. We're going to have to boot it to get back in decent time." Sandy and Coop jumped into the pool at 10:10 a.m. Now it was nearing 4:00 p.m. They turned to leave, but the way was blocked. They were strangers, and this group of people wanted to know more about them.

Coop pointed to both he and Sandy as they redistributed their things, and pointed away from them. "We have to go," he said out loud. They pushed through the people and they started to run. They did turn and look back once, waved and they were gone.

"For a second there I didn't think we were going to get out of there," Sandy said as they moved along swiftly through the underbrush.

"I don't think we need to be careful anymore. They know we're here now," Coop replied as they went.

It was not long before they were able to see the harbor. It was 5:05 p.m. when they stepped into their canoe and paddled as fast as they could. This time they paddled right straight down the eastern side of the harbor. Before too long they were passing inside of Rocky Neck into what was Wonson's Cove at home, and pulled without trouble along that inner coast. It took them just an hour to get to the passageway and then another twenty-five minutes to their cavern. They took care of their things and the canoe and then changed into their 'perfectly dry and soon to be wet again' clothes. They jumped in

Sandy looked at Coop as they climbed up out of the pool and into early evening, this was the longest they had stayed there so far, and she asked, "Did we do a good thing today? Do you think they understood what we did, or is this going to be trouble for us?"

"Don't know, I hope not, but I do know one thing, you saved my butt today, and I want to buy you an ice cream. Let's see if we can mooch a ride."

Chapter Fourteen

Mothers know! They always know. Fathers are a different matter, once something is pointed out to them, they follow well enough, but their concerns are not always the same as a mother's. Being next-door neighbors and living in a very isolated part of town, Mrs. Madison and Mrs. Hayden, Joan and Ella, respectively, had coffee nearly every morning at about nine for an hour.

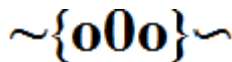
"It is strange," Joan Madison said, "she never leaves her bedroom door open, but of late, it doesn't seem to matter to her, and she's been keeping it clean. When she's around, and she and Coop aren't huddled into some corner somewhere, she really helps me do things."

"Now that you mention it, Coop's been doing things around here, as well, when he's not with Sandy." She stopped, sipped her coffee and finished with, "what do you suppose is going on?"

"Whatever it is, I for one, hope it keeps up. I have not seen Sandy sitting at her computer or texting or talking on her cell phone or even watching T.V. for more than a few minutes since you and the kids got here," she said to Ella Hayden.

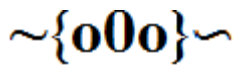
"Coop's never been a big cell phone user, but he is a computer gamer. I don't even think he's unpacked his games from the suitcase he brought with him." Mrs. Hayden had to stop to think. She had noticed other things, as well, but she was well behind Joan Madison in putting things together. "I have noticed that if they are around, they're usually together. Have you noticed how much walking they have been doing? Dad, I mean Cooper, will drive and drop them off somewhere, but they come home on their own. And when Coop's in his room, he is all over Cooper's big map of Gloucester. He's even cracked both Babson's and Pringle's 'History of Gloucester.' Both are pretty dry reading for a teenager, and to top it all off he's excited about something. I can't figure out what."

Joan Madison took a sip of her coffee, set the cup down and idly broke a piece of donut and gave the piece to the baby, Bobby, sitting in the highchair with them. "Reading – and in the summer? Sandy's a smart girl, if a bit unmotivated, she usually had to work a bit to keep up with all her other activities. She keeps looking at a chart of Gloucester Harbor your father-in-law gave them." She stopped to think a moment, and added, "They're happy!" she turned to Ella and laughing out loud said, "Should we be worried?"



Grandfathers know, too, maybe because they are more watchful than busy parents. Cooper Hayden kept his eyes and mind open and his mouth shut. He knew something was happening with his grandson and Sandy Madison. This summer was different than any other summer that they had spent together since they were ten years old. Something was up with them, but he did not mind; he liked the girl that lived beside him. He always had.

The older Mr. Hayden was an early riser; as well as an early reader. When and while the house was quiet, he sat in his favorite room, the downstairs study. There had not been an early morning that Coop and Sandy left that he did not watch them meet and travel up the dirt lane together. He also noted that packages went with them that did not return. The time element puzzled him since they left every day at a different time. But they did not come home hurt, nor out of sorts, mindful maybe, but happy all the same. Happy teenagers! That's different, he thought to himself.



Grandpa Hayden was sitting in his study reading when Sandy and Coop invaded the room. “Gramps, I owe Sandy an ice cream cone. Can you help me out?”

“You need a few bucks?” the man asked smiling.

“Nope, I’m good there. Just need a ride to Stage Fort Park,” Coop said, running from the room. “Be right back.”

“Your mother okay with this, Sandy?” Mr. Hayden asked.

“Yup, she told us to stay out jail.” Sandy said laughing.

“Well, let’s see if we can do that.” Mr. Hayden got up out of his chair and walked toward the kitchen where he knew Ella Hayden would be getting the baby ready for bed. “Did you hear them come in?”

“I heard the stomp on the stairs,” she replied, holding the baby in one hand and a bottle in the other. “What’s up?”

“It would appear that Cooper is held in servitude to this young lady here, and he needs help getting himself out of hock.”

“He needs some money? Get my purse, please, Cooper,” she said.

“No, no, I’m told that the only way we can help him save face is with a ride.” The older Hayden started for the door to find his keys. Sandy stepped over to Mrs. Hayden and took a long look at the baby in her arms and smiled.

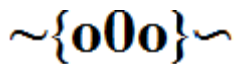
“He’s getting big,” Sandy said. “Is he eating well?”

Something was running through Sandy’s mind, Mrs. Hayden could tell by the look on her face. It was a mature look she had not seen before. Maybe she had not been looking for it before the conversation she had with Sandy’s mother that morning.

Coop popped into the room tucking his wallet into his back pocket. He too walked over to his baby brother and looked down at him as well. Mrs. Hayden noted the interest by both of them. “Little late for him isn’t it,” Coop said, smiling as he reached down to brush his fingers against the baby’s cheek and patted his baldish head.

Mrs. Hayden looked at Sandy, smiled back and replied, “He eats very well, thank you, and he is getting big, goes hand and hand, you know,” she turned to Coop and said laughing. “He slept late this afternoon. Now, get going, you two, and let your grandfather help make an honest man out of you, Cooper Hayden.”

They ran out the door and headed for the car. Mrs. Hayden muttered to herself, “They’re growing up. Oh please, let them slow down a little.”



On warm summer evenings the ice cream stand at Stage Fort Park is mobbed. Coop stood in line for fifteen minutes before a young girl finally looked at him and said, “What can I get for you?”

“One medium vanilla in a cone, one medium Chocolate Chip in a cone and a small maple walnut in a cup, please,” Coop said. The girl gathered his order; Coop paid and then carried it all back to the picnic table where Sandy and his grandfather were waiting for him.

They sat looking around them and idly talking. They had been discussing the Boston Red Sox, who were having a bad season, in reality the elder Hayden talked about the Red Sox and Sandy politely listened. At the time the Red Sox were holding up next to last place in the standings. Coop, very unlike him, had not been paying much attention to them. His grandfather thought that odd since Coop was a huge baseball fan and the New York Yankees, the Red Sox rivals, were doing so much better. Grandpa Hayden just shrugged and thought to himself, *when there’s pretty girl around!*

Sandy looked Coop’s way when his grandfather was not looking. She nodded toward the top of the knoll. Coop knew what she wanted. She wanted to walk to the top so they could have a look around. It was not quite

dusk yet, and if they wanted to be able to see, they had better do it now. “Gramps, can Sandy and I take a walk up there? We won’t be gone long. Is that okay?”

“Don’t go getting lost.” He pointed at Sandy and said, “Remember what your mom said.”

Sandy smiled at him and patted his arm. “You can trust us, believe me.” She winked at him, and both Coop and Sandy swung their legs out from under the table and headed for the knoll.

They gained the top of the hill and stood there looking all around. Tablet Rock sat there big as ever, but with a message for the ages on it; the cove was not there, and a softball field, an ice cream stand, and a small restaurant stood right in the middle of what is all water in their Gloucester. Besides Tablet Rock, absolutely nothing was the same. Coop stood looking down the hillock toward the ball field licking his Chocolate Chip. “You know, I’m still going to miss the ice cream stand when we’re over there.”

Chapter Fifteen

Sandy drew back on the bow and let the arrow fly. It hit its target and the wolf fell dead, sliding down the incline right in front of her. She snapped up in bed, drenched in sweat. This was the fifth time that night she had awakened with the vision of the child's scream, Coop running and grabbing the little girl and Sandy killing the animal. Every time she closed her eyes she lived the incident again; she had killed that animal.

She looked across the room and saw the clock; it read 3:22 a.m. She did not need to get up until later that day. The earliest she and Coop would have a favorable tide would be 10:57 a.m. She did not want to see that image again, always with the same outcome – the blood laden wolf lay dead in front of her. The story did not go any further than the death of the wolf and when she closed her eyes, the scene rewound and played itself again in her brain.

She had never killed any living thing before and it was bothering her that it had happened so easily. Sandy's father, Ronald Madison, a local business man in Gloucester, had told Sandy when she was very little, "when something you have done or been involved in comes back to haunt you, the best thing to do is try and focus on another outcome and see where that would lead you." She lay back down, resting her head on the pillow, she closed her eyes, and her brain player rewound as she drifted to that place between sleep and consciousness.

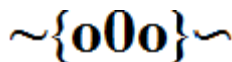
Sandy was standing outside of her body this time. She was watching as the little girl's scream came, and both Sandy and Coop responded. This time there was no slow motion; Sandy saw it all clearly, as it had happened, and from all angles at once.

Coop broke into the clearing through the thick blueberry bushes, while she was still a small step behind him. She was able to see Coop through the green mantel of foliage. Coop had the little girl wrapped in his arms tightly as he tried desperately to regain his balance and run. Coop was having trouble, and she could see him hold the child ever tighter, clenching his muscles.

Just as quickly as it had happened, she actually saw herself break through the blueberry bushes, release her satchel, drop to one knee, pull an arrow out of her quiver, string it in her bow, aim and let the arrow fly. The shot was instantaneous, but this time the wolf sprung off the mound in time. The arrow missed this time and she watched the wolf find its target and ripped into Coop, whose neck was bleeding profusely, blood splattering everywhere. She watched as the wolf finished with Coop and then overwhelmed the screaming child dragging her away.

Slowly Sandy woke fully; it was 5:30 a.m. "Coop would have died, and I would have been helpless to stop the wolf from doing the unthinkable to the child," Sandy said out loud, sitting up in her bed.

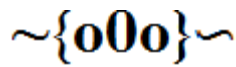
This time when she woke there was no sweating, there was no crying, no misgivings, no doubts; the outcome that really happened was the best outcome. "Kind of sucked for the wolf," she said to herself and lay back down, peacefully this time and slept well.



Coop was somewhere else entirely in his sleep that night. The little girl, why was she there alone? How had she gotten so far away from her people's camp? Had he and Sandy missed something or someone? Should they have looked around for someone else that may have been in trouble or worse?

Coop knew Sandy would carry killing that wolf for a while, but he also knew her well enough to know she would work through it and realize the truth before too long. She had saved his life, and the child's, too. He owed her more than just an ice cream cone, he owed her his life. She would not be easy to pay back; she would not want that from him.

He knew what to do for her. It might take him a day or two to pull off, but he knew what to do, now. He lay back in his bed and waited for the alarm.



“Good Morning,” said Coop. This was the first time Coop had beaten Sandy to the middle of the dirt road; it was late for them, 10:45 a.m. They would not be able to return before 4:42 p.m. That day Coop was more anxious to go; he had questions to answer.

They traveled light, no packages; it was just them to cross over. “I want to be back at the soonest possible time this afternoon,” Coop said as they walked down the dirt road to the boulder and the tidal pool behind it. “Ah, I have to go with Gramps tonight.” There would be no more information from him. Sandy knew probing would not help.

Just like every other day that they went ‘Over There,’ they fell into their routine, and before too long they passed into the sunlight and did not stop. They made for Rocky Neck, passed it on their left and continued until they reached the northern most section of the harbor. They slipped the canoe into the same bushes just as the day before, hiding it as best as they could.

After thirty minutes, Coop pushed through a dense group of undergrowth and walked into the clearing on top of the small baldheaded hillock overlooking the ocean to the northeast.

They stood looking at the view. Coop finally tugged himself back into the here and now. “Okay, the girl screamed. I had been looking in that direction,” he pointed in the direction of the open ocean. “I needed to turn completely and go that way.” Coop walked, he did not run, toward a group of bushes, inspecting the bushes and terrain. “Look, a fresh broken limb. We had to have gone through here. Coop pushed through and held the bushes back so that Sandy could follow him.

They found their barefoot prints and followed them nearly another hundred and fifty feet to the thick growth of blueberry bushes. “Are you okay with us looking this over?” Coop asked.

Sandy hesitated only a second; she reached out her hand and placed it on his upper arm. “I know what we did yesterday was an ‘it or us’ situation, that’s the nature of the balance around here. I’m glad we were the ones that walked away from it.” Sandy got a bit thoughtful, and added, “I hope the little girl’s all right.”

Coop pulled the blueberry bushes apart, and they went through into the clearing. They were expecting to find the carcass of the wolf, half eaten and smelling badly, but still lying there. However there was no evidence of a carcass, there did not seem to have been a struggle by other animals over the remains, as they had witnessed many times before, only splatterings of the wolf’s blood was all that was left.

Sandy topped the rise where the wolf had stood just before she shot it. She looked all around and found nothing. “Sandy, here is where I lost my balance grabbing the girl. I kicked up a lot grass. Over here is where you knelt to shoot. I wonder what happened to the wolf’s body,” Coop said, standing up again. Sandy continued to look over the area and found small human footprints and wolf prints. Sandy could tell that this was where the little girl had been hurt and thrown by the attack’s force.

“There are no small footprints down here. She must have landed on her back, just as I found her.” said Coop thoughtfully. “I must have barely missed seeing the girl hit the ground.” Coop turned his attention to Sandy and asked, “Can you tell which way she came from?”

Sandy looked all around her, but she was having trouble. “I’m no Kit Carson, you know, but if I had to guess, I would say, that way, the south. I don’t see anything that would tell us she was with anyone.” Sandy looked down at Coop, “Well, we didn’t find anyone else, alive or dead. We made sure, now let’s head back.”

Coop said, “We missed the girl’s village by going that way,” Coop pointed toward the east, “so, to find her village, we need to swing a little south from here.”

“Why do we need to go there?” Sandy asked. “Remember about our non-involvement – The Prime Directive?”

“That’s exactly why we need to go there,” said Coop. Sandy looked at him puzzled. “We didn’t retrieve your arrow.”

Sandy gasped, “An aluminum target arrow! To tell you the truth, I’m surprised I was able to kill that wolf with that arrow.”

“It was a really good shot, Sandy. Drive anything foreign through a heart, it will pretty much stop it,” Coop said. “We have to try and get it back.”

“Okay, let’s go, but it’s ‘Hi,’ look for the arrow and ‘Bye!’” Sandy said giving in.

Sandy and Coop started south, but within a short distance the passage became very difficult, and they eased further eastward. Before too long they found themselves on the northeastern edge of the compound they had been in only the day before. There was no slipping into the encampment quietly without being seen. One of the naked children detected the pair as they entered the commune.

The children ran to greet them encircling them completely. With both their hands filled with smaller hands, Sandy and Coop were drawn further into the cluster of shelters. All the children were talking at once. The excitement of their being there brought the quiet village to life. It was like they were rock stars, but without the music. They looked at all the children, and none of them was the little girl from the day before.

“It would appear we are popular, at least with the younger set,” said Coop.

“It might be nice if we knew what they were saying so we could either agree with them or defend ourselves,” Sandy replied, laughing.

The young woman, who took the little girl from Sandy’s arms the day before, walked up to Sandy and wrapped her arms around her and tightly hugged her for a long time; she spoke in words neither Sandy nor Coop understood at all. Sandy could also tell that this woman, who was already a mother, was a little younger than herself. Girls here became women very early on.

Men that were obviously just Coop’s age came into the camp from every point of the compass. They were all smiling at them. “I don’t think we have to worry about defending ourselves; I was worried they would think we hurt the little girl,” Coop said.

Sandy drew one of her arrows out of her quiver and showed it to everyone. She shook the arrow and pointed to all of them, then pointed to her eyes and then pointed to the arrow again. There were only blank looks on their faces.

“Well,” Coop allowed, “Looks like that’s a ‘NO,’ if they understood you at all, Kit Carson,” Coop smiled a very toothy smile.

The mother of the little girl took Sandy’s hand and pulled her along into one of the shelters. Lying on a bed of leaves and straw was the little girl. She looked up at Sandy and smiled, recognizing her. Sandy ran a hand over the girl’s forehead and over her hair. She seemed cool to the touch and Sandy looked for red lines and swelling of the girl’s leg. Sandy brushed her hair back out of her eyes and then pointed to the bandage, then herself, and then her eyes. The young mother pointed, palm up, toward the bandage. Sandy found a loose piece of bandage and peeked under it, it looked good to Sandy. Sandy pointed and nodded her head and smiled. Sandy stood and so did the young mother, they looked at each other, and Sandy recognized the gratitude on the mother’s face.

Both she and the mother of the girl stepped out of the shelter. Coop was standing by the entrance. “The girl?” he asked.

“She’s cool to the touch, and I didn’t see anything that looked like infection, which is really more luck than good care, given the medical system here. She smiled at me. Are we ready to go?”

The little girl poked her head out through the opening to the shelter, and when she saw Coop she ran forward and hugged him around the middle. Coop looked down into her eyes and smiled, then knelt down with both her hands in his. The little girl was obviously happy to see Coop. Sandy may have killed the wolf, but it was Coop, in the little girl’s mind, that kept her from being hurt more. Coop tweaked her pug nose and they smiled at each other again. Coop gave her a hug and then turned to Sandy, “Now we can go.”

As they turned to leave, it became apparent that the people wanted them to stay longer. “This may not be as easy as we thought,” Sandy said, inching her way toward the edge of the clearing. They smiled and waved to everyone, and as soon as there was an opening, they took it and ran into the brush.

They followed a small beaten path to the harbor just in view not too far away. Once they reached the water, they walked northward following the harbor edge. When they got to the place where they had hidden their canoe, they pulled it out and found inside it the wolf pelt and Sandy’s arrow. Sandy looked up into Coop’s face, and smiling said, “Now that’s what I call one hell of a thank you.”

Chapter Sixteen

Over the next few days things went along as usual. Coop and Sandy explored, and every day brought something new to them about ‘Over There.’

The day after the connection with the people living in the village, they decided to avoid the area for a while.

Governor’s Hill was one of those places where the trees and bushes cannot easily take root; Sandy thought it might afford them an interesting view of the harbor from a goodly elevation. The view was spectacular and worth every minute of the climb to reach the top. The fact that the Annisquam River did something completely different at its source and mouth was a little off-putting. They were used to the deep canal and the bridge, but ‘Over There’ it flowed into the harbor in many shallow creeks that barely had any water in them at low tide. From the top of Governor’s Hill, it looked like a massive delta, fanning out making the marshland terrain very wide. The view from the north, Ipswich Bay and the mountains in New Hampshire and Maine, from this vantage point they found breathtaking, making them want to go further in their exploration.

Before they even jumped into the tidal pool for their seventeenth journey, Sandy and Coop knew they wanted to stay on the eastern side of the harbor. What better way to do that than to explore the “Big” island, their name for Rocky Neck. The reason they called it the “Big” island was because it took up at least twice as much space as the other two islands combined, Ten Pound and Five Pound Islands.

Rocky Neck sat in the middle of the inner harbor; without the influence by man to fill in and shift the currents around these landmasses. From the eastern side of the inner harbor, the distance had to be almost a quarter of a mile. The pull from the eastern shore of the harbor to the western shore of the island was short and an easy approach. They slipped the canoe up onto the sandy shore and secured the little boat, as always, to a tree. It took them the better part of two hours to walk the whole perimeter of the landmass. The southern side, because of the direct impact of the wave action from the mouth of the harbor, was very rocky, making it easier to climb to the highest part of the island.

Once they had gained the high ground they had a good view to the south of the harbor, Stage Head, Norman’s Woe and Eastern Point were easy to identify. After taking in the seascape, they started northward. Similar to other places they had been, thick underbrush and bushes stood in their way. “Sometimes I think of us as Lewis and Clark,” Coop mumbled as he pulled himself through a thicker than normal line of bushes.

“Ah, could you make that Louisa and Clark?” asked Sandy pulling herself right behind him.

“You got it, Louisa,” kidded Coop.

“Ha – ha,” answered Sandy as she stood up in what seemed at first glance as a clearing. Sandy twisted herself around studying the landscape. “Now,” she said, not trying to be funny at all, “this is not so ha – ha. This looks, ah,” Sandy hesitated and then added, “Planned.”

They were standing in the middle of what looked like a pathway running faultlessly from east to west. The path was easily ten feet wide, and Coop was as baffled as Sandy. “Nature doesn’t grow, suddenly stop in an area in a perfectly straight line, jump a space, and then start growing again.” He turned to look at Sandy who only shrugged back at him.

Looking east they could follow the view, of what seemed to be a downward sloping path. They could see the water separating the island from the eastern shore of the mainland. “Well,” she started, “we can see where that goes; I say let’s go that-a-way.” She hooked her thumb to the west and headed up the grade toward the top.

As they reached the top of the rise, about a hundred feet in front of them, stood a huge mysterious mound. They looked at each other, and slowly and very quietly approached it. Like when they were surprised by the

wolf, they had learned to be very careful and cautious when advancing toward anything unknown; this had been a lesson learned the hard way.

It was a large mass easily twenty feet square and completely covered by greenery; including vines and leafy moss. It did not stand very high. Bushes had wildly taken root all around it. Maples had also taken root along one side a few feet away. These tree shoots were already struggling to stay in place in the shallow dry earth and would never get much bigger, Coop thought.

Coop had his hatchet at the ready, and Sandy had an arrow already strung into her bow with her hands set and the string partially pulled back. She never wanted to be caught off-guard again. She did not like the feeling of having killed something, even an animal, but when it came to Coop and herself she wanted to be ready.

When they were within twenty feet of the object, Coop leaned toward Sandy and whispered in her ear, "We stay together, got it?" Sandy did not even look at him. She simply nodded her agreement and slipped up beside him. She wanted to be ready to either attack or flee.

They walked around the strange mass once completely and then turned around and walked the other way round right back to where they had started. They had not seen or heard anything. "Now, this is another 'something' new," Coop said quietly.

"What do you think it is?" Sandy asked.

"Haven't the faintest idea, but if someone said this thing was a space ship, well, at this point, I'd believe them." He took a breath, looked around them one more time. Coop stepped forward, pushed his hand through the dense foliage, grabbed, leaned back and then pulled what he could of it toward him. The greenery gave way. He hacked at it with his hatchet until he had about a two foot square exposed. He reached in and felt tree bark, not going up vertically, but lying horizontally. "Either it's a really big pile of logs..."

"Or a log cabin," finished Sandy. "You go that way, and I'll go this way and see if we can find a door."

Coop walked over to the edge of the forest and chopped at two small saplings measuring about six feet long. He whittled away with his knife all the small limbs and whittled a blunt point on one end and then handed the first one to Sandy. "Use this as a probe. That way you won't snatch something you don't want to. It may just make the job a little easier," he said, and started on a staff for himself.

He was standing on the south side of the overgrown lump when his stick slipped into a void without resistance. "Got something here," he called to Sandy.

Sandy walked around the thing, slung her bow over her shoulder, slipped her knife from the sheath and started ripping away at the growth. Coop attacked the heavier limbs with his hatchet, and before too long they had uncovered a rather crude opening. They leaned in looked around. It was dark inside. Sandy looked up, and she could see green above them with small shards of sunlight poking through. She stepped back and looked up to her left. She took Coop's hatchet from his hand, and started to chop a few fairly large bushes and vines which traveled up the side of the building. When she gave them a huge pull, they slid from the top and almost immediately the room lightened up enough so that they could at least see inside.

Again, with hatchet and bow and arrow at the ready, they entered into what was now evidently a cabin that someone had lived in. They stepped over the last of a rioted door lying on the stone floor. In the center of the room stood what had to be a stone fire pit. The rotted green canvas roof fell in all around, the shack had at one time had a peaked roof, with the roof rafters there as proof. The floor was exposed granite ledge; obviously serving as both floor and foundation of the shanty's walls.

Coop took the right side. Coop found a hammer, a handsaw, a large hand drill known as an auger, an ax and an older type turnbuckled bow saw. All the metal was rusted beyond any of them ever being useful, and the wood was rotting away. As Coop picked up the hammer, the rusted head fell off. Leaning in the corner was a hunting rifle and the remains of two empty boxes of ammunition. The paper on the cardboard boxes were still bright red but unreadable. Coop lifted the weapon and inspected it closely. The wooden stock was dirty and worm holed, the bolt was rusted shut and the trigger frozen in place. He tried to read the stamped lettering on the bolt, time and weather had done its worst. He respectfully placed it back where he found it.

Sandy worked her way along the walls to the left of the door. She found two canvas-type camping cots that had a long time before rotted and collapsed to the rocky floor. In between the cots stood a small crudely-built table. There was nothing attractive about it, there were a few small items lying on top of it, two stubs of pencils

and a small notebook. The book was badly decaying. Sandy tried carefully to turn the pages, but only the bottom four pages remained readable. Sandy read through the four pages, there was not much there.

“Got some hand tools here,” Coop said. “There’s a rifle, too. I don’t know much about guns, but it looks like one Gramps has hanging on the wall of his study. I think he said it is a 30 caliber Springfield bolt action hunting version of an army rifle used in World War I. Wonder who used all this and where they are now. Why would they desert it?”

“I think the person who lived here didn’t desert it” Sandy said. Coop looked her way and saw her pointing to the other rotted cot, she said, “Cooper Hayden, meet Mr. Joshua Elwell. The last entry in this notebook is dated February 8, 1959.”

Coop followed her finger, and on the stone floor amongst the rotted canvas and wooden legs and other rubble and debris lay a skeleton, obviously human. It was in no specific semblance of order, the pelvis and the legs seemed in the right place, but the rest had been dislodged, and in the middle of the pile was the skeletal head very badly yellowed with age. “That explains a lot. I wonder how long he’s been laying there.”

She gently turned back a few pages of the notebook, “Listen to this,” she said excitedly. *‘I have not been well this past month. I grow weaker all the time. I do not know what this illness can be. Except for these last few weeks I have enjoyed good health being here at Camp Gloucester.*

‘If I am so sick, then I pray the end of it comes soon; if not, well, I pray the same. I am no fool, I have nothing left in my larder, it is snowing, it is very cold and there is no way I can hunt, I have grown that weak.

‘As always, when sitting here alone I wonder how my friend and companion, Cameron Parkson, has fared all these years since I last saw him and we were together here. I hope life for him was good. I hope someday this will be found and if possible, word can be gotten to Cam that I have been here and waiting in hope for something to happen.

‘Life here has been hard, but free of the war that was raging when last we spoke. I was hunting at Stage Head that last day that we were to meet here. I was injured badly when I fell from the higher rocks above Half Moon. I had a broken leg and busted up a few ribs, too. That is why I did not make that last meeting.

‘Now, I will leave it all there. Joshua Mathew Elwell, February 8, 1959 (I think).’

Sandy looked up at Coop, who was now sitting on the rock floor beside her. “I guess we know who left the things in the cavern,” she said.

“We were hoping to find a clue, and we now have not one name, but two,” Coop replied. Coop got up and started for the door. “I’m going to clear some of the growth from around the cabin. Brighten it up a little in here. I would guess we can use this place now.”

Coop hacked for the better part of two hours, and the roofless shanty was again exposed to daylight. Sandy worked inside straightening up and cleaning as best she could. Coop had the foliage cut back and the mess cleared out when Sandy came out of the cabin carrying the bones found on the floor. “I think we ought to bury Mr. Elwell. Wouldn’t that be the respectful thing to do?” she asked.

“I am not certain that it will matter much to old Joshua, but I’d like to think someone would care enough to take care of things for me,” Coop said.

“Well, we can’t bury him up here, all ledge,” she replied looking around.

“It looks as though Joshua Mathew Elwell had a garden. There is a raised bed that looks a lot like one my mother has at home. We could put him there.” Coop waved for Sandy to follow him, and they went to the northern side of the cabin then over a small knoll. “See?” he said, pointing toward a square rock wall about two feet deep and at least the size of the cabin’s perimeter, a good twenty feet by twenty feet. “He must have grown vegetables up here.”

“I have heard a well-planned garden, even one this size, can yield quite a bit of produce,” Sandy said. “He must have been a planner, of sorts.”

Coop dug into the center of the overgrown bed with his knife and then the hatchet. He went as far as the ledge would permit. He then laid the bones, as organized and respectfully as he could, into the hole, and together Coop and Sandy carefully covered over the remains of Joshua Mathew Elwell. They stood quietly when they finished, not knowing exactly what else to do or say; neither one of them had experience with death and how to deal with it.

“What should we do now?” asked Sandy.

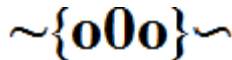
“I don’t think there is much we can do, beyond this, but now we have to go.”

Chapter Seventeen

Sandy lay in bed idly staring up at the ceiling of her room. It was early Saturday and sadly, she thought, she had nowhere to be and nothing at the moment to capture her attention. Today was the start of a break in the action for them. She hated not being able to go there. She was a modern girl, but she felt so liberated when there. There was something invigorating about their travels. Independence was the word she groped for. She felt older, more responsible, than she had only a month before when school let out for the summer. When she and Coop were there, she needed to take care of herself and Coop, too, and Coop needed to take care of himself and her, as well. They had become a team, a team she felt comfortable being part of. She had this feeling before, but never had it come to her as strongly as it had just the day before when they had each other's backs. She trusted Coop with her life.

The night before, she scanned Joshua Mathew Elwell's last few pages into her computer, re-sized and enriched the copy, and printed them out on fresh paper, rendering a copy for Coop. The enlarged and enhanced copies made the handwriting easier to read. She then placed the originals in plastic sheet protectors for safekeeping. Anything from 'Over There' was to be prized. Sandy must have read those four pages a dozen times. She rolled up onto one elbow and looked out the window toward Coop's house. "Where is the best place for us to start looking for someone?" she asked out loud, like Coop were standing beside her.

They had been 'Over There' seventeen times, and now she was fairly convinced that they were not crossing some kind of time-barrier thing. The weather was the give-a-way there. Back in time would not follow the same weather patterns as this time would. Was the situation dimensional? How would she know; she was not a physicist or some other educated, impressively-thinking person. More questions and no answers. She tried to sleep some more, but that was not going to happen, either.



Coop had been out of bed and dressed an hour before Sandy's mind had been a-whirling. Coop's brain was not spinning a mile a minute like Sandy's was. Coop had become rather passive about everything he did not know or understand. As far as 'Over There' was concerned, he knew, unless something major came along to change things greatly, he would never really understand it.

Right now, however, he had another question bubbling up inside of him. Joshua Elwell and Cameron Parkson, whoever they were or are, were two names to be looked into.

Coop had been sitting in the kitchen. He had made some coffee. He had only started drinking it a year before. Something caught his attention, a noise from somewhere in the house. It took him a moment to remember where he was, there was nothing menacing here to worry about. He got up and started for the front hall; when he reached the front door, he heard his grandfather's voice say, "Cooper Benjamin Hayden the second, this is the first time I have not beat you into a new day. Coop, why are you up so early?" he asked. Coop's grandfather stood looking suspicious, "Should I infer this behavior is directly related to Miss Madison, next door?" the elder Hayden queried.

"If you mean, would I be meeting her this morning, Gramps, the answer is, not this morning," Coop replied. "At least not until later, that is."

“Well then, if it’s not Miss Madison, whom I like very much by the way, what’s got you up, dressed and ready to greet a new day?” he asked.

“Had enough sleep, I guess,” Coop answered.

“Now, as a man who once was a parent of teenage children, and, now, teenage grandchildren, I find that answer quite inadequate, Coop.” the retired lawyer said, a questioning look on his face.

Coop did not know what to say. He finally said, “Head working overtime. Just can’t seem to shut it off.”

“Coop, that’s pretty thin and weak, if you ask me,” the doubting reply came.

“Gramps, have you ever heard of Cameron Parkson or Joshua Elwell?” Coop asked him.

“Never heard of Joshua Elwell, Cameron Parkson is a name I’ve heard. I may have done some legal work for him once, why?”

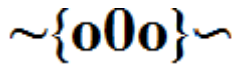
“Sandy and I just want to find him, that’s all,” Coop said. “Want some coffee?” asked Coop.

“Okay, but, you need to assure me that there is nothing wrong. I worry that you two may get hurt,”

Coop smiled. “We won’t come to harm from anything human, Gramps. We’re good there, believe me. Nature, on the other hand, is always a pretty unpredictable thing. You never know about nature,” Coop believed that more than his grandfather could have imagined.

“You’re being careful, right? You know what I mean?” Coop’s grandfather let that gel in Coop’s head before going on. “Remember, no jails, no hospitals, no anything else.”

Coop knew exactly what his grandfather was warning of and he agreed as he handed him a cup of coffee, “No anything else, Gramps.”



Parkson, Cameron ----- Clarendon Street, was the listing in the Cape Ann version of the telephone book. Sandy and Coop walked along Rocky Neck Boulevard, crossing the causeway and followed the narrow road all the way out to the very end of the street. It being Saturday, the Rocky Neck Railways, a very large shipyard, was not very alive by the time they got there that afternoon. The Rocky Neck art galleries were up and running and very busy. The restaurants were full, as well, and patrons sat out on the patios overlooking Smith’s Cove.

“So hard to believe it’s the same place,” Sandy said leaning on the railing of the pier observing the comings and goings of boating traffic. The car and foot traffic was not to be ignored, either. People were loud and the cars backed up along the narrow streets of the neck, slowing everything down considerably. “I definitely miss our quiet harbor.”

“It’s someplace different, that’s for sure,” Coop replied, pointing toward a little shop on the bend in the road, “ice cream?”

“No thanks, big spender,” Sandy said laughing.

“I’ll buy you dinner tonight,” Coop invited seriously. That had been hard coming out. He had wanted to do something special connected to the surprise gift he had picked up for Sandy that morning.

“Can we get reservations at someplace nice downtown, maybe dress up?” Sandy asked smiling hopefully.

“If you’d like, Ms. Madison,” Coop bent from the waist and pulled out his cell. “Gramps?” he asked, when the phone had been answered on the other end, “could I reserve a ride in the family chariot for this evening for myself and Ms. Madison for dinner? Say 7:30?”

“Is this going to be a round trip kind of thing?” came the question over the phone.

“Oh yeah, I have a feeling Sandra is planning on heels, Gramps,” Coop said.

His grandfather chuckled and replied, “I’ll write you in for a round trip. Can I make a suggestion and reservations?” he asked.

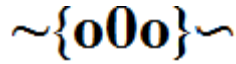
“If you wouldn’t mind, I’m already a little out of my league, here,” Coop pleaded.

“I’ll make table reservations for two at Passports, eight o’clock should be okay.” The man hesitated and added, “Hey, Coop, you going to need a few bucks?”

“Mom’s got some money of mine, I think I’ll be okay, Gramps,” Coop said.

“No worries, here, you’re covered, Coop,” and the cell went dead.

Coop looked at Sandy and said, "To quote a great man, 'No worries, here, we're covered.'" Sandy grabbed Coop's hand and pulled him along, "We gotta go. I have to do my hair."



A pink chiffon cocktail dress with narrow shoulder straps, a deep V neck and a hem that fell to just two inches above her knees was what Sandy was wearing when Coop, dressed in a blue blazer, white shirt, navy blue dress pants (borrowed from his grandfather), a pink tie and cordovan loafers (also borrowed), saw her for the first time. She took his breath away. Her hair hung prettily to her shoulders, but Sandy could not bring herself to forgo the deerskin bling and stick barrette she had made while 'Over There' which she wore when she needed something to keep her hair out of her face. That had been alright with Coop, she was beautiful, no matter how she dressed or no matter what she wore in her hair. Coop had walked across the lawn to get her, and Sandy met him at the door, her matching pink three inch heels in hand, there was gravel to negotiate and a twisted ankle would not have been a good way to start the evening.

Grandpa Hayden sat appearing very serious, dressed in a black suit coat and a black chauffeur's hat perched on his head.

The mothers, on the other hand, were standing together in the Hayden kitchen observing their children walk down the path to the car. Watching the car as it drove away, Ella Hayden turned to Joan Madison and said, "She's beautiful, Joan."

"That dress does more for her than it ever did for me," Mrs. Madison said, smiling enviously.

"Oh, Joan, she's you all over," Ella Hayden said, smiling and hugging her friend around the shoulders. "Want a drink?"

Joan Madison, with glossy moist eyes, turned to Ella and said, "Should we be worried or happy?"

Ella Hayden took in a long breath, held it a moment and slowly allowed the air to escape. "Joan, something's going on with them. Have you seen them together? They're not infatuated teenagers, I'm sure they love one another, whether they know it or not, but they are not gushy about it. They are sharing something and it's doing something for both of them. Joan, that scares me, but we have to let them grow up on their own. Yes, sweets, we should be both worried and happy."

Chapter Eighteen

Coop and Sandy were sitting at a corner table in the storefront style windows of the restaurant. Though Sandy had lived in Gloucester all her life, seafood was not her thing. The lamb was prepared just perfectly as far as Sandy was concerned. Coop had the fish and chips, and he loved every mouthful. All in all, the meal was wonderful, and they enjoyed being together without thinking about other things, though lately, those other things were never far away.

The dinner plates had been taken away, and the desert menu was brought. There were items on that menu they had never heard of, but Sandy knew what Chocolate Mousse was, and they ordered one to share.

It was during dessert that Coop drew a small flat box out of the inner pocket of his blazer. It was wrapped in beautiful silvery paper with a green ribbon tied into a pretty bow on top. Sandy looked at the box and then back into Coop's face. "You're not going to ask me to marry you, are you?" she finally whispered, leaning forward.

"No, but what would you say if I did?" Coop asked, also whispering and leaning forward so they were nearly nose to nose. Coop was smiling, but he felt a bit awkward. He had not been thinking that kind of thing at all.

Sandy smiled back, her face blushing. "I'd say not today."

"Is there someone else?" Coop kidded back.

"Not this summer, there isn't." she answered. They sat quietly for a long awkward moment. "Cooper Hayden, what did you do?"

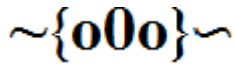
"I got you a thank you gift, for killing that wolf, in just the nick of time. Thank you, partner," Coop said, handing Sandy the box.

Sandy took the box into her hands and just looked at it for a few seconds before turning the box over and gently pulled at the tape, trying to save the pretty paper and bow. It was a flat jeweler's box, and Sandy fumbled a little trying to open it. She did get the top off, and resting between two layers of flat cotton packing was a timepiece, a beautiful gold timepiece with black jeweled roman numerals on the face and an ornate gold second hand. Attached to a fancy heavy round gold hoop was a handsomely-worked leather lanyard. Sandy had never seen such a watch before. The watch itself was the size of a large silver dollar and was thin and extremely light for its size. "If you press the watch stem it illuminates the face, its waterproof to some really foolish ocean depth, and it has a life time guarantee," Coop said, a bit excited.

Sandy gently lifted the watch from the box and then turned to Coop and said, "Coop, I think the leather thong is connected upside down."

Coop stood up quickly and stepped behind her, reached and took the watch from Sandy's hand, "You see that's the way it is supposed to go, look." Coop undid the extra heavy clasp he had fitted and slipped the lanyard about Sandy's neck, closed the clasp, locking it under her hair and allowing it to gently fall in front of her. "It's upside down, so when you look down, you can see what time it is without having to turn it and look," he said smiling, proud of himself. "Maybe you've never noticed, but you're always looking at my watch when you want to know what time it is."

She had not noticed that before, but Coop was right, she did look at his watch often. "It's lovely, Coop, thank you. It's very thoughtful of you." Sandy had a tear in her eye. She looked up into his face. "You are thoughtful and a true gentleman. You are definitely one of the good guys, Cooper Hayden." She hesitated a moment and said laughing, "You better watch it or I will marry you."



Coop had made arrangements with his grandfather to meet him on Harbor Loop, right near the U.S. Coast Guard Station. This was to save Grandpa Hayden from having to chase down a parking space in downtown Gloucester on a busy Saturday night.

Sandy and Coop sat on the stone bench on the harbor side of the Fitz Henry Lane house, which was situated on a small knoll once known as Duncan Point. They had given up comparisons as useless. Besides, they knew all too well that their harbor was much prettier than this harbor.

Sandy had all she could do not to look at the beautiful timepiece hanging around her neck. In her mind it was the nicest gift anyone had ever given her. Of course, Coop had become more than just anyone for her, for everyday that went by, in her head and in her heart, he became more special. She shifted her thinking a bit and looked at him, “The people there carry pointed sticks. I haven’t seen any bows or arrows. I did notice that they use sharpened thin flakes of rocks as knives. I haven’t figured out how they make fire, yet,” Sandy said, “hard way to live.”

“There is nothing we can, or should, do about that,” Coop replied thoughtfully. “Think about it, they saw your bow and your arrows, both in your quiver and in the wolf you killed.” Coop stopped a moment. He was trying to collect his thoughts. Sandy had an idea she knew where Coop was going with his reasoning. “They saw your knife; they saw my hatchet and my knife, too. They haven’t seen how we’ve used them; maybe that’s a good thing, I don’t know. It’s like that Prime Directive thing; maybe they are supposed to learn about these things on their own, without our influence.” He stopped, thought a second, made a face, and then added, “Was that at all clear?”

“Coop, everything starts with an idea. Sometimes, maybe, it’s a wild thought, and maybe it doesn’t work when they try it, who knows. I do know this, if one of them is smart enough to put two and two together, and they get even a little bit of what they’ve seen to work right, well, I’m okay with that.” She looked into Coop’s eyes and ran her arm into his and hugged it as if she were chilly. She rested her head on his shoulder. She sat like that a minute and then said, “It’s not like we taught them the mathematical formula for the circumference of a circle. It’s only a bow and arrow, a hatchet and a couple of knives, Coop.”

“I understand what you’re saying, and it does seem simple enough, but what if in the ‘Big Picture’ they’re not supposed to have these things yet?” Coop asked. It was obvious from the tone of his voice that he was simply wondering out loud; there was nothing challenging about his manner.

“Okay, I know we can excuse or explain things differently, but have you talked about Greek Gods and or Greek Mythology in your school?” Sandy asked.

“A little, I’ve heard of Plato, Hercules, Thor, the Incredible Hulk,” Coop quipped.

“The hulk’s not a Greek God, Coop,” Sandy said, mocking a punch in his arm.

“I know, just wanted to see if you were paying attention,” Coop smiled his winning smile. “Go on,” he said.

Well, those guys had these fairies or angels or something that they called Muses. When one of those godly thinkers had an idea about something they would credit their Muse,” Sandy smiled again, her head still on Coop’s shoulder. “Maybe, we’re their muses.”

Chapter Nineteen

Monday morning Sandy and Coop were off with the first light, which in July in Gloucester is about 5:00 a.m. They hit the dirt road and were off.

It was a beautiful morning with a mostly clear sky that was dotted with a few small clouds of no consequence. They both carried their shoes, Coop with sneakers hung around his neck and Sandy walking uncomfortably in flip flops.

At 6:15 a.m., having donned their footwear, they walked into the breakfast and lunch diner at the intersection of the two major roads on the neck, not that they were all that major. They took the last booth on the windowed side of the diner. A young lady from behind the counter called over, “Coffees, Sandy?”

Sandy turned to look, “Hi, Sue, sure.”

The young lady walked to the booth, two coffees and cup cradled spoons in hand. She placed the cups on the table and stepped back drawing out an order pad. “New fella, Sandy?” she asked teasingly.

“Maybe,” Sandy answered smiling.

“Hey – hey, you know I’m right here, right?” Coop said, mocking disgust. “Oh, go ahead – talk about me all you want.”

Sandy looked up at Sue and then back at Coop, “Sue this is Coop Hayden. He’s summering next door. Yes, I’m working on him, I almost got him convinced.” She smiled, “Coop, Susan Winters, she was my babysitter a gazillion years ago. I can tell you stories.”

“Don’t you dare, Sandra,” Sue said laughing. “Nice to meet you, Coop. I could tell you a few things, too. Hey, what can I get ya this morning? The specials are on the board.” Sue pointed with the eraser end of her pencil over her shoulder and waited.

“Just toast for me, ah, wheat, I guess,” Sandy said.

Sue was writing then looked at Coop. “I’ll have the same. I know, not very inventive, is it?” Coop allowed smiling.

“Toast all around,” Sue said, and started to walk off.

“Hey Sue,” Sandy had a thought, quickly she called Sue back and asked, “do you know Cameron Parkson?”

She was definitely thinking about it, finally she put her finger in the air and walked backward a few steps, “Karen, what’s old Cam’s last name?”

Karen, from the kitchen, stuck her head up over the ordering shelf, “Ah, Parkman or Parker, no, Parkson. He lives up on top of Clarendon. It’s a little early for him, but he’ll make an appearance sometime in the next half hour or so. Always walks; come rain, shine, snow or dark of night.” Karen’s head dropped back down out of sight.

“Thanks, Sue,” Sandy said. “Thanks, Karen.” Sandy added loudly.

“No problem,” the equally loud reply came from the kitchen.

“How do we approach Cameron Parkson?” Sandy asked, dropping her voice back down so that only Coop could hear her. Sandy made a snooty face and stuck out her hand. “How do you do, nice to meet you, by the way, we found your cabin in that place we can’t figure out, oh, and your friend is dead and we buried him in a vegetable patch?”

“I suppose we should have talked more about this, huh?” Coop said. “No matter what, we can’t do it in here, that’s for sure. Besides, what if he is the wrong guy?”

“If we just say ‘Joshua Elwell,’ he’ll know or draw a blank and we walk away. No muss – no fuss,” Sandy said. “Either way, I think you’re right, we can’t talk to him in here.”

They ate their toast when it came and asked Sue for ‘To Go’ cups for the remainder of their coffee, which Sue filled right to the brim before pressing the covers in place. They left the coffee shop, walked across the street sipping at their coffee and waited near a small gallery that would not be open for some hours yet.

Coop bought a Boston newspaper, mostly for the sports page. “Hey the Red Sox are out of last place – today.”

Sandy was in another place entirely. “I’m thrilled,” she said dryly. When she realized what she had said out loud she quickly back pedaled. “Oh, wow, phew, about time.”

“I get it, you don’t care about the Boston Red Sox,” he said without looking her way. “Yankees are in first place now, though,” he said. That was only ‘kind of’ good news. Coop had always been torn over his loyalties between the two teams.

“I don’t follow hockey, Sandy said straight faced. Coop just closed his eyes for a moment then opened them wide and started to say something. Sandy cut him off with, “I know, I know.” She waved a hand at him. It was then she looked up the street to see a man slowly sauntering toward the coffee shop. “Coop,” she said nodding her head in the man’s direction.

“How do we know that’s him?” Coop asked.

Obviously doing some calculations in her head and trying to make some sense of her thoughts, she quietly rationalized, more out loud than she meant to, “The last entry in Joshua Elwell’s notebook was in February of 1959. It’s now 2012, so that’s,” it took her a second, “fifty-three years ago. He also used that phrase ‘all these years.’ Let’s pretend he meant ‘all these years’ to be ten years.” Sandy stopped talking a moment. It was obvious to Coop she was trying to make sense of what they knew with certainty. A blank stare, a frown of frustration remained on her face. Slowly she shook her head and looked his way. “But we have another number connected to ‘Over There’ we haven’t thought much about or how it might fit.”

Coop looked at Sandy and then a ray of comprehension ran across his face. He pointed in Sandy’s direction, “1943.”

“1943 it is, folks. Give the man a Kewpie Doll,” Sandy softly said, cleverly sounding like a carnival barker.

Coop stood there thinking a moment. “We do have that number, but, Sandy, it could easily be a piece of another puzzle all together,” Coop reminded her.

“That’s true, of course, it could be.” She thought a second or two and looked back up at Coop, “You’re right, Coop, maybe it is better to hold that number in check until we know more.”

“Sandy,” Coop allowed, “1943 fits somewhere, we just don’t where, yet, but, all the same, you could just as easily be right.”

“Thank you,” she said and quickly went back to her mathematics. “Okay, back to my way of thinking, if ‘all these years’ is ten, that knocks the fifty-three years out to sixty-three years old and if, let’s say, they were our age when they got there, that makes seventy-nine years. Could he be around seventy-nine years old or older?”

Coop nodded his head, “My grandfather is seventy-one years old and he looks older than Gramps, that’s for sure.”

“Let’s watch him for a while. Maybe he’ll go someplace where we can talk to him,” Sandy said trying hard not to look at the little coffee shop.

They moved away from the gallery front and sat on a wooden park bench not far away. They could see the front door of the shop easily. It was nearly an hour later when the elderly man left the diner and started up the main street toward the Rocky Neck Railways, the shipyard at the very end of the neck. He stood rather erect and took precise steps and moved along rather well.

In his youth he must have stood six feet tall, he was a handsome man of medium build, the hair he had, which was a lot, was gray/white. He wore glasses, loose fitting work style blue jeans with hammer loops and a short sleeved blue work shirt.

He walked all over, stopping at every gallery and shop on his way toward the shipyard. He spoke to everyone and everyone had something to tell him. He walked fast, but his progress was slow as he waved and acknowledged everyone on the street. He arrived at the shipyard just as the coffee break truck with the words

MUG UP painted on the side pulled into the work yard. He had coffee and a donut with the workmen and he easily spent forty-five minutes hanging around the boatyard watching everything that was going on there. He then took his time walking back the way he had come, again talking to everyone in his way. He passed the diner and made for the middle of the causeway, sitting on a wooden park bench that faced toward the outer harbor and the huge Dog Bar Breakwater.

Sandy and Coop stood across the street in the parking lot and waited. They had first seen him at 7:15 a.m., and now it was nearly 10:30 a.m. It was time to talk to him. Maybe they were wrong, maybe he was not even Cameron Parkson.

The man's back was to them as they took those first few steps across the street. They advanced across the recently mown lawn. When they were about eight feet away from him he said, "It's about time. I've waited all morning to find out what you two want."

"Mr. Parkson?" asked Sandy.

"Who are you?" the man asked in a neutral tone.

"Cooper Hayden," Coop said stepping forward.

"Ah, your father did the deed work on my house." The man replied.

"That was my grandfather, sir," Coop explained.

"Of course, now, young lady, what's your story?"

"I'm Sandra Madison, sir," Sandy said.

"Which Madison family would that be, Eastern Point or Annisquam?" he asked.

"Eastern Point, sir," Sandy replied. "My aunt and uncle live in Annisquam."

"So, your father would be Ronald the gentleman who runs the fish plant out on The Fort." It was not a question and the man remained emotionless.

"Yes, sir," Sandy said. "My cousins and I used to make jokes because my dad makes fish sticks and my Uncle Mark sells them. I don't laugh anymore, honest, sir." Sandy was never quite certain why she added that little confession. Maybe to help convince him that she was serious minded at the moment.

"Good, I like his fish sticks. I'm also glad to see you have seen the error of your ways." Sandy thought, for just a nanosecond she saw a glimmer of the smile show and disappear at the corners of his mouth. "So what would you like to talk to Mr. Parkson about? It must be very important to stalk a guy like this."

Coop stepped forward again, "Are you Mr. Parkson? It is a very private matter we wish to speak to him about."

The man stood up and turned his attention on them both. He took in a very thoughtful breath, closed his eyes as if to think and then opened them, holding his expression. "If you're looking for Cameron Parkson, then you've found him. Now, once again, what's this about?" The look on his face was stern and it said – this better be good.

Sandy stepped up beside Coop, as if to say – I'm not afraid. She looked back at him and said, "You know Joshua Elwell?"

The elderly man just stood there a thoughtful look on his face, and said nothing. Coop and Sandy did not want to intrude on the man's thoughts. Finally Parkson blinked, shook his head and looked directly at them. "I have not heard that name for a very long time, though he is rarely out of my mind. How is it that you have tripped onto the name of a man who disappeared sixty-eight, no sixty-nine years ago?"

Okay, Sandy thought, this is where it is going to get a bit sticky. This is where we take a huge leap. She closed her eyes and said, "We know where he's been the last sixty-nine years."

Parkson showed nothing. He stood still, but after a long moment he turned and sat back down on the park bench. "Is he still alive?" Parkson asked quietly.

Sandy stepped forward and stood beside him, "It appears that he passed away in February of 1959."

Parkson seemed stunned. He sat there not saying anything. Finally he looked around to be certain that there was no one around them, when he was satisfied that they were alone; he looked at them and weakly allowed. "Can you explain?"

"We found a cabin and in the cabin we found these last few pages of a decaying notebook." Sandy handed him one of her copies of the pages she had carried with her.

Parkson read through the pages, it did not take him long. Finally he choked out, “We were joining the army together in the hopes that we would somehow stay together through what was left of the war, that’s World War II, by the way. We knew it was a long shot, but we were going to try the best we could. We had our physicals and our paperwork all done and were scheduled to leave in mid-August, August 17, 1943, to be exact. That last few days together we were going to spend hunting and fishing and closing up ‘Camp Gloucester,’ that’s what we called it. We had no idea how long we would be away”

Sandy sat next to him on the bench and rested her hand on his shoulder, “Nothing here is your fault,” she said.

He looked right at Sandy, but he could have just as easily not seen or heard her. “I thought that he had chickened out of going. For three days I wait for him to come back from wherever he had gone hunting, but late in the evening of the sixteenth I needed to leave, we were scheduled to be on our way on a bus for army basic training at Fort Dix in New Jersey at dawn. I hoped he would show up at the last second, but...” Parkson looked their way, but almost as if he was looking right through them.

After another minute he continued, “That is all I know. When I left it was August 17, 1943. I didn’t return until September 7, 1945. World War II ended at the end of April and the beginning of May of 1945. They discharged as many of us as quickly they could, but it still seemed the longest time until we were all going home.”

Parkson pause as if you keep his thinking within a proper timeline. He continued without too much hesitation. “On September 10, 1945 I tried to go to Camp Gloucester. The way was blocked, the ledge had shifted somehow and I couldn’t get through no matter what I did, no matter how hard I pulled and prodded. I could feel the current of the tide, but the opening was only as wide as my fist. No one knew what had happened to Josh, his family had no idea, I had no idea. I am sorry to think that I thought the worst of him. I tried to hold on to the hope that it was not his doing that he had not made it when the bus left.”

“Didn’t people look for him?” asked Sandy.

“Oh yeah – when you’ve signed a contract with the U.S. Army, you don’t just not show up, especially during wartime. If what he wrote is true then I should have gone looking for him instead of waiting at the cabin. By the way, how did you two find it?”

“It was Coop who found the opening and your canoe and all the stuff you had in that cave,” Sandy said.

“There was only one canoe?” Cameron Parkson asked.

“Yes,” Coop allowed. That comment set Coop thinking, “you had more than one?” Coop looked at Sandy, a questioning glance on his face. Sandy understood the look, had they missed something, like another cavern?

“Yes, we each had one, we built them there. We found the way into the cave in June of 1939. I was fifteen and Josh had a few months on me, he was sixteen at the time. It is quite a story to tell and I’m not certain I have the stamina to tell it all at once.”

Chapter Twenty

Coop and Sandy joined Cameron Parkson in his walk back to his home on Clarendon Street. His house was not fancy, just a small white clapboard single-floored cottage with maroon shutters and trim. It sat on a small house lot near the top of the street, almost at the highest point on the neck.

The inside of Mr. Parkson's house was as neat as a pin, yet sparse. Obviously if Parkson did not need something he did not bother with it. "Your Camp Gloucester, the cabin, was completely covered in wild growth, ivy and vines and out-of-control shrubbery, not that there is any other kind of growth there but wild." said Sandy. Coop watched her. He knew that later she would be able to tell him everything there was to see and know about the place.

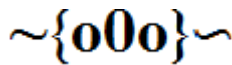
They did not want to push the man. Slow, was what Sandy said to herself; let's share it all with him in small doses. "Would you like any of the things we found on the stone shelf? We have added quite a bit to that shelf," Sandy added.

"I've lived without them for sixty-nine years, you two use them with my blessing, without worry," he replied.

"We don't want to overwhelm you, and we can't go there for the next few days anyway, so would you mind if we visited you over the next few days, just to talk?" Coop asked.

"Let me buy you fellow travelers into the unknown breakfast in the morning, how would that be?" Parkson asked. "I usually get to the coffee shop about seven-thirty."

They left the yard waving to the man. "Well, we got a little bit of the story. You were right, 1943 was a year," Coop said as they walked down the road toward home.



What use could they make of the cabin; that was their discussion? "We don't hunt, on purpose, that is," Coop smiled and looked Sandy's way, she blushed, "and we don't fish, either. Mostly what we do is explore and act baffled," Coop said as they walked the shoreline and then Niles Beach on their way home.

"Now that Joshua Elwell has been found, we have cleared up a fairly important mystery for Mr. Parkson, and it is obvious that he can't go there now. Maybe we ought to just demolish the cabin and let nature do its thing," Sandy replied

Agreeing, Coop added, "We have our own routine and starting place. Besides, we don't go there for days on end like they did. I think we should have our base somewhere else don't you think? Me, I'd rather build a small place on Eastern Point. We could just as easily work from here, I mean 'Over There.' You know what I mean."

Sandy just nodded, and they kept walking. After some thought, Sandy finally said, "Coop, did you happen to notice whether or not there was any sign of a Mrs. Parkson?"

"I wasn't really looking," he replied sheepishly. Had he missed something?

"If there was a Mrs. Parkson, she either left or died a long time ago. I also didn't see any pictures of children or grandchildren or even great-grandchildren. I would have noticed," Sandy said.

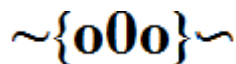
"I know you would have." Sandy looked at him funny, as if to say what do you mean by that crack? Coop didn't even see her face; he just kept on talking and walking. "You notice everything and you remember everything, you're great that way." Sandy's face softened quickly and changed to a smile.

They got home and without even thinking about it they made for Grandpa Hayden's study, each finding a book and a place on the big rug in the middle of the room.

Ella and Grandpa Hayden had quietly watched them come up the road, walk to the porch and head straight for the study. Ella Hayden turned to her father-in-law and whispered into his ear, "Cooper, see? Reading, and in the summer, yet, together, without discussion, each with their own agenda. What do you think's going on, Dad?"

"I'm a pretty old man, and goodness knows it's been awhile, but I think its love, and not that puppy love stuff, either. It's a more mature love than I remember summer loves being. I think they're experiencing something together, something they both care about, and as a result, that has sprouted into this love we see right now." Gramps stopped and thought a brief second and added, "I don't think they even know it." With that he walked off toward the kitchen.

Ella Hayden smiled to herself as if she remembered a long time before. She whispered to herself as she walked into the kitchen, too, "Lucky them."



The next few days passed slowly for Coop and Sandy. Both were anxious to get back 'Over There.' Each day they met with Cameron Parkson, and each day they heard more about both Elwell and Parkson and their travels to and about Camp Gloucester. However, Parkson seemed to be holding out something. Sandy could feel it.

On the last day of their second five day time out, Coop and Sandy had made arrangements to meet Cameron Parkson for dinner at one of the seasonal restaurants within walking distance of Parkson's cottage. Sandy was wearing a black skirt, a white sleeveless blouse that buttoned up the front and was open at the collar. She wore comfortable black leather flats for the walk.

Coop donned a pair of long tan pants and a blue denim shirt with a button-down collar. Sandy talked him into a pair of leather sandals instead of his grungy sneakers. It was a very pleasant evening with a cooling breeze off the ocean. It had been typically July-warm all day, and this cooler evening sea breeze was a relief.

Parkson asked for a booth in the far corner of the waterfront bistro overlooking Smith Cove in the hope there would be some privacy and that they could talk more freely than they would have otherwise. "We are able to go back in the morning," Sandy said to Parkson.

"Tell me," he said, "why do you not go there these five days of the tidal cycle?"

"We have parents who, even though they pretty much leave us alone, watch us closely, and if we were to push the envelope, they might just watch us more closely," Coop said.

"It would not be right to worry them, especially if they caught us sneaking out or back in at all hours. We have to set some limits. Also, we've not stayed after dark. I for one don't think I'm ready for the dark of night there, yet. We've had enough adventures during the day to hold us, thank you very much," Sandy said.

"So, you think it's the responsible thing to do by not slinking around and staying out at all hours?" Parkson was prodding for something; Sandy just didn't know what it was he was looking for.

"If we were to get caught sneaking around, I'd get grounded for life. Not only that, they'd worry. We've seen them watching us. I think they worry about us now, already. Why make it worse?" Coop said.

"Most kids your age might not be able to help themselves and go anyway," Parkson added quickly.

"Oh, to what end?" asked Sandy. "That would ultimately stop us from going there, at least together, and we've made rules about that. Neither one of us is to go there alone, ever."

"That's an extremely good rule. Promise me you will stick to that rule, no matter what comes up. Remember Joshua Elwell." Parkson had a look on his face that told both of them that he was serious and concerned. "You know sometimes Josh and I used to come back feeling a little different, would you mind kind of watching for that, and let me know if you notice anything unusual. I'd like you to promise me something else." He looked down at the tablecloth, playing with his fork, making light swirls in a pattern into the white cloth. "I'd like it if you would contact me to let me know when you've returned each time you go there."

“Okay,” said Sandy. “We can do that.” Sandy thought for a moment then asked him, “How did you get along with the people there?”

Cameron Parkson snapped his head up and replied, “There are people there?”

Chapter Twenty-One

Both Sandy and Coop looked surprised at Parkson. Coop sailed right ahead and inquired, “You never ran into any people there? We knew they were there about a week after we started going. We avoided them at first hoping they wouldn’t see us. But, it wasn’t long after that we helped a little girl, saved her from a wolf, Sandy killed it.”

Parkson looked at Sandy, a fascinated look on his face, “Killed a wolf? Now that’s a better-than-fair feat. How’d you do it?”

Sandy shrugged it off, “With an arrow, lucky shot, that’s all. Anyway, she was hurt and we had to return her to her people. As a result of that kind gesture, they’ve left us alone, and in return we stay out of their way.”

Coop jumped in, “We’ve talked a lot about them. We don’t think they are a threat to us, they seem to like us. They are not stalking us and for the most part, unless we seek them out, they stay away.”

“We never saw any people. Never even saw any evidence that there were ever people there.” Parkson said. “There was plenty of wildlife, but no people.”

“In our travels we found a deserted campfire pit at Stage Head on the far side of that inlet from Tablet Rock. It looked fairly recent and temporary, just a pit stop, so to speak.” Sandy looked at Coop, and he nodded to her to go ahead; she was doing fine as far as he was concerned. “We also found some evidence that maybe, if we read all the indications right, there may have been a small settlement in the Fort area at one time. It really is too bad more of Mr. Elwell’s journal didn’t survive” She gave Coop a look that seemed to ask him if she had missed anything. When Coop did not add anything to her observations, she went on, “Other than that, there really haven’t been other traces of habitation.”

Coop said, “We decided that we had to be careful not to upset the natural progression of their lives. We haven’t seen bows and arrows or anything made of any kind of metal. They use fire, of course, but we haven’t seen anything resembling a wheel.”

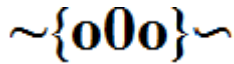
“That’s very astute of you to observe all that,” Parkson replied.

“When you think about this as much as we do, you naturally come up with ideas,” Sandy said.

“What other kinds of things do you two think about, talk about?” he asked in return.

“Anything everyone our age thinks and talks about, I guess,” said Coop.

“I want you both to look around this room, and tell me what you see,” Parkson said. A bit bewildered by this request, Sandy and Coop did as they were asked. They looked, and they were not able to fathom where Cameron Parkson was going. When it was obvious by the looks on their faces that they were not following as he had hoped, Parkson continued, “I’ve known and observed you two for what, five days. I’ve noticed that you two act, speak, and seem to reason at a far more mature level than all the sixteen year-olds I’ve known. Example: you are having dinner here with me tonight, which at this stage of our relationship is more a business meeting, for lack of better words. You felt obliged to dress tonight appropriately, with maturity, I might add, for this occasion. You both seem to have pride in how you carry yourselves. Remember, I was a policeman here in this city for a lot of years. Observation is a huge part of the job. Instincts and insights help, as well. I just wanted you to know what I see. If that’s a recent change, your parents have already noticed and been thinking about it, too.” Parkson stopped talking, and he realized that he must have come off sounding quite preachy; he smiled and finished with, “Just be open, be aware, be yourselves.”



Sandy slipped off her flats almost the second they left Cameron Parkson at his house. They sauntered and meandered more than their usual energetic stride. They were both in the same “thinking” place, so keeping up with one another was easy to do. Forty-five minutes later they were standing ankle deep in water when Coop remembered his grandfather could be waiting for a call. “Gramps, sorry I didn’t call earlier. Sandy and I are walking home. We’re about halfway, Niles Beach. We’ll be along.” Coop closed his phone and put it away.

“Was he mad?” Sandy asked.

“He didn’t sound mad,” Coop said. “Fessing up right away, when you screw up with Gramps, is the best way to go. He doesn’t seem to get as mad.”

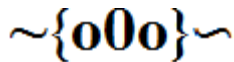
Sandy nodded; she understood, she had known Mr. Hayden her whole life, and Coop was right. She quickly shifted gears. “What do you think Mr. Parkson was getting at?” she asked.

“Maybe since we’ve gone ‘Over There’ we’ve become more self-assured, more self-sufficient?” Coop asked, and he meant it as a question; he was fishing for an answer, and since Sandy was his partner and confidant, he looked to her for help.

“Could be, we’ve risked our lives and saved another, we walk into the unknown every time we go there. I feel responsible for you, and you feel responsible for me, and I don’t mind telling you I like how that feels. The idea that I’m not alone feels very safe and reassuring. On the other hand, I’m confident enough now with myself to know because of all that’s happened I could get by on my own if that need arose. Coop, that’s a big deal, on some level,” she patted her chest and then rested her hand open-palmed over Coop’s heart. “I think our vision of what’s really important has changed. I can’t tell you the last time I wanted to argue with my mom or purposely piss my father off,” she paused looking for something and simply added chuckling, “just because I could.”

“You know, now that you mention it, I was really mad about having to come here this summer, about traveling with my mother. I thought Bobby was a royal pain. I realize that part of those feelings were some form of jealousy,” Coop shrugged, “he’s a baby.”

“He is a cute one,” Sandy said idly hooking her arm around his and leaning her head onto Coop’s arm. There was something curious in her tone, Coop only noted it and then let it go.



The canoe slid over the water of the harbor. This time Sandy was steering, and Coop was in the front just paddling along. Sandy felt so much more relaxed now that they had gotten back. She saw the columns of smoke rising up into the still air in the distant East Gloucester area.

They had dropped into the pool at a few minutes past 5:00 a.m. They were even happy to see their small cavern again and all the things they stored there. They had changed and gotten to work. The mission for this day was to go to the “Big” island and see what they could of the rest of it. They had hoped that maybe they would find something that might help them fill in a little bit more of Joshua Elwell’s story.

They found the Grassy Way, as they referred to the path leading to the cabin, drew the canoe above the shoreline and secured it. They walked into an area almost completely roofed over thick with huge oak, elm and maple trees. The surface of the damp ground, which lacked sunshine enough, was covered with ferns and other shade preferring small plants. It was a fairly good-size opening and allowed a good shady spot to rest in after having hiked all that way. After a short breather they continued on toward the center of the island.

They could stay there until 5:30 p.m. It had reached a point that, as time had gone by, they were staying longer and longer until they agreed to always try to reach the passageway an hour before their absolute limit. That gave them virtually just a few minutes over ten hours to be there; they wanted every second they could get to explore.

They felt wonderfully free while there; it was always hard to give that feeling of freedom up when it came time to leave. Now, however, they were shifting gears and studying an oddity. Not far from the northern-most

tip of the island, they had entered an area void of trees and growth. In the very center of the circle, which appeared to be almost two hundred feet in diameter, there stood a rocky ridge some twenty feet high. "This is strange," Sandy said.

"You could say that," Coop quipped, looking all around, "is this natural?"

It was amazing, thought Coop, how Sandy could pay so much attention to the details around them and still be able to coherently make complete sentences while thinking about it all. "This goes onto the ever-growing 'We-Don't-Know' list," she answered.

Neither one of them had noticed that they did not think singularly any longer. A month before, the list would have been referred to as the 'I-Don't-Know' list; now it was the 'We-Don't-Know' list. That development had happened so subtly and gradually they did not realize it had happened.

Sandy turned to Coop and asked, "Something feels odd here, is this dip below the harbor level, you know, sea level?"

Coop stood blankly looking around. "You're right, there is something different about this, isn't there. And I meant to take that surveyor's class, too," he said straight-faced and then smiled when Sandy gave him her 'behave yourself' look. He shrugged his shoulders then said, a question in his voice, "A dried up pond?"

"It would have had to have dried up an awfully long time ago. The ground's not even damp down here." She replied. "If it were like our tidal pool at home, there would be water here now. The tide's only about a third of the way down."

"Why should answers about this come any easier than anything else we've wondered about this place?" asked Coop, a little frustration coming out in his voice.

Sandy threw her hands in the air and shrugged her shoulders. She started up the opposite side of the divot and reached the rim. "The way stops here," she said to Coop as he caught up with her. Below them was the northern-most point of the island. "Just like everything else here, all questions and no answers," she said.

They were sitting on the edge of a good-size rock when Sandy tapped Coop on the shoulder. "Look!"

On the far shore, the people from the camps were busy gathering something and pulling it above the shoreline. They looked frantic about their work. Coop handed Sandy the binoculars, and she studied their movements. "It looks like they're getting ready for something. That's not just floating junk they're playing with, it's their fishing gear," she whispered.

Coop turned looking back the way they had come and Sandy gave up the glasses to him. He searched the horizon and then puffed his cheeks out and idly popped his lips. This was a mannerism that took place when he was starting to seriously think about something. Sandy had noticed this mannerism which happened when he was seriously thinking about something. She had learned there were times when Coop would kid around about something, and then there were times when he became thoughtful. Sandy instinctively knew this to be one of those times to listen to him. He pointed toward the people on the shore across the harbor, "If they are sensing something bad, like severe weather coming, it might be a good idea to heed that warning. I'd bet their sensitivity to the environment around us is a lot better than ours," he finally said.

Sandy could not fault that logic. They had learned from experience that there was a time to fight, a time to stand still, and a time to run; this might be a time to run. "You're right, let's get the hell out of here," she said as she started to scramble to her feet. "We can't get stuck here, Coop." Their best bet was the shoreline so they headed for the beach below. The way would be sandy, but they would not be fighting bushes and trees. It also gave them a straighter path southward toward their canoe.

When they reached the canoe, they slipped it into the water. Sandy touched Coop's arm, "Coop, you're stronger than me, and you've gotten better at steering than I am, you better take the stern."

Coop only nodded; now was not the time for a conversation convincing her that she was just as capable. They climbed in and headed south, making a straight line right for the western side of Wonson's cove. The wind was picking up, and the sky was beginning to gray, but right behind that wall of gray was bright blue sky. "That's really weird, look," he said pointing to the southeast. "Now, if only we can get to the beach before it opens up on us."

Right at that moment the harbor changed completely. The wind started to gust first for thirty seconds and then it would calm, then it would gust up again. To the south they could see rain falling, looking like a wall of

water with some force behind it. Coop and Sandy had seen this type of storm before, but from a distance. They had been lucky in the past; they had watched it move off, not advance toward them, like now.

Sandy got into a rhythm, three strokes on the right, then three on the left. She kept that up and left the rest to Coop in the stern. She saw what was coming and worked very hard to not panic. The harbor started to kick up a bit and the little canoe started to get bounced around. Within a few minutes they were feeling the force of the wind and current on the canoe. The wind wanted to push the boat back from where it came, and the current was working to draw it toward the mouth of the harbor with the tide. The wind was the stronger of the two. The current was just strong enough to create chaos. Normally the outward flow would help the small vessel and the paddling arms of its crew. It started to rain, and before they could respond, the canoe was filling with water.

A series of five fairly large waves either of them had ever seen splashed hard on them. At home, the Dog Bar Breakwater prevented most of that kind of wave action. Without the breakwater there to slow the waves down, they were fetching up, curling, and then breaking almost two feet high. Coop found their beach and tried to head for it, but the movement of the waves foiled that progress. He kept the front of the canoe facing the harbor mouth, and in between waves he tried to carefully slip the craft sideways, and he was doing reasonably well. He knew that they had about seven hours of time left to them. He also thought with the blue sky in sight that it might be best to simply try staying upright, not fight too hard and hope the canoe remained steady and afloat.

Between waves, he still slipped the boat toward his left as much as he dared. It was maybe an hour after they had gotten underway that he could see Sandy was tiring, her strokes had a little less punch to them on every hit.

They were about one hundred feet from their beach when the rain stopped falling, but the wind and the wave action had not slowed at all. It would take an hour of calmer winds before the wave would subside.

The biggest of the waves, hit the canoe broadside and started to roll the little vessel toward the shore. Sandy was tossed overboard first, Coop tried to right it all without success. The whole thing turned turtle and bobbed in the next wave. Coop looked for Sandy everywhere and just on the other side of the capsized canoe he saw her floating face down. Without hesitation, he dove under the canoe groping for her legs, arms, anything that he could grab onto.

He broke the surface of the water and found her right in front of him. He reached and held on to her tightly, pulled her to him, and heaved her back drawing her face from the water. He put an arm around her neck and swam backward toward their pebble beach just outside the dark passageway.

As soon as he was able to get his feet planted on firm bottom, he lifted her into his arms and ran for the beach. It was rocky along the water's edge so he ran further toward the grassy area right above the beach, itself. He laid her down on the ground. He opened her mouth, took a deep breath and pinching her nose with the other hand, put his mouth to hers and breathed naturally into her mouth. He saw her chest rise, and immediately she coughed and choked and rolled to her side, gasping for breath.

Coop knew enough that if she were coughing, choking, and making sounds, he needed to let her get past the next few seconds on her own. He rubbed her back, held her chin and watched her for the next minute as she struggled to pull in all the air she could and gain the required rhythm to her breathing. Sandy then rolled onto her back and took deep breaths, each one bringing her closer to normal respirations.

After watching Sandy closely for a few seconds, Coop suddenly snapped to attention. The canoe, he thought to himself, where was the canoe and how badly damaged was it? He turned his concentration back to the water, instantly stood up and made for the beach. The paddles were together, as luck would have it, almost right in front of him as he reached the water's edge, along with most everything else from the canoe. He quickly picked it all up and threw the lot further up the beach and well beyond the influence of the wave action. The shape of the bottom of one end of the craft caught his attention. It was rolling toward the large ledge to his left. He ran out into the water and dove back into the raging surf, swimming as hard as he could toward the canoe. He reached it in only a few strokes and grabbed the little boat and starting swimming backward just the way he had with Sandy.

In a few feet he was standing waist deep in water pulling the vessel up onto the pebble beach. He inspected the canoe, which was still whole and serviceable. Pulling the canoe up out of the water, he tied it to their

favorite tree and ran back to Sandy. She was now laying down looking up into the sky. Coop stepped into her line of vision and knelt beside her.

He was able to take a few minutes and sit down beside her; trying to recover from the last few minutes of work. All he could think of was, thank goodness he had not lost her. He was more shaken by that thought than the ordeal, itself. What would he have done if anything had happened to Sandy? “You okay?” he asked, looking over at her, a concerned look on his face.

Sandy sat up and nodded her head, “Thanks to you I am.” All at once they realized what had happened, and again their close connection had brought them out of harm’s way; this time it was Coop who took the lion’s share of the risks. “I’m starting a list,” she said looking right into his eyes, “Let’s not do that again, either.”

Coop smiled and started to laugh to himself. Sandy reached out and slowly inched forward, wrapping her arms around Coop’s neck. In that moment their lives changed. There was an ache inside that neither one could understand or describe. Coop put his arms around Sandy, as well. Sandy let out the quietest of sighs; she reached behind her neck and undid the tie holding her top in place, and she let it all fall away. She whispered into Coop’s ear, so quietly that he barely heard her words, but their meaning came through clearly, “Coop, please peek, peek right now.” She pulled them both back to the ground, Sandy laying on her back looking up into Coop’s face. They lay like that for a long moment just looking into each other’s face and knowing all too well what their eyes were saying to each other.

What happened next happened so slowly, so precisely, so perfectly. In this, too, like everything else in their life of late, they were partners. They surrendered themselves to each other, for both, the first time. They kissed each other gently, they caressed each other gently, and everything they did for each other they did gently. Before too long, they were laying there in the shade of the huge leafy oak tree, nothing between their bodies but a beautiful gold timepiece, with black jeweled roman numerals and an ornate gold second hand; that carries a lifetime guarantee.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Of Late normal was certainly not a word either Sandy or Coop could relate to. Their lives were so far from normal that they had even stopped thinking of things in those terms. For that matter, what could normal mean? Who was it keeping track, anyway?

But, uncertainty was a different matter for Sandy. She did not know how to feel about the physical love she had made with Coop. Emotionally, it was different, she was different. Sandy did not regret anything she had done with Coop. She was happy that Coop had been her first; he was, as always, a gentleman and nothing about this innocent lovemaking felt wrong.

However, there are always consequences. It had all happened so suddenly there had been no means, or time, for protection. She knew one thing; she would hold it together no matter what happened. She was positive STD's, sexually transmitted diseases, would not be a worry. She had trusted Coop with her life and now she had trusted him unconditionally with her body.

Now that she had acted as a mature woman, she was going to continue acting like a mature woman. She knew, however, she would have to share the worry with Coop at some point, but not right away. They had things to do, and places to explore and she would do her best to not let this slow that experience down.

That very next morning Sandy woke with a feeling that she had just joined a special club, a club with a secret. She was now a woman with a private life. Coop was also part of a club, but in a very different way. Sandy had heard that boys or men are wired differently than girls or women. The emotional part of this ritual was very different for both sides. For Sandy it seemed as though she had made her first dues payment to womanhood. There were other steps, but she was very willing to climb them one stair at a time.

It was awkward that next morning between them for exactly four minutes. They met on the dirt road and walked up the road. It was just after 6:00 a.m. They travelled straight back to the "Big" island, Rocky Neck. There was no bad weather in sight. From that time on they would not go 'Over There' without checking a weather forecast first. When they got there they stood in the middle of that mystery hole from the day before. They did not know enough about nature to be able to even start explaining this anomaly. "Coop, what could have caused this?" Sandy asked turning in the center hoping she would see something, anything, to explain this.

"I know I'm beginning to sound very redundant, but, if someone came along and told me, 'Oh yeah, a spaceship did that,' well, I'd consider it," he said shrugging.

Sandy knew he was not trying to be funny; she was beginning to feel the same way. It was becoming their slogan, their mantra, their standard line, 'too many questions, no answers.'

"I wonder if Mr. Parkson can help with this," Sandy said. "Maybe he could at least tell us if it was here when he was here last."

"We can ask," Coop replied.

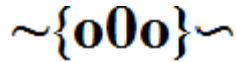
Coop had been a lot preoccupied that morning. Before they met he had been wondering what he should say to Sandy? He knew there was no right thing to say, but he was very certain there were many wrong things he could come out with. Like, I'm sorry, or thank you, or, wow, that was fun. He was not sorry it had happened; he was very glad it had happened with Sandy. Saying thank you would be a slap in the face to her, though he was thankful that it was with her, uttering the actual words, thank you, just would not be right.

Coop did not say anything right away, but when they stood at the edge of the pool and had gotten ready to jump he took her hand and turned her toward him and they hugged for a very long time. When they stepped back he said, "Sandra..."

Sandy stopped him by putting her hand to his mouth. She looked up at him, and simply nodded her head and said, “Shh, I know, Cooper Hayden, let’s give it a little time to settle in and we’ll talk, don’t worry about it,” she had a little tear welling in her eye and she smiled at him and closed her eyes. “Everything is wonderful, Coop, believe me.” She opened her eyes and he did believe her.

Now there was a hole, to investigate, to figure out and answer the part it played or plays in the big picture. It had to mean something; it had to have been something, but what?

“Too much mystery and not enough data,” Coop allowed more to himself than to Sandy.



They lived and felt wonderment during their time together ‘Over There.’ Nothing could have kept them away. They did not see the people from the camps again. One day they traveled in that direction and when they walked over the rise and looked down at the campsite, it was empty. The fire pit was there and some small frames to the shelters still stood upright, but the hide walls and roofs were gone. When they went down to take a closer look it was obvious that they had been gone for some days. They had seen the people eight days before when they were taking in their fishing gear before that big storm that nearly claimed Sandy and Coop.

“Well, maybe they are nomads and traveled from someplace else to here and now they are headed home, like Florida for the winter,” Coop said.

“Obviously they are nomadic, but I wonder whether they came from the south or from the north.” Sandy wondered out loud.

“Maybe they’ll come back next summer and we’ll see them again then,” Coop replied.

Chapter Twenty-Three

No matter what adventures one may be having every day, life still has goes on. When wolves attack, when the weather turns, when exciting things happen, all those instances occur in brief spans of time. Lewis and Clark, Columbus, Magellan and deChamplain experienced more quiet time than hair-raising adventures. This held true for Sandy and Coop, as well. One day passed very much like the one before it.

They had done just as Cameron Parkson had requested, they called him whenever they returned from their time 'Over There.' He was always very happy to hear from them, and on the first day of their third time out they were having lunch with him and telling him all they had seen and everything they did not understand.

"A deep hole on the north end of the island?" Parkson stopped talking and Coop and Sandy let him have all the time he needed. "There was a small pond. It was incredibly swampy, too dirty to drink. Fish couldn't have lived in it, I'm certain; it was thick with mosquitoes and leaches."

Obviously, Parkson was having a problem. He was clearly upset about something, and had something else on his mind. Sandy could see he was agitated. She was certain he did not know where or how to start talking about what was foremost on his mind.

Coop was as perplexed as Sandy. Coop remembered a joke he had heard once, and he remembered that at the time, the punch line, did not make a lot of sense to him: 'Don't just do something, stand there.' Right then he understood its meaning. He was sitting beside Sandy, and he could tell by Sandy's body language that she was about to say something. He reached over and took Sandy's hand and when she looked his way he simply gave her the smallest shake of his head.

She understood what Coop was getting at. It was almost like she could read his mind. They sat quietly waiting. It was possibly two minutes before Parkson found the words and then put them in the order he needed for them to make sense. "You two, it happened to you two faster than it happened to Joshua and me." Cameron Parkson was still struggling with finding words. "Maybe it is because you two mean so much to one another." He looked at them closely. "Don't look at me like that. You two know, you may not have put it all together, and you may not have spoken of it to each other, but you know."

Sandy exhaled a long breath. She had not realized she had stopped breathing. "You mean that we've matured since we started going there, we don't know why."

"That you've matured 'greatly' since you started going there. It happened much more quickly for you and Coop. I don't know why either, but maybe it's because you have a different connection than Joshua and I had." He looked at Sandy, and she nodded her head back at him. "It happened to us over the first summer, and for some reason when we did not go there throughout the winter it didn't really stop, it didn't go on as fast, but we kept maturing all the same. By that next summer we were maybe as mature as thirty year-olds. That was why we got sloppy, we really thought we knew better and could handle anything. We thought we would have forever to work it all out." Parkson was on a roll. He had found the place where he wanted to go and spun off.

Once he got started, there was no holding him back; it was a waterfall that had been dammed up for sixty-nine years, and the falling water just flowed, without control. "There were two parts of it that were difficult to deal with. First, we were not like other people our age. We had different views, interests, likes and dislikes. We seemed to understand things differently. People didn't stop talking to us, but they didn't seek us out as they had, and Josh and I were left alone a lot. Secondly, we also became obsessed with Camp Gloucester and got very depressed when we couldn't go there, for whatever the reason. All in all, it helped us develop intellectually and understand the world better, but it also pushed us to a place where we wouldn't be happy with teenage mischief,

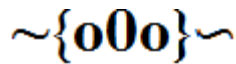
drinking parties, panty raids and other school activities geared to express the wild side of adolescence. Even though we had each other, we were lonely for contact with others our own age.”

Parkson needed to stop. He sat back in his chair and took a long sip on his drink. “The biggest reason I have been haunted all these years is that the last time Josh and I were together we argued over something very foolish, so foolish I don’t even remember what it was. When Josh didn’t show up, I thought it was because of me, that maybe he had gone earlier, but when I left after three days of waiting and put the canoe away and covered it over with the oily tarp, Josh’s canoe was not there, and I left thinking he’d calm down, and we would see each other the next morning.”

Parkson almost could not get the next sentence out of his mouth; the hurt on his face was that great. “Two years had gone by, and I tried to return to find out what had happened to him, but I couldn’t.” There was something more he wanted to say, but he stopped and looked at them. After a very long pause he looked back at them. “Know why I came back from the war unscathed? It was because I reasoned better. I knew when to not foolishly run into booby traps, I ducked quicker and better than some of the men I knew. I came home when others I knew did not.” Parkson was near tears.

Sandy said, “There is nothing wrong with being a little smarter or quicker to react or more thoughtful than the next guy.”

“Young lady, don’t do that. I need to finish with you before I get side tracked. Don’t lose sight of who and what you are. No one ever expects to find mature teenagers, so don’t go getting cocky.” He turned to Sandy and she could tell he was sorry for having snapped at her. He took her hand in his. “And be careful. You’ll have your time. Don’t go getting yourselves lost in it all. There are many sides to life, and you do need to live it all.” Parkson hesitated and finally said, as though he had made up his mind about something, “It will slow down, I guarantee it.”



Sandy and Coop started to walk back home. They passed Niles Beach and stopped to sit on a very large rock out of the way of other people. “Coop,” she gave him her full attention; it was time to share, “I am not pregnant.” This declaration was out of the blue, and Coop simply was not ready for it. “Since we made love I have been a little concerned. It was not time to be too worried yet, and as it turns out, it is not a worry at all.”

Coop started to say something and she stopped him. “I am not going to make light of what happened for us. I think it is absolutely essential we remember that ‘Over There’ we are not children, but here we aren’t really adults. Even though we can see life differently and feel differently than our friends, we are only sixteen years old, physically. Now that we have opened that particular emotional door, I do not want to close it. I do not mean to underestimate it either, but, Coop, we need to be responsible about this. There is too much at stake for us.” Coop nodded and listened. “We both have things we need to do, and if we are not careful, we would not be able to reach our potential. We could jeopardize our futures and our future happiness. We can’t let that happen, Coop.” She thought for a moment and continued, “There are also certain expectations, and yes, obligations, we are expected to meet and achieve. We owe our parents to do the best we can.”

“Sadly,” Coop reminded her, “I will be leaving in a few weeks, and that is going to make things difficult for us.”

“Good,” Sandy said. “If it comes to us too easily, Coop, it will not be worth having. I know life is going to be different for us now, and I, for one, want us to fight to keep every bit of it.”

Chapter Twenty-Four

Sandy and Coop kept busy. Over the next few days they took care of many things they had let go throughout the summer, but they still found time to be with each other as often as they could. 'Over There' was never forgotten, even for a few moments. Both were drawn to the pool every day, and every day they were unable to jump into that cold water and find themselves in the one place in this world that they were most comfortable and happy.

Sandy had return calls to friends to make, while Coop did things around the house, mowing the lawn, helping his grandfather with trimming the hedge; his friends would never expect notes or letters from him. They would not have expected phone calls, either.

Sandy and Coop, though busy, were lonely for 'Over There.' They knew there was not much time left of the summer to do all that they wanted to there. There would be next year, they both agreed. "If we don't learn what we want to now, we'll get to the bottom of it all when you come back, Coop," Sandy said.

All Coop could do was agree. "What do we need to do to get ready for the winter?" he asked.

"Short of putting the cave in some kind of order, I can't think of a thing," Sandy replied. It really doesn't matter what we do, Coop, nature's going to do whatever it wants to."

Nature – now that was a subject she would have to broach at school, Natural Science. There was far too much she had not paid attention to in the earlier grades. And now, in Sandy's mind, nature was calling to her to understand it, take care of it and keep it safe. Coop had similar thoughts. He knew that there needed to be a first line of defense to help keep man from doing away with what nature had left.

The Gloucester they lived in was so much different from the one they visited. They had become very aware of the natural beauty man had had cast aside. The problem as they saw it, and they agreed with one another wholeheartedly on this, nature had too few people to fight on its behalf. The more they thought, the more frustrated they became. What could they do to help? Somehow that, they both knew, would become their goal in life, to find what needed to be done and to stop more harm from happening.

Sandy and Coop realized they would need to sneak up on the problem and try to fix it as best they could from the side lines. They did not know how yet, but they would find the way, they were certain.

Coop and Sandy were in the study reading, trying to find the place to start when Grandpa Hayden walked into the room, a newspaper in his hand. "Coop, didn't you ask me once about Cameron Parkson?"

"Yes," he answered, "we found him, he lives on Rocky Neck. A very nice man, Sandy and I have been to his house, we've eaten with him a few times, we spent some very enjoyable time with him."

Sandy tensed. She was quicker than Coop to see where this was going. "Mr. Hayden, what's happened?" she asked

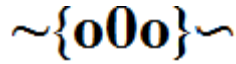
"His housekeeper found him late last night. Apparently he had been deceased for a day or so," Mr. Hayden said.

"Gramps, we had lunch with him," Coop looked at Sandy and then looked back at his grandfather, "not the day before yesterday, the day before that. We left his house about 1:30." Coop said sadly. "Is that something we should share with anyone?"

"Looks like natural causes. I'll call the chief. They may have a question or two, but from what it says here, it seems he died peacefully in his sleep."

"What arrangements have been made, Mr. Hayden, does the paper say?" Sandy asked. She was starting to cry and both, grandfather and grandson, could feel it coming.

“At the time of this newspaper’s printing, it appears as though things were unsettled, up in the air,” Grandpa Hayden said, moving forward quickly as Sandy fell into his arms. “How well did you two know him?”



It had been a beautiful summer day. Everyone who attended the funeral seemed to come and go without much emotion. Cameron Parkson had been in his late-eighties; he had little family, and so many of his friends and acquaintances were already gone. Sandy and Coop stood alone after the graveside service when a man they did not know at all approached from behind them and asked, “Sandra Madison, Cooper Hayden?”

“Yes,” Coop said quietly. The man handed him a legal size white envelope. On the outside, in bold hand lettering, it said, *Sandra Madison and Cooper Hayden – To be read at the place we first met.* “Is this from Mr. Parkson?” Coop asked.

“Yes, oh, sorry,” he raised his hand to both of them to shake and continued. “Bill Harris, he gave that to me about eight days ago. I was to give this to you when he passed, and, as he asked me to, tell you it was important that you read this as it says, where you first met him,”

Sandy looked down at the envelope. She had never seen Cameron Parkson’s handwriting before. It was a bold script and it was easily read. She looked up to the man and simply said, “Thank you, sir.”

Coop nodded his head, “Yes, thank you,” he said. Turning to Sandy he added, “Let’s do as the man asked.”

Mr. Harris watched the two walk off. He, too, turned and walked toward his truck, popped his cellphone and said into it, “Okay, Hal, we know where they are, go ahead.”

Sandy and Coop sat on the wooden park bench on the causeway between East Gloucester and Rocky Neck. They had brought coffee. It was a plain white, legal-size envelope. They sat looking at it; neither one wanted to open it. Opening it was like admitting that Parkson was gone, and these would be the last words they would hear from him.

Finally Sandy turned the packet over, slipped a fingernail under one corner, and started to tear it open. She took her time, but like all things you want to avoid, there came a time when there was nothing left to do but do it.

Dear Sandra, Dear Cooper,

It is safe to assume that you have met my friend Bill Harris. He has been a good friend for many years. He is the head of the Public Services Department in Gloucester. I knew without a doubt that he would deliver this letter to you as I requested. He has nothing to do with the decision I made and he has agreed to do, though he knows not why.

For sixty-nine years I have lived an incomplete existence. The trouble that has kept me from living a life much better than the one I have lived has haunted me daily. I was so obsessed with keeping that world alive that I could not think about anything else. That is no way to live. I know you saw a seemingly happy man who seemed to like and be liked by everyone. In my moments of quiet, Camp Gloucester always found its way into my brain, and Joshua Elwell was never far away, either. I never had a family, I never settled down, as such, and I never made a real life. To live a life like that is not good. It is time I come clean completely so you will be forewarned.

In my heart I was completely convinced that Josh was at Camp Gloucester. If he was living in Camp Gloucester, he would not be dead or worse, a true fugitive. I needed to think the best of my friend. I became a cop to keep my eye out for him in the chance he was not in that other world. There was never any sign of him, and right from the beginning he was the unsolved mystery that slowly, and quietly, went away. There was no way to trace him, simply because he hadn’t gone anywhere. There was never any sign of him, until you two came along.

For this one summer you lived the life Josh and I lived for three summers. You seem to have stayed more level-headed than we did. Maybe we never saw what was happening to us; it certainly took us longer to figure

out what you two seemed to know and understand so easily. I could tell by your faces from the very first that you were almost on the road to a breakthrough in understanding.

I tell you now, that if you were to go there too much longer, you would never want to leave it. You would become obsessed with the place and before you knew it, your family would not matter, your closest friends would not matter, your future would not matter, and you would do or say anything to rationalize your every thought about being there.

I am sorry. I have taken steps to prevent this happening to you. You will not carry on my fate, nor will anyone else. You will be upset at first, but in the long run I know I am right, and you will forgive me in time. Please know I have done this for your greater good.

No matter, know that what has happened to you so far is good. What you have experienced is not reversible and you will be better off for it in the future.

You made an old man very happy when you told me of my friend's lot. At the very least, I knew what had happened and where he was with certainty.

My wishes for you are that you be happy in life. You have shared and experienced something this summer that no other people have, and if I have done my job well, it will never happen again.

Take an old man's advice and be true to one another, and be there for each other. Live this summer in your memories and know you are unique.

Please think of me kindly.

Yours forever

Cameron Parkson

Sandy was in tears and Coop sat thinking. "I wonder what he has done," Coop muttered to himself.

"What could he have done?" Sandy asked.

"I don't know, but we better go find out," Coop replied. They were off, running all they could. For the first time they did not stop at Niles Beach to wade, they dashed right by it.

It was forty-five minutes before they ran onto the dirt road. They did not notice it right away. They ran to the very end of the dirt road and stopped. The large glacier boulder was no longer standing at the end of the road, it was now in the middle of the tidal pool and it rested in such a way that the pool had disappeared completely.

Sandy and Coop stood in absolute shock. Sandy fell into Coop's arms, and she cried very hard. Their special life was gone forever. There was no way to find the fissure now. "There is no moving that boulder. It would take like the biggest crane in the world to lift that thing," Coop said.

"Coop, it's over," said Sandy between sobs. "What can we do now?"

Coop held Cameron Parkson's letter crumpled in his hand. "Well, we know 'Over There' exists, somewhere. We can't stop caring just because we'll never be able to go there again. Maybe we can think about protecting this place." Coop took Sandy into his arms, and as he held her tightly, he cried.

The Final Result Seven Years Later

Sandra Madison had never been particularly religious; given her experiences, teachings and philosophy, she worshiped something a little more unique, the Earth itself. Sandy had studied and worked very hard, and at the age of twenty-three, had recently been accepted as a rookie Massachusetts Environmental Police Officer.

The large open field at the top of a knoll had been mown that morning by two school kids Sandy had paid and she thought it looked great. The ground was mostly hard-packed shallow dirt, loosely lying over ledge, without much to mow. Sandy stood looking out over Eastern Point; In one direction she viewed the open ocean, in another a small woods and to the third the tip of the highest point on Rocky Neck. Joan Madison walked up behind Sandy, and hugging her daughter from around the back, she said, “You look pensive. You do that a lot, you know. What do you see, and where do you go when you get like that?”

Given the day, what was about to happen and the fact that she was so very happy, Sandy rattled off dreamily, “There is a herd of deer as far as I can see,” she waved her hand in front of her, and then she turned and pointed north and said, “Wolves, a large pack of wolves are over that way, on occasion I see one particular wolf, most always at night. Over there, I see two columns of smoke drifting up from campfires located just about in the middle of East Gloucester Square, and over there behind that hill, on an island all alone, there is a log cabin standing empty waiting for someone to find it, to visit it.” She stopped and stayed silent a long moment. Finally she turned in her mother’s direction and continued. “When I get like this, I think about two men, one a complete mystery, and the other a long time Gloucester police officer, a man I only knew for a short time, but learned to love and now, even after all this time, I miss him terribly. I see rolling hills and shallow creeks, and beautiful and healthy salt-marsh, and a harbor full of wonder.”

“That is a nice dream to have,” her mother said, leaning in and kissing her daughter’s cheek.

Sandy just stood there emotionally, tears in the corners of her eyes. “It’s not one I have often enough anymore. That is the only way now to find it, in my dreams,” Sandy said, hugging her mother.

In evenings when neither she nor Coop can sleep they take out their journals and read them through together. The summer of 2012 will live within them and they will never forget the man they were able to share it all with.

Joan Madison was silent; she had gotten lost watching her daughter during the monologue. Not understanding anything of what Sandy meant, she thought it was only a day dream. “Tell me the truth, sweetie that first summer with Coop, that very first summer you shared together, something happened that summer, right?” Joan Madison was still holding her daughter tightly in her arms, rocking back and forth.

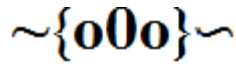
“Mom, that is the summer Coop and I grew up and found what we wanted in life, besides each other.” Sandy stopped, leaned back, and looked into her mother’s face; she closed her eyes and spoke quietly. “We learned that summer, there are parts of life and nature no one can control. However, through greed and thoughtlessness and a lack of awareness, people can certainly screw things up so badly that no one will eventually want it. This natural environment needs to be protected. With so many people walking the surface of the Earth, the best we can ever hope for is a very unequal balance.”

“It sounds like quite a job you’ve chosen for yourself,” Mrs. Madison replied proudly.

“This is going to sound very silly, and I know I sound a little extreme, Mom, but I didn’t choose the job, and I’m very excited about it. In the long run, nature chose me, and I guess, Coop, too.” Sandy smiled to herself and

then nodded her head, “We grew up another way that summer, as well, and together we learned how to deal with that and what it takes to hold lives together and be responsible for one another. We have been partners in that since then.”

Joan Madison leaned in close and said, “Ella Hayden and I held our breath all that summer, hoping you would be careful and learn that. It was quite a while before we were convinced you had it under control. You did it better than most, honey.”



Only a few days before this, on June twenty-seventh, Cooper Benjamin Hayden, the second, passed the Massachusetts Bar and was given the right to practice law in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. His office would be located in Gloucester, and he would specialize in Environmental Law. His new house, located on Rocky Neck stands not too far from the top on the hill. He now plays on a single “A” baseball team, as well. His loyalties are still divided between the Boston Red Sox and The New York Yankees.

Coop stood near the wild grape arbor; his mother, father, little brother and grandfather sitting not too far away. Through the violin music, he could hear and sense the breeze off the water. The faint scent of the ocean lingered in the air.

He always found it hard to be in this field when he and Sandy took long walks. It had become difficult to think about a time that once was, and they would never have again. There had been in his head for some time a question. Having been ‘Over There,’ a place he could not explain, and lived here, within another place entirely, which of the two places was the ‘real’ place, ‘Over There’ or ‘here?’ There would never be a way to find out.

The violin music stopped for a moment and then started up again, but this time everyone in the seats stood, turned and looked toward the road. Ronald Madison stood there, very erect and looking very nervous. On his arm, and looking absolutely stunning, stood Sandra Madison, soon to be Sandra Hayden.

The irregular ground made it very difficult to march down between the rows of chairs toward the open arbor. Coop looked down, and though Sandra was wearing a beautiful long white wedding gown with a beautiful train, he knew with certainty that she was barefoot. The minister asked the question, “Who gives this woman today?” Sandy’s father responded, “Her Mother and I,” Sandy stepped forward and took both of Coop’s hands into hers.

“You are beautiful.” Coop smiled and looked deeply into Sandy’s eyes, “Remember the first time I said that to you, where we were and why?”

She could not look anywhere but into his face, remembering in a flash all they had been through together. Her eyes were moist with happiness, “Until the day I can’t anymore.” Sandy said quietly back to him. She then turned and looked at all the people attending, both friends and family; she gave Coop a sideways look and she added teasingly, “Cooper Hayden, what have you done now?”

Without hesitation he smiled, looked back into her beautiful face and said, “Fell in love with you.” Coop looked down, and hanging around Sandy’s neck and lying against her bare skin, rested a beautiful gold timepiece with black jeweled roman numerals and an ornate gold second hand, that carries a lifetime guarantee.

The End

About George G. Story



George G. Story is a Charter-boat Captain, Writer, Musician and Entertainer. Besides the many books and short stories he has written, he has been a short subject and feature contributor with many New England based magazines and newspapers. Recently he wrote, produced and directed an audio walking tour of the Gloucester, Massachusetts' waterfront entitled the Gloucester HarborWalk. It has proved to be quite successful with both tourists and locals alike.

Between George and his wife, Ann, they have five grown children; a Peabody, Massachusetts special needs teacher, a New Orleans based maritime captain, like his dad, a Long Island lawyer, a Boston based unionist and a civil engineer working out of Boston. Presently there are five grandchildren in their lives, four girls and one boy.

George was born and raised in Beverly, Massachusetts, and now lives, and works within the seaside communities of Gloucester and Rockport, Massachusetts (Cape Ann). He has happily called Cape Ann home since 1976.

Reviews on AMAZON welcomed or send comments to me at: george_g_story@comcast.net