

## CHAPTER FIVE

The next morning was very nice weather-wise considering the time of year. There was hardly any wind, just the odd little breeze to tickle the edges of the poplar trees. From a distance the lake looked like a mirror. On the way to Speedo's place, Joanne went through my box of tapes and criticized my taste in music. "What's with all this Simon and Garfunkel crap?" she wanted to know. I told her that a lot of the tapes of that sort belonged to my sister. She gave me a look and made a noise that I took to indicate that she didn't believe me, Then she told me I should have a tape player in the car. I told her it wouldn't matter with all the noise the car was making since she plowed it into a deer. She was quiet the rest of the way.

When we got there we had a short discussion on how to proceed and decided that I should finish off the outhouse first off so that we could get that part out of the way. We could then return Warren's tools at the same time we went down to borrow his ladder. Joanne said she would start staining the dock. She took my boom box and tapes with her when she skipped up the path to the cottage. I pushed my way through the bush to the spot where I had left the sledge hammer and hoped that the job ahead of me would be quick and easy.

It went along fairly well at the beginning. I knocked a few odd bits of board that were still attached to the throne part out of the way and took a few swings at the area around the hole. It soon became apparent that the throne platform had been built in two sections with a piece of plywood dividing it. I found that mildly surprising and I wondered about why it had been designed that way. I decided that there must be a reason for it that I was not aware of . It might also have been that all outhouses were made like that for all I knew. The nasty half was of the left and that section caved in readily with a few blows from the big hammer. The right side seemed sturdier. I traded the sledge

hammer for the big crowbar and tried to pry the top part away from the base. It took me a while but I managed to pry it up only to find a second layer of plywood underneath. Now that did seem strange.

I took a closer look at the base and noticed that the right half had screws holding the plywood in place while the left half was held together with nails like the rest of the structure had been before I smashed it apart. The screws were the type made with a square indentation at the top. Robertson is what they're called. I'm not sure if I knew that at the time but I do now. They're very good screws and oddly, from what I understand, they're only available in Canada. Don't ask me why.

Anyway, the plain-end screwdriver I had borrowed from Warren would not be of any use. I had a fleeting thought about going down to Warren's and asking to borrow the right screwdriver but I quickly realized that was a dumb idea. It's not like we were planning to salvage any of the wood so why should I waste time unscrewing pieces. I should just keep on smashing. That's what I did.

Those screws still held after the plywood they were holding cracked and splintered and broke off in pieces. The platform itself tilted sideways and collapsed finally. I pulled it away from the hole and thought about how much more I would have to smash apart before it was in pieces small enough to haul over to the parking area. I was reluctant to look down into the hole but my curiosity won out. It just looked like any old hole in the ground which was actually a bit disappointing and wasn't as deep as I would have expected. It was deep enough though that I knew I should throw some dirt and rocks into it so it wouldn't be a safety hazard.

Getting back to what was left of the throne section and now looking at it from a new angle I could see that there was something attached to the bottom side of the platform that I had still not managed to break into pieces. When I bent down for a closer look I could see that it looked like a piece of canvas which had been stuffed into a space between the top of the bench and a couple of boards underneath it. I grabbed a crowbar and tried to pry it out not knowing exactly what it was or how tightly it was secured. I pulled part of one edge out and re-positioned the crowbar to get a better grip on

the rest of it. When I leaned on the crowbar I got a loud ripping sound that made me think I should change tactics.

I stood up and wiped some sweat off my forehead with my sleeve. The day wasn't very hot yet but all the pounding away with the sledge hammer had got me heated up. I looked at how much was left to do and assessed the situation. Did I really need to find out what was stuck under there? It was going to take some effort to get it out. I could probably drag that whole section over to my burn pile and forget about it. On the other hand it might be something interesting but then again how interesting could it be coming from an old outhouse? In the end I decided to proceed with the demolition, I had come this far so I might as well see it through.

I picked up the big crowbar and went to work on the boards what were holding whatever it was in place. The boards gave way without too much trouble. One of them split in half so that it came away in two pieces. With those boards out of the way I could see that they had been holding a large canvas bag in place. The bag was also taped to the underside of the platform with duct tape. I think it was duct tape anyway. It had been there so long that most of the stickiness had gone out of it and sections had deteriorated to the point that they were almost transparent. It didn't put up much resistance when I pulled the bag away from the platform. It was pretty heavy. Not real rock or gold brick heavy but substantial was probably a good word to describe it. The canvas was almost like cardboard, stiff with age. I dropped it on the ground in a patch of sunlight and stood back to take in the whole picture. I could see what it was right away because I recognized it as something familiar.

It was an old paper bag, just like the one I remembered from my childhood. You're probably thinking of a bag made out of paper but that's not it at all. It was what we called a paper bag because it was used to carry newspapers along your paper route as you dropped off newspapers at neighbourhood houses. When I was a kid most of my friends and I aspired to be paper boys because that was about the only way to make any real money which was needed for bus fare and admission to the movies

downtown. I finally did get my own paper route somehow and I spent many hours carrying a bag, much like the one I was looking at, up and down the streets of my neighbourhood. It was a learning experience for me. I learned that the business of earning money isn't always as great as it's cracked up to be.

I gave the bag a shake and straightened it out so I could see the name printed across the front. Big fancy letters in faded red ink spelled out the name of a newspaper that was no longer in print. It had gone out of business just a few years earlier. That was a sign of things to come. When that happened I didn't know there would be reliable old newspaper companies going broke every other week and that the ones left would be printing papers with fewer and fewer pages. Another change coming was that pretty soon someone would decide that newspapers should be delivered in the mornings instead of after school in the afternoons. That decision was the end of the line for paper boys which I thought was a little sad even though I was long out of the business by then. That's progress I guess.

I seem to be going off track here. Back to the topic at hand.

I pulled at the bag until I got the flap open and could see that there was another bag inside. It looked like it was made out of burlap, like maybe an old flour sack. I put my feet down on the edge of the paper bag and pulled it open wider. The canvas material was stiff as cardboard. With some difficulty I pulled the burlap bag out into the fresh air and sunshine. I was careful to keep my gloves on when I reached inside but that turned out to be an unnecessary precaution. What I came out with was a fistful of money, as in dollar bills or banknotes.

I was dumbfounded. I was sitting on the ground now and I wasn't sure if I had sat down on my own or if I'd fallen over from the surprise of it. I pulled the bag up close to me and took a look inside. It was full of money right to the bottom. I reached my hand in and felt around to make sure there was nothing else that would add to the weight and volume, The bills were not in neat stacks with rubber bands around them or anything like that. They were all mixed and scrambled like whoever filled the

bag just wanted to get it done quick . The bills were all different denominations as well, fives, tens, twenties and right down to ones and even some twos. Remember when we had two-dollar bills?

I probably sat on the ground there for some time holding that bag open between my feet and looking at that pile of money. I had never seen anything like it before and I didn't know what to think about it. I'm pretty sure I didn't think about anything, I was fascinated by the sight of all those banknotes. I took the gloves off so that I could get the feel of them between my fingers. I was mesmerized.

What snapped me out of it and back to reality was the sound of music coming from way down near the lake. I believe it was “Sounds of Silence” by Simon and Garfunkel and I knew that if I could hear it all the way over here and make out the words, that Joanne had the volume turned up too loud again. I got back up on my feet, took a look around at the trees and the sky and then I looked down at the bag of money mostly to see if it was still there. It was still there so it was real.

I picked it up and carried it up the path to the cottage. When I got there I set it down in the middle of the kitchen table and went out the patio doors to look for Joanne. I could see most of the dock by leaning out over the railing but the part that I could see didn't have Joanne in it. I started climbing down the stairs to look for her with the music getting louder every step of the way.

When I stepped out on the dock I could see her sitting in a lawn chair, in the shade of the boathouse, stirring a can of stain with a stick. She looked up at me with a puzzled expression. My boom box was on top of an overturned milk crate and plugged into an outlet on the boathouse. The cardboard box with the tapes was on the dock beside it. I went over and turned down the volume.

“Hey!” Joanne objected.

“It's too loud,” I told her. “We don't want Warren getting annoyed at us. We still need to borrow that ladder from him. I thought you didn't like Simon and Garfunkel.”

“It's not that bad,” she admitted. “I'm adjusting my opinion on that. When you listen to the

words it really adds something to it. You know how you usually hear music and skip over the words? Like you hear but you don't listen?"

"Yea, I know what you mean", I admitted.

"How's the outhouse project coming along?"

"Pretty much done and you won't believe what I found in there."

"In the outhouse? I can just imagine."

"No you can't," I assured her. "Come on, I'll show you."

"Just tell me already. I don't need to climb all the way up there."

"Alright then," I shrugged, "It's a bag full of money."

"Yea, right." She continued stirring.

"No, really. There was a bag of money hidden under some boards. I found it when I pried them apart."

"No shit?"

"Not in the bag. No"

"Okay, you got me." She dropped her stir stick into the can of stain and stood up. "This I have to see."

A minute later we were sitting across from each other at the kitchen table with the bag between us. Joanne was leaning forward with her elbows on the table, her mouth open and a look of wonderment on her face. She reached into the bag and pulled out a handful of bills which she spread out on the table in front of her. She pushed them around with her finger, sorting them into groups of different denominations. She picked up a twenty dollar bill and held it up to the sunlight streaming in from the window over the sink. She turned it over in her hand and then put it down and repeated the procedure with a ten dollar bill. She looked at me. This is probably not relevant but I remember being taken with her beautiful brown eyes at that moment.

“These look real,” she said. “Not that I'm an expert or anything but ... they look pretty real to me.”

I didn't say anything. This was like a new experience for me and I think I was just waiting to see what would happen next. I think I felt like an innocent bystander and would have been glad to stay in that role. Maybe I had a premonition. Whatever it was, I knew I didn't want to get any more involved than I already was.

“When you said a bag of money,” Joanne continued, “I was thinking like maybe a lunch bag, something about that size. This is no bag, Mike. This is a sack.”

She reached into the bag with both hands and pulled out a wad of bills. Then she let them drop through her fingers slowly. They fluttered down onto the tabletop. She spread them around in a circular motion and then leaned back and looked at all the money spread out in front of her.

“We need to think about this,” she decided. “I think ... first of all ... we need a beer,”

She stood up and opened the fridge from which she extracted two bottles. She popped the caps off expertly using the opener that was on the wall beside the fridge. Then she put the bottles down on the table and slid one across to me. She sat back down. We both sampled our beers and looked at the bag and the money scattered across the table without saying anything for a while. I took another sip and cleared my throat.

"Whose money do you think this is?" I asked her.

"Well," she took a sip of her beer before answering carefully. "Right now I'm thinking about that saying, finders, keepers. you know? That's standard procedure in a case like this, I would say."

"So, since I'm the one who found it ..."

"Hey, don't go there!" she warned me. "Don't be like that. This is a team effort isn't it? If you want to get all technical like that maybe since I'm the boss on this job and you're just an employee ..."

"Okay, okay I was joking." I smiled to show her that I wasn't serious.

"So you're with me on this? Finders, keepers? That's even like an actual law isn't it?"

"I don't think so."

"I don't think so either but I was hoping you would convince me." She ran her fingers through a pile of bills. "So what do you think, then? Who would this belong to in your best legal opinion?"

I didn't have an opinion ready so I gave her the first one that came to mind.

"Well I guess it would belong to the property owner seeing as they purchased the property along with furnishings, contents, etc. The money would fall into the contents, etc. category. That would be my guess anyway."

"No way!" She clearly disagreed with that interpretation. "Not Speedo, that jackass! Screw him and screw the legal crap too. Let's talk common sense for a minute here. He didn't even know the money was there! He couldn't have or else he wouldn't have told us to tear that outhouse down. There's no way he should benefit. He doesn't deserve it. That wouldn't be fair, would it?"

"That might be true," I agreed. "That is one way to look at it but you know how they say that life isn't fair. This could be an example of that."

"This also might just be an example of us making life fair for once. How about that? Nobody but us knows about this money, Nobody else has to know about it. Especially not Speedo."

She shuddered at the thought of turning it over to Speedo before she continued.

"We have possession right now and possession is nine-tenths of the law. That's another one of those sayings isn't it?"

I didn't like the idea of surrendering the bag of cash to Speedo any more then she did but neither did I feel right about us just keeping it. I thought of another angle to consider. I must have been in shock or something from the moment I found the money because it was like I was on auto-pilot and I was just waiting to see what what would happen next. Now I was finally waking up and realized that we had just skipped over the most important question which was why the money was there in the first



place. That's what I asked Joanne.

“Who cares?” was her answer. “Probably the people who first built that outhouse put it there. Maybe they didn't trust banks for whatever reason. Maybe the wife was hiding money from the husband or vice-versa. Whatever it was, they're not around anymore. Remember your story about the old lady frozen to death in her lawn chair?”

“Okay, but the question is why they would put it there. It's an odd place to choose. You wouldn't normally put your money in an outhouse for safe keeping, Imagine the time and effort involved. They must have really wanted to hide it well and they figured that an outhouse was a place no one would think to look.”

“Good for them,” Joanne seemed impatient. “It looks like they were right. All these years gone by and nobody found it until now.”

“Right, but why would they be wanting to hide it? I'm thinking that there could have been something illegal going on. Maybe this money was stolen or maybe it was from selling drugs or who knows what? Something bad anyway. Maybe the correct thing to do would be to turn it in to the cops so they could figure it out.”

“Are you out of your mind?” Joanne asked me. “Here we have a once-in-a-lifetime stroke of luck and you want to throw it away? So what if it came from something illegal? Whatever it was would have happened years ago so by now everyone is either dead or has forgotten about it and the main point to bear in mind is that we had nothing to do with it! We are not to blame. We don't know anything about it so let's keep it that way.”

“Yea, but still ...”

“Okay, here's another one of those sayings I just thought of. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth. Have you heard that one before?”

“I never understood that one. What the heck is a gift horse and why would you want to look in

its mouth?

Joanne slammed her beer down on the table and held her head in both hands. I took a sip of my beer and looked at her. I felt those were valid questions.

“A gift horse? Would that be like a hobby horse maybe?”

Joanne groaned and held her head in her hands. She was about to say something when she was interrupted by the sound of a car horn blasting away from up at the parking area. Joanne stopped holding her head and looked at me with a startled expression.

“Oh-oh.” she said. Her expression didn't change but I could see her thinking. “I bet that's Speedo! Wouldn't you know it? He's back early and he's probably mad that he can't park his stupid Jeep because your car is in the way and you've got all that crap piled next to it.”

“Oh-oh, is right.” I agreed. I didn't know what to do about that so I took a sip of beer.

“Quick!” Joanne took charge of the situation. “Get all this money out of here. We can't let him see it. You take care of that and I'll go distract him.”

“Where should I put it?” I wondered.

“I don't know!” She was already heading for the door but stopped to pour what was left of her beer down the sink. The horn sounded again. “Anywhere you think he won't see it. Just MOVE IT!”

Then she was gone and I scrambled to stuff all the loose money back into the burlap bag. That should have been easy enough but due to my trying to hurry, some bills kept escaping and fluttering away from me. I ended up on the floor tracking a few of them down underneath the table. I banged my head on the table when I went to stand up which knocked my beer bottle over and it rolled off the edge. I heard it rolling across the table so I made a dive for it as it went over. I managed to catch it just before it smashed on the floor so that was one good thing. A nice catch too.

When I stood up I quickly grabbed a dish towel and wiped it across the table to get rid of the spilled beer and then swiped it along the floor where a few drops had splashed out. While I was doing

that I kept glancing at the door expecting at any second to see Speedo come barging in. I knew he would be coming in that way so when I snatched the bag off the table, I headed in the opposite direction and went out the patio doors.

I made my way down the stairs that led towards the dock as quickly as I thought I could without looking like a fugitive or a criminal fleeing a crime scene just in case someone, like Speedo for instance, might be watching. There were a lot of stairs and I was feeling more stressed out and nervous with each step. Just as I was getting close to the bottom I turned and looked back over my shoulder to see if anyone was watching from the cottage. That was a mistake.

When I looked back I missed the last step and landed awkwardly on the dock. I staggered forward trying to regain my balance but there was a lawn chair right in my way. I fell as I was trying to dodge around it and I lost my grip on the bag I was holding when I hit the dock. The bag opened when it landed in front of me. As I was lying there on the dock I watched a few of the bills spill out and spread across the surface of the dock.

I had that feeling of being watched as I scurried around the dock picking up loose bills and stuffing them back into the bag. It only took me a few seconds but it seemed much longer. I looked up at the cottage when I was done and was thankful not to see anyone looking back at me from the railing on the top deck. That was a slight relief but then I was on to the next crisis. I was literally holding the bag and looking around for some place to stash it.

I noticed someone in a canoe on the lake not that far from the dock. It looked like he was probably fishing since he wasn't paddling. The canoe was almost still, floating there in one spot on the lake. I kind of filed that image away to worry about later. First I had to get rid of the incriminating evidence. The only sensible place I could think of to hide the money was in the boathouse. I knew from my previous investigation that it didn't seem like a place that Speedo or his guests tended to frequent regularly. I pulled open the door and went inside waiting for my eyes to adjust to the dim light of the

interior. I resisted the urge to switch on the lights because I wanted to avoid any chance of attracting attention.

I could make out the outline of the old boat in the light that was coming in from under the garage-type door at the front of the building and through the single little window on the dock side which was obscured by years of accumulated dust and grime. I stepped cautiously toward it until I could reach over and touch the side. It wobbled a little on the ramp it was resting on. By then my vision was clear enough that I could see that there was some junk on the closest seat which was the one in front of the steering wheel. I pushed that aside so that I could stuff the money bag in under the front part of the boat where someone driving would put their feet. Then I moved some of the junk back onto the seat and spread it around, hoping for a natural looking arrangement that wouldn't attract any notice. I knew it wasn't the safest hiding place in the world but it was the best I could come up with at that moment and I figured we would have to be really unlucky to have it discovered before we had a chance to move it to a better location.

I went back outside to the dock being careful to close the door firmly but quietly as I left. I had a little trouble seeing again, this time because it was so bright outside. I held my hand up to shade my eyes as I turned around and looked out at the lake. That guy in the canoe was still there in much the same spot, There was a flash of sunlight reflecting back at me when I looked at him. The first thing I thought of was binoculars. I turned my head a bit to the side, squinting and shielding my eyes as I looked again in his direction. He had turned away from me and was now holding a fishing rod which he was slowly raising and lowering over the water.

"Hey Mike!"

It was Joanne yelling at me from the front deck of the cottage. She was leaning over the railing and looking down at me. I waved back at her and I think she winked at me although I couldn't be sure from that distance.

"We need you to move your car," she shouted. "Speedo's back and you're in his spot."

"Okay. I'll be right there," I yelled back and waved again hoping she would interpret that as a signal that all was well and that I had towed the money away safely.

I was feeling a little more confident as I made my way back up the stairs to the cottage. I knew from our brief exchange that I hadn't been spotted stashing the money. Now all we had to do was act normal like nothing out of the ordinary had happened and we certainly weren't hiding anything. I knew that sometimes normal is the hardest act to make believable so I tried to prepare myself.

It turned out that Speedo wasn't alone this time. That should have come as no surprise really but somehow I wasn't expecting it. He had brought a fairly classy looking blonde with him. I'm not very good at estimating the ages of females but I would have guessed her to be a few years older than Speedo. She was dressed like she was ready to leave for the office instead of being prepared to spend the weekend at the lake. She was wearing sunglasses which gave her a glamorous movie-star look. They were both leaning against the front of his jeep like they were posing for photographers. The Jeep was in the middle of the road where it would have been blocking traffic if there had been any traffic. Speedo was wearing white shorts and a short sleeve shirt of a flashy tropical design even though the season for that type of outfit was over. I think he was also trying for the rich playboy, movie-star impression. His shirt was half undone and he had one of those shiny gold medallions, that I always found hilarious, hanging around his neck. They watched me impatiently as I climbed down the path to the parking area. Joanne was nowhere in sight.

"What are you going to do with all this junk?" Speedo demanded first of all. He pointed at the pile of old boards and plywood stacked next to my car. He didn't bother to introduce me to his associate which didn't really bother or surprise me. I was only the hired help after all. I found out later that her name was Phyllis That struck me as unusual when I first heard it. She looked more like a Trixie or a Tammy to me.

“That's from the outhouse you wanted taken out,” I advised him even though that was probably obvious.

“Yea, okay. But it's in the way here. You gotta move it.”

“We don't have a truck though,” I explained. “I was thinking maybe we could burn it.”

“Oh, a bon fire!” the blonde exclaimed. “That might be fun.”

I think Speedo's first inclination was to object to my suggestion but changed his mind when the blonde said she liked the idea.

“Maybe,” he conceded. “We'll see. In the mean time move your junker out of the way so I can get in.”

I knew that was coming so I didn't object to his suggestion or to his calling my car a junker. I could tell he was just showing off in front of his new lady friend. I climbed in behind the wheel and turned the key. It started up fine but with a louder rattling and clanging noise than I had come to expect. A puff of black smoke shot out from the exhaust pipe. That was a new symptom. I adjusted the rear-view mirror so I could see their reaction. They both seemed to find it hilarious. I tried to not let that bother me much since I wasn't concerned with Speedo's opinion of me or my car but I admit there was still a touch of resentment there.

Speedo's Jeep was in the way so I couldn't drive back out the same way I'd come in. I probably could have parked in one of the neighbour's driveways since they were all empty and there were likely to remain so, at least until the weekend, but I decided to follow the road right around to where it met up with the main road and then back to the start of Speedo's bay. The main road was wide enough that I could pull off to the side and park. From there it was less than a ten minute walk back to Speedo's place and I didn't feel in any hurry to get there.

Walking back up that narrow, gravel road, I had a chance to think about what was happening. Since the moment I found the money I had either been in kind of a mental fog or I'd been just reacting

without thinking. Like when Joanne told me I had to go hide the money, I didn't question it, I just went and did it. It seemed like the only choice we had. I thought I knew for sure what would happen if Speedo found out about that money. He would claim ownership and that would be the end of that story. Maybe that was what should happen even if we didn't like it. I didn't know what the correct legal point of view would be but I really hoped that any ruling wouldn't go in Speedo's favour. That would be a tough one to swallow.

On the other hand, I didn't feel right about Joanne's finders-keepers theory. That was okay for kids games and situations without any serious consequences. We weren't talking about dimes and nickels in this case. This was big money by the look of it and it belonged to someone. I didn't know whose it was but I did know it wasn't ours. I wouldn't feel right about keeping it and not saying anything but if it came down to a choice between us or Speedo I knew which way I would lean. I guess that's what they call a dilemma.

I passed Warren's place on my way back. His dog came out to greet me as I approached the entrance to his driveway. I gave the dog a pat and it quickly lost interest in me and turned away. Warren was out loading some stuff into the trunk of his car. I called out a greeting to him and he dropped a heavy-looking cardboard box into his trunk before he straightened up and turned around to look at me,

“Hi there, Mike,” he returned the greeting. “How's the job going? Are you getting anywhere?”

“Not too badly,” I told him. “I got the outhouse knocked down. I just need to fill in the hole and get rid of the remains. I'll return your tools later today and maybe we can pick up that ladder?”

“Sure thing. There's no rush. I ain't planning on starting any new projects this year so I won't be needing them.” He shut the lid on the trunk carefully before he asked me. “Was that you blowing your horn earlier?”

“No that was Speedo. The cottage owner, you know? He came back early from the city this week.”

Warren nodded and thought about that for a second or two.

“So he came back early to blow his car horn did he? Well I hope he ain't getting ready for another noisy party this weekend. I can only put up with so much.”

“I can't say what his plans are,” I told him. “I'll warn him to keep the noise down though.”

“You do that.” He nodded again and folded his arms. “Did your buddy in the canoe find you okay?”

“Buddy in the canoe?”

“Yea, well I assumed he was a friend of yours. I was down at the dock earlier and this fellow came by in a canoe asking if I knew where the Morello place was. I told him I never heard of it. Then he says that this Morello is the new owner. He tells me that he knows the people doing some work on the place. I figured he must mean the old Baxter cottage so I pointed him over there. I told him to look for the boat house with the green door that had a big dent in one side.”

Of course I right away thought about the canoe out on the lake that I had seen while I was trying to stash the bag of money. The guy in that canoe hadn't given any indication that he was looking for Speedo's place. Then I remembered that flash of reflected sunlight that had caught me in the eye when I came out of the boathouse. Of all the people Joanne or I knew, who might possibly be out on the lake in a canoe and secretly watching us? One name came to mind.

“Wait a minute,” I told Warren as I kept remembering that episode. “Was this guy kind of short and squat with a brush-cut sunglasses? A thin little moustache?”

“Well he was sitting down,” Warren considered my description, “so I couldn't say for sure how tall he was. And the brush-cut ... maybe, but then he had a hat on. I think I do recall a moustache though and the sunglasses for sure. All in all, I'd say that was probably right.”

“Aha.” That description wasn't exactly conclusive but I felt certain it was Fusco spying on us. That sounded just like something he would do even if I couldn't see any obvious motive. That was



another question I set aside to puzzle out later. With Fusco I didn't necessarily expect to find any common sense, logical explanation.”

“So I take it he never found you then?” Warren concluded. “I hope he didn't tip over and drown. He didn't look very steady in that canoe.”

“I wouldn't worry. He probably had a life jacket on didn't he?” Fusco was the type who would be dead certain to have a life jacket on if he was going anywhere near a canoe or any other kind of boat.

“Yeas now that you mention it, he did have one on.”

“He'll be okay,” I told Warren. “I'm pretty sure I know who it was. He's not really a friend of mine just someone I know. If he did drown it wouldn't be a great loss.”

That last bit might seem unkind but I meant it as a joke and that's how Warren took it. He smiled and nodded. I told him I would see him later and continued on my way back to Speedo's place. When I got there I found Joanne arranging the tools I had used during demolition, putting them neatly in a row by the side of the driveway. She must have heard me walking up.

“I'm just trying to lay low here,” she explained. “Speedo's giving chickie-poo the grand tour and I didn't want to be around in case he had some stupid questions for me. I thought I would gather the tools to take back down to your friend's place when we go for the ladder.”

“That shovel and the hammer aren't his,” I pointed out. “That's from the tool shed and I'll need the shovel to fill in the hole.”

“Well, screw that,” she objected. “We're not filling in any holes unless he specifically asks for it. If we're lucky, he'll forget about it and fall in.”

She glanced back over her shoulder as if to check if anyone was listening before she asked in a loud whisper, “What did you do with the money?”

“I hid in the boat,” I whispered back.

“What boat?”

“The one in the boat house.”

“There's a boat in there? Holy crap! What if they decide to take it out for a spin?”

“Don't worry,” I assured her. “That boat looks like it hasn't moved in years. It doesn't even have a motor on it.”

She breathed a sigh of relief. “Okay then. But we'll need to get it out of there as soon as we can. You never know. He could be poking around in there right now.”

“There could be another problem maybe. I don't know.”

“What?” she demanded.

I told her about how I had tripped on the dock and some of the money had spilled out of the bag and that I was afraid that the guy in the canoe might have seen me scrambling around to pick up the bills. I also mentioned the flash of sunlight reflection that made me suspect binoculars.

“You're getting paranoid,” she decided. “Remember nobody knows about this except us. Why would some stranger be spying on you with binoculars?”

“Not exactly a stranger. I think it might have been Fusco. That guy in the canoe, I mean. I think it was Fusco.”

She looked at me with wide eyes and a surprised expression while I went over my recent conversation with Warren. When I finished she didn't say anything right away. I could see she was thinking things over. She looked back at the cottage then up at the sky. She dusted her hands off on the back of her jeans and then slid them into her front pockets.

“Fusco, eh?” she asked finally. “What the hell would he be spying on us for?”

“No idea,” I admitted. “With him, it could be anything. Maybe he just had time in his hands and wanted to play at being James Bond for a while.”

“Does he have anything against you? I mean like a grudge or something?”

"No." I replied. I didn't have to think about it for long either. "I never had much to do with him, He used to drive through the campground sometimes when I was on duty but he never usually said anything to me. He would just drive by real slow and look at everything like he was suspicious of everything and looking for evidence. "

How about you? You must have seen him in the bar during the summer. Were you rude to him or anything?"

"Of course I was rude to him," she admitted. "I'm rude to all the customers. You have to be or they'll take advantage. He hardly ever came in and when he did I mostly ignored him. It seemed like he was always staring at me with this goofy look on his face. That's nothing unusual though. A lot of them do that."

"Yea, I guess that's right," I agreed and then wondered if she included me in that category. I didn't know about the goofy look but I admit I had often – well I wouldn't use the word "stared" - "admired" was more like it. I had often admired her waitressing skills and way she looked while she worked. Secretly, of course and from afar. It occurred to me that it might have been her that Fusco was hoping to aim his spy glasses at. I could sympathize with that and was about to suggest it as a possibility when she cut me off.

"So maybe he saw you picking up some money on the dock."she continued. "He could have missed it though. How far away was he?"

"Pretty far. Far enough that I didn't recognize him right off. But I think he had binoculars, remember?"

"Binoculars," She was thinking things over. "Yea he would have binoculars, wouldn't he? Well then. let's say he did see the money. So what? That doesn't mean anything, does it? It's not any of his business if you happen walking around with a bag full of money. There's no crime in that. And let's not forget that he's not really a cop even if he thinks he is. He's just some dork in a canoe. I don't think

there's anything to worry about from that angle."

I shrugged and nodded. I did feel a little relieved after having talked it over. As much as I wanted to agree with her but there was still a nagging shadow of doubt in my mind.

"I wonder if it has anything to do with that hitting the deer business," Joanne was looking at it from a different angle and she gently rubbed the bruise across the bridge of her nose as she thought about it.. "Somehow he figured out that it was me driving, didn't he? The little weasel. Maybe he's some kind of animal rights freak."

"I don't think so," I told her. "If anything, he'd be more concerned with pinning a driving without a license charge on you. Not being able to, since he's not a Parks cop anymore, that would bug him."

"Yea, well who knows what's going on in his little pinhead? I say we should try not to worry about it but we keep a lookout for him lurking around in the bushes."

We agreed on that and slowly went to work hauling the rest of the outhouse debris, which wasn't much, over to the driveway and adding it to the pile. Joanne moved things around to positions where she thought they would burn better. I didn't see how that would make much difference but I didn't argue. The finishing touch came when I pulled the toilet seat out of the tree and set it on top of the pile. We both stepped back and admired the results for a minute or two.

Joanne was trying to either prepare herself to go and talk to Speedo or think of a new reason for delay, when we heard him making his way down the path from the cottage. It was hard to read his expression when he joined us beside the burn pile. He wasn't smiling but he didn't look angry either.

"Looks like you cleaned up inside," was the first thing he said to Joanne. He didn't look at me. I was getting used to that.

"Yea we did. It was quite a shambles. We picked up some trash down by the dock too."

"Well. Thanks for that. Nice work. That's more or less the reason we came out early though. I

wanted to get the place cleaned up for the weekend. I have some guests coming out."

He didn't sound exactly appreciative when he said that. It was more like something he felt he had to say even though he would rather not. I thought about making some crack about how I noticed he brought his cleaning lady out with him. I was alert enough to cancel that idea and keep my mouth shut. Sometimes that works for me.

"How did you get in?" Speedo asked casually. "I locked the place up when I left."

"No... It was open." Joanne looked at him with a puzzled expression in her big brown, innocent eyes. "You must have forgot to lock it. It was open, right Mike?"

"That's right," I agreed and then added as an afterthought: "Maybe the lock didn't quite catch when you closed it." I wasn't all that thrilled to be included in the conversation but I tried not to show it.

Speedo still didn't look at me. It almost seemed like he was determined to pretend I wasn't there. He didn't seem especially concerned about the door being locked but he wanted to make sure we knew that he didn't let anything get by him. Joanne smiled and told him she thought it was really nice and thoughtful of him to leave it open for us and that we sure appreciated it. That seemed to smooth things over. I was waiting to see what he had to say about the missing beer bottles but apparently that issue hadn't occurred to him yet.

"The painting looks pretty good too," he admitted. "The stairs could probably use another coat. They get a lot of wear."

I felt some pain in my knees when he said that.

"So, finish what you can for today and tomorrow", he continued, "then you can knock off for the weekend."

"Knock off for the weekend?" Joanne repeated. She seemed surprised but I think she was just trying to annoy him. I was pretty sure she had already mentioned taking the weekend off. "If we work