

Divining Moments

Divining Moments

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A life's journey.



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Table of Contents

Divining Moments Chapter 1

Divining Moments Chapter 2

Divining Moments Chapter 3

Divining Moments Chapter 4

Divining Moments : Chapter 1

Divining Moments

a novel by E J Gordon

Chapter One *early winter 1919*

Time has a funny way of speeding up, or much worse; slowing down, and always it seems when you want it to do the exact opposite.

Every letter written to me by my grandparents since our painful separation had the words near the end reassuring me that he was fine; but I knew that couldn't possibly be true. I knew that as much as I hoped now that I'd been lied to by my great grandmother, when she told me that he was a brother of mine; a brother from a previous life. Not because I didn't believe it possible at first, I did, but because I couldn't believe what she told me much later as part of that belief; that there was no way to find him again in the next life: and that frightened me enough to search for another truth for us. What scared me more was being told incessantly by my father that there was no place in heaven for him, no place for him because he had no soul; but that if I lived a good life, I would end up there, and if I didn't, I'd still be without him. Even though he wasn't much of a church going man, there was more than one priest who had verified my father's belief system to me, and I had prayed to God after every time that none of that was true about him, until I heard what I desperately hoped to be true: that he and I were kindred spirits. I was told we were like the lakes craddled by the ancient rock of Muskoka, that we were twined forever. I prayed to God rarely after that. I hoped desperately for that at first, because I knew I loved him more than anyone else.

But after what seemed like another life time had passed, all I knew was that I missed him terribly, and was feeling this new life to be impossible without him -and I knew how bad things would be for him, without me. There were days recently when I wasn't sure I believed in anything anymore, and if it wasn't true what Michel Oulette had told me, all I had then was my anger toward the persons keeping us apart.

I wasn't leading a very good life; and I didn't care.

About an hour after my brother from this life had been the hero, I was staring at the newly resurfaced rink; still wet from the arena worker's last big chore for the day. I was concentrating on the abstract images, the blurred images of the surrounding scene, trying to identify anything without cheating. I gave up as quickly as those faint images, but at least for those few minutes I was remembering my previous life; like when my grandfather laughed hysterically after I couldn't identify the subject, watching a huge cow moose crashing into the lake with her calf and then hearing me yelling "shit!" and joining them out of the canoe. He told me later it was the first real laugh he'd had since before the war, and he thanked me.

Before the war my grandfather and I would play this game during long canoe trips, it was always preceded by me, telling him, that I was ready to go home. He would make me look away from his target, then place his wide brimmed hat on my head, and then direct my gaze to where the image rested on the water's surface. I would get a few seconds to identify the reflection without cheating. I never really liked the game, but I liked it better than paddling. He would allow me to win occasionally, but his chosen subjects were always tougher than my half hearted attempts -it was more his way to get my mind of the chore of paddling. It wasn't my game, it was his. His and John Rogers, and it was their betting game to break up the days they spent together.

Divining Moments

My grandfather had befriended John Rogers, the area's most renowned cartographer, and the two of them had been on many canoe trips on the big three, and thanks to John Rogers, he was the only man who knew them better than my grandfather. In the late years of the previous century John Rogers had come to Muskoka, like many others with no money in his pocket, just a willingness to try new things. He left Muskoka reluctantly so he could earn enough money to finish his life's work -which at that time he knew nothing about. He spent time in Arabia and along the east coast of Africa visiting many ports of call by ocean going clipper ship; correcting navigational maps became a passion. When he had enough money he returned to Muskoka and began his work, he met my grandfather soon after out on Lake Rosseau doing the same thing. During those years, amongst other odds and ends he won a sextant from Mr. Rogers, and gifted it to me for Christmas one year. They taught me how to use it, and I pretended to enjoy it. I would lug it with me through long trudges through the bush where they would look for old roads that once went somewhere, or telltale slash marks on tree bark and old survey pegs marking a boundary proving that yours were not the first footsteps sinking in sphagnum on that very spot. If they'd locate a rectangular scar on the forrest floor it was always a solemn occasion for them, representing a monument to a structure and a life long since rotted away.

The sextant became one of my prized possessions on these long trips because the use of it meant a respite from these long walks; but never from attacking black flies in early summer, or huge horse flies in the height of it, or miserable ground hornets with no queen and nothing better to do than sting anything they wanted as it waned, and the use of it never provided any relief from the ever present ravenous mosquitos of Muskoka. But I did learn how to use the sextant, and how to avoid the cuts and scrapes and bruises acquired off old broken branches that could stick you like a sword, or fallen maple trees with bark that could peel your legs like they were potatoes, and even the innocent looking rock shelves covered in algae hidden by the dark lake. Late last summer through some carelessness of mine on one of those rock shelves that gift was now sitting at the bottom of Lake Muskoka, I found the courage to tell my grandfather, and lied that I was sorry. He knew, I think, that I wasn't; and that my canoeing days with him and John Rogers were over.

Just prior to my daydreaming of summer I had been playing shiny. There would always be a few minutes after a night game where any kid could strap on skates and grab a stick from someone (the hero had given me his) and play ruleless hockey. When I had joined the others from Port-trying out my new skates again- there was only a couple of minutes left and things were getting serious, thanks mainly to my best friend.

"Skate Gene. Skate! Like I showed you!" The hero had taken notice. I spotted Paul crossing centre ice, turned awkwardly and started skating, mainly on my ankles, he spotted me and passed the puck my way, I had tried going for it and fell hard on my elbows and knees missing my opportunity to score on a tiny kid from Bracebridge who was now laughing at me. A moment later there was a loud ring, Paul had just missed scoring and almost killing the kid who had now stopped laughing.

"Gene, bloody hell; you're not even going the right way! C'mon! ...get up you dumb ass!" My brother yelled.

I tried getting up and fell again and I slumped over.

"C'mon you idiot, get up!" He was laughing now with a fellow team mate of his, he kept at me as I struggled up on my skates, and kept laughing with his team mate until I said -like it was one long word:

"Fuck you Dan and Fuck Bracebridge!" I had yelled that a lot louder than I should have and before my brother could say anything we all heard from somebody else.

Everything seemed to stop. She walked and waved her arms quickly saying the same word over and over:

"Atrocious!" That word bouncing off the cold walls as a narrow white fog trailed behind her. I sort of recognized her. The hero hurried to the front door and opened it for her, and he disappeared with her into the

Divining Moments

night. Paul skated up to me and said:

"Well, that sure will let your brother know how you feel Gene." Paul said as the kid who had been standing in the net pretending to be a goalie skated by us with his eyes almost bugged out of his head.

How did you like that shot?" I asked of him.

Paul laughed and remarked. "Little shit."

He skated to his parents and got off the ice. We did the same and I said hello to Mr. Frazer.

I sat down on the bench and waited for the inevitable, it didn't take long.

"Great Gene. Thanks for wrecking my night."

I didn't say or do anything.

"C'mon Gene God dammit, let's go, my hands are freezing." I didn't move.

He grabbed his stick making sure he brushed past me with his elbow digging into my back for good measure. I watched him carefully as he headed towards the front door, I was ready to go -but I wanted him to wait, so I watched the arena workers flood the ice and then those images appeared.

Now:

I stared blankly at the dry ice. What a poor substitute for the parts of the lake where it is easy to guess the image, with not a ripple appearing for hours, and if you held a photo -like the one in my Uncle's dining room- you would not know what was up from down, or what was real, from it's reflected perfection. Or the changing colours of a familiar bay which you can only see at certain times of the day; like the indescribable green hues in the very early morning, that same water surface changing to a soft orange colour during the short twilight -just before darkness falls over Muskoka; at least the Muskoka I knew. I smiled thinking of those thoughts of summer: the escape didn't last long.

"Gene! Let's GO!" The hero snapped me back to a cold, unkind, and unfamiliar Muskoka. I'm sure he felt he had been patient enough, but I wanted to push him some more; anyway he was still revelling in the adoration of the last of the home team supporters leaving the building. I turned back and looked at my best friend in the world and his Dad, my grandfather's best friend untying his skates, just as the parents of the kid Paul almost decapitated passed between the players bench and the stands.

"Port Carling? God. ...that bumptious little place, serves them right gettin beat that bad by our boys." The man said louder than he needed to his ordinary looking wife. Their boy, fully recovered from his near death experience, was up in the stands playing with friends and following his parents on a different path toward the front door. Mr. Frazer didn't move.

"Bumptious?" I asked of him.

"Why don't you mind your own business kid." He said to me.

Mr. Frazer stood up blocking their path.

Divining Moments

"What did you say?" The man froze and I instantly felt good for the first time in a long time. Mr. Frazer wasn't tall, maybe five foot six, much smaller than this man; but he was all muscle, and according to my grandfather, tougher than then the nails he sold in his hardware store. He kept staring at the man.

Nothing was said for a good minute. "Please; we don't want any trouble." The ordinary wife said. Mr. Frazer let them pass, and he sat back down; and so did I, more than a little disappointed.

"Bumptious? What does it mean Mr. Frazer?"

"Forget it boy." He said without looking at me, but he was watching the man who was now escorting his ordinary wife and lucky kid out the front door of the arena, but not before the mandatory handshake with the hero. My brother noticed Mr. frazer looking and waved at him. He waved back.

"You'd better get goin Gene."

"Nah. I don't need to yet." He smiled at me and motioned with his eyes toward my brother. I didn't look.

"Gene! C'mon!" The hero yelled out.

I didn't look. Bumptious? It didn't sound very complimentary, and it didn't seem like Mr. frazer knew what it meant either, but I did know who to ask to find out.

That someone had given up her teaching career to raise the hero, and now me. And there was more than one bloody awful day when I wished I could relieve some of that burden by crawling back to Florida. But at least I had a new word for her to explain, which would be worth something as long as I remembered where and not when I heard it. Tonight wouldn't do, but the location was fine; the centre of this frozen foreign universe. It was nothing more than a barn with tin clad walls on the interior covered in frost, thanks to the huddled up masses breathing in the cold air and then cheering it out in great banks of fog, which if cold enough -whcih it sure as hell was tonight- would rise and then quickly fall to the ground, or if you stood close enough, pulled like a magnet to the cold walls where those droplets of water would freeze in an instant. It had taken me awhile to get used to seeing such things in this my fifteenth year, and in too many ways feeling like my first. Curiosity for the cold had turn to fear and loathing after stabbing the palm of my right hand with an icicle and receiving my first stitches, almost breaking my neck every time I strapped on my skates, learning the hard lesson of thin ice on the Muskoka river and still feeling like I hadn't warmed up almost a month after my late November swim, and the ultimate humiliation of realizing even frozen puddles are dangerous and arriving at the only school I had ever attended with a soaker in mid November. A kid from my class told me what it was called the second he heard me walk into class, then everyone knew and wondered if this kid from Florida was really as dumb as a stump. I spent the rest of that day explaining with my fists to those who were making fun of me what they already knew; that I really didn't belong. I kept explaining to anyone who needed to know, until the principal sent me home for a week.

That week I watched an entire forrest laid bare -even the stubborn oak leaves were gone. Andthanks tothat late fallrain storm, from the distance of my bedroom window,that forrestlooked seemingly deviod of life. Then later that week aftergoing for a walk on millions offallen wet leaves to investigatelsaw many of the winged and wingless creatures I knew from much longer walks with my sextant.They hadn't been smart enough to migrate back to Florida with my grandparents, but they were still there; looking pitiful and enduring the cold wind howling through dead looking trees with nothing to protect them, colder than I'd been in my life, and colder each time I went and looked, and wondering while I walked on those dried out broken leaves how in the hell those sad looking creatures would survive what was coming without any shelter, aside from the bears of course, who I hadn't seen in weeks, and envied because I knew from my grandfather had shelter, and were fast asleep and dreaming of summer, long before tonight. Winter. Which I understood tonight must have

Divining Moments

arrived, even though it wasn't winter on the calender, because these local Bracebridge idiots were telling each other how lucky they were to survive the walk to the arena on such a winter's night.

I realized too, just now, that this Muskoka doesn't give a shit about the calender, nor about being heartbroken; that this hellish Muskoka was intent only on it snowing a little more each shorter day, then letting the temperature drop a little more each longer night, and there didn't seem to be any end to either.

The only thing I did know for certain before this winter arrived; was that nothing but the ending of it was going to be good.

Chapter 2

Chapter Two

"Jesus Gene. C'mon!" My brother yelled at the top of his lungs. I could hear another shithead team mate of his laughing, so I didn't move.

Gene! Now! And the same shithead laughing.

My brother had copied rather well our father's serious voice, one that I was quickly learning was always better to obey. I glanced over at him standing by the ice covered door next to his friend. He looked more like our father too, who wanted the best for his sons, or so he would constantly tell me, and we wanted for nothing according to him, as long as our grades were to his high standards. My brother regularly achieved that and at the same time was one of Muskoka's best athletes, a great hockey player and an even better baseball player. I, on the other hand hated school, was an abysmal athlete and wanted things my father simply wouldn't give to me, had he been able to, I would have tried harder. My mother had told me more than once that if Dan became a professional baseball player that it would be up to me to grant the one wish my father had; that one of his sons would take over his medical practise. My mother didn't know yet how little that meant to me, or how much I resented my father. I didn't realize I was staring blankly at my brother until:

"What are you lookin at dummy? Let's GO!" I turned away from him and looked at my best friend.

"You'd better get goin Gene." Paul was now standing over me, I was surprised to see how tall he was, how much he'd grown since last summer.

"That asshole." I said.

"Take it easy Gene, he'll kill us both." Paul whispered back.

Paul would fight in my place without asking -even with Dan if it came to it- he was as loyal a friend as you could hope for. I still had my skates on and I started struggling with a knot I had poorly tied.

"Here son, let me help. Mr. Frazer said, and he bent down and started untying my skates, he had them off in no time when we all heard one of my brother's team mates yell:

"Ah Miss Fenn, look at him. Give the boy a kiss, all the colour is runn out of him. A kiss. ...that'll warm him up."

Margaret Fenn, the prettiest girl in Bracebridge, and my brother's new girlfriend, obliged with one on the hero's cheek, and a lot of hooting and hollering ensued, led in part by Paul -which didn't go unnoticed by the hero.

"Jesus Paul, quit it. I'm in enough..." I hesitated with Mr. Frazer so close.

"You can say shit Gene, my ol' man don't care." Paul smiled at his Dad who had just lost a hockey game, and we both knew wouldn't be happy.

"Let's go boys." He said sharply.

I looked at Paul when his father was far enough ahead of us and he said:

Divining Moments

"Dat old woman looked like that old crow I shot outta the sky last september eh Gene?"

"Ya, I remember." And she did in that black overcoat with her arms flailing away and screaming out that same word over and over. It was funny; but I didn't laugh.

"I think my parents know her."

"O shit. Really?" Paul said.

"Ya. I think so."

"I'll get my Dad to take ya home Gene, wait."

"Nah Pauly, I wanna walk."

"Are you nuts? It's freezing."

"C'mon Paul! ...stop prickin around." Mr. Frazer yelled to us, he was at the front door with my brother.

We walked slowly towards them. Paul nudged me. I knew what was coming, I saw the legless wonder.

"There he is!" he whispered with delight.

"Look, the old circus act is back." I smiled and pointed toward the thin looking man with no legs. We both liked picking on this old joke of a man. I nodded my head at Paul and pretended I was throwing a grenade at the old fart. I looked at him again, he went to our church, and my grandfather had gotten my dad upset when he had told us what a coward he had been. but that wasn't the story he came home with, the story my dad had heard, long before the real heroes arrived back in Muskoka.

"Retreat!" I whispered to Paul. "Don't pay no attention to your friends goin the other way, retreat! I smiled and tried to figure out again how you could blow both your legs off on a dead run with your own grenade, running away from where you should have been while your friends went the other way and beat back the krauts. When he came back to Muskoka his story was nothing like that and he was welcomed back as a hero of the war, and given a job at the town library which didn't last long, and then later the arena, which mainly involved leaning on his broom -just like he was now, and we called him the man with three wooden legs any time we saw him.

"You ready Gene? Can we go now?" I didn't say anything.

"See ya Dan. Good game son, say Hi to your Mom and Dad." Mr. Frazer said trying to ease the tension a bit, and he opened the door for Paul.

"Yes sir, thanks."

"Christ Jesus on a stick, it's fucking cold." I said softly to Paul.

"Gunna get colder from here Gene."

"You gotta be kiddin me?"

"Nope. Fraid not. Why don't you ask your parents if you can come to Port next weekend. I'll teach you to skate."

Divining Moments

I shook my head no and swiped at him gently. "I'll see ya Paulie."

"Alright. I'll see ya I guess." I could hear the disappointment in his voice as my brother and his girlfriend exited in front of us.

"Be real careful of him tonight Gene." My best friend whispered to me as we walked out into the cold wind.

I let the door go and it slammed shut.

"Call when you get a chance Gene." I nodded. A lie to make Paul feel better, but I didn't have to, he knew I only cared about being in Port in summer.

"You won't call." He waved as he turned and ran after his Dad.

"See ya Paulie."

I walked away from the building and the wind grew stronger, a biting wind howled down Wellington Street. I could see several dust clouds for a moment, as the wind ripped the sides off snowbanks, they looked like mini tornados, something else I hadn't seen. My eyes began to water and I turned the corner of the building to get out of the wind, I set my skates down and started putting my mitts on. As soon as I did I curled my fingers inside them and felt the warmth of my palms help a little, I grabbed my skates with both curled up mittenhands and slung them over my shoulder. I pulled my scarf up over my mouth and felt my breathe warm my chin and cheeks. But I was freezing, especially my feet.

"Ga Ga God dammit." I said aloud, my teeth began chattering.

"Mrs. B is very upset with you Gene. I went out to help your brother calm her, but she's really very angry with you."

I didn't even look at her. I didn't care what she was saying, it was so cold, all I could think of was how I was going to get back to the house alive. Although she did identify the old crow, and I knew instantly I was in deep shit. Her nervous husband had already gotten me in trouble.

He had been injured in the war according to my dad -even though you couldn't see an injury. My grandfather hadn't seen it that way with this man any more than the coward with three wooden legs; and when I told my father last summer what my grandfather thought of him he got very angry with both of us. He told us both he didn't want me going to my grandfather for advise, that his opinion was all that mattered, and that we should remember that. Remembering now added to the shitty way I was feeling tonight, and now it was his wife's turn to get me in trouble.

"Didn't you hear me Gene? She's very upset, and she'll get your brother in trouble for nothing. Gene?"

"Christ Mae. I. truly. don't. give. a. shit. Did you hear that? I don't give a shit!" I began picking a frozen sliver off my face when I heard:

"No Dan"

"Look out Mae." My brother yelled.

I turned into the hardest punch I'd ever felt. Another new sensation. I couldn't breathe. The thud of the punch to my chest registered and then the pain. I doubled over and fell to my knees. My skates hit the frozen

Divining Moments

sidewalk. My anger drove me. I got up and swung wildly. I caught Mae weakly on the shoulder and she fell to the ground.

"Come here you little asshole." My brother grabbed me hard around the neck and threw me to the ground. This time I hit with my elbows and then my chin, something happened in my mouth, a tooth, I spit out a small piece of one of them. I still couldn't catch anything but a short breath. I pulled off a mitt and felt my lip, it was split, but it wasn't bleeding bad. Then when I finally got a big breath I felt my chipped tooth with my tongue. And a sharp pain started repeating with my breathing.

"Ah shit. you bastard. You fucking bastard."

"Shuddap Gene, Shuddap! Or I swear to God I'll..."

"You're so mean to him." Mae spoke, and then probably saved me from more than I could handle right now when she started to cry.

"Oh Jesus Mae, I'm sorry."

I rolled over onto my side and reached in my mouth and felt the chipped tooth.

"Christ" I got up quickly and ran across the street. A man I didn't know stopped and said:

"You alright kid?"

I didn't say anything back, I just started running down Wellington street.

"Gene!" My brother yelled. I stopped and looked back and saw him tending to Mae.

"Go to hell you bastard." I yelled back. And I ran harder than before, I ran under the new street lights and past the homes with bright Christmas lights, some with glowing fires you could see through their front windows. I slowed and started breathing through my nose, which helped with the pain. By the time I made it from any lights, or smells of burning wood and could hear in the distance the dull roar of the falls I knew the long driveway leading to my parents house was close -although it was too dark to see it. I'd lost one of my mitts, and the exposed hand was freezing, even though I had it hidden in my jacket pocket.

Then headlights!

I started running faster afraid of getting picked up by anyone, but I was too far from the house. I looked back and Mr. Frazer's truck was bearing down on me.

I stopped and waited, he pulled up beside me and Paul opened the door.

"Get in Gene." He barked.

"Nah, it's alright, I'll walk Mr..."

"Shove over Paul. Gene! Get in, now."

I squeezed in beside my best friend. Mr. Frazer had a flashlight ready and shone it on my face.

"Jesus." Maybe it looked worse than it felt I thought.

Divining Moments

"Open your mouth Gene." I did what he asked. "OK. Let's get you home."

I nodded and knew the jig was up. I grew very nervous thinking: What if my dad is home already?

"Dad and me saw it all from the parking lot across the street. He couldn't get the truck started, or we woulda picked you up quicker. You OK Gene?" Paul said quietly as we started down our long driveway.

"No. Not really." I said back softly.

"hurt bad?"

" Can't feel nuthin. ...I'm in deep shit Paulie."

"Why? It'll be Dan that catches it."

"I snuck out tonight." I whispered to him.

"Again? Holy shit." He whispered back. Paul knew I'd been a handful, skipping school whenever I could. Then missing school because of fighting, and then fighting at home with my brother and going to school with black eyes or split lips had gotten my parents in some trouble which Mr. Frazer had heard about.

"Your lip ain't bad Gene, but you'll have to get your Dad to look at that tooth." he said as we pulled up to the house. Fortunately my Dad's car wasn't there.

I got out of the truck as quickly as I could but Mr. Frazer started following me: "Thanks Mr. Frazer, goodnight sir."

But he kept on comin. I knew I was in trouble, I opened the door and yelled for my Mom. I stood there while Mr. Frazer told her what he had seen with his flashlight, he didn't say how it happened, so I said:

"I slipped on the sidewalk Ma."

Neither said anything.

"I'm gunna go upstairs and wash up. Sorry about sneakin out Ma."

"OK Gene." Was all my Mom said.

"Goodnight Mr. Frazer."

"Night Gene."

I went upstairs and into the bathroom and surveyed the damage, my chin was skinned. My mouth was really throbbing now. I spit a little blood into the sink, but nothing was bleeding bad. Both elbows stuck to my sweater as I pulled it off, there was bloodstains on each sweater sleeve. I washed off the blood on my elbows then looked in my mouth. My lip was split dead center and it hurt when I opened my mouth, but the cold must have stopped any real bleeding. I opened my mouth as wide as my lip would allow and saw my broken tooth, when I pressed my tongue on top of it the pain sent me to my knees.

"Jesus Christ's shit that hurts!" But even that pain, and the thought of having it pulled out of my head paled to the worry of my Dad arriving home any hearing the news of me not being in the house studying.

Divining Moments

I listened at the top of the stairs to Mr. Frazer saying goodnight to my Mom and the door closing behind him. I went into the bathroom and envied them as they headed up the driveway in their truck and out of Bracebridge; and then I got into bed.

I couldn't sleep, I just lay there staring at the ceiling with one of my pillows against my face for the pain.

Dan came into the house about 1/2 hour later. He came into the room we shared, he had my skates and placed them carefully in the closet.

He asked nervously. "Did you tell Mom?"

"No."

"Why not?" He was relaxing a bit. He turned the bedroom light on. I turned away from the light and him and faced the bedroom window. He didn't say anything for quite some time.

"Sorry Gene."

I didn't say anything back.

He came closer. "I said I'm sorry."

"Get away from me."

"Goddamit your such a..."

"I'm in deep shit." I told him.

"What are you talking about?"

"I got a test tomorrow. Dad told me to study, but I snuck out anyway."

"What subject."

"Canadian history."

"I know that stuff backwards, where's your textbook."

"I don't know. Forget it." I said dispassionately.

"C'mon Gene, get up; I hear from Mom Dad's gonna be late. We got time."

"I said forget it."

"Jesus, I don't understand you Gene. I really don't. ...you know you're gonna catch it from Dad, again."

"I don't care." And I didn't.

"You will when he pulls his belt out."

"I can take anything."

Divining Moments

My brother didn't say anything for a bit: "We'd better get our story straight Gene." He said, nervously again.

I didn't say anything.

"Gene?" His voice changed back to the one I was used to.

"Leave me alone."

"You're such a little prick Gene. How did I end up with you as a brother?"

"We're not brothers."

"You got that right you little shit."

As it turned out there was no time anyway, not that I wanted his help. We both saw the headlights illuminate our room only a few minutes later, my brother quickly turned off the light in our bedroom, threw off his clothes and got into his pajamas, he scrambled into his bed as we both heard:

"Again!" From our father.

"It won't do you any good to pretend to be sleeping." I said.

"Shuddap."

I didn't take long to have our bedroom light switched back on.

"Get up Gene." He barked. I got up and walked towards my old man. My Mom stood in the hallway holding my Dad's black medical bag.

He looked at me, the second son, the one born in Florida, the one born when no one knew if I would have two parents, or two grandparents; the one who grew up with his real brother rather than the one I was stuck with now -which took until this past summer to figure out, and I thought everyone must have considered everyone else's feelings but mine when this decision was rendered, and I felt betrayed. I had been doing my best to change that decision; knowing why it had taken so long, but my brother beating me up constantly made it seem like it may not be the best course of action, but I was determined to get my life back.

I stared at the person keeping me apart from him, then said unconvincingly. "I fell on the sidewalk."

"Open your mouth." he looked at me for a moment or two.

"Lois."

"Yes dear."

"Get him in the bathroom after I wash up."

"Come here Dan."

He took my brother into his bedroom -my parents had separate bedrooms, each with their own bathroom.

"It's alright Gene" my Mom said and took my hand leading me into the bathroom.

Divining Moments

My Dad who was very good at extracting teeth, and the truth, did both in short order.

"You'll probably be better without that one anyway." He said after he took it out. I hadn't made a sound the whole time.

The punishment came down the next morning, right after the obligatory dictionary exercise -which was even more uninspiring than usual. Dan was miserable for two weeks; the second most when it was game night and he was still grounded. Even his coach's pleas fell on deaf ears, and then Dan was at his most miserable after each successive loss.

I got the same length of punishment, although my Dad had made the wise decision to not coincide them so mine got delayed for a week, which made for only one miserable week. The second seemed more like a vacation as my brother joined his team up north at a hockey tournament, the weather warmed considerably, the snow and ice receding and everyone but me in town worrying over a ruined Christmas as I pretended to do school work dreamed of summer.

Then watched my Mom being admitted into the hospital on Christmas eve and spent the rest of the holidays with no dreams of my real brother to comfort me, amidst depressing mountains of snow, going back to the hospital early each day and praying to God intently for the first time in a long time for another brother, until she gave birth to my first sister on the tenth day of our lengthened Christmas break thanks to two blizzards of the century in the same week, and I stopped praying to him for a very long time.

The day following when we went to see our tiny sister Mary crying as loud as anyone I'd ever heard, my brother was on me again. I had gotten what I asked for Christmas but according to my brother I hadn't thanked Dad properly for it.

"Thanks for the bike Dad." I said at my first opportunity and then stared at my brother.

Mom saw us staring and said. "Gene your father and I love you very much."

I didn't say anything. I kept staring down my brother.

"That's it? He doesn't even mean it!" My brother groaned out. "He doesn't even want to live with us!" During the week our groundings had coincided, I let him know in no uncertain terms that I'd be happiest if they just let me go home, and when he couldn't understand why I told him what he didn't know, and he didn't believe it, and it led to the biggest one-sided fight we'd ever had; which got me two black eyes and confirmation from our parents that what I told him was true.

My brother was behind me and without looking back I said:

"Go to hell." I was quickly struck in the face. I wasn't expecting it from in front of me.

"I'm tired of your swearing."

I stared at my feet, my cheek stinging I sighed out. "I don't care what you think anymore."

"Cec!" Mom yelled out. He may have been ready to slap me again and she wanted it to stop, but it came from behind. My brother slapped the back of my head hard.

I was ready and turned quickly and caught him with the best punch I was capable of, even one that Paul would have been impressed with, but it only made things worse. He threw me against the wall and I hit my head hard

Divining Moments

near the door of the hospital room our Mom and now screaming baby sister was in, he grabbed me around the neck and we spilled out into the hallway and before my dad could separate us my brother got in a short punch to my mouth.

"I'll kill him, let me go." I yelled.

"Let him go dad."

"You stay there, if you move you'll be sorry." He yelled at my brother, pointing and staring at my brother, holding me with the other he pulled me roughly back into the room, where my Mom was crying. Two nurses came into the room.

"Dr. Quinn?" One of them said.

"It's alright. It's over."

"No doctor. Mrs. Crassweller is in trouble."

"Sit right there Gene. Don't move." My Dad hurried out of the room and said the same to my brother about moving.

"Gene?" my sobbed.

I could feel my lip swelling and taste blood in my mouth again, a familiar feeling, but this bump on the back of my head was growing by the second. I felt dizzy.

"Gene, come here." I waited for a minute, I started for her bed but my anger took over and I turned and went outside. I started for my brother.

"You come near me Gene and I'll kill you." That didn't stop me, blacking out did.

I came to on my mother's hospital bed, a nurse was pressing a cold compress against the back of my head, my Mom was sitting up on the side of the bed looking at me.

"O thank God." She said to me. "Gene, my darling. My darling." She was crying again.

I saw my brother, who I now truly hated in the doorway. I started to get up.

"No Gene, you have to wait for your father." The nurse said.

"Let me up."

"Gene, please." I looked at my Mom, she never looked this sad before, and she had looked sad plenty of times to me in the past.

I started feeling nauseous. I rolled over with the nurse complaining to me about not moving and staying on my back. I hid my face in the pillow.

"You bastard." I said loud enough for my brother to hear.

"He is such a..." My brother stopped whatever he was going to say as my father said angrily:

Divining Moments

"Get back in the hallway Dan!"

Before my father knew how bad it was for me he said:

"Mrs. Crassweller family is coming up, you two must be quiet."

"Is she gone?" the nurse asked.

"yes. Nurse, try and settle the baby"

The nurse who had been looking after said very quietly: "Dr. Quinn your son's head. I think you'd better have a look."

"God help me." He said even more angrily. After a moment he said softly to Mom "Lois I just lost another patient, I have to see to the family. I'll be back."

Then he said firmly: "Gene. ..get up, let me look at you."

I didn't move. He started to pull at my arm and I pulled it away from him with as much strength as I could muster.

"Leave me alone." I said without looking.

He pulled me up roughly and I whispered to him with tears in my eyes:

"I fucking hate being here." and he slapped me hard across the face. I slumped back onto the bed and curled up.

"Nooo! Cecil he's hurt. Please!" My mother pulled me towards her. I was crying now.

"I'm sorry. I'm so tired Lois." My father's voice cracked as he said those words.

"That's right, cry those fake tears Gene." I heard my brother angrily say. I tried pulling away from my mother but my Dad stopped me.

"Get out Dan, I swear to God I'll hurt you."

He tried to lift me but I held onto my legs as hard as I could to prevent it, he righted me easily and I sat on the bed.

"Please. Please don't." I pleaded with my eyes closed as he asked me to open my mouth.

"No Cecil, look." My Mom directed. My father held me and felt the back of my head.

"Jesus!"

I looked at him because it sounded bad. He looked at me wearily. Lay here for a minute. I lay on the pillow face first.

"Please, let me go home. Please. Please."

Divining Moments

"You can go Gene."

Then I whispered his name over and over and over and my Mom started to cry again.

A little more than a couple of months of relative peace later, after enduring another boring day at school, and my brother and I were alone something I don't remember being said got us going again, I readied myself; and despite what my brother and I had heard as a repercussion my brother allowed me one good punch on his chin, then he broke my nose with one of his own.

I spilt a lot of blood that day, but felt good about the one I had gotten in, until Dad arrived home and I heard Dan getting the strap so bad I felt bad for him -then he left the house for good to live with friends of my parents, because they realized no repercussion would keep him from killing me, and nothing they could think of could reconcile us either, there was just too much water under the bridge.

There was even more passing under the Wellington bridge now, and more every successive day as March led to April with temperatures rising but more snow falling. And early in that curious month of weather I could better endure my sister sleeping only when I didn't need to, and this long winter which didn't want to end, and school mates I had nothing in common with, and a mother I tried mostly to avoid, and a father I just couldn't forgive, not because my brother was gone; but because of my best friend Paul.

He had sent up a letter his father had received from my grandfather -which Paul had stole and then found a kid in Milford Bay who went to my school, and asked me sincerely to make sure Paul knew that he had given me the best news I had gotten since I was told I wasn't going to Florida in the winters anymore.

I counted all the remaining days of winter down, not by the calendar, for it was still wrong; but by the forest and river and then the lake. Including counting one that was more like one in the dead of winter, one where I had already learned that if you were not smart enough to retreat to shelter by the snap of a freezing tree, your toes and fingers would punish you later for walking on snow as dry as sand, snow which was blasted by a vicious winter wind into anything exposed, one that sadly refroze everything that had started to thaw, one where you'd hear the familiar cracking of frozen branches as they duelled each other for space, but thankfully there only was one of those.

The rest were easy, ones that you could walk atop hardened snow and look at the all the stark beauty of Muskoka against a sky as blue as I'd ever seen from anywhere. Then subsequent warmer ones where I watched all the snow compress into soft banks that sank you to your crotch if you walked on them, slowly disappearing at first, and then with the help of April showers seeing exposed ground, brown and frozen, and watch water run over that ground always to the river, and watching the falls in Bracebridge look more like the one in Niagara, and the river rise as high as I'd ever seen it, carrying all of Algonquin Park's winter, and anything else near its banks, toward the big lake, which I happily followed every day after school, happier after some local adult idiot told me it was spring.

During those long treks along the banks of the river I watched all the dead grass, dead trees, dead animals, one picnic bench and one flipped over rowboat rushing in the dark water, all hurrying out the Muskoka River, then churning and disappearing under the thick blue ice of Lake Muskoka. Ice which looked weaker every successive day in April, with temperatures so warm I didn't need anything but an undershirt during my run to the mouth of the river where it met my lake.

I was transfixed by the river's water worrying the blue ice covering my lake to look so grey and weak in no time, with dark rimmed holes which at first I thought only near the shore, and which flooded out rhythmically every few minutes with brown water and grew much bigger each day, until I could see they were everywhere; for days I wondered how long it would take to see it like I knew it, the grey ice didn't release its grip easily.

Divining Moments

Then after spending one long day in the rain soaked to the skin, I saw every waterlogged chunk of darkened ice left sink, waterlogged, to the bottom of my lake; and the few that were still trapped to the mainland becoming true islands again, and I knew for sure that mine must be free.

And finally, spending one glorious windy afternoon watching my lake as I knew it, free of ice and flecked with white caps, I felt compelled to pray carefully like I was properly instructed by others who practised their faiths much better, to Buddah first in honour of my great grandmother, and then the Great Spirit in honour of Michel Oulette, and then just to be safe, the father, the son and the holyghost for this brutal Muskokan winter being truly over, and yet as much as that meant to me, feeling obliged to thank someone else even more.

Which I did as I watched the sun go down, and the wind subside, and my lake calm, and knowing my real brother was on Idlewyde watching all that too, but those were not the reasons I shouted out:

"Thank you Paul Frazer!"

I meant it as a praise to my best friend for knowing and then letting me know well before the winter ended what I wasn't supposed to know -even now.

The best news possible.

That I almost had my life back.

Chapter 3

Chapter Three

Spring 1920

It was an unusually warm day for this early in May; so I'd been told by my mother, father, and now the man at the gas station.

"How ya doin Doc? Beautiful day eh?"

"It sure is Paul, real nice."

"I ain't seen a better one in May in years."

"Nope, that's for sure." my Dad said back.

Jesus, you got any gas here in this gas station Mr. Crammond? I almost said to hurray the old fart up -but I knew what my dad would say to me if I did, ruining the last few weeks of angelic behaviour.

It had taken me weeks to get on his good side; weeks of studying things which had fortunately come pretty easy to me thanks to my grandmother having me so far in advance of grade eight studies, but surprising myself along with the idiots in my class, and in the process making my father very happy, by putting up marks even better than my brother did two years before in the same grade, instead of what I had been doing unsurprisingly, by constantly getting into fisticuffs with my idiot classmates. I did it because I knew I was never going to see any of those folols again, and maybe, if I was lucky, my brother included.

Besides, this old fart stammered when he was upset, and I didn't need anything distracting him; he was doing fine so far.

He smiled at me as I approached the rear of the car; I nodded back and asked:

He was ready, I'd done it before. "Can I pump it Mr. Crammond?"

"Sure Gene. Just wa, watch it, when it's ga, gettin full"

"I know, I know." I was careful to let the air out as I was pumping the gas in.

I breathed in the warm air.

"I love that smell." I said to a little kid watching from the sidewalk along Manitoba Street. He didn't say anything, I figured him to be just another retard from Bracebridge.

After enduring about a half hour at my dad's office -which he said would only take a minute- watching Mr. Crammond talking to my dad and holding his money after checking the oil and cleaning the windshield at a snail's pace was too much.

"We're in a bit of a rush Mr. Crammomd."

"Oh. OK let me get your dad his change."

Divining Moments

He left in middle conversation and my dad shot me a dirty look.

"That was rude Gene." I didn't say anything for a second.

"Dad I'll go get the change OK?" He nodded and I bolted for the front door of the Esso gas station.

Mr. Crammond spotted me, he looked nervous. "I, I, I c, c, cc, can't git, th, th, the ba, ba, ba, bloody da, da, da, door open." My dad's five bucks lay on the counter. I rested my head in my hands to help with this new torture.

I looked to see if my Dad was watching, and saw he was talking to the little retard on the sidewalk:

"Jesus sir, my dad's got a patient real sick in Milford Bay -we really gotta go!"

"La, la, la, la let, ma ma ma me sa sa sas see, wa wa wa wa what, I, ga, ga, ga, ga, ga, got Ge, Ge, Ge, Gene..." He started pulling at his pockets and by some miracle had almost the exact change; and I had the rest, a gift from my Ma."

"That's OK Mr. Crammond, dad wants you to keep the rest of it anyways." I ran out of the office hearing him stutter.

"Na na na na na nooo, wait. I g ga got it open!"

"It's alright, keep it!" I yelled as I ran for the car, which fortunately dad had running.

"OK?"

"Yes sir, let's go."

My dad was a careful driver and eased the car over the sidewalk. I peered over my shoulder and saw Mr. Crammond rushing towards us, but my dad didn't, and we bumped onto Manitoba Street and down towards the road that takes you to Port Carling. That highway is paved for only a couple of miles, then the old Ford which Mr. Crammond fauned over for my dad, and was in remarkably good shape, creaked as we hit the first of a million pot holes, I hoped this wasn't going to be too much of a test for it. We bounced and rolled over the spring pot holes and winter heaves; each mile away from Bracebridge I felt better -and even if the car didn't feel as good as me, it ran without a hitch. Although the twenty miles to Milford Bay went slower than I was hoping -it went surprisingly faster than I was expecting, knowing how my dad drove.

Just before we got to Milford Bay I counted out the change, a combination of what Mr. Crammond had nervously pulled out of his pockets and what my Mom had given to me as a reward for good grades. My Dad seemed mildly impressed with the ability to count the change back from a five; but remarkably less so when I told him Gramps had taught me.

"Keep it Gene, in case Mr. Frazer takes you boys out for ice cream. You tell him I told you to pay for it, OK?"

"Yes Sir." I said as we pulled into the Milford Bay school house parking lot, abandoned on a saturday. The little village had one store and a few houses and small farms scattered through the bush on both sides of the highway, set up on a small hill overlooking the lake. I looked through the trees, with new leaves showing a myriad of green colours, towards the lake; which was a vibrant blue.

I smiled, I was so happy, and looked at my Dad slowly untying my bike, he noticed smiled back and asked:

Divining Moments

"You sure you don't want to spend the day with me Gene; you might be surprised how much you'd like it?" My face must have gone as blank as my mind.

Finally I said as nicely as I could muster: "Please Dad, I'm gonna be late."

He didn't speed up much, but after a couple of more minutes he got it untied, and said:

"You've been good these last few weeks Gene, I like to see if I couldn't get you and your brother back together again, what do you think?" I didn't say anything, I just took my bike and wheeled it away from the car. He took hold of the bike with me.

"Gene?"

"Yes sir." I said wearily.

"Your brother wants to come home."

I almost said what I knew, but I didn't, instead:

"I don't wanna fight with him Dad, but I, I..." My voice trailed off because I didn't know how to finish that sentence that wouldn't get me in trouble, so I just said:

"Can I go please, I'm real late?"

His voice changed.

"Watch for car Gene. You see or hear any you slow down and get on the shoulder, and don't ride in the middle of the road Gene; you hear me?" Dad had heard from patients that I was a real maniac on my bike, ignoring stop signs -which I figured were for just cars anyway, and any people silly enough to cross in front of me if I had enough speed going which was most of the time, and usually at the bottom of one of the many hills in Bracebridge where you could be travelling faster than the posted speed limit if you peddled all the way down.

"Yes sir."

"I mean it Gene."

"I'll be careful, I promise." He let go, and I got on. "OK?" I asked.

He nodded, and I started to pedal out of the parking lot.

"Gene!"

Christ, I said to myself. I stopped and looked around at him.

"You're going to church with your mother at Morinus. I don't want to hear anything different from that Gene, understand?"

"Yes." I lied.

We stood staring at each other for a minute, then:

Divining Moments

"Be careful." I got on and started to pedal as hard as I dared. I didn't wave goodbye, and he didn't say anything. I pedalled as quickly as I dared, as hard as I could without weaving all over the road, and kept abiding by his rules until I was sure I heard the car going in the opposite direction. Then I started pedalling like a madman right down the middle of the gravel highway.

God, I'm free! Was the first thought that crossed my mind. As soon as I got onto the old gravel highway to Port I stood on the pedals, and pedalled until my legs burned, then I kept pedalling as hard as I could seated, until I had the strength to get up again; I kept up all the way until I heard a car coming -which I ignored until I recognized the sound of it.

My Dad pulled up beside me as I travelled dutifully along on the shoulder of the road: "Dammit Gene, what did I tell you about cars coming? You're all over the damn road." He pulled in front of me and stopped.

Dammit it. I said to myself. He pulled the bike out of my hands and placed it in the back of the car.

"No Dad please, I'll ride better, please."

"Get in Gene."

"Nooo. please I gotta go."

"Get in!"

I got in and slammed the door shut.

My father rubbed his face and eyes, he looked tired these days -things had been going bad. "I don't want you gettin hurt out here Gene. There's no doctor out in Port Carling."

I fully expected the car to turn back to Milford Bay; but he kept going towards Port Carling. After getting me to within a couple of miles to Port and the last of the big hills behind us, he stopped the car. Without saying anything he got out and picked my bike out of the car and I scrambled out to get it."

"Thanks dad. Thanks."

He didn't speak, no more words of warning or anything else for that matter, and I had nothing else to say either; so I got on the bike and started riding along the shoulder, I waved without looking back. Then I heard the car turning around and shooting gravel as it accelerated away from me; I looked about 30 seconds later and it was gone; and I started riding the way I had been, towards Harris Street first, then turning right on Bailey Street near the river and onto the front lawn of my best friend's house.

-I dropped my bike in front of their garage, exhausted, unable to speak. I banged on the front door of the main house and there was no answer, I ran around on the flagstone walkway past the perfectly rectangular garden plots with delicate shoots of daffodils poking out of dark soil, past the smaller but identical guest house and gardens towards the boathouse. I saw them both on the dock and sprinted to them, still unable to speak.

I stood there looking at them. Then:

"Holy shit! Dad Look! It's Gene!" Paul hurtled towards me and knocked me over like a rag doll. I'd never been happier knocked off my feet.

"C'mon let's go!" Paul picked me up as easily as he had bowled me over.

Chapter 4

Chapter Four

I looked through Paul's arm and choked out: "Hi Mr. Frazer!" I'd made the mistake of pushing Paul from behind just as we made it to the dock, and so now after Paul had picked me up like a pencil I was standing on the dock bent at the waist in a head lock.

"Stop prickin around boys when you get in; I don't wanna be spendin any goodfishin' time pick'n you twooutta the drink."

"It'll be Gene, not me Pa." My best friend said, and he let me go.

"Get the lines." He barked.

"Yes sir." I said and hurriedly untied the stern line, curled it and handed the white braided rope to Mr. Frazer.

"Thanks Gene. You might wanna teach Paul how to curl up a line someday."

"Just a second Dad!"

I stood there breathin in the smell of the smelt run and watching Paul run around the corner of the boathouse, then I turned and looked past the boat at the river sparkling in the sunlight, it looked magical after the winter I had just spent. There was a big bird comin in overlandfrom the west.

"Ah hum. Ya gunna get in Gene, or do ya wanna stay behind?"

"No sir, are you kidding. Sorry!" I got in quickly; Paul had snuck back and had already sat down in his usual seat.

The tiny engine started up and we backed quickly away from the dock; I curled the bow line that Paul had tossed onto my seat over it's place on a wooden peg off an oak rib near the front seat. I looked around at the familiar scene, I knew the ins and outs of Mr. Frazer's pride and joy, I had fished with them plenty of times before.

We were in a disappearing propeller boat, eighteen feet of bliss for me right now, looking like a large rowboat made out of cyprus and oak, with a unique hinged propeller shaft you could pull right up into the hull, what the locals in Port called a Dispro had been a popular boat before the war -and bigger versions of this one had been made here in Port Carling for the British war effort.

"Hey Gene, you ready to catch some fish?" I smiled at Mr. Frazer and still breathing heavily I said:

"I don't care. I'm just happy to be here!"

"He won't catch anythingPop -he never does" Paul slapped me hard on the arm.

"We'll see; I feel lucky today Paulie." I looked down at the bait bucket and didn't notice at first which direction we were going.

Divining Moments

I opened the lid and looked in as the bucket came under the sun it revealed a lot of dark backed minnows nervously darting above about ten or so crawfish.

"Aren't you worried about the crawfish pickin off the minnows Mr. Frazer?"

He didn't say anything, so Paul volunteered: "Water's too cold Gene."

The water was hard to look at, I shaded my eyes and watched a Blue Heron land in the swamp across the river from the Frazer's place. Man, it's early for him I thought.

"Gene?"

"What?"

Paul pointed towards the big locks.

"We're not goin to Lake Muskoka?" I asked.

"Nah." He said and smiled at me, I think a little relieved.

"Are the locks even open?"

Paul just shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe."

We slid by the Johnston Boat Works and waved at Charlie Amy -who never waved back.

"Do ya think Charlie ever smiles boys?" Mr. Frazer said.

We didn't say anything as we worked our way past the place his pride and joy had been built, that man was always miserable; I'd met him a couple of times, so I knew he never smiled, and so did everyone else in Port, but I was smiling enough to make up for him. I was thinking this was going to be easy now thanks to my best friend's Dad. I looked back just as Mr. Frazer put two of his fingers in his mouth blew threw them, letting out his famous ear piercing whistle.

I put my fingers in my ears too late.

I looked at Paul, shook my head and mouthed. "Holy shit!" Paul just smiled.

My ears were ringing as we got pushed by the current coming out the channel from the damn near the small locks, I looked up and spotted what I figured was the new lockmaster, standing resplendant in his new unifrom in the middle of the catwalk on the top of the big locks facing the Lake Muskoka side of the Indian River.

He was watching us approach, and I was happily looking at him.

"Damn it, go in and get the bloody door open." Mr. Frazer said just loud enough for us to hear.

The man waved to us, and yelled:

"You ready?"

Divining Moments

"Well; that's what we're here for Bob." he said too quietly.

"You goin through?" He yelled againto us.

"Let's try 'em out!" Mr. Frazer shouted back this time, and the uniformed man scurried off the catwalk and ran towards the old building housing all the new levers and switches and blinking lights for the reconditioned big locks. Mr. Frazer guided the boat away from the current and positioned us right in front of the right gate, leaving just enough room for it to open, it wasn't long before we could hear the big pumps working, then after a few more minutes both huge gates opened in unison and we slipped between them into the locks, they closed behind us right after they were fully open.

"Sorry boys, I just locked through Murray Walker; he said he was in a hurray, so I...." His voice reverberated on the concrete walls

"It's alright. ...how'd they work?" Mr. Frazer asked.

"Perfect." Came the reply.

"What's his name?" I whispered to Paul.

"Mr. Bartleman. He lives on the Indian reservation."

"Is he an Indain?" I asked, he didn'tlook dark skinned enough.

"I guess so; but he only looks half Injun don't ya think, in the face I mean....I don't know, not sure, anyway, hell, maybe he just married one." Paul didn't much care about Indians, he didn't mind them either, his non interest in their culture had reminded me once of a word my Mom had taught us: ambevelant.

"Who ya got with you Henry?"

"My boy Paul, and his friend Gene Quinn."

"How you boys today?"

"OK." Paul said. And I said "Great!" Over top of him.

Paul shot me a look and whispered. "Take it easy Gene, you ain't caught a fish yet."

"Fishin should be real good today, what you goin for?"

"Whatever's in season Mr. Bartleman." Mr. Frazer said back a little tersly, and he went back in his new buildiiing, the pumps started putting back in what they had just pumped out and after the same number of minutes the big doors on the Lake Rosseau side of the Indian River started opening, and I couldn't believe it.

Mr. Bartleman came back out and waved to us. I waved back.

"Thanks Bob." Mr. Frazer said.

The tiny engine that had been sputtering and echoing off the huge walls the whole time we were inn the locks, echoed less strongly now as we slid past the open gates. I looked back and saw several people on the bridge who had been watching us lock through, we must have looked to them like a child's toy in a bathtub I thought.

Divining Moments

After a minute of enjoying looking at the town docks, realizing this was actually happening, and that I was not needing my master plan anymore, I looked back and saw Paul going through his tackle box. Then I spotted Paul's Christmas present gleaming in the sunlight beside him, with the new cork butt on the floor board and the blue steel rod resting on his seat, the shining silver reel was reflecting a bright distorted image of itself on the varnished wood of the freeboard.

"Nice outfit Paulie."

"Yep." And he picked it up to give me a closer look. The reel was a Pflueger, and had beautiful etchings in the polished silver metal with what looked like ivory bordering each side between where the line was wound, and that same look of ivory on the winding handle. It was the prettiest reel I'd ever seen.

"Wow. Real nice." I said. Paul smiled as he kept rummaging through his tackle box.

I leaned over and whispered to him. "Guess I won't need the canoe after all."

"Be quiet Gene." He whispered back.

Paul quickly pulled some black line off his reel, wetted the end and made a small loop which he threaded through the guides, then he rigged the line with two small red glass beads, crimped a small lead piece below and above them, then placed the line through a groove in a larger lead piece and crimped it shut with his pliers; with the remaining line he placed two more small red glass beads rigged the same way and finally about eight inches below the lowest glass bead he tied on a hook, he carefully trimmed that knot with a small pair of scissors. He placed the hook in the lowest guide and tightened up the drag on his reel before he reeled the line taut putting a slight bend in this new rod and placed his new outfit next to him. I turned around and looked over the bow, confident that he would do a similar good job with his old outfit -which he told me I was going to use.

I was staring at the water. The tiny engine putting along and the sound of the water running under the hull, and the cries of two seagulls fighting over something only one of them had should have been making me feel good, but all of sudden I felt incredibly sad -it had been so long since I'd last seen my brother, so long since I'd been worrying about him that it all had hit me like a fist: I had a terrible lump in my throat as I fought back the tears.

"You all right Gene?" Mr. Frazer asked.

"Yes sir!" I said fast wiping my eyes.

"My Dad just whispered that you look a little sad." Paul whispered to me.

"I'm alright. I just want to see my Shadow."

"You're lookin on the wrong side of the boat Gene." And he poked me in the ribs. But I didn't find it funny, and I looked him to make sure he knew that.

"Sorry Gene. I know ya do, but...." He whispered back, his voice trailing off.

I looked back and saw Port Carling vanish behind the first sharp bend in the river.

Paul tried to cheer me up with: "Gene, Dad, that's ol' man Millard's place. He's the best tipper at the club by a mile, and he's there practically every day! We're gunna make a fortune this summer Gene!"

Divining Moments

"O ya, I know him, he's been in for a bunch of stuff at the store -took me awhile to get those shingles. He's doin a good job with the old place that's for sure. ...how long's he been here now?" Mr. Frazer said back.

"bought about a year ago. He fought in France he told me, he wants to forget it all, figures this was the best place to do that." Paul shot back.

"He ain't the only one, funny, he don't sound too frenchy with that name."

"Nah, he's the furthest thing from that Pa."

The sign on his boat house was up. It read SUNSET, then it had his name below it Milliard.

I was taught a different way to pronounce that spelling, but Paul had told me about this man from Pennsylvania last summer, how he talked, but I knew most people in the States pronounced things different than Canadians anyway. My grandfather knew him too, he had been a customer of his a couple of times, a lawyer from Pittsburg. I'd never met him, but everyone who had, liked him. His small cottage sitting almost at the water's edge was newly painted all white, matching every other small cottage along the river except for two major differences, the shutters and the shingles were orange. You could see clearly the hard backed sand all along this shoreline as it passed, and you knew when SUNSET went by, you were half way out to the lake. I listened to the engine putting and watched the heavily treed shoreline pass by.

"Gene? Ya hear me?"

I shrugged my shoulders at him. "What?"

"I said you can work with me at the Club this summer. I fixed it."

"Oh; well my Gramps told me before he left for Flordia that he got me a job in Beaumaris, at the yacht club."

"Shit Gene, don't work there. Their even worse down there than the funckin tourists up here!"

"Watch your mouth boy." Mr. Frazer said.

"Sorry Pa."

"Gene. You gotta work with me, I got it all arranged; don't go down there with them bloody idiots." He whispered to me.

The Beaumaris Yacht Club's main rival for the next prominent american family to arrive in Muskoka was the place that Paul was loyal to, and the fact that he could walk to The Muskoka Lakes Golf and Country Club, and get paid a lot of money just for lugging golf clubs around all day, and then play as much golf as he wanted had nothing to do with the way he felt about Beaumaris; according to him anyways.

"sides, they always win the regatta every year, you don't wanna work for a bunch of losers Gene. Do ya?"

"Ya, I guess so. ahh. I don't know if I'm gunna work anyway Paulie." I said quietly so his old man wouldn't hear.

Paul whispered back fast. "What? You gotta work Gene. We gotta have money in our pockets for the girls were gunna meet this summer. You got to. " I smiled at my friend as we turned hard right and I saw beautiful Lake Rosseau for the first time in months.

Divining Moments

"Gene?"

"OK Paulie. OK. I'll think about it."

"Great."

Mr. Frazer guided his boat out onto the lake and we sliced through the first small waves. I looked over the bow to familiar islands.

"We got the whole lake." Mr. Frazer said.

I looked all around and couldn't see another boat, and then; got a cold splash Of Lake Rosseauright in the face.

"Sorry Gene, didn't see that one." Mr. Frazer said. Paul laughed.

"Ha. You got the wet seat. You got him good dad!"

"Shutup!" I said, and then I laughed too as I wiped the cold water from my face.

"We're almost out of the wind Gene. But it'll get wet again around Windermere, you switch with Gene boy when we get the other side of Tobin." Another small wave broke against the side of the bow and splashed my jacket.

"It's alright Mr. Frazer, I don't care." I said, and I didn't.

The warm wind was blowing hard from the south, and had picked up some bigger waves from way down in Brackenrig bay. We headed for the small group of island closes to the mouth of the river, they were known as the Venetian Group and rested along the western shoreline of big Tobin Island, and I knew the name of every one of them by heart, and started reciting them as we past them all.

I looked up at the sky after we past Meribeth, the last one. I closed my eyes and moved so I could feel the sun directly above me, warm on my cheeks, and as the boat rolled beneath I listened to the familiar sound of waves slapping the sides and then rumbling under this hull, every boat I knew well I loved, but right now I didn't think anything was better than this one.

I let out a big sigh and said to myself, I'll see you soon brother.

The boat rocked a little and I looked up at Paul. "Damn. Shoulda brought our over-unders Dad. Bang. Bang." Paul yelled.

It looked like about a million ducks were taking off in every direction, some coming right for us. I recognized the ones doing the close fly by as Mallards.

"Shit!"

They were in the middle of the first small bay on the southern shoreline of Tobin Island, but Paul kept standing and yelling at them, now all airborne most flew over the big island, calling to the rest to follow, but a few just circled over the lake, wings flapping rapidly, until they dove back into a perfect glide, landing closer

Divining Moments

to the shoreline on this small bay in small groups, by the time we lost site of the bay many more were returning from the middle of Tobin Island.

"Sit down boy." Mr. Frazer barked out at Paul.

"I've never seen that many ducks before." Paul said to his Dad.

"I don't think I have either." Mr. Frazer said. It meant something, because according to my Gramps he was a very good hunter, and I knew he was out on Lake Rosseau as much as anyone.

"Coulda had a few there."

"Not as many as me." Mr. Frazer said back. "Hey Gene, you heard from your Grampa yet?"

"Nah, not yet. My Ma talked to them on Wednesday, they were stayin at Mr. @@@@ place in Gravenhurst. They got on Tobin yestrerday I think."

"Lookin forward to seeing him."

"Yes sir. Me too!"

"OK Paul switch with Gene."

"Nah it's alright, I wanna stay here."

"Hang on then, gunna get a little rough." I looked uppast Windermere and saw big rollers heading toward the top of the lake; I looked toward Brackenrig Bay, the southern most part of Lake Rosseau and saw what those rollers looked like from the front; white topped and angry lookin. Mr. Frazer opened her up and I felt the bow rise up as the speed of the boat picked up. He headed for the nearest shoreline which actually took us a bit south at first, but I knew why; it's alot easier going with these kind of waves than handling them broadside, and it wasn't going to take us long to get to the opposite shoreline -which belonged to Wellsley Island, but it was wet, and I was drenched pretty good by the time we got behind Wellsley and the waves quit.

"You Ok gene."

"Yep. I'm fine."

"We got it beat now Gene, and we'll go the other side of Tobin when we go home."

And I knew that like anyone else who knew this lake when it was roiled up, and I could hardly wait -we could've gone right away and forgot about fishin for all I cared.

Divining Moments

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