

THE CABIN AT GREAT SLAVE LAKE

CHAPTER ONE

The two young men had been raised in the city of Yellowknife, a small town located on the northern shore of Great Slave Lake in Canada's Northwest Territories. Yellowknife played an important role in the development of Canada's north, acting as a distribution centre for goods shipped throughout the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. Commerce from both water and land made this small community a busy place.

Jordan's family was firmly rooted in Yellowknife. His father owned a third-generation hardware store, which had been started by his grandfather, when the roots for the town were planted. Jordan's father also owned two planes, which he used to transport people and goods around the lake, one of the largest freshwater bodies of water in Canada. Air travel was the easiest option to reach the small towns dotting the water's expansive shoreline. The bush planes were also used for flying fishermen and hunters into remote lodges and cabins in wilderness locations far from home.

Jordan's friend, Jeremy, had just completed his first year of college in Edmonton and was on his way back to Yellowknife in his truck. The two friends had their summer planned. One of Jordan's uncles had owned a cabin in the bush, he had used for hunting and fishing. It had been sitting empty for the past two years, as the uncle had suffered mortal wounds following an accident with a chainsaw. Being far from medical help, the uncle had perished in the bush. The uncle's brother, now in charge of the cabin, offered to give it to Jordan. However, it was in need of rehabilitation, as it had been built years before and never updated. The uncle suggested the boys fly into the cabin to get an idea of what supplies would be needed to spend the summer there, before beginning their adventure. Jordan, who was a licensed pilot, planned to fly to the cabin tomorrow with Jeremy.

The boys met the following morning at the airport in Yellowknife. They loaded supplies for their trip from Jordan's truck onto the airplane, carrying only what they needed for a visit to the cabin. The plane sputtered to life. Jordan let the engine warm up before taxiing the plane out to the runway. The day was sunny and warm, the late April sun shining brightly down on the land as the plane accelerated down the runway. The boys soon found themselves in the air, flying away from the city, into a land filled with forests and lakes as far as their eyes could see. Jason knew his destination well, having flown his uncle here numerous times in the past.

The cabin was less than an hour flight from Yellowknife. After what seemed like a short time in the air, Jordan nudged Jeremy, pointing out a lonely looking cabin surrounded by trees, sitting one hundred feet from the shore of the lake. The small aircraft circled once, before making a perfect landing on an expanse of open water which led to the sandy beach by the cabin. Jordan guided the plane to its destination, the plane lightly beaching in the sand. Jordan and Jeremy unfastened their seatbelts and exited the aircraft, walking toward the cabin, hoping what they found would not be surprising.

CHAPTER TWO

Jordan and Jeremy walked the short distance to the cabin. Except for vegetation needing to be cleared from around the building, the structure appeared intact. The cabin had weathered being dormant the last two years, with little wear and tear on the building. The front door was nailed shut,

sending Jordan back to the airplane to retrieve a hammer from a tool box on board. After opening the cabin door, the boys entered the building. Jordan's uncle had treated his home in the bush well, keeping up with maintenance and cleaning, both in and around the vicinity of the building.

Completing a thorough inspection of the inside of the cabin, the boys went outside. A shed built from lumber stood fifty feet from the cabin, Jason's uncle having used this building for storage. The door was also nailed shut, but after a brief struggle, Jeremy removed all the nails from the wood and opened the door to the shed. The first thing the boys laid their eyes on was a canoe, stored overhead in the rafters. Two paddles, crafted by Indigenous wood carvers, lay beside the canoe. These craftsmen often carved animals and birds into wooden paddles, depicting wildlife living in the lakes and forests surrounding these early Canadian people. Throughout history, white men used such paddles while traversing the lakes of the Northwest territories.

There was a table for cleaning fish or fowl, Jordan pointing out to Jeremy the blood stains in the table top. He told Jeremy how he had flown his uncle in to this cabin the last week of October, where he would fish and hunt. His uncle would store the meat in an underground freezer he had constructed for this purpose. Jordan would then return at the end of the first week of November, to take his uncle and his haul of fish, meat, and fowl back to Yellowknife. This would provide his uncle with protein, an innovative way to keep food on the table throughout the long, dark days of winter.

Continuing to look around the shed, the two boys found two pairs of snowshoes, and an axe, saw, and other useful tools hanging on the wall. They discovered four iron traps, for catching bothersome animals who moved onto the property as unwanted guests. Wolverines were the most offensive of these, capable of inflicting great damage to the cabin, if provided the opportunity to get inside while the owner was away. A hook and chain for hanging the carcass of a deer or occasional moose in a tree to bleed out were also in the shed, something the boys would probably not use this summer. In addition, two good shovels and a pick lay against the back wall.

Satisfied with their inspection, the boys realized it would take little effort to bring the property back to its former glory. They secured the buildings, planning to have their needed supplies and themselves flown in by Jordan's father later in the week. He would drop his son and Jeremy off for the summer, picking them up in the fall on a prearranged date agreed upon by both parties. Over the summer, Jason's father would fly in additional supplies, these visits also serving as a wellness check, making sure the boys were living comfortably and were in good health. He would be just another worried father, regarding his son and his friend playing a survival game with nature, man's enemy which leaves little room for mistakes.

CHAPTER THREE

Jordan and Jeremy spent the next week purchasing supplies for their wilderness adventure. The goods they bought were sitting in Jordan's father's airplane hangar at the Yellowknife airport. Jordan and Jeremy arrived at the airport shortly after daybreak to meet Jordan's father. While waiting, the young men loaded their supplies and belongings onto the bush plane.

A brief time later, after Jordan and Jeremy had finished loading the aircraft, Jordan's father arrived with a surprise. He had purchased a dog from a friend who bred and sold huskies, the workhorse of the north. These dogs, when domesticated, made loyal pets, many times these animals saving their

owner's life by warding off bear attacks. A husky also serves as an early warning system of possible danger in the bush, such as a pack of hungry wolves.

Molly was a mature, three-year-old female, who had been returned to the breeder in Yellowknife after the sudden death of her previous owner. Molly was well trained and disciplined; she would provide companionship and love to Jordan and Jeremy while staying in their isolated cabin on the shore of Great Slave Lake.

After the three men and Molly boarded the airplane, there was little room to maneuver in the cockpit. The dog had to sit on Jordan's lap while preparing for takeoff. Jordan's father started the plane's engine, letting the cold motor warm up. He then guided the plane out toward the runway. Within minutes, he was cleared for takeoff. Jordan held Molly tight. The dog had never flown in an airplane before and was petrified. Once the plane was in the air on a direct course to the cabin, Molly became more comfortable.

Jeremy looked out the windows, watching Yellowknife become but a speck in the distance. Dense forests of hardwood trees and the sparkling waters of Great Slave Lake surrounded the airplane on its way to the cabin. After a forty-minute flight, their destination came into view. Jordan's father landed the bush plane on the still waters of the lake, the pontoons of the aircraft sending up a spray of water upon landing.

The small plane sputtered slowly toward the cabin, coming to a halt after gliding onto the sand of the shoreline. Molly, anxious to leave the plane, jumped from the cockpit into the shallow water and made her way to shore. The men exited the aircraft and followed Molly as she headed to the cabin. Jordan opened the door, allowing Molly to enter before them. She began sniffing everywhere, investigating what she thought may be her new home.

Jordan's father took a look around, pleased with the shape the cabin was in. He needed to get back to Yellowknife for a meeting, allowing just enough time for the three men to unload the plane, leaving all of the boy's supplies onshore. Climbing back in the aircraft, the engine soon came to life; the plane becoming but a speck in the distant blue sky shortly thereafter. Jordan and Jeremy looked at their belongings, hoping they had everything they needed, knowing the hard work was about to begin.

CHAPTER FOUR

Jordan and Jeremy were awestruck by the beauty which surrounded them. Looking out over Great Slave Lake, the placid water sparkled in the morning sunshine. The boys, with Molly in tow, began carrying their personal belongings and supplies to the cabin, where the items would be sorted and stored. All food and personal items would be kept inside the cabin, while the mechanical items, such as the chainsaw and gas Jordan purchased in Yellowknife, would be stored in the shed.

The cold water from the lake kept the air around the cabin cool, even during the warmest months of summer. The late spring temperatures, especially in the evenings, seep into the cabin, making a fire in the woodstove a necessity. Although the day was sunny and turning warmer, the interior of the cabin was still cool. Jordan started a fire in the woodstove, using some of the firewood they had found stacked in the shed. A short while later, the building was a bastion of comfort, even Molly was sleeping contentedly beside the warm stove.

Included amongst their belongings, the boys had brought perhaps their most important possessions, their hunting rifles. Jordan and Jeremy each had brought two rifles with them to the cabin, one for small game and waterfowl and the other, a higher caliber firearm, used to shoot deer and moose. This larger gun could also be used to ward off animals, such as wolves and bears. At times, predators like these can become aggressive when encountered in the bush.

Jordan and Jeremy had noticed there were a large population of squirrels living in the trees around the cabin. The boys decided to take their rifles and hunt this food source for dinner. If their venture was successful, Jeremy suggested they would cook the squirrel meat over a campfire later this evening. The boys left the cabin, taking Molly with them. They thought any squirrels in the area would view the dog as a threat, giving their positions away by chattering loudly at her. Using this hunting technique, the boys harvested numerous squirrels. Returning to the cabin, the boys took the rodents to the shed to clean and prepare the meat for cooking. Molly got to enjoy the remains the boys would not eat.

Later that evening, the squirrel meat sizzled over the open fire. Jeremy cooked some potatoes in the fire, as the boys had purchased root vegetables in Yellowknife, including a twenty-five pound bag of potatoes. The sky was clear and the wind calm, allowing the smoke from the campfire to drift aimlessly into the dark forest. A wily fox waited patiently in the nearby trees, hoping for an opportunity to steal some food from the campsite.

The boys ate until their stomachs were full, throwing Molly the scraps of leftover meat picked from the carcasses of the small animals. The boys let the fire burn down to the coals. Only the call of the loon on Great Slave Lake broke the silence of the night. The trio returned to the cabin, where they enjoyed a peaceful sleep in their new home in Canada's north, a place the young men had chosen to be.

CHAPTER FIVE

Molly woke Jason and Jeremy from what was a peaceful sleep shortly after midnight. A low growling coming from the back of her throat meant the dog was alert and no longer sleeping by the woodstove. Molly had heard something outside; her growling waking the sleeping boys.

Jordan's uncle had been a carpenter and had crafted a set of bunk beds, the frames made from Aspen trees, onto the back wall. This saved space in the cabin and was ideal for allowing two people to sleep comfortably in the small structure. Jordan had claimed the bottom bunk, being the less agile of the two. Climbing into the top bunk required upper body strength and a flat stomach, neither of which Jordan possessed.

The full moon shone through the cabin window. Being on the top bunk, provided Jeremy a better view outside than Jordan, who was on the bed below him. Jeremy saw a large animal investigating the outside area of the cabin. Judging by the animal's size and its gait while walking, Jeremy surmised it was a bear. The young men knew after the omnivore's curiosity was quenched, the animal would leave in search of another place to find food.

The boys and their dog fell back asleep until the morning sun and birdsong woke them, the sunshine promising a beautiful day. Jordan and Jeremy pulled themselves out of bed. They had purchased bread and peanut butter in Yellowknife before leaving for the cabin, which was what the

young men would eat for breakfast. Jordan's father had purchased a large bag of dried dog food for Molly, solving the problem of keeping her fed. However, it did not solve the bigger issue, keeping Jason and Jeremy's hungry stomachs full.

After only a few days in the bush, the boys realized their summer was going to be spent looking for food, just like their forest counterparts. As the summer wore on, fishing and hunting waterfowl became life saving gifts the lake offered to the young men. Jason and Jeremy also loved paddling the canoe on the lake at sunset, watching nature settle down for the dark night's passage, leading to the light of the following day.

It was a summer not soon forgotten by the best friends, but one that would not be repeated. The isolated cabin sits empty, alone in the forest again, waiting for its next visitors to bring life back to this lonely structure.

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