

THE CHANDLER ESTATE

CHAPTER ONE

The old mansion sat on a wooded hilltop, accessed by a long, dirt driveway. The original owner, who built the elaborate home overlooking the Detroit River, made his money in the shipping industry, which had blossomed after the completion of the Erie Canal in the early 1800's. The Chandler Estate had a rich history. Built before the American Civil War, it was reportedly used as a transit point to help slaves across the Detroit River, to freedom in Canada.

Over time, the old house had deteriorated, the once elegant home rented to many different tenants over the years. In the 1920's, one of these tenants was a known bootlegger, who smuggled liquor from Canada into the U.S., using the old Chandler Estate as a distribution hub for speakeasys. There were rumours of a fight at that time, a dispute over money which resulted in two deaths in the house, the victims' bodies buried somewhere on the property.

After the last tenants moved, the property was abandoned and fell into ruins. The Chandler Estate sat vacant for years, only spiders and mice making the old place home. The land and house were purchased in the mid-1950's, by a wealthy family from New York City, who planned to return the house to its former glory. The man was a steel tycoon, who made a fortune when he sold his company to U.S. Steel, one of the largest steel manufacturers in the country. Under pressure from his wife, Louise, to move their two young teens out of the city, Johnathan bought the old estate and moved his family to a small community outside of Detroit.

Buying a house in Edinboro to live in while renovating the Chandler Estate, the move from New York City was uneventful and the family soon found themselves settled in a quiet neighborhood near Detroit. During the first weeks of living in Edinboro, the family acquired a dog, something the boys had been promised before making the move. The mixed breed animal was a little over a year old and well-trained. The boys decided to name him Rusty, due to the reddish color of his coat. The new kids in town had immediately been accepted by their peers, making friends with others in the neighborhood.

Toby and Dexter finished eating their breakfast and waited on their father, who was giving the twins a ride to the Chandler house to explore the property. Having heard stories about the abandoned estate from their new friends, including tales of money hidden on the property and reports of the house being haunted, the twins wanted to see the home and property for themselves. The twins packed sandwiches, water, and small tools, such as a hammer, screwdriver and prybar, into their knapsacks and loaded them into their father's car. When they were finished exploring, the boys and Rusty would walk the thirty minutes home.

Johnathan dropped his twins off at the estate, wishing them luck in their undertaking. A discovery by Toby and Dexter would make the mansion even more interesting, proving at least one of the rumours about the old structure was true.

CHAPTER TWO

The boys and their dog approached the front door of the home, admiring the architecture of the building which had been constructed during the previous century. Dexter used the key his father

had given them to enter the house. The door was hard to pull open due to its rusty hinges, a clue as to how long it had been since anyone had entered the old estate. Upon entering the home, the boys found it lacking light and warmth. The grey clouds outside made the interior of the house dark and foreboding, a feeling intensified by the cobwebs and mice droppings everywhere. Rusty stuck close to the boys, unsure if he wanted to be here. The home had been abandoned since the last tenants had been escorted away in handcuffs by the police. These men would never set foot in the house again, their personal belongings still where they laid. The doors had been locked, the house sitting vacant until the boys' entry minutes earlier.

Toby, Dexter, and Rusty made their way through the different rooms, starting with the ground floor. The home was large, a parlor, kitchen, formal dining room, butler's pantry, and sitting room were found downstairs, while six bedrooms were located on the second floor. The master bedroom suite had large windows which overlooked the Detroit River. The boys discussed the home's past, and the beauty of the nature which surrounded the property. Finding a staircase going up from the second floor, the trio continued their exploration.

Upon entering the attic, Dexter told Toby the space was large enough to be another floor in the house, rather than just a small space generally used for storage. Wooden boxes of goods were stacked along the attics walls, with a random assortment of both large and small items littering the room, some dating back to the original tenants of the house. After the Chandler family sold their estate, the attic had been locked, with no access given to any of the tenants who had lived there afterwards. Dexter and Toby had been the first to enter the attic in a very long time. The boys were excited thinking about the treasures they would find in the boxes, their imaginations running wild.

A large window at one end of the room provided a stunning view of the surrounding area. The grounds around the Chandler Estate were heavily wooded, the large branches of the deciduous trees shading the river. The mid-June wildflowers bloomed in open areas below this once majestic home, offering a cascade of colours to an otherwise dreary day.

Dexter and Toby noticed a door on the opposite side of the room, and out of curiosity the boys went to investigate. The door opened easily, revealing a large walk-in closet. Inside was a tall chest of drawers against the wall, and a few stray boxes lay strewn about the floor of the room. Dexter noticed an anomaly in the wall, partially hidden by the chest of drawers. The boys moved the piece of furniture out of the way to get a better look at what was behind it.

A doorway had been built into the wall, hidden by a secret door, which originally must have been difficult to see. Now, the wood used to construct the door had rotted, leaving a hiding place no longer hidden. Dexter pulled back the remains of the decaying wood, revealing a hidden staircase leading downwards through a dark passage. With no light, the investigation of this passageway would have to wait for another day. Satisfied with the day's discoveries, the boys and Rusty headed toward home to share their adventure with their parents, who were looking forward to Dexter and Toby's report.

CHAPTER THREE

With a degree of excitement, Dexter and Toby captivated their mom and dad's attention at the dinner table, telling them of their day's events. The boys shared finding the hidden stairway in a

closet in the attic of the old house, but having no light to investigate where the passageway led. The boys mentioned all the boxes piled along the walls of the attic, wondering about what each contained peaking their imagination. Dexter and Toby told their parents they would like to return to the estate tomorrow to investigate the old home further.

The boys finished dinner and headed to the neighborhood park to join in a game of basketball with the friends they had made since moving into their neighborhood. Dexter and Toby agreed not to share any information about the mysteries unfolding at the Chandler Estate with their friends. While playing basketball, the kids jokingly asked Dexter and Toby if they had seen any ghosts at the old mansion. Numerous sightings of a young girl, dressed in white, standing in the attic window had been reported by passersby, the image of the girl seen from the roadway which crosses in front of the old mansion.

Most of the populace living in the area believed the Chandler Estate was haunted. The mystery was made more interesting when the boys' new friends told them another story. Two men, believed to have been murdered at the home, are reported to be seen walking the outside of the property on moonlit nights. The kids shared the men's graves had never been discovered, their souls never resting in peace. That evening, Dexter and Toby went to bed with these stories in mind, not believing them to be true.

The bright sun shone in through the boys' bedroom window. The windows had been left open, as the night had been warm. The wind carried the sound of barking dogs through the windows, waking Dexter and Toby early in the morning. Anticipation of the day's adventure dominated their thoughts. The boys had packed the supplies they thought they needed for today before going to bed last night. This morning they would grab some food and water to add to their bags. Too excited to eat breakfast, they left the house with Rusty in tow.

The sun was shining brightly, warm air ushering in a hot day. While walking to their destination, the boys could see the mansion, built from granite rock, sitting majestically on the distant hilltop. Dexter and Toby remarked that even from this distance, the old house had a certain mysticism about it.

The early morning was quiet, most people still asleep in their comfortable beds. Upon reaching the house, Dexter admired the porch which wrapped around the house. Intricate carvings in the wood which surrounded the house was a testament to the fine work of the craftsmen who built the porch long ago. Dexter used his key and the trio entered. The many windows in the building allowed light to illuminate the interior, unlike yesterday when the sky was full of clouds and rain. The boys chose to continue their search in the attic, the stairway being foremost in their thoughts.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dexter and Toby climbed the stairs to the attic, the old stairway creaking and moaning under the brothers' weight. Upon reaching the top step, the boys walked onto the open floor of the room. They headed to the open closet door, flashlights in hand. Dexter shone the beam of light down through the dark opening, an old stairway looming in front of him. The boys told Rusty to stay, as they began down the stairs. After descending three floors, there was a definitive change in the

passageway. The structure's wood appeared to be rotting in the dampness which permeated the area.

Toby, being the smaller of the twins, led the way. The decrepit stairway appeared to be leading below ground, carved out of the hilltop the Chandler Estate sat on. The walls surrounding Toby and Dexter were made of rock and dirt, as the stairs led downward, toward the river. Toby, who was a half of a flight ahead of Dexter, suddenly yelled out he had discovered a small opening. Dug out of the side of the hill, to the left of the stairway, Toby pulled himself through the gap, into a small enclosure.

The cave-like structure was large enough to seat eight people. Hapless souls must have hid here, waiting for a boat to arrive on the river below to take the escaped slaves across the river to Canada and freedom. In the corner of the newfound room, sat a pile of rusty metal; a set of discarded leg-irons from a desperate man or woman escaping their master. The boys left these artifacts where they lay, wanting to show their parents what they had discovered.

Toby and Dexter continued their journey downward, emerging outside through a small, well-concealed opening in the rock, facing the river. Dexter and Toby wondered how many slaves had earned their freedom this way. With this discovery, the boys had proved one of the stories about the old estate was true; the home was secretly used as a departure point for slaves from the United States seeking to cross the Detroit River to freedom in Canada.

Dexter and Toby looked up at the sheer face of rock between them and the top of the hill, where the mansion sat. The twins decided to follow the same route which had led them here back to the attic. After a twenty-minute struggle climbing upwards on the crumbling staircase, the boys reached the top unscathed. Rusty greeted Dexter and Toby with tail wagging, knowing he would soon be returning home, where he could sleep comfortably.

The trio walked home, where their parents were waiting to hear about where the old stairway led. The twins' parents were fairly sure they knew the answer to this puzzling event, solving one of the tales about the old mansion. Dexter and Toby's discovery would prove to be the first of more surprises to come.

CHAPTER FIVE

Dexter and Toby awoke to sunshine streaming in through their bedroom window. An alarm clock sitting on Dexter's nightstand suddenly rang, the sound reverberating throughout the bedroom. Today the twins were going camping with their new neighborhood friends, Casey and John. Casey's father was an outdoor enthusiast, who volunteered to take the boys on a wilderness camping, canoeing, and fishing trip.

Dexter and Toby's mother had awoken early, already cooking breakfast for the boys. She also wanted to make sure the twins remembered everything they needed for their trip. Rusty alerted Dexter and Toby to their friends' arrival, the sound of Casey's father's truck idling in the driveway breaking the silence of the morning air.

The boys kissed their mother good-bye, yelling at their sleeping father they would see him when they returned home. The twins greatly appreciated his help last night getting them ready for this trip.

Dexter and Toby loaded their belongings onto the trailer being pulled by the truck, which also held two canoes and all the camping gear. Minutes later, the truck was heading towards the Canadian border.

Casey's father had a favorite place to go in Canada, the province of Ontario which bordered the state of Michigan. When they arrived at the border, they were pulled in for a secondary inspection. Fishermen and hunters were known to try to carry prohibited firearms across the border. After a quick check of the vehicle and trailer, the border agents found nothing of interest, sending the group of Americans on their way.

Once entering Canada, Casey's father drove northeast to a secluded lake in Algonquin Park, a wilderness enclave of undeveloped land in Northeastern Ontario. The drive across rural Ontario was uneventful, the group pleased they would be getting to their destination in time to set up camp before darkness settled in, cloaking their campsite in inky darkness.

Turning off the paved road, a one-mile drive on a rough trail brought the truck and its occupants to their site. A lake of untold beauty, surrounded by a forest of trees with their majestic limbs reaching toward the heavens, greeted them. The boys pitched their tent in a clearing by the lakeshore, Casey's father unloading the rest of the supplies while the boys worked. He left the canoes on the trailer, but unloaded the firewood they had brought from home for the evening campfire.

The day was getting late, and darkness would soon be approaching. Hunger was gnawing at the campers' bellies. The boys started the campfire, with hot dogs and beans being on the menu for dinner. The fire was soon burning, the flames lighting up the darkening sky. A million stars magically began appearing in the night sky, as a feeling of peace and tranquillity washed over these visitors to paradise. Thankful for being given the privilege to enjoy the beauty, the campers realized this was a gift only nature could provide.

CHAPTER SIX

The campers sat quietly by the campfire, cooking hotdogs over the smouldering remains of the hot coals. Two cans of pork and beans sat on the hot end of the fire, and when they were ready they would be eaten with the hotdogs. The quiet evening was suddenly overtaken by the distinctive call of a loon, a bird whose summertime habitat brings them to the lakes of Northern Ontario. The loon's call is like no other, reverberating across the lake and into the forest. Once hearing this orchestra of sound coming from the loon, its song is trapped in one's mind forever.

The boys and their chaperone retired to bed shortly before midnight, the cool air blowing from the lake making them happy they had carried extra blankets with them. The boys snuggled under their covers in their tent and quickly fell into a peaceful sleep. Casey's father decided to sleep in the cab of the truck, as it was more comfortable than sleeping on the ground in a tent.

The first rays of warm sunshine against the canvas tent woke the boys, the light announcing the start of another day. The boys rose from their beds, making their way outside, stretching their aching muscles. The boys had slept on the hard ground all night, their sleeping bags and blankets offering little padding, leaving the young teens stiff and sore. Casey's dad had woken before dawn, relit the campfire, and was cooking bacon for breakfast in a cast iron frying pan. Eggs and bread would complete the first meal of the day.

During the lakeside breakfast, the campers discussed using the two canoes. The smaller boat would carry Casey and his dad, while the three other boys would use the larger of the canoes. They would all paddle to one of the many islands which dotted the lake, and fish for dinner from the rocky piece of land. The day was sunny and warm, perfect for being on the lake in a canoe. Cool air caressed the faces of the paddlers as they made their way to a rocky, wooded island in the distance, Dexter noticing the water in the lake was cold, deep, and clear.

Upon arrival, the campers found a small stretch of sandy shore, pulling their canoes up out of the water and retrieving their fishing supplies. Using dew worms brought from home, the hungry fish who made their home around the island couldn't resist the tasty morsels. Within a short amount of time, a fish buffet was obviously going to suffice for the evening's dinner.

The three boys in the larger canoe decided to head back to camp to clean and prepare the succulent flesh. John had been fishing since he was a toddler and was well-versed in gutting and filleting fish. Dexter and Toby were anxious to learn how to clean their catch from him. Casey's father was taking his son on a quick paddling trip on the other side of the island, to observe the wildlife living on or around the lake. Casey had been looking forward to spending some alone time with his dad, having discussed it with him before leaving on this trip. He was hoping to share this moment in nature with his father, who would act as a guide, narrating what Mother Nature created in front of them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The water on the lake was sparkling, the bright sunshine reflecting off its calm surface. The two canoes split up upon leaving the island, heading to their prearranged destinations. Casey's father guided his canoe to the east end of the lake, wanting to paddle the shoreline to a wetlands area, where he knew a variety of species of wildlife made their homes.

The canoe slid effortlessly through the calm water. A young deer drinking from the lake was the duo's first encounter with life in this wilderness enclave. As they slid past, she raised her head, glancing at the motion of the canoe. Unafraid, the animal went back to drinking the lake water. Casey's father motioned to Casey to look skyward, at a majestic bald eagle circling above, looking for food to fill its hungry stomach.

As the canoe moved down the shoreline, the water became shallower, with weeds and lily pads dominating the area. Frogs and turtles could be seen up out of the water, basking in the sunshine. Geese and ducks were abundant, with noisy red-wing blackbirds claiming their spots on the tops of the cattails in the swamp. This end of the lake housed a large beaver colony, the dam covering an area of a thousand feet. The earthen banks of the barrier slithered through the swamp, like a serpent heading home with a full belly.

The duo beached their canoe on the dam and carefully exited the craft. The father and his son walked along the top of the dam, enjoying the scenery of the industrious animals' territory. The vast amount of water needed for the beavers' colony had killed numerous large trees, leaving valuable habitat for a new range of species which had moved into the resulting swamp, calling it home. Insects were abundant, as were amphibians, who multiplied rapidly in this pristine sanctuary of life.

Casey and his dad were happy with what they had seen today and decided to return to camp. In the distance, dark clouds could be seen rolling across the blue sky, and the sound of rumbling thunder could be heard. The young boy and his father left the beaver dam, hoping to beat the impending threat of a storm. On their way back to camp, Casey pointed out an adult loon carrying her baby on its back to his father. This was a mode of transportation for her young, not common in the waterfowl world.

The father and son reached camp without incident, the storm staying in the distance. They beached their boat, pulling beside the other canoe up on the grassy shoreline. The other boys in the group proudly showed off the meat they had cleaned from the fish. Everyone would enjoy one more night of camping, eating the fish they had caught for dinner. This trip was short because Casey's dad had to return to work. Sitting around the campfire that evening, the group talked about returning to this piece of paradise, a place reserved for the stars, the moon, the sun, and the wildlife, as well as the occasional humans visiting.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The following morning, the bright sunshine woke the boys early. The campers ate the leftover fish from dinner the night before for breakfast, a short time later their camp was dismantled. The group's personal belongings and camping gear were loaded onto Casey's father's truck and trailer for the journey home. The vehicle slowly made its way down the unserviced road toward the highway, large, hard-packed ruts making the truck bounce back and forth violently. Large tree limbs brushed the exterior of the truck as it drove on the narrow parts of the roadway. After a gruelling twenty minutes, the group reached the paved road home and were safely on their way to the border.

Before reaching the US border, Casey's father had a surprise for the boys, a roadside attraction featuring a black bear kept in a cage. The owner had rescued the cub, after its mother had been hit by a car. He nurtured the baby bear, feeding it milk from a bottle, until it was old enough to eat solid food. As the bear matured, it became more aggressive, forcing the owner to hire a friend to build a large steel cage, where the now mature animal lived. A star was born, a bear called Smokey, which the man charged a dollar per person to view.

The boys stared at the animal, having never seen a bear up close, with only the cage and a buffer zone of a few feet between them. All four were glad they had not encountered such a predator while camping at the lake. The boys loaded up on potato chips and pop before leaving the man's store and tourist attraction to continue the drive home. Reaching the US border, the group encountered no delays and were soon pulling into the driveway of Dexter and Toby's house.

Hearing the truck pull into the driveway, the twins' parents went outside to greet their children. After welcoming the rest of the group home, the boys' parents helped retrieve their children's belongings from the trailer. Saying goodbye, Casey and his father pulled away to drop off John, their last stop before finally arriving home.

Dexter and Toby wiled away the rest of the afternoon at home. At dinner, their father told the boys he had taken his car in for an oil change. While at the garage, the old timer who ran it told him a rumour about the stately home he had purchased. Supposedly, there were two men buried in the basement of the Chandler Estate. These men were said to have been killed over a gambling dispute during the

home's seedier past. The suspects in the murder had admitted to playing cards with the missing men, but swore the pair had left happy after a night of festive partying. The men had never been found, adding to the mystery of the old mansion.

Their interest piqued, Dexter and Toby told their father an investigation was in order. Dexter and his brother wanted to head back to the old estate tomorrow, hoping to find something of interest buried under the cellar floor.

CHAPTER NINE

Loud birdsong drifted in through the open windows of Dexter and Toby's bedroom, waking the boys. The morning sun was making its way over the horizon, as the twins climbed out of bed. They joined their mother, who was downstairs in the kitchen preparing breakfast. After eating eggs and toast, Toby and Dexter's dad gave them a ride to the old house. They had loaded a pickaxe and two shovels into their father's pickup truck, planning to dig up the basement floor to see what they could find. Rumors from the community that two bodies were buried there had sparked Dexter and Toby's interest to investigate further.

The truck maneuvered its way up the pothole infected driveway to the house at the top of the hill. The Chandler Estate looked forsaken and forlorn, as dark rain clouds filled the sky, making the old house look like a shadow sitting in the darkness. The boys unloaded their tools and told their father good-bye. They walked toward the front door of the house, now unsure if they wanted to undertake this venture.

Before leaving, the boy's father told them at the first sign of anything suspicious while digging, they were to stop their search and report the discovery to him. Dexter and Toby walked down the cellar steps, each carrying a lantern into the windowless enclave. Shelves of goods from the home's earlier days lined the back wall of the basement. The twins shone their lanterns around the dark space looking for any clues or anomalies in the floor.

The pair moved to the corner of the basement, where a door led outside. Over the years, water had seeped under the door from heavy rainstorms and melting snow, altering the dirt floor of the basement. Dexter suddenly shouted out in surprise to Toby. Protruding from the dirt, he could see a swatch of denim fabric. Digging carefully around the exposed material, the boys could discern it was the sleeve of a jacket. Cautiously continuing to remove dirt, they soon discovered it was attached to a skeleton.

Shaken by this discovery, Dexter and Toby stopped what they were doing and immediately left the basement. They left the house at once, wanting to find their father. Authorities were called and within a few hours, the police dug up the skeletal remains of the two missing men, who had been lying under the basement dirt for thirty years. Dexter and Toby became the talk of the town; their picture was in the newspaper, and they were given credit for solving this longtime mystery, which had baffled local authorities.

Lying in their bedroom a few nights later, a warm breeze blew in through the open windows. The sky was full of twinkling stars, with a full moon illuminating the countryside. Dexter and Toby were happy they had moved out of New York City and settled into this smaller town, where the boys knew

more adventures awaited them. With that last thought in their minds, the twins drifted off into a peaceful sleep until the following morning.

CHAPTER TEN

Dexter and Toby were awakened by the sound of loud thunder. The wind was blowing hard, banging large tree branches against the house, with heavy, pounding rain falling on the roof. The boys pulled themselves out of bed, got dressed, and walked downstairs to the kitchen, where their mother was cooking breakfast. Within minutes, two plates of scrambled eggs and bacon were sitting in front of the twins, waiting to be eaten.

While they were eating, the storm passed, leaving only a calm breeze and the sound of thunder in the distance. Dexter and Toby finished eating, said goodbye to their mother, and walked to the outside shed to retrieve their bikes. The twins had decided to ride their bikes to the Chandler Estate today, something their parents had agreed to. As the boys rode away, they said goodbye to Rusty, who was staying home for the day. They intended to continue investigating the home, not needing to carry anything with them today, except for a few items in their backpacks.

As the boys peddled up the hill to the house, large, dark storm clouds began filling the once blue sky. Reaching the top, they placed their bikes in the shed, just in case it rained again. Entering the house through the back door, the boys began exploring. When the twins had not returned home by dinner time, his parents began to worry. Their father, Johnathan, decided to drive up to the house and see if he could find them.

The twin's bikes were found by the boy's father, still in the shed, but there was no trace of Dexter or Toby. Returning home, their father immediately called the police, who began searching for the missing pair. After a fruitless search, which lasted for over a week, the boys' parents knew in their hearts their children would never be found, the locals attributing their disappearance to the house and its history.

The family's plans for the mansion changed, with renovations of the estate no longer being in their future. The twins' mother and father were moving back to New York, hoping it would ease their grief over the loss of their children. The couple decided to donate the valuable piece of property to the town, but only if the old mansion was used as fuel for a fire department training exercise. Once the building had burned and been demolished, the land would be transformed into a beautiful park overlooking the Detroit River. The park was named after the two boys, whose whereabouts remain a mystery to this day. There now stands a plaque honouring the history of the home which once stood there, a home many people hoped to forget.

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