

## CHRISTMAS AT THE LAKE

Anticipation mounted as the last load of the Johnson family's belongings were moved from the house to their SUV. The two children sitting in the back of the vehicle were excited about the coming week. The kids' winter break meant no school for an extended period of time, allowing the family to leave for Grandpa Ray's cabin. Built by himself and his wife during the early part of their marriage, the cottage still stood tall in the forest.

A two-hour drive from the Johnson home, the SUV pulled off the road into a parking lot, where the vehicle would be left. From here, it was a twenty-minute walk to the lake the cabin sat on. The Johnson family hiked to the property, with the family dog, Harvey, in tow. This is where they planned to spend a week, which would include Christmas.

Mr. Johnson retrieved the snowmobile and sled from the shed, which he used to transport the supplies from the SUV to the cabin. Mrs. Johnson and the children entered the building, where she started a fire in the woodstove to warm the structure. Returning with his second load, Mr. Johnson's work was finished; all of the family's belongings were safely inside the cabin and shed.

Harvey loved coming here, being free from any type of restraint was what the dog loved best. He relished running in the snow, roaming and exploring the area. If he happened upon a small mammal, a chase usually ensued, with Harvey never being the victor.

The afternoon sun was waning by the time the family finished what needed to be done for their week-long stay. The sunset was spectacular, the red sky promising another clear day tomorrow. Mr. Johnson, whose father owned the cabin, told his wife and children Harvey needed to be kept inside the cabin after dusk. He had seen wolf tracks on the property coming off the lake, and knew their pet's life would be in danger if he was confronted by wolves. The larger predators would kill and eat the small dog, showing no mercy.

The following morning, the family was able to watch the wolf pack cross the lake through the large bay window, using binoculars. After breakfast, Mr. Johnson took his children on the snowmobile to find a Christmas tree. His wife stayed home to prepare a spot in the cabin to set up the tree and to retrieve the ornaments and lights from the closet.

Mr. Johnson, loved spending time with his two children, Chrissy and Alex, the couple's ten-year-old twins. The kids were adventurous and enjoyed all sorts of outdoor activities during the winter, including finding the right Christmas tree. Selecting the perfect tree was not always easy, as the two siblings were often disagreeable. The children loved riding on the snowmobile, with their father driving full throttle across the vast expanse of the lake. This gave Alex and Chrissy an exhilarating, but dangerous, ride.

Mr. Johnson powered his snowmobile toward a thicket of small evergreen trees. After a short search and brief discussion, the kids decided on a six-foot tall pine tree. The children liked the long needles and the tree's bushy appearance. Mr. Johnson used a hand saw to cut the tree from its base and attached it to the snowmobile with a rope. The trio dragged the evergreen back to the cabin, with the kids brushing the snow from the tree, after their dad leaned it up against the cabin's exterior wall.

After the family ate lunch, they brought the tree inside and placed it in the stand. Mrs. Johnson declared the shape of the tree to be perfect, as they began stringing the lights on it. As the family decorated the Christmas tree, Mr. Johnson noticed the wind blowing through the open branches of the hardwood trees. He walked to the front of the cabin, opening the door to a whirlwind of blowing snow. He hoped the snow would not last long, as storms in this area were known to drop large amounts of snow in a short time, paralyzing the people staying in homes near the lake.

The family enjoyed the comfort in the cabin, the home being warm and safe from the elements of nature. The storm raged all night, but was more wind than snow. In the morning, an accumulation of only six inches refreshed the landscape. A bright sun and clear blue sky greeted the family upon awakening. After spending an hour frolicking in the fresh snowfall, the children agreed to stay in the cabin while their parents went exploring on the snowmobile.

As the couple headed across the lake, the sun shone down brightly upon the thick blanket of white which covered the ice. Following the tracks of another snow machine, they were led to a forested area. They waved at their neighbors, who were cutting a Christmas tree of their own, before continuing on their way.

The lake was quiet, with no other human activity observed on their outing. However, signs of nature were abundant, with the Johnsons seeing two raptors, an eagle and a hawk, flying above the scenery in search of an easy meal. A fox watched from the shoreline, waiting for their noisy piece of mechanical equipment to pass by before continuing on its way.

The Johnsons returned to their cabin, to find their waiting children happily playing a board game. The rest of the family's stay at the cabin was beautiful. They enjoyed their Christmas in a remote, wilderness setting, where their loving bond grew even stronger.

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