

## Mystery Lake

Bob pulled into the driveway and turned off the ignition. The sounds of gentle snoring filled his ears. His son and daughter were asleep in the back seat. He let them be as he opened the car door and stepped out.

It didn't take him long to recognize the woman sitting on the veranda. She drank from a glass and smoked a cigarette. Ellie McNamara whose hair had turned white but he could see that she hadn't changed her habits. Still fond of her Scotch whisky and her ciggies.

Ellie stubbed the cigarette and approached him with a broad smile.

She said, "There you are Bob. Looking good. I was glad when you called. I went through the house with the vacuum, washed the sheets, picked up a few groceries. Chicken pies, veggies, cereal and milk."

"That's great, Ellie. Haven't kicked the cigarette habit? Not very good, Ellie. Not very good. Shouldn't you be trying harder?"

"Honest, Bob, I have cut down. I don't smoke inside but you might find the air a bit stale. I opened the windows but the place has been closed up since last fall.

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Aren't you nervous about bring the kids back after what happened to their mother?"

Bob said, "I see where you are coming from, Ellie. The way I see it, they have no bad memories. I want them to know this summer home where I was happy as a kid, a place where we have our roots."

"Okay, kid, sounds reasonable. Don't forget I can look after the kids. You might want to look up some of your old pals. Listen, I need to be on my way. See you soon."

Ellie waved as she walked away. She was a bit of a character, an Irisher who believed she had second sight. She boasted that was because she was the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter. At least, that was the belief back in County Kerry, Ireland, where her mother had been born.

The car door swung open and Sally and Jimmy jumped to the ground. Sally had just turned eight and Jimmy would be three in a couple of months. Their cheeks were flushed from sleep but their eyes were full of excitement. Sally shouted out with glee, "Hey, we're here, we're here. I can see the lake."

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She started to run and Bob took Jimmy's hand and hurried after her.

"Sally, Sally, slow down. Wait for us. You are not allowed to go near the water without me." said Bob.

Sally could hardly contain herself and chubby little Jimmy tried to keep up with her. He hung on to Bob's hand and struggled along on his short little legs, huffing and puffing. Finally, Bob picked him up and they got through the long grass that was sadly in need of mowing. Bob could see his work for the next few weeks was cut out for him. The place showed signs of neglect.

Not that Sally or Jimmy cared. They squealed with delight when they reached the dock. They didn't care about the worn uneven planks that needed replacing. Sally started skimming pebbles across the water. She was surprised to see that every third pebble drifted back towards the dock. When she questioned Bob, he said that he had no idea why this was happening.

"Maybe it's because the dock is in bad shape. I used to catch fish here. I threw them back. They were tiny and not worth keeping. Time to eat. Let's see what Ellie left for us."

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The kids went early to bed and soon fell asleep. They were exhausted after the journey and the excitement of the day. Bob looked down at his slumbering children and envied their peaceful dreams. He was still bitter from the loss of his young wife with whom he had been deeply in love. Sally missed her mother and was sad for a while. Bob told her that God loved her mother and wanted her in Heaven. He assured Sally that one day God would see that they would all be together again. Looking down at Sally as she slept, Bob perceived that her hands were folded in prayer. Bob did not believe this for he thought indeed it was a cruel God to rob a family of a young wife and mother. Jimmy never really known his mother but Sally seemed to hope for some kind of reunion.

Bob sat outside and looked down at the lake shining in the moonlight. He recalled that last evening when he watched Alice walk down from the cottage, leaving Ellie in charge of her sleeping children.

The happy crowd by the lake were glad to see her and before long, Alice was leading them in song. She loved singer Harry Chaplin and his song, T taxi.

“It was raining hard in Frisco...”

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The whole gang joined in and they sang the song right through. Bob never had loved Alice more than when he watched her sing that song, her blonde pony tail swinging and her hips swaying with the music. Her pals cheered her on. It was late when the party broke up and Bob and Alice made their way to the cottage. Ellie left and the couple staggered upstairs and fell into bed.

Bob woke to the sound of Ellie's voice. "Bob, wake up, wake up. I can't find Alice. The door was unlocked so I let myself in. Jimmy is hungry. Crying his poor little eyes out. I'm warming his bottle. I sense something is horribly wrong."

Bob struggled into his jeans and ran down to the dock. The red painted canoe was nowhere to be seen. A blue and white striped beach towel lay on a heap on the dock. He shook it and Alice's locket fell on the dock. Alice's body was never found. Someone threw the locket in the bedroom bureau drawer and so the years passed.

Now Bob was sleeping in that same bedroom when things started to happen. Bob awakened to a bumping sound. He turned on the light and watched a bump under the rug. The bump kept moving towards the bureau. Then it seemed to melt

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into the floor. A few days later, Bob had the same experience in the middle of the night.

He got to thinking about Ellie McNamara who claimed to know about things that went bump in the night. So he got in touch Ellie was more than happy to offer her help.

“Put the kettle on. I ‘ll bring the tea leaves,” she said before hanging up the phone.

She poured him a good strong cup and told him to drink up.

“Bob, this takes some pandering. Somehow the tea leaves are telling me that Alice knows that her children are in the house. She wants some part of them, some memory she can keep forever. Can you think of any other signs?”

Bob knitted his eyebrows and said, “Well, the kids still are throwing stones down by the dock. The third one always jumps back as if it were trying to get back on the dock.”

“Well, well, well,” said Ellie with a wise shake of her head. “Now what did you find on the dock after Alice went missing?”

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“I remember a towel and a locket. it contained pictures of our kids.”

“Ah-ha. We need to find the locket. How about the top drawer of the bureau?”

Ellie was dead right. She wasn't the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter for nothing. Bob found the locket in the top drawer and together they walked to the dock. Bob took the locket and threw it far out in the lake. There was a splash and then the locket sank to the bottom.

There were no more stones jumping backwards and no more bumpy things moving under the bedroom carpet. Ellie and Bob never breathed a word of these happenings because they were convinced that nobody would believe them.