

# 1

A breeze ruffled the surface of the pond, creating a field of sparkling water. The early April day was cool and windy but the stand of trees nearby offered some protection from the chill air. Guy Bessette followed the trail to the edge of the pond. He glanced over his shoulder to make sure Tommy was keeping pace with him. Guy carried two fishing rods, his well-used one and a smaller one he had purchased for the boy.

Guy smiled to himself and shook his head. Here he was, a single guy, didn't even have a girlfriend, yet he was playing dad to Tommy Evans. When Tommy's mother had fallen ill more than a year ago, Tommy had taken to hanging around Guy's auto shop in the village. It's funny, Guy thought, I've had more fun doing things with Tommy than I ever had when I was a kid myself.

"Hurry up, Tommy. You've got the bait, right?"

"Yup," Tommy replied, his shorter legs moving fast to keep up with Guy's stride.

"We couldn't have picked a better day. It's still cool. Best time of year to catch trout."

Tommy looked at him dubiously. "You sure we'll catch something?"

"Well . . ." Guy paused at the water's edge. "I can't be sure, but this is perfect weather for brook trout. I've caught 'em here before. One time I even got a bass. This is probably our best chance before the water gets too warm."

"Why's that?" Tommy asked.

"Cause brook trout like cold water, maybe around sixty degrees. They go deeper if the water gets too warm." Guy dropped his backpack on the sandy soil. He had prepared sandwiches and iced tea for their lunch. Tommy's mother, Karen, looked relieved when Guy had suggested he and Tommy spend Saturday fishing. She was back

on her feet now, healthy and getting strong, but Guy suspected she didn't yet have the energy to keep a young rambunctious boy entertained.

"Pass me that can of worms, will ya?" Guy asked.

"Sure." Tommy giggled as he looked into the can of squirmy creatures.

"Now, here's what we do. We put one of these little guys on the end of our hook, like this . . ."

"Can I do that?"

"Okay." Guy held out the end of the line for Tommy. "It's all yours. I'll hold the hook and you can do the bait."

Tommy reached in and grasped a slippery worm. He hesitated and looked up at Guy. "Does this hurt them?" he asked seriously.

"I never really thought about it." Guy's brow furrowed. "I guess it might."

Tommy let the worm drop back into the can. "Maybe we can use something else?"

Guy sighed. "Well, I have some lures but I didn't bring 'em today. I've always used worms 'cause they're cheap and they work good." Tommy still didn't look convinced. "Tell you what. I understand how you feel. Next time we come out here, I'll bring my best lures that the fish might like just as much as worms."

"Okay," Tommy replied regretfully. "I can do this." Concentrating, he carefully pushed the hook into the worm. "There," he grimaced, "I did it."

"Okay. You did good. Now, we'll weigh down this line and you stand back a little. You want to swing it out like this." Guy demonstrated and then reeled in the fishing line. "Now you give it a try."

Tommy swung his rod and watched as the weight plopped the line into the water. "I didn't get it out as far as you."

“That’s all right. You did fine.” Guy eyed the short wooden pier with a rowboat tied to the side. “Tell you what, if we don’t get any nibbles soon, we can move over to the end of the pier and try there.”

“Can we go out in that boat?” Tommy asked hopefully.

“Maybe. We’ll see. The man who rents them isn’t here. And it’s a little early in the season. The other boats are in the boathouse over on the other side of the pond.”

“I’ve never been in a boat before,” Tommy remarked wistfully.

Guy smiled. “Really? Well, it’s high time then. If we can’t do it today, I will definitely take you on a boat ride. You can help me row and we can go out to that little island out there.” Guy nodded in the direction of the small parcel of land covered with trees in the middle of the pond.

“I wanna play pirates when we’re in the boat.” Tommy gazed at the island.

“What’s out there anyway?”

“Not much. Just some trees and things.”

“Can we park our boat and walk around?”

“Sure.”

“Have you ever gone out to the island?”

“Uh . . .” Guy thought a moment. “No. I don’t think I have. I’ve been in these boats before but I never stopped there. It’ll be a first for me too.”

The man and the boy stood patiently, holding their rods for several minutes. Guy remembered he had brought two small folding chairs, which were still in the back of his car.

“Guy?” Tommy asked.

“Yes?”

“I have to . . . I have to go.”

“Ah. Okay.” Guy nodded. “Tell you what. Reel in your line and we’ll go into the woods a bit. Then I want to go back to the car to get us those two folding chairs.”

“I can go by myself,” Tommy insisted.

“I know you can. But I don’t think it’s a good idea to go into the woods alone. I won’t look. I’ll just stay close. All right?”

“Okay.” Tommy sighed. Guy was beginning to sound just like his mother.

Guy followed the boy into the stand of trees behind them. Tommy took a meandering pathway searching for just the right spot. Finally, he reached a tree trunk that met with his approval and turned, looking over his shoulder at Guy.

“Okay. I’m not looking.” Guy turned his back, waiting for Tommy to give him an all clear. After a minute Guy shoved his hands in the pockets of his jacket. This was taking a while. Finally, he said, “You done, Tommy?”

“Yup.”

Guy heard the sound of a zipper and then quiet. Then the rustling of leaves.

“Hey,” Tommy shouted. “Look what I found!”

Guy turned around. Tommy appeared from behind a bush holding a woman’s shoe, high-heeled and black. Guy reached out and took the shoe from the boy’s hand.

“Where did you find this?” he demanded. The shoe looked almost brand new.

“Over there.” Tommy pointed at a spot near a small clearing. “I think it belongs to that lady.”

“Lady?” A chill ran up Guy’s spine. “What lady?”

“Shhh. I think she’s sleeping.”

The hairs on the back of Guy’s neck stood at attention. “Stay right here, Tommy. Don’t move,” he ordered.

Guy stepped slowly into the clearing and turned in a circle, carefully scanning the underbrush. Something colorful caught his eye. A bright splash of color. He walked forward a few steps and pushed back the branches of a thick bush. The woman lay on her side as if asleep. Her eyes were closed. A dark purple mark encircled her neck.