

CHAPTER TWO

The boy had been good. He had learned to paddle a canoe and read a compass. He had finally begun to swim underwater and even jumped off the high board. Roger, a boy from his cabin, had dared him, and he'd gone and done it.

When they made their Sunday night calls home the boy had told his mother "It wasn't that scary," and she laughed and said she was sending him a box with an extra sweatshirt and some snickerdoodles. He didn't tell her how he had cried in back of the outhouse when another boy named Jason called him Weenie Sucker. Or how he had wet his sleeping bag, a little.

When his father had gotten on the line the boy told him they made a fire every night and that he was learning to use an axe. And how, when he chopped through a big log, Michael, one of the counselors, said he must be eating his Wheaties. And that, when they played baseball, he had gotten on base twice, but once was on a walk.

Someone behind him started poking him in the back, but the boy had stayed on the line, and when his mother got on again he told her he was making lanyards. Then he got a real hard poke, and the boy knew he had to get off the phone, so he never got to talk to his sister. Besides, it was Sunday, and Sunday nights sometimes Melissa worked at the Dairy Queen.

Hers was the only lanyard he'd finished. He'd thought he'd have the one for his mother, done too, but it was only half-way finished. He'd need to work on it before school started because then he'd have homework and Cub Scouts and maybe junior Safety Patrol if he got picked and, when he turned ten in November, maybe he'd have to start studying to be an altar boy like his cousin Steve.

The lanyards lay twisted together in the snickerdoodle box his mother had sent. He'd packed the box in his trunk, and now it was next to his duffle bag on the porch of Pinecone Lodge, where the camp director had his office. The boy sat beside the desk of Miss Sally, the camp's assistant director.

"I'll try again, okay?" she said and reached for the telephone, smiling at him while she dialed—the boy could hear it ringing. Miss Sally gave her head a little twitch to as if to say, "Isn't that the darndest thing?" and hung up. "Still no answer . . . got to mean they're on their way. Maybe a little car trouble or something."

The boy nodded.

"Want a Coke? I bet a nice Coke would taste real good about now."

"I'm cold."

"Oh," She got up and started rummaging around in the Lost and Found trunk. "Good heavens, I think some of you boys should get locked up in the caboose and the key thrown away, the way you lose things." She held up a Miami University sweatshirt. "Look at this, will you? Practically brand new. Maybe a little big for you, but it's just 'til your parents get here."

"My Mom sent me a new sweatshirt. It's in my trunk."

"Well, then why don't you get it? I'll bet she'll be so happy to see you wearing it."

On the porch, the boy dug beneath his muddy jeans, smelly underwear and T-shirts. The sweatshirt was plain gray. He'd secretly hoped that his mother would send him a Reds or Bengals one, but he knew those were expensive and going to sleep away camp had cost a lot. His sister had never gone. Not ever.

When he stuck his head in it, the sweatshirt still smelled new, and when his head popped out, the moon looked like a scoop of vanilla ice cream sitting on a pine tree.

He went inside and Miss Sally had two cans of Coke on her desk, one beside the chair where he'd been waiting.

"Hungry?" she asked.

"Not really."

"Well, then, drink your Coke. I'll be back in a jiff."

She went into the office of the camp director and the boy heard their voices. Not what they were saying like when his mother and father screamed at each other, but he could tell something was up.

The camp director came out with Miss Sally. He was a big man, much bigger than the boy's father. Although his real name was Mr. Makowski, everyone called him Mr. Mac—at night, in their cabin, the older boys would talk about how Mr. Mac "was doing it" with Miss Sally.

"So, Champ," he said to the boy. "Looks like you're the last."

The boy said nothing. It was obvious he was the last. He wondered if he should stand up. At St. Dominic's, children always had to stand when speaking with an adult—it was a rule.

"Well, not to worry . . . there's probably been a little bit of confusion or something."

Behind Mr. Mac, Miss Sally was smiling and nodding her head.

"Bet you can't guess how many brothers and sisters I have," Mr. Mac said.

"I don't know."

"Ten! Would you believe it? . . . ten brothers and sisters. That's a lot, isn't it?"

The boy nodded. "I only have one . . . my sister."

"Well, I have ten. When I was little we would troop into church they would call us the Marching Makowskis."

“My Dad has only one, my aunt Toni. But my mom has a lot. She has six. Four sisters and two brothers.”

“Well, that *is* quite a few. Not ten, but still quite a few.” The camp director looked at the piece of paper he was holding. “Do you know where any of your mother or father’s brothers and sisters live?”—Mr. Mac glanced at the paper again—“anyone near you in Steubenville?”

“My uncle Bill and my aunt Mary Katherine live in Youngstown, but Uncle Pat lives in Steubenville.”

“Would you know your Uncle Pat’s last name?”

“Sullivan.”

The camp director looked surprised. “Your uncle is Pat Sullivan? Played for Ohio State?”

“I think he was the quarterback.” The boy knew his uncle had played football, just as he knew that he was now a “big deal” lawyer, at least that’s what the boy’s father called him—the boy’s father didn’t like his uncle very much. But the boy loved him. Whatever his father expected from the boy felt vague and confusing, but with Uncle Pat, the boy knew exactly what he was supposed to do. Walk like his uncle. Talk like him—be polite, look people in the eye, shake their hands, smile. And always act like he knew what he was doing.

“My Uncle Pat’s my godfather. I’m named for him. His full name is Patrick Douglas Sullivan.”

“You don’t say,” the camp director put his papers back into his pocket and went into his office.

The room beyond that was where the camp director slept, and after Mr. Mac called the boy’s uncle, he persuaded the boy to have some spaghetti back there with himself and Miss

Sally. The boy said he wasn't hungry, but the camp director repeated the suggestion, so the boy agreed. He was eating at a small table with Mr. Mac and Miss Sally when he heard a dog bark Sasha! His uncle had brought his black lab, Sasha.

"Thinks he's a fuckin' Kennedy," the boy had heard his father say about the way Uncle Pat even brought Sasha to work. But the boy thought it was cool. He loved Sasha almost as much as he loved his uncle.

While Mr. Mac and his uncle talked in the camp office, the boy petted the dog and let her lick traces of spaghetti from his mouth, and then his uncle came out. "Hey, Dougie, let's get this show on the road," and they all went onto the porch, where his uncle hoisted the boy's trunk onto his shoulder and carried it down the stairs. And then he took the boy's duffle bag from Mr. Mac and tossed it, too, into his old Volvo, telling the boy to "climb in and buckle up." And then, from the "shotgun seat," the boy watched his uncle shake hands with Miss Sally and Mr. Mac.

As he drove out of the camp, Uncle Pat started telling the boy how his Aunt Ginny had wanted to come and get him, too, but she couldn't, because his cousin Molly was sick with "some sort of stomach thing" and that his Aunt Ginny thought the boy's other cousins, Steven and Pete might be getting it, too.

"Where are my Mom and Dad?" the boy asked. He was worried that his sister had busted up the car. She'd just gotten her license, and his father said she drove like "She's too dumb to work a turn signal, let alone read a speedometer." Plus, all summer she'd been running around with Joey Kolpecki, who was only in a "tech" program at school and maybe she'd gotten into some sort of trouble with Joey—Joey Kolpecki was one of the things the boy had heard his parents argue about. They argued about other things, too, but Joey was the only one the boy understood.

“Your folks are tied up a bit. They’re fine . . . ,” Uncle Pat said. “They thought it might be best if you spent the night with me and Aunt Ginny. How does that sound?” On the backseat Sasha was making a play-growl sound and shaking something in her mouth. “Hey, give me that,” the boy’s uncle said and reached over the backseat to grab a stuffed animal from the dog. “Here,” he said and flipped the stuffed toy onto the boy’s lap.

It was Fred, the boy’s stuffed penguin. Fred was gooey and smelly with dog slobber, but the boy didn’t care. He’d missed Fred while he was at camp.

He was wearing shorts and his legs were cold, so he drew his knees up to his chest and stretched his new sweatshirt over them, crushing Fred to his heart. Out the window, he could see nothing but treetops and the moon. He felt sleepy. And not afraid.

