

GRENNELL

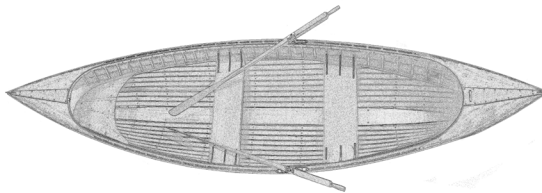
1912

A NOVEL



1912

Lynn E. McElfresh



**River Skiff Press
Grenell Island, NY**

This is a work of fiction.
While real characters from history are represented,
their appearance, personalities, mannerisms,
and dialogue are imagined.

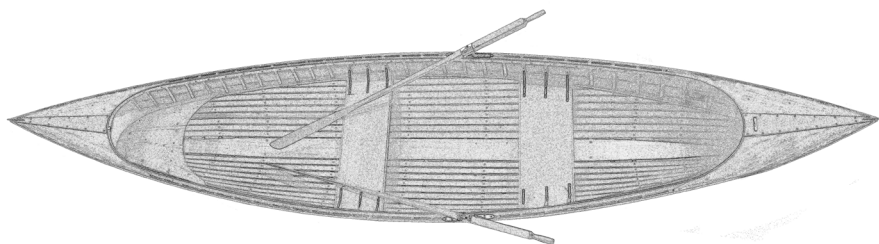
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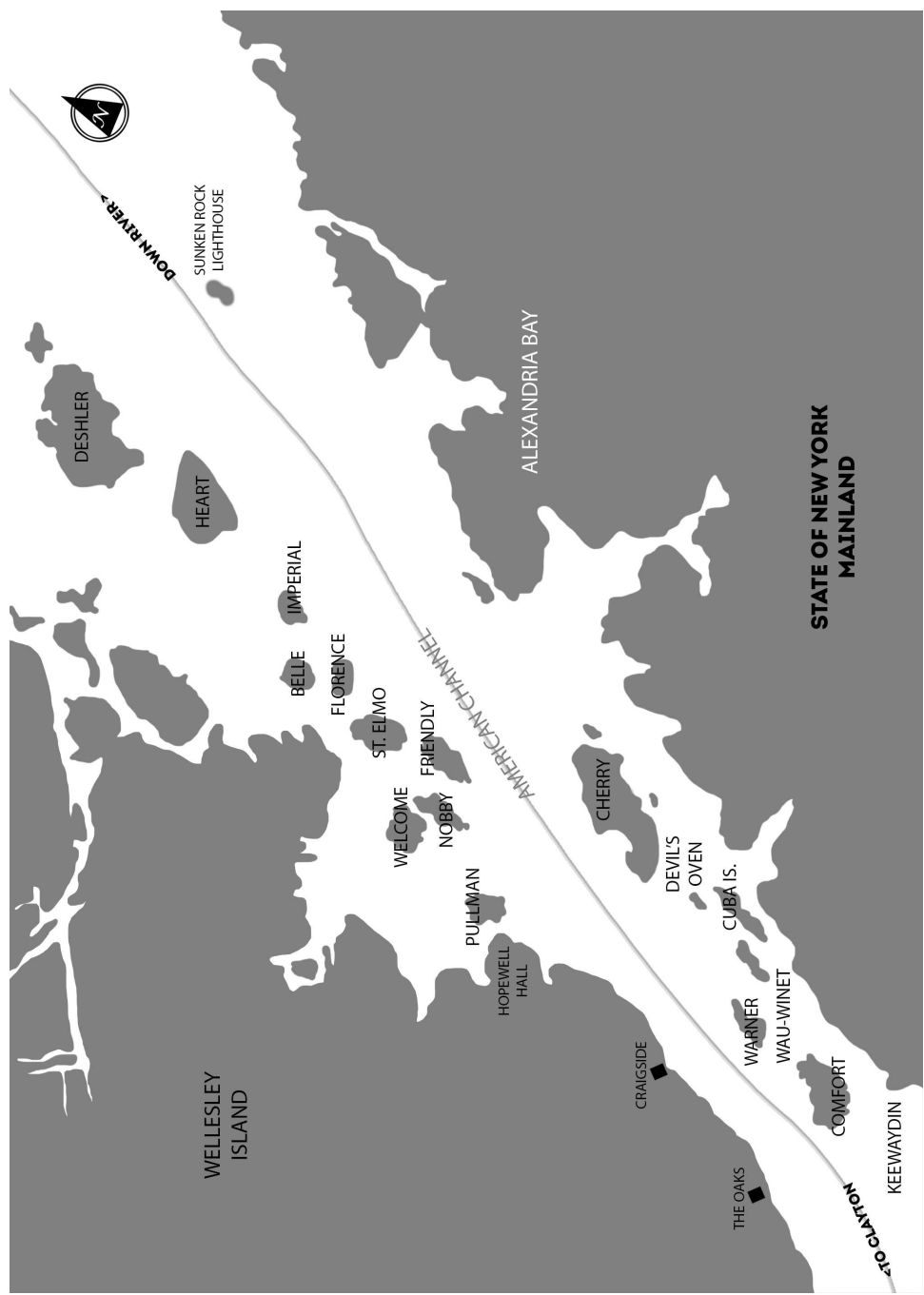


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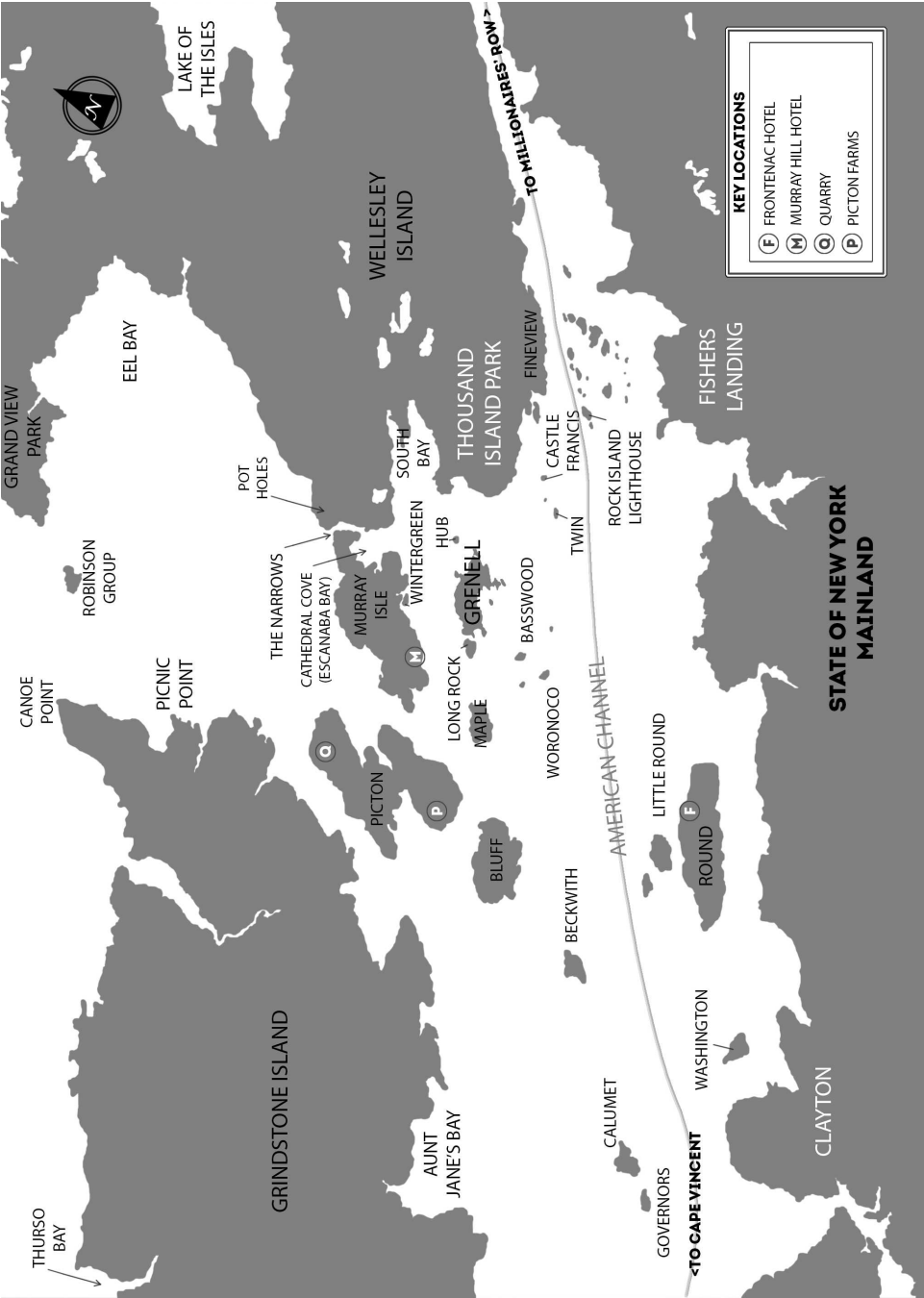
To Mabelle Roberts Ogden, or Grandmother Ogden as you were known to our generation. I remember your stories of witnessing the Thousand Island Park fire from Prof. Pabst's launch. Your love of island life, books, and poetry still inspires me.



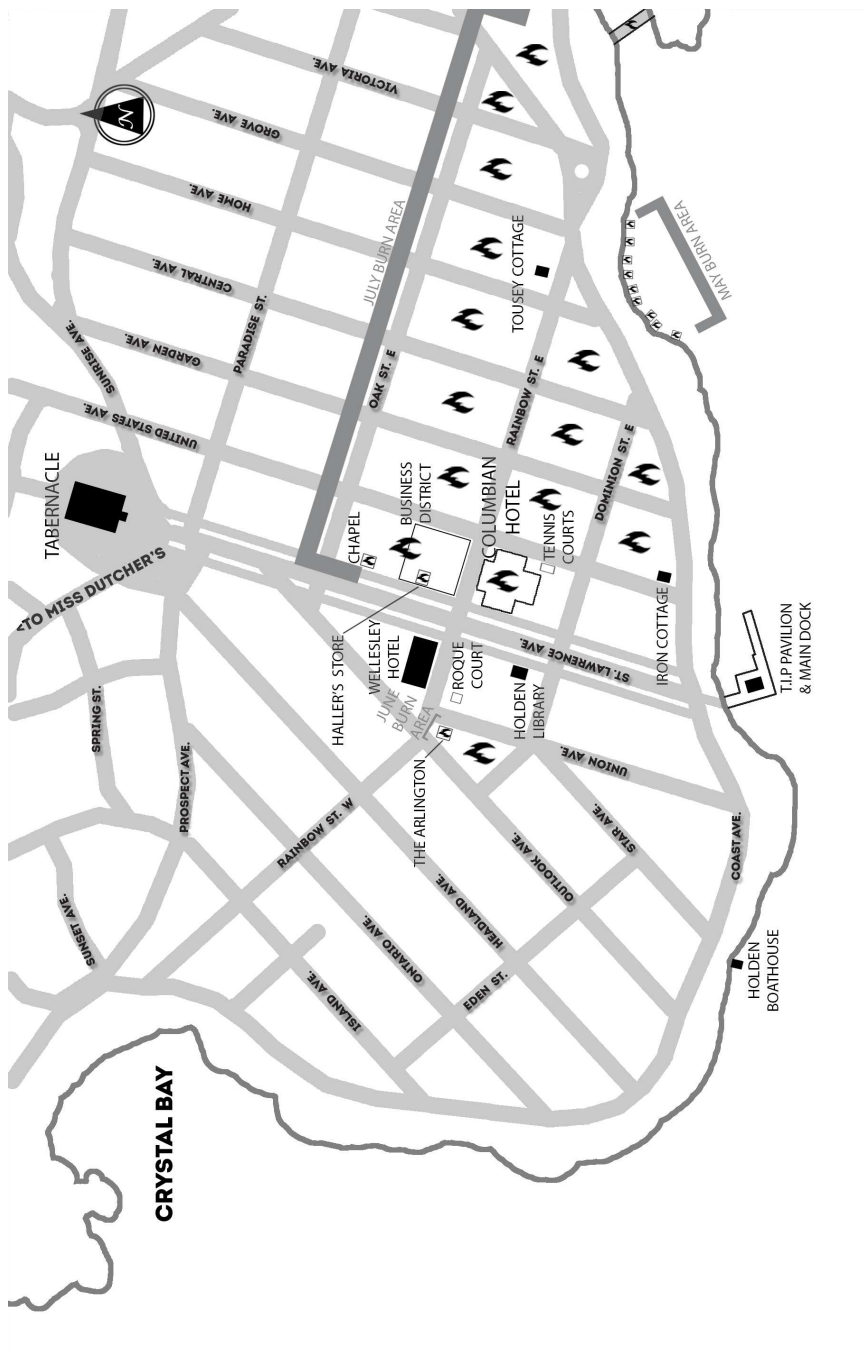
Millionaire's Row 1912



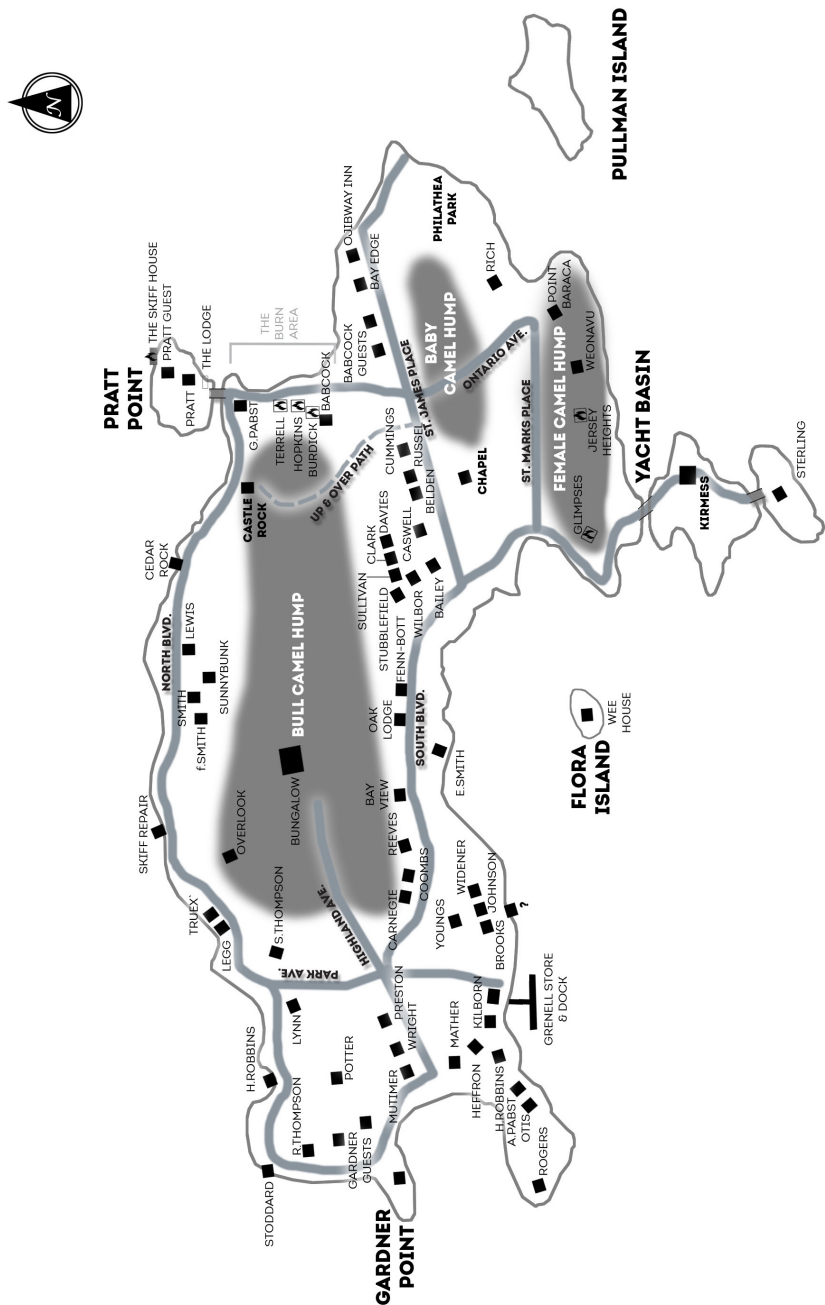
Thousand Islands Region 1912



Thousand Island Park 1912



Grenell Island 1912





Friday, May 3, 1912

GRENNELL ISLAND, THOUSAND ISLANDS, NEW YORK

Only a handful of people were on the steamer. As I approached the island, I noted smoke rising from a chimney through the bare tree branches. Mostly, the cottages were shuttered against the cold. Only a handful of families lived on Grenell through the winter months, but there wasn't a soul in sight this morning. The day was gray and windy. I'd never seen my dear island look more desolate. Yet, despite the lonely atmosphere, I was flooded with relief to be on Grenell Island once more.

The strong southwest wind buffeted me as soon as I stepped from the steamer, pushing me toward the bridge that connected the long steamship dock to the island. Instinctively, I raised one hand to secure my hat. I put down my carpetbag so I could clutch my shawl tightly around my shoulders with the other hand—afraid both hat and shawl would be stripped away by the wind. I breathed in deeply. The air was bracing. Chilling, yet invigorating.

"Miss Marguerite! Over here!"

I looked up to see a lanky man walking toward the bridge. My heart jolted. For a split second, I thought it was my father and I wanted to rush

into his arms. Not until that precise moment, did I realize that for the last twenty-four years, “Hunk” Hunkerson was the nearest thing to a father that I had in a long while. My father had died in the winter of 1888. In reality, my father looked nothing like this sinewy countryman. Father had been shorter, stouter, and infinitely more refined. Though at that precise moment, I wondered if Father had ever looked as hale and hearty as the man on the other side of the bridge.

“Hunk,” I said, waving hello.

His weatherworn face crinkled into a smile. “You’re a sight for sore eyes. Mighty glad to see ya. But as I told you . . . tweren’t no need to make the trip. Besides, we’re in for a cold snap. Gonna be mighty miserable for you up on that rock.”

Another gust tugged at my hat and pushed me a few steps forward.

He beckoned me toward his side of the bridge. “Come along now! Let’s be on our way before you lose your hat.”

I picked up my carpetbag, walked across the bridge, and followed Hunk around the southeast corner of the store, which provided instant shelter from the wind.

“Here, let me get that bag for you,” Hunk said, prying the carpetbag from my grip. “Jumping piminy! What you got in here, girl? Feels like a load of bricks!”

I blushed. I was hardly a girl. I was nearly forty-nine. But I was equally embarrassed by what I knew had added a bit of heft to my bag. “No, not bricks . . .” I started.

“Wait,” Hunk said, holding out a hand to stop me before I divulged more. “Let me guess,” he said as he rubbed his chin in mock contemplation. “You got a passel of books in here, don’t ya?”

I smiled. The red flush that spread across my cheeks was all the answer he needed.

“You can’t be without your books for even a couple of days, can you,” he teased.

“I suppose not,” I said.

He was only partially correct. There were other objects equally as heavy, but I was too embarrassed to disclose what else I had packed for my short two-night stay on Grenell Island.

The wind tugged at my skirts as we left the shelter of the store. We

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turned onto the South Boulevard cement sidewalk and walked behind a row of cottages to our right, which blocked the wind once more. Hunk slowed his pace and we savored this momentary respite from the wind.

When I greet newcomers to the island who arrive via steamer at the store dock, they are astounded that this modest sidewalk is referred to as a “boulevard.” That always makes me laugh. The flat sidewalk of South Boulevard is a civilized haven compared to the twisting, winding goat path on the other side of the island that we call North Boulevard.

Hunk took the momentary reprieve from the wind to adjust his hat. “Told Sadie you were comin’ to check your place. She thinks you’re daft in the head.”

That sounded like Hunk’s wife Sadie. To her way of thinking, the more “book smarts” a person had, the more they lacked commonsense. As a classics professor at the University of Pennsylvania, I was at the top of Sadie’s “Lack of Commonsense List.”

“I told you the fire didn’t touch your place,” Hunk reassured me.

Ten days ago, I was alarmed by newspaper reports that six cottages had burned on Grenell Island. My heart leapt when I saw George Pabst’s cottage on the list. His cottage was not far from mine. Two days later, I’d received a note from Alice Pratt—another island neighbor—who told me her skiff house had been lost in the fire but not listed in the newspaper. She thought it had been omitted because she didn’t carry insurance. All the others had been insured. I gulped when I read Alice’s note. Our little cottage—the one I have shared with my dear friend Anne for nearly three decades—wasn’t insured either. I sent a frantic note to Hunk asking him if our cottage were still intact.

This had been the second fire since we left Grenell last September. In November, two grand cottages— Glimpses and Jersey Heights—went up in flames.

Our nation was in the midst of a drought that started in 1910. Forest fires raged last summer in the Adirondacks to the south and Canada to the north. Last August, the Frontenac Hotel on nearby Round Island was lost to a blaze. As alarming as the local fires were, it was nothing compared to “the Big Blow-Up”—the Great Fire of 1910—which burned three million acres of forest and killed eighty-some people in northern Idaho, western Montana, eastern Washington, and southeastern British Columbia.

As we passed the back of the Widener cottage to our right, the names George and Harry Widener came to mind. The news of the fire on Grenell had come on the heels of the *Titanic* disaster. Nine Philadelphians went down with the ship. For weeks, the sinking of the *Titanic* dominated the headlines, each day revealing new bits of the tragedy. It seemed most of my acquaintances knew someone aboard the ill-fated craft. When I read that George and Harry Widener were among the lost, I immediately wrote to Howard Widener, who owned the red cottage on Grenell's south shore, to see if they were related. I was promptly notified that they were not. I was greatly relieved.

All this news of tragedy, disaster, and loss gnawed at me. It seemed the whole world was falling apart. I longed to return to the island, not so much to reassure myself that the cottage was still standing, but to immerse myself in the solace I find in this place. There was no way I could explain that notion simply and succinctly to Hunk, so I made a joke instead.

Hunk eyed me sideways. I could see that I hadn't fooled him at all.

Once past the Widener place, we were in the wind again. I was grateful Hunk had taken my bag so I could use one hand to secure my hat and the other to clutch my shawl tightly around me.

I paused at the spot where South Boulevard jogged to the right before it intersected with St. James Place. I looked up and was stunned by what I saw. Never in my thirty-plus years on the island had I ever seen the former Grenell cottage closed and shuttered. This white, two-story cottage with a double-stacked front porch had been Sam and Lucy Grenell's permanent residence. Lucy died in 1901. After Sam died in 1910, his son Myron had sold out and moved back to Michigan. Sam's nephew George Grenell had owned the cottage next door. George and his family had moved to Rochester. Sam's shuttered cottage now belonged to summer people—the Stubblefield family from Chicago. It was a poignant reminder that no one named Grenell remained on Grenell Island. It was the end of an era.

The world was changing, I reminded myself. But another niggling thought persisted. Was it changing? Or was the world simply falling apart?

Before we turned onto St. James Place, Hunk paused and pointed to the south. I released the grip on my shawl as my hand instantly went to my mouth. I gasped with surprise. At that precise moment, a gust of wind ripped my shawl from my shoulders. Luckily, Hunk caught it, so I didn't

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have to chase it down the cement walkway we call St. James Place. After I wrapped it around my shoulders again, I looked up to the location of November's fire. Atop the rocky bluff, a line of blackened trees stood dark against a gray sky. The smaller branches had dropped away, leaving only a few large boughs raised as if pleading for help to the sky above. Beneath the burnt trees, I could see the remains of what had been a lovely cottage called Glimpses. I looked to Hunk, who nodded to the East, where I saw an ash heap that at one time had been one of the grandest cottages on Grenell-Jersey Heights.

"The Kerrs were not in residence, correct?"

Hunk bit his lip as he nodded. "Thankfully, Mr. Clarence had closed for the season and the family was back in Englewood, New Jersey. That fella from Oklahoma—Mr. Overholser—his wife and a babe were stayin' at Jersey Heights."

"Do they know what caused it?"

Hunk shook his head. "Fella said he made an inspection of the grounds before he went to bed that night and everything seemed fine. Then around three o'clock in the morning, he smelled smoke. The family escaped in their nightclothes. Lost every stitch of clothing and everything else in the cottage. Had to borrow money and clothes to catch a train back to Oklahoma."

"What a horrible loss," I said as we continued along St. James Place.

"Wanna stop and visit with the Russells?" Hunk asked, nodding to the cottage just past the Chapel on our left. Smoke was rising from the chimney.

"Later," I said as the wind pushed me down the sidewalk. I was eager to see what had happened on the island's east end.

Perhaps it was because we were once again sheltered from the wind, but when we headed north, the acrid smell of smoke stung my nostrils, preparing me for the shock of what I was about to encounter. I'd viewed the ruins of Glimpses and Jersey Heights from afar. This experience was quite different. Here, I felt surrounded by loss. Everything from the ground I was standing on to the tips of the tree limbs was charred, blackened by fire. Burnt trunks poked up through scorched landscape, a jumble of sooty limbs surrounding each base. I raised the hem of my traveling costume as I picked my way through the burnt terrain.

I looked up at the mound of debris that had been the Babcock cottage. "This is where it started?" I asked.

Hunk nodded.

"What caused this fire? Do they know?"

Hunk took off his hat and ran a hand through his dark hair. "The Babcock boy couldn't explain. Just dug his toe in the dirt and said he didn't know what happened. Said he was gettin' ready to paint, turnt 'round, and saw the cottage in flames. But I noticed he had a pack of cigarettes in his front pocket. Don't take a genius to figure that one out. I'm sure he lit up, shook out the match, and dropped it to the ground. Seen him do it a million times. You remember how dry it was last fall? Leaves dropped from the trees in August. This place was littered with dry leaves heaped upon dry grass. Add a carelessly dropped match to that and poof! A recipe for disaster."

"Which son was it?" I asked. John Babcock had died a few years ago and his sons, Frank and Ray, helped take care of the place for their mother. "Neither of them can be considered a boy. They're both married with children."

Hunk didn't say anything, but his look told me that just because they were married with children didn't mean they were responsible adults. "Frank," he said.

I looked down the path and saw the burnt remains of the Burdick, Hopkins, and Terrell cottages to the left.

"Didn't take much for the flames to jump from one cottage to another," Hunk explained.

I looked to the right and viewed the collapsed remains of the burnt boathouses. An old willow tree leaned out over the water, its gnarled trunk blackened. Most of the limbs had fallen away.

One sentinel pine stood near where the Terrell cottage had been. Gone was any hint of greenery. The sooty limbs that remained were twisted and contorted by the heat.

"Hopkins lost all his boats, as did Terrell."

"What about Professor Pabst? Did he lose his boats as well?" I asked as the charred remains of the Pabst boathouse came into view.

"Luckily, we were able to save the skiff and the launch."

"You were here?"

"Yup," he said. "The wind was strong that day, blowing from the south. The rock ledge next to the Pabst place helped protect the cottage a bit," he said, nodding toward the structure.

"My goodness! It must have been a hot fire. The paint on this side of the cottage is blistered and peeled," I noted.

Hunk tilted his head to the side and appraised the clapboard siding. "Might need to replace some of those boards. You can see that the porch was damaged, but at least the darn thing didn't burn down."

"And Mrs. Pratt? Did she lose her skiff when the skiff house burned?"

"I made that skiff with my own two hands. I weren't gonna let it burn up in a fire. No, we got it and the Rushton cedar canoe out in time."

I looked out toward Hub Island. Flying fast and low with rapid wingbeats, a flock of ducks slapped the water in a collective *whoosh* as they landed. They were smaller and chubbier than mallards. The drakes were quite striking with black and white bodies. Their large, dark heads shimmered with iridescent green and purple. Their female counterparts were a more subdued gray and brown with a bright white patch under the eye. Moments after they landed, they began disappearing under the water's surface. Ah! They were diving ducks, but a breed I'd never seen before.

"What type of waterfowl is that?" I asked.

Hunk swiveled his head in the direction I pointed. A huge grin spread across his face. "Those are buffleheads," he said. "Pass through here around this time of year on their way north. Good thing I brought my shotgun with me when I rowed over this morning. Sadie's gonna be beside herself with joy if I can bag three or four buffies." He rubbed his hands together in expectation of the meal that awaited him this evening.

"They're awfully small," I noted.

"Small, but tasty. Well, some folks don't think so, but Sadie has this way of preparing them. She wraps the breast in bacon. That's good eatin'," he said as he patted his belly. "Sure you don't wanna come for dinner and stay the night?"

I chuckled and thanked him for his invitation, but declined. I was more interested in the state of my cottage than this evening's meal, so I rounded the Pabst cottage and followed the dirt path we call North Boulevard. Hunk followed me through the dark lot that separated the Pabst cottage from my beloved Castle Rock. The dark lot wasn't so dark

on this day as the trees were just budding. Dappled light fell on the usually shaded ground. Poking up through the leaf litter here and there were wildflowers: white Dutchman's breeches, pink spring beauties, and yellow trout lilies. Usually, I arrive too late for such sights. I brushed aside the nagging desire to stop and appreciate their beauty as I rushed toward the cottage.

I looked up as I rounded Sentry Rock. I stopped at the base of the spiral path and stared up at the white cottage perched high on the rock above. It wasn't a castle. In reality, the structure was small and ordinary—a crackerbox of a cottage. Its location atop this rock is what made it regal. Towering and stately, this looming hunk of granite always reminded me of the turret of a great castle, especially the way the spiral path wrapped around the outer edge of it. Perched atop this grand rock, this tiny cottage was a castle to me.

My eyes inspected the structure from the roof's peak down to the lattice skirting. Finding it intact, a feeling of gratitude washed through me. I fought the urge to hug Hunk in my relief. Instead, I smiled and said, "You took the shutters off."

"Mighty cold and dark inside with them shutters up," Hunk said as he started up the path. "Took 'em off yesterday. Thought a full day of sunlight might warm up the place." He paused outside the kitchen door, then opened it, "After you," he said.

Despite the light flooding in through the windows, the cottage's interior felt cooler than the outdoor air. I readjusted my shawl to keep the cold from my neck. Cold or not, I was happy to be here. I loved living with my nieces at Dillworth Manor in West Philadelphia, but the manor was their home. This small, four-room cottage was my home.

"Well, what do you think of your new addition?" Hunk asked.

I spun and saw the New Perfection Oil Cookstove I'd walked past unawares. The sight of it caught my breath. "It fits perfectly!" I said. "Oh, Hunk! Friend Anne will be so surprised!"

Despite the need to reassure myself that the cottage was unharmed, this had been a major reason for the trip. I had purchased a new oil stove. "I can't imagine how hard it was to get that old iron cookstove out of here and down the path. Where is it now?" I asked.

Hunk gave me a lopsided grin. "Hauled it back to my place. Found a

buyer, iffin' you approve of the price."

"I trust your judgment on that. And keep the proceeds for your troubles."

"No need to do that. You pay me quite handsomely for my efforts," Hunk said.

"But you always go above and beyond—like taking the shutters off. I want you to know how much I appreciate that," I told him. "Now, teach me how to operate this thing."

Hunk showed me how to fill the fuel reservoir from the big kerosene tank he had installed at the back of the cottage. He taught me how to light the burners and fire up the oven.

With the turn of a little knob, I could instantly increase or decrease the temperature. At last, the twins and I would be able to help prepare meals. Anne had been the only one who knew how to cook on the old cookstove.

"Oh, Hunk. No more hauling wood or cleaning out ash. No more guesswork on whether the stove is hot enough. Better yet, no burnt food because the cookstove was hotter than I thought. Oh! And the gleaming white enamel finish makes this kitchen so much cheerier."

"Now, don't go tellin' Sadie about this stove or she'll be badgerin' me to get 'er one. Promise me that."

I smiled, as I hugged myself, rubbing my arms in an attempt to warm them.

Hunk tilted his head to the side and glared at me. "I can see you're freezin' and you still have your traveling coat on and a shawl over it to boot. Why don't you come stay with us? Our place is right toasty and you'll have a nice warm meal."

I gestured toward the stove. "I'll have a nice warm meal here thanks to the New Perfection Oil Cookstove."

Hunk dejectedly shook his head. "Sadie was right. She said I wouldn't be able to talk you into stayin' with us. So she sent this along when I opened up the cottage yesterday." He went to the table and picked up a flannel and wool quilt. "She figured your summer quilts would be too light. Oh, and don't be using the stove for heat. Leaving it on while your sleepin' might prove deadly. Don't need another fire on Grenell."

"Don't worry, I brought hot-water bottles to warm the bed. It's

only for two nights. I'll be fine." I thanked Hunk for the stove lesson. He left chagrined that he hadn't been able to talk me into staying at the Hunkerson homestead upriver from here on Grindstone Island. He stopped at the bottom of the spiral path and called up to me. "Oh, and iffin' you hear some gunshots later, don't be alarmed. That'll be me rustlin' up a few buffies for dinner. You don't know what you're missin'!"

As soon as Hunk left, I went to my bedchamber to change from my travel clothes into work attire. I unpinned my hat and set it on the washstand. I reached in my wardrobe and pulled out a gray day dress, one of several dresses I leave here at the cottage to wear while cleaning.

I opened my carpetbag and took out two books, the two hot-water bottles, and a small stack of clothing. Finally, the two things that I hoped would keep me warm the next two days were at the bottom of the bag. I lifted out a red flannel union suit. I carefully unrolled it and revealed the two McGinnis Pure Rye Whiskey bottles. Flossie had brought by this package of goodies the night before I left. "Guaranteed to keep you warm," she said. "If the union suit doesn't, these two bottles might."

Flossie had more experience rusticating in colder climes than I did. As an anthropologist studying the Indians of the American Plains, she had slept in many tents and sometimes out under the stars.

Truth be told, she had purchased the one-piece union suit nearly twenty years ago, long before she became an anthropologist. The long underwear had been manufactured in Utica, New York, as part of the dress reform movement. It was initially called "Emancipation Union Under-Flannel," an alternative to the constricting undergarments of the time. The notion never caught on with women, but men—especially men in the west who were sleeping outside in tents or out in the open using a saddle for a pillow—had adopted the union suit. I could tell that this particular union suit had been made for a woman because of the dozen pearl buttons evenly spaced from neck to groin. I quickly stripped down to all but my stockings and stepped into the union suit. The union suit's insides were slightly fleeced and so soft. I hastened to button up and put my day dress over the union suit. I tied my shawl in place over my shoulders.

Even with the union suit and shawl, I was still chilled. I felt that I'd freeze to the spot if I didn't start moving. I moved to the main room,

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paused at the window, and looked out at our neighboring island, Murray Isle. The bare tree branches wore a bright sheen of spring green. Usually obscured by a thick canopy of leaves, it was the first time I could clearly see the roofline of the Frank Russell cottage, perched high on the ridge, towering over the summer cottages that dotted the shoreline. Frank's brother and family—Floyd and Florence Russell—had lived on Murray Isle before they had built a cottage on St. James Place on Grenell, using the lumber from the dismantled Grenell barn. I could see white smoke curling from the Murray Isle chimney and knew that the Frank Russell family was cozy and safe inside. I realized that it was the perfect spot for a winter home. With the leaves off the trees, they would be warmed by the southern sunlight all day. Yet, the ridge behind them served as protection from the chilling north wind. A smile spread across my face, thinking of the Murray Russells. Their cottage would be full of life and noise of five young children.

Two loud shotgun blasts, one right after the other—*BOOM! BOOM!*—broke my reverie and echoed off the palisades of the Narrows. I realized that Hunk had just procured buffleheads for tonight's dinner.

The silence in the wake of the shotgun blast was ringing. I relished the silence that surrounded me here at Castle Rock. I breathed in slowly and savored being alone. This was another tangent reason for coming up for a short weekend visit—an overwhelming desire to be alone.

Alone. Mother had always uttered that word to me like it was a death sentence. "You don't want to end up *alone*," she had cautioned me. To her, a woman alone was a tragedy. Her idea of marriage had nothing to do with love or companionship. Marriage meant security. I thought of all the failed matches she had tried to make for me after I graduated from the University of Pennsylvania. The men she pushed me toward were all older, mostly widowed—men looking for a woman to manage their household and oversee their children's rearing. To Mother, these older men represented security. They were established.

Had I acquiesced to my mother's wishes, my life today would be much different. My days would be filled with household management and endless rounds of social visits—fall, winter, spring, and summer. And most importantly—I would not have this wonderful cottage perched on this regal rock overlooking the St. Lawrence River. While I was passionate about

teaching Greek, Latin, and the sensibilities of ancient Greece, I sometimes felt that I only truly lived when I was here at Castle Rock.

Married life seemed so small and confining compared to the life I had created for myself. There was no way of explaining this to Mother. My marital status had been a point of contention between us for years. With that thought, I grabbed a broom and tried to whisk away those thoughts as I brushed cobwebs from around the window frames. As soon as I finished, I raised the front windows hoping to dispel the stale cottage air and warm up the interior at the same time.

Mother and I had never seen eye-to-eye about anything even before I attended the University. *Stop feeling sorry for yourself*, I admonished myself. Besides, it had been a long time since Mother had lamented my unmarried status. Perhaps she had given up because I was well-past forty now. But sometimes, I suspect Mother had forgotten that I was not married. Half the time, she thought I was Lily, which I suppose was logical. After all, after Lily died, I stepped in to become the guardian for her girls. Mother's mind flickered in and out, giving her a faulty memory of what was what. Some days, she remembered that I was Vivi's aunt, but other days she thought I was Lily and that Vivi, Ivy, and Iris were *my* daughters.

Nowadays, admonishment mostly comes from my older sister. Rose had been equally relentless in her quest to find a husband for me. But after my fortieth birthday, even Rose had stopped her matchmaking efforts. Unfortunately, she had not stopped making stinging comments. I shrugged as I switched to sweeping the floor, attacking the corners and baseboards. As I cleaned, I hoped to brush away thoughts of Rose and her surliness with the dust that had accumulated over the winter.

With the cobwebs and dust swept away, I uncovered the furniture and gave the wood a nice coating of beeswax polish before recovering it again. There was no point in leaving the furniture exposed. Pine pollen would coat everything before I returned if I didn't. I was no longer chilly. I went out to the porch, sweeping away leaves and pine needles gathered in heaps in the corners.

After finishing the porch, I decided I needed to take Vivi's letter to Corrine before I forgot. I avoided the burned district by taking the up-and-over path to St. James Place. There, I paused in front of the Russell

cottage. My thirteen-year-old niece Vivi and the Russell's second daughter were the same age—born on the same day, in fact. Vivi had begged to come along, but I insisted that she remain home at Dillworth Manor with her older sisters. At twenty-seven, the twins were old enough to watch their sister for the weekend. Aided, of course, by the half-dozen staff members we needed to maintain the household.

I felt a twinge of guilt as I quietly climbed the porch steps. Vivi had been so disappointed with me that she hadn't said goodbye.

I could see movement in the kitchen at the back of the cottage as I knocked on the screened door. In an instant, Corrine appeared, dusting off her floured hands on her apron. "Miss Marguerite!" Corrine called out when she saw me. She swung open the door and motioned me inside. Even though Corrine was the same age as Vivi, the golden-haired girl was much shorter and slighter than my niece. If I didn't know better, I would have thought that Corrine was a year or two younger than Vivi. Corrine peeped behind me as if she expected to find her dear friend standing there. "Did Vivi come, too?" she asked.

Her face fell when I shook my head, but her eyes brightened when I held up the letter. When I gave Corrine Vivi's letter, she clutched it to her chest and called to her mother to ask if she might go out onto the porch and read it. Mrs. Russell poked her head out the kitchen door and nodded her consent. With a squeal, Corrine dashed to the door and was gone instantly.

"Do come in, Miss Hartranft," Mrs. Russell said, motioning me toward the kitchen. The kitchen was warm and inviting. A stew simmered on the stove. It smelled delicious. "What kind of stew is that?" I asked.

"Squirrel," Corrine's older sister Myrtle replied. "Gerry shot three this morning before breakfast."

Mrs. Russell—Florence—was making a pie from the cherries she had canned last June.

"It's the last of the cherries," Myrtle told me. "There won't be any more cherry pies until the end of June."

"You must stay for dinner," Mrs. Russell insisted as she picked up the newest member of the family—a husky one-year-old named Phillip—and settled him on her hip while she stirred the stew. I was surprised when Mrs. Russell had had another son last summer as there was a twelve-year

gap between Corrine and little Phillip. I suspected that Mrs. Russell might be with child again, but I daren't ask.

The child gurgled and cooed and raised a chubby fist to his mouth. I'd often wondered if they had named the little tyke for Mr. Russell's employer—Phillip M. Sharples. Mr. Russell—Floyd—had been the Sharples boatman, caretaker, and handyman for three decades now. Like the Russells, I was on Grenell because of the Sharples family, albeit for far different reasons.

I told Mrs. Russell that I'd love to stay for dinner, but I'd bought provisions for my short two-night stay and I'd hate to see my supplies go to waste.

I felt a twinge of guilt. This wasn't exactly a lie, but not exactly the truth. I'd brought my two favorite varieties of Campbell's Soup, which could easily be left in the cottage. While it would be lovely to catch up with my island neighbors, I was looking forward to two days of solitude. Instead, I accepted Mrs. Russell's offer of a cup of coffee, though I'm usually a tea drinker. As I sipped, I learned that Mr. Russell was working up at the Sharples place this afternoon and Gerry—the oldest—was at his Uncle Frank's on Murray helping to mend the fences for the pigs.

"The Russells have pigs at their place?" I asked.

Myrtle took Phillip from her mother's arms so she could roll out the top pie crust. "Yes'um. And a cow, too. Not up on the ridge, but down in the hollow behind their place," Myrtle told me and anxiously continued. "But the big news this week is—I gotta job. I'm working for the Markert and Langan families—Mrs. Markert and her married daughter next door, Mrs. Langan. They got two cottages side by side down on Centennial Avenue over at the Park. I'm to help in the kitchen and clean. I'll get six dollars a week. Can you believe it? Six dollars! Course, I gotta give Ma and Pa the money, but maybe they'll let me buy something for myself once in a while." In a conspiratorial whisper, she leaned in close and added, "And no laundry duties. Corrine almost had a conniption fit when she heard that! Six dollars and no laundry duties! Shhh! Here she comes!"

Myrtle pushed away from the table. With her younger brother still on her hip, she went to stir the stew simmering on the stove.

Corrine came into the room and rushed to my side. "Tell Vivi I said yes," she said excitedly.

- Grenell 1912 -

I knew better than to ask what she was agreeing to. Vivi and Corrine were fast friends and spent the winter planning how they would spend the summer together.

"I'll send Corrine over with a piece of cherry pie after supper," Mrs. Russell offered when I said I needed to be getting back to my cottage chores. Actually, I didn't plan to do much else today but read and take in the view. Again, I felt abashed at telling half-truths.

I took the long way home through the burned-out area and then through the empty lot between the Pabst cottage and Castle Rock. I stopped there to gather a few spring beauties and woodland violets. Once back in the cottage, I found a tiny vase for them. I spent the rest of the afternoon reading on the porch, soaking in the silence along with the May sunshine. I had an early dinner of Campbell's Mulligatawny Soup. My nieces weren't fond of curry, so this was a rare treat. I had just finished when Corrine wandered by with my cherry pie. It smelled heavenly. I thanked her and transferred the piece to one of my dessert plates, washed hers, and handed it back to her.

"Did you know anyone on the *Titanic*? Ma said there were folks from Philadelphia aboard."

I nodded that I did.

"Ma said she saw the name Widener and was hopin' they weren't kin to the folks in the red cottage."

I shook my head. "No, they weren't related."

"But you knew folks? Other folks from Philadelphia?"

"Not well—I knew *of* them, but didn't know them personally," I told her.

Corrine bit her lip. Then hugged me. "Give Vivi a hug for me. I can't wait to see her." With that, she turned and ran up the hill back toward the Russell cottage.

I decided to save my cherry pie for breakfast and to treat myself to a hefty pour of rye instead. I went to my wardrobe, where I hid the cut-glass whiskey glasses, and brought out the leftover bottle of rye. Both were gifts from Flossie last year. I took a glass and the bottle out to the rocker on the porch. I loved how the heavy, lead-crystal glass felt in my hand. "To a fabulous season on Grenell," I said, toasting the River. I took a sip of the rye and let it warm my insides.

It's not that I hid my tippling from Anne or the girls. They knew I had a nip now and then. It's just that I didn't flaunt my drinking. I took another warming sip of the rye and felt myself relax. My shoulders had tensed as soon as Corrine had mentioned the *Titanic*. When I'd heard about the disaster, my thoughts instantly went to my dear friend and ardent correspondent, Commander Guilford, and his ship, the *Albatross*. I knew it was silly to worry about him. He was half a world away from the North Atlantic in the South Pacific. Still, when I'd received a letter from him days later, I'd breathed a sigh of relief. He was safe and sound in Honolulu. The note said he was returning to San Francisco and was unsure of his next posting.

Could it be that I was to see him again after eight years? Surely, he would come East to visit his parents in Philadelphia. And . . . they often came to the Thousand Islands and spent time with the Jacksons at Keewaydin. I felt a twinge of hope. I took another sip of rye to quell the anxious butterflies that fluttered inside me. I reminded myself that he had not mentioned coming to Philadelphia, much less the River. I must not get my hopes up. Still, the thought of Gilly's return was like finding a missing piece to a puzzle that would make my fractured life feel whole again.

A chill settled around me before the sun disappeared behind the treetops on Murray. I abandoned the porch and prepared for a cold evening. By the time I had filled the hot-water bottles, the wind had shifted. The first blast of arctic air hit the cottage like a hand slamming a gate closed. The cottage shuttered. I shivered. I hurried off to bed. Light still lingered in the sky when I climbed into bed that night, grateful I had Sadie's flannel and wool nine-square quilt atop me.

Despite two glasses of rye, sleep did not come. My mind whirled, busy spinning possible scenarios. "Be here now," I reminded myself and focused my attention on each little sound I heard as the wind battered the cottage. Outside, the north wind howled. The windows rattled at every gust. Occasionally, dry windborne leaves tapped against the windowpane. Above, the wind whispered through the pine needles as their large limbs creaked. The stirring of cedar branches sounded like the rustling of satin skirts. Below, water splashed on the rocky shore. Just as I started to doze, I heard a voice whisper my name. My mind's ears pricked to listen to the words hidden within the waves.

“Marguerite,” I heard again.

Gilly? I thought. I shook my head at the thought. It wasn’t the Commander’s deep baritone. It was a voice I knew well—that I’d heard for decades—long before I’d ever met Commander Percy Guilford. A voice I’d come to think of it as *The Voice*. A voice I only heard here alone in the middle of the night. Perhaps that is why I had come so early to be here alone so that I might hear that voice—*The Voice*.

“Mar-guer-ite!” I heard again through the sloshing of the wind waves on the rocks below. I love how *The Voice* drew out every syllable, so my name sounded long and flowing like the River itself. I turned onto my side and hugged one of the hot-water bottles closer to me. A small smile tipped up the corners of my mouth. It was the River welcoming me back and ensuring that I would always be watched after and cared for. I felt safe. Secure. I was home.



Monday, June 3, 1912

CASTLE ROCK, GRENELL ISLAND, THOUSAND ISLANDS, NEW YORK

As soon as Captain Hy dropped the *Cora's* sail and engaged the small motor at the stern, Vivi dashed to the front of the sailboat. For a moment, I thought she might climb out onto the bowsprit. Instead, she leaned forward, threw her arms into the air, and shouted, "Ahoy, Grenell!" The twins smirked and shook their heads at their younger sister's exuberance. Yet, when she turned, cupped one hand around her ear, and motioned with the other for us to join her in shouting out a greeting, we complied.

Vivi put her hands on her hips and gave us a withering look. "That was weak. Come on! Shout out as if you mean it!" Vivi admonished. "On three. Let them hear us!"

On three, we all shouted, "AHOY, GRENELL!" Even Captain Hy and first mate Fred Collins added their baritone male voices to our all-female chorus. At thirteen, my niece Vivi had the makings of a field general.

Vivi cocked her ear toward the shore and listened. We heard an ahoy come back from Cedar Rock and Pratt Point. Vivi shielded her

eyes from the bright sun and scoured the shoreline. I could see a wave of disappointment wash over her when she neither heard nor saw her dear friend Corrine.

I put my hands on her shoulders, bent, and kissed her ear. "It's washday." I reminded her. Vivi grimaced and nodded solemnly as we approached our dock. Vivi did not let disappointment sit long. She jumped to the dock before the *Cora* was secured and ran up the spiral path.

I'd made the mistake of telling Vivi that there was a surprise awaiting her when she arrived at the cottage and she couldn't wait to find out what it was. By the time Fred had tied the boat to the dock, she was back. "Friend Anne, hurry! There's a surprise in the cottage. First of all, look!" she said, pointing up at the cottage. "Did you notice? The cottage is freshly painted. See how it gleams?"

Anne raised her hand and shaded her eyes against the bright south light. "So it is. What a wonderful surprise, Marguerite."

"But that's not all. There's . . ."

I shook my head. Vivi clamped her mouth shut. She grabbed Anne's hand and pulled her toward the path. "You'll have to see for yourself."

"Vivi," I called after her, "you needn't rush. It's not going anywhere." I gave her a pointed look. Recognition washed over her face as she remembered our earlier discussion. Vivi dropped Anne's hand. Instead of pulling her along the path, Vivi allowed Anne to proceed at her own pace. A pace that proved much too slow for the excited Vivi. She reminded me of an excited cocker spaniel prancing around its master as Anne trudged slowly up the steep path.

Instead of rushing after them, I waited. I wasn't sure how Anne would feel about the newfangled stove. Sometimes she could be so traditional, clinging to the status quo and eschewing modernity. Would this be one of those times? I waited in the lower camp, staring up at the cottage as the twins helped Fred and Captain Hy unload our things onto the dock.

It seemed like hours instead of minutes before Vivi stuck her head out the door and shouted, "She loves it!"

I breathed a sigh of relief and hurried to the cottage.

I opened the screen door to find Anne examining the new oil stove. "Well? What do you think of our latest addition?" I asked, scrutinizing