

Island "X"

(A Short Story by T. U.-P.)

One summer's night many years ago, I descried something quite peculiar while I was out for my usual long-distance swim to Jove's Island and back. After the sun had dipped below the rocky horizon, I dove off the South-facing dock into the frigid fresh waters of Onlooker's Bay and surfaced after gliding underwater like a scaly torpedo. I continued to do a front crawl until I reached the outer bay and headed West along the stony shoreline. As I reached the rocky monoliths on Jove's Island, I could hear the faint sound of oars scooping water to propel a vessel. As the row boat approached, a gruff voice began to holler and chant a drunken pirate's ditty.

*Heave-ho and onward she goes,
Amid the isles and bay of woes,
The pirate's mate within stone's throws,
Hiding the corpse with broken toes!*

As the row boat continued its approach, I dove down to hide below the surf, holding my breath underwater for about one minute. As I re-emerged, the boat had changed its course onto a small island some hundred or so meters South of Jove's Island. As I started my usual route back to the dock, I could faintly see that the row boat and its stumbling solitary passenger had reached the shores of the rocky holm. As I made the turn away from the monoliths situated atop the bouldered plain of Jove's Island, I could only faintly see the row boat to the South and not the mysterious oarsman. I then switched to a backstroke and continued my nocturnal swimming route skimming the surface of the bay waters like a two-limbed water strider insect until I reached my familiar wooden dock once again.

The very next morning, I took my outboard out to fill a canister of fuel at the closest gas dock located North-east of the property. As I neared the gas dock, I noticed that the old haunted boathouse on Lone Pine Island had a boat tied to the dock. As I came closer on my 15 horsepower outboard, I noticed that the small vessel had a similar profile to the row boat I had spotted on my swim the night before. After making an approach to the gas dock on the starboard side, I took out the bumpers and tied a reef knot to a small metal loop to firmly tether the outboard. I then filled up my small red canister with engine fuel. After presenting a twenty dollar bill to Ned the cashier in the small wooden hut, I untied the boat and headed back home. On my way back, I decided to make a quick stop at Lone Pine Island to examine the boat. As I neared the dock on the port side, I could see that the charcoal gray row boat had red lettering spelling out the name "MUSKRAT". After discretely docking the oatboard, I searched the bow of the small row boat and found a rolled up parchment next to an empty bottle of cheap rum. As I unfolded the parchment, a crude map depicting parts of Onlooker's Bay was drawn out in black ink. The map was titled "Island 'X'", which could very well

have been the tiny holm where I had spotted the nocturnal rower the night before. In the center of the island, was a red arrow pointing to a dot that read "THE KILL". A drawing of a larger stretch of land separated by water from the holm had two small ovals that could have been Jove's Island's monoliths. Worried about being spotted, I left the map in the hull of the row boat, quickly got back in my outboard and rushed back towards home. As I veered away from the haunted boathouse on Lone Pine Island, I worried that I had spotted a strange pirate waiting until after dusk to bury an unknown cottager and possibly usurp their prized land. When I got back to more familiar ground, I tied up the outboard, took out the canister of fuel and placed it in the boathouse next to the cedar canoe. I then walked toward the cottage and decided to report what I had seen to the sheriff's station at Hidden Bay Marina. After dialing "8" and then the emergency contact number, I heard the ring tone and soon got through.

"Sheriff's office. Is this an emergency?" A female voice inquired.

"Not quite. Well... I think I may have information about a murder." I said hesitantly.

"Are you in the Onlooker's Bay area sir?" She prodded.

"Yes. I live near Jove's Island and believe there may have been a body buried just offshore on a small neighbouring island." I told her.

"What makes you think so sir? Did you witness the murder?" She asked, raising her voice slightly.

"Well... I saw a strange man in a row boat while I was swimming last night. Didn't look like he was from these parts. And later today, on my way back from the gas docks, I saw a row boat which could have been the same one. When I reached the dock and looked in the hull, I saw a map. It appeared to be showing where a body was buried near Jove's Island." I told her with slight apprehension.

"I'm going to send a dispatch over to your cottage. I see you are listed as a Gustavson. Is that correct sir?" She enquired.

"Yes. I'll clear the front dock so that your dispatch has room to come ashore." I told her before the conversation ended.

After a half hour, a small police boat arrived at the front dock from Hidden Bay Marina. I went over what I had seen the night before and early today and we both headed off to Lone Pine Island together. When we reached the haunted boathouse, the row boat was gone. We then headed off to Jove's Island and toward what I believed was "Island 'X'". Since the water was quite shallow and we didn't want to scrape the hull of the police vessel, we dropped anchor not far off and jumped into the shallows to come ashore. Once on the island, I talked about the map that I had seen and how the monoliths were marked on the mainland much like our true view to the North would suggest. The male officer then walked toward the center of the island where a large granite boulder appeared to have been rolled and noticed a patch of patted down soil

directly underneath. He then got out a shovel and began to dig, exposing a pit where at least a meter of dirt could have been heaped above the rocky island's base. After about ten minutes of intense digging, the shovel struck something solid and the officer prudently tried to unearth the mass without damaging its overall integrity. Soon, the head of an older woman could be seen and a call was made for backup to the marina's sheriff office. When another larger police boat arrived, we uncovered the body of Mrs. Wardley, an elderly woman who lived alone on an island 2-3 kilometers East of Jove's Island. After the identification was made, another dispatch was sent to the Wardley's cottage to investigate the property. The next day, the Onlooker's Bay Herald showed a picture of the "MUSKRAT" on the front page with a headline that read: "*Body of Mrs. Mary Wardley, 86, found near Jove's Island*". In the column below, another passage read: "*Man trying to appropriate Wardley cottage land, caught in stolen row boat conspiracy.*"

The End