

## The Oven

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

Basking on the rocky shores of Fellowship Bay—an archipelago of bedrock and pristine turquoise fresh water in the Isles of Baybrock—Carter looks far beyond his cottage property's front dock, to the distant property of Mary Craigleigh. The retired widow of Sir Henry Craigleigh—who spent most of the months of the year in her large cottage on Glennock Island—Mary once invited Carter as a young teenager to have tea in her salon. As the years went by, Carter grew up to jointly inherit his grandparents' bay property, along with his older sister Hazel and their mother Christine.

As the sun began its downward descent below the western horizon, offering a last glint of its celestial rays over the far off islands of Fellowship Bay, Carter—binoculars in hand—focuses his magnified gaze over to the Craigleigh cottage.

“Haze... This is the second night that the Craigleigh boathouse is missing their sailboat... Not only that, I don't see any light on upstairs in her salon where she usually likes to look out at the bay...” Carter says to his sister.

“You've been so preoccupied lately by the Craigleighs. Maybe she went into town to get some supplies or something. Come inside to play poker with us.” Hazel replies.

Soon, Carter leaves his favorite rocky perch and heads indoors where a small group of friends and family play cards and board games between dinner and dessert. Across the bay, the familiar upstairs light, signaling any activity within the Glennock Island hearth fails to light up as a blanket of faraway and ancient lights emerges star by star on the dark charcoal canvas of night.

The next day, after a big and hearty breakfast, Carter, his sister and their two guests head off for a hike on Big Island. After taking the outboard to the Kingston Gas Docks, Hazel hops ashore and tethers the boat with a tight bowline knot. The group of four then heads to the trails in the woods north of the docks, following a marker with a dark blue arrow and piles of neatly arranged rocks resembling miniature Inukshuks.

“I remember that we have to follow the markers until we get to a big bent cedar tree. From there, we head left instead of going toward the Martin Cottage.” Hazel says as she leads the hiking group.

“If we get to the big stone oven, we've gone the too far, from what I can recall.” Carter says with an old trail map in his hands.

“Are the Martins up this weekend?” Hazel asks.

“It's been a while since I last saw them. Must have been when their youngest won the Bay area sailing regatta three years ago that I last ran into them.” Carter states.

“Rumor has it, the dad got into some troubles with the mob. Apparently, they were in court last year as a family to fight the allegations.” Hazel says.

“Heard the dad had some kind of device strapped to his ankle when court was going on. Cynthia from the Herman Cottage said that he argued over having the device on, saying he couldn't really exercise and go for his usual daily swim.”

“Whatever it is, I'm getting bad vibes from the Martin Cottage, let's just stay on our trail when we get to the big tree.”

After reaching a rocky clearing with flat pavement-like bedrock lined with yellow lichen and bright green moss, the group of four reach another pile of rocks. Soon, the large inclined cedar tree emerges from the old growth forest path and the group heads left.

"I'll catch up with you guys. Just going to check something out. I'll see you at the swimming rocks on the north shores of Big Island." Carter tells his sister and his friends.

"Don't be too long. We're going for a dip and hope to see you when we have our picnic. We've got to head back right after that and you have the boat key with you." Hazel says.

Soon after, as the others head toward the rocky shores on the north side, Carter discreetly heads within the outskirts of the Martin property. Following a slight clearing in the forest, he reaches the stone oven and notices a sign that says: "Private Property-No Trespassing"

Upon reaching the oven, he notices that the small metallic door with the branded words "SARGEANT" carved into it has been left open. Stooping a little bit to peak within it, Carter notices a few embers are glowing a dull orange with the slightest amount of smoke escaping through a metal opening at the top. Looking over his shoulder and along the clearing to the cottage, Carter feels strangely compelled to search the stone oven for any content that may have escaped being burned. Poking about with a stick at the contents of the large outdoor oven made with blocks and small boulders of bay bedrock, Carter manages to salvage a small piece of metal inscribed with a serial number. After pocketing the unusual find, he also notices a partly burned photograph which reveals a mast of a sailboat but no evidence of its crew or ship name. Hearing the sounds of distant voices from the cottage nearby, Carter quickly finds his way back to the pile of rocks and makes the turn toward the north shore after spotting the bent tree signaling the way out of view and suspicion.

After heading out of the woods, Carter spots the bay waters and the horizon speckled with myriads of rocky archipelago islands. After hiking a short time along the north shore, he notices a few heads bobbing above the wavy waters of Big Island in the eastward distance. Soon, he is reunited with the familiar trio, who sunbathe a bit to dry off before the picnic lunch.

After heading back along the trails leading to the outboard docked at the gas station, Hazel undoes the sailor's knot and hops into the boat as Carter revs up the old Mercury motor to head back to the cottage before dusk sets in. Upon the return to the small log cabin Hazel and Carter called their second home, Carter decides to call the Fellowship Bay Boating Society to enquire about a possible missing vessel.

"Hi, this is Carter Parker. I'm calling to ask about a possible missing vessel."

"Hello Mr. Parker, what type of vessel may I ask?" A female voice answers back.

"Well... I'm not entirely sure, but perhaps you have a listing of sailboats that are registered for this area?"

"Mr. Parker... I'd actually need the 6 digit serial number for the sailboat in question to answer your query."

"Well... This is a longshot but I have 5 digits with the last one missing... The serial number is: 7-5-4-5-7..."

"Let me check my list... One moment please..."

After a brief moment when the boating society attendant checks a computer listing of boats with serial numbers beginning with the number 7, she says: "It appears that this boat belongs to the Craigeighs. However, according to our records, this boat has never been reported missing."

"Thank you Ma'am. I think I have information for the Baybrock Region Coast Guard. I appreciate you helping me search boat records."

As the sun once again arched toward its usual part of the Fellowship Bay evening horizon, Carter—who had just gone outside again to watch the light fade behind the large White Pine on their family's cottage property—notices a police boat head over to the Craigeigh Cottage in the dusky distance. As the light dimmed again to signal the end of another cottage night, a coast guard vessel joins the police boat that seemed to have dispatched security personnel onto Glennock Island in a search for any evidence connected to a potential missing person's case. After failing to find Mary Craigeigh following an intensive nightly search of her island, the coast guard—with special equipment to scan the lake's depths—locates the tip of the "SPARROW" mast not far off from the shores of Big Island. The following day, after a long phone conversation, Carter tells the police and Coast Guard that he found suspicious pieces of evidence in the outdoor oven located on the Martin cottage property while hiking to Big Island the afternoon before.

After using special equipment to bring the "SPARROW" out of the lake's bowels, Arnold Martin is arrested when Mary Craigeigh's body is found tied up with rope in the sailboat's cabin. Soon, Big Island is searched and the Martins' stone oven is surrounded with yellow police tape. Upon reaching Pier 5 Marina, Carter and Hazel give their two friends a hug as they make their way back into the city. Heading back toward their larger boat, docked in section 3, Carter notices a caravan of police vehicles, setting up camp for a thorough homicide investigation.

The End