

# TRUE CRIME STORIES

I debated with myself about writing this story, for fear I would be shunned were I to reveal my dubious past. Then I thought, "Heck with it, Nothing else comes to mind to write about anyway, so let's get on with it."

It began on a warm evening in September when Dick and I executed the plan to steal the boat. We had wanted to try duck hunting in the marsh by the town reservoir, but we knew we would require a boat to retrieve any ducks we shot. We didn't own a boat, and as we were Grade 10 students, it didn't seem likely that we could come into enough money to buy one.

My friend Dick lived a couple of kilometres away from my house, and walking over there one day I was drawn to a small eight foot pram in an overgrown yard with some rusted lawn mowers and old cars. It seemed an ideal boat to steal, for it was small enough for us to carry and most of the distance to the marsh from there was on dirt roads. It was a long portage, sure, but we felt we were modern day voyageurs and could cope with it. We didn't consider asking to borrow the boat, for if the owner refused, we couldn't then steal it without becoming prime suspects, nor could we inspect the boat closely because we might be noticed loitering about. In our debates about the theft, we felt that maybe the guy wouldn't even miss the boat for months, and then not even care. With that flimsy rationalization, we justified our act. We decided to steal it on the night the carnival came to town. This would give us a reason to be away from home, and moreover might lead people to believe the theft was some sort of prank.

At nine o'clock, in almost full darkness, we crept through the field. Dick lifted the front of the craft, I lifted the back, and we trotted away...until the rope that attached the boat to a cement block pulled taut. Then the boat was wrenched from our hands and fell onto a pile of rusted metal with a clatter of oarlocks and a reverberating echo from the assorted metal, almost as though we were ringing the dinner bell to call in the field hands. They say a rich man keeps a dog, and a poor man keeps many dogs. The owner of the boat must have been a poor man because a dozen dogs began baying lustily, warning the owner of foul deeds afoot. He was not to be disturbed however, and after several minutes the dogs stopped their

racket, the crickets began chirping again, and our hearts once again began to beat.

We untied the rope from our boat, definitely ownership had changed now, and stealthily made our way down the dirt roads that led to the marsh. In addition to aching arms and backs because the boat was heavier than we thought, we encountered an additional problem. At midpoint in the journey there was an automobile parked on the dirt road. There were people sitting very closely in it, and it didn't take a straight A student to figure out what they were up to. We could not make our way through the woods in the dark carrying the boat so, as unfair as it may seem, the lovers had to leave. Placing the boat off the road in the brush, we silently approached the vehicle through the woods. Dick threw a pine cone onto the hood with a soft thud. The lovers briefly disentangled themselves, but soon re-engaged. A few pebbles pinged off the side of the car, and they convulsively sprang apart.

The window rolled down and a man called out, "You're not funny! Is that Bert? Cut it out!" Our voices had not reached the full manly timbre of adulthood, but we endeavored to laugh in as low and sinister manner as possible. A few minutes of this nonsense and the automobile sped off on the rutted road, the occupant hurling imprecations at his unknown tormentors.

Ultimately, with arms and backs on fire, we reached the marsh and hid our craft in a predetermined spot where we knew it would remain undetected. On Saturday, we launched the boat, only to find that its long tenure in the field had caused the plywood on the hull to become soft, and separate from the ribs. In short, it was a mess, and wouldn't float. It had to be repaired. We dreamed up a tale that we had found the boat drifting down the Charles River, ownerless, and prevailed upon my brother to borrow Dad's car, drive it to the marsh, where we tied the boat to the roof and took it home. Through the winter, we applied fiberglass cloth and epoxy to the soft spots, sanded and varnished the ribs, and repainted the boat a fetching blue. It was now a wonderful craft, waterproof and newly painted. We doubted the owner would recognize the boat even if he saw it.

In the spring, it went back to the hiding place in the marsh ready for fishing. We used it once and it handled quite well, though it was a little small for two. When we went to use it a second time, it was gone. Stolen! After all the work we put into it, stolen! It seemed a horrid world where personal belongings could be taken with im-

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