

A detailed illustration of an owl perched on a gnarled tree branch. The owl has large, bright yellow eyes and a sharp beak. The background is a dark, moody night sky with swirling clouds, framed by the dark, textured branches of the tree. The overall tone is mysterious and naturalistic.

NATURE

What the Lake Remembers

a relay in eight chapters

RELAY · WRITERS

The writers

Eight people who never met. One chapter each, in the order it was written.

One	Olive Kassen
Two	Mark
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Chapter

One

written by Olive Kassen

The lake had been empty for three years when the first heron returned. No one saw it arrive. It simply appeared one morning in the shallows near the collapsed boathouse, a gray statue against water the color of tarnished silver. Mrs. Oleander, who walked the shore path each dawn with her thermos of black tea, noticed it first. She stood watching from beneath the willows, breath misting in the October cold, until the bird lifted one stick-thin leg and placed it down again with the calculated slowness of something measuring time differently than she did. She told no one. There seemed no language for it that wouldn't reduce the sighting to mere fact, and facts were not what she had witnessed. The lake itself had changed in the years since the herons left. The water sat lower in its basin, exposing a rim of bone-white stones that had never known sunlight. Algae bloomed in strange geometries where the old dock pilings leaned like crooked fingers. The summer people had stopped coming after the incident, and their houses stood shuttered along the eastern shore, paint peeling in long strips that curled like bark. But the light in autumn still came slanting through the pines at angles that made the whole surface of the lake look hammered from metal. On mornings after rain, mist rose in columns that twisted slowly in air so still you could hear individual pine needles falling into water. The heron seemed to understand this quality of stillness. It fished in the earliest

hours, when even the chipmunks were quiet, and Mrs. Oleander began timing her walks to coincide with its hunting. She learned its pattern. The bird favored the northwest shallows where a spring fed cold water over a gravel bed. It stood for long stretches without moving, then struck with a speed that seemed impossible for something so deliberate in all other movements. Twice she watched it swallow fish that seemed too large for its throat, the shapes visible as they traveled downward. On the morning of the sixth day, there were two herons. The second was smaller, its plumage darker, almost blue in certain lights. It kept a distance from the first, as if acknowledging hierarchy or perhaps just preference for solitude. Mrs. Oleander found herself walking slower, stopping longer. She no longer pretended to be passing through. She was waiting. For what, she couldn't say. The temperature dropped. Frost came early, silvering the sedge grass and making the shoreline stones slick. The herons remained. Three more appeared over the following weeks, and then four more after that. They distributed themselves around the lake with what seemed like intention, each claiming a section of shoreline. At dusk they gathered near the island, the small hump of land thick with cedar that rose from the lake's center. Mrs. Oleander could see them from her kitchen window, their shapes black against the last light, perfectly still. Her husband had asked once, early on, what she was looking at. "Birds," she'd said, which was true and also completely insufficient. He didn't ask again. November brought the first snow. It fell during the night, a wet heavy snow that bent the remaining unfallen leaves still clinging to the oaks. In the morning the world was muffled, sound traveling differently, and Mrs. Oleander put on her boots and walked to the lake before the sun was fully up. The herons were flying. All of them, nine gray shapes turning slow circles above the water. They called to each other, harsh sounds that carried across the white silence, and Mrs. Oleander understood with a clarity that felt like cold water that they were not simply fishing birds who had found the lake tolerable. They were nine, and nine was the number that had left.

They were the same herons. She stood in the snow and watched them spiral higher, and something in her chest opened like a door.

Chapter

Two

written by Mark

one day jack planted a bean stalk that grew. then jack tried to climb up there and there was a castle. the giant came. jack went to hide in the closet and the giant said "fee fi fo fum, what beanstalk did you take from?" jack closed the door. the giant said "get out of my castle.." jack said "sorry, ill climb down the beanstalk", which he did, after cutting the beanstalk down so the giant would fall.

Chapter

Three

written by Sammy Hall

Look, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that last bit makes no sense, that it's some kid's fever dream or maybe Mrs. Oleander finally cracked from all those dawn walks breathing in lake mist. But here's the thing about this village: stories get tangled up in each other like fishing line in a tackle box. What actually happened was the Kowalski kid, Danny, age seven, told that beanstalk story to his grandmother the same morning Mrs. Oleander stood in the snow watching the herons. His grandmother was Vera Kowalski, and Vera had been the one to ring the bell eleven years ago, the night the herons left. Nobody talks about why she rang it. The bell, I mean. The one in the church tower that hasn't been rung since, that the current pastor had the rope removed from because he said it was a lawsuit waiting to happen. But Vera rang it that night, and the sound carried across the water, and by morning every heron was gone. Danny told her the beanstalk story because he'd found something. A rope, basically. Thick hemp rope, frayed at one end, tied to the iron ring set into the rocks at the old lumber landing. The rope went straight down into the water and he couldn't see where it ended. He'd pulled on it. Something pulled back. Vera called the police, which in our village means she called Martin Frye, who's been the volunteer fire chief for thirty years and owns the hardware store. Martin came down to the landing with his son-in-law Paul, who works for the county doing water

quality testing. They pulled up the rope together. It took both of them. What came up was a cage. Aluminum frame, chicken wire sides, the kind you'd use for trapping raccoons or possums except bigger. Scaled up. Inside the cage was a leather satchel, dry, which shouldn't have been possible given where it had been. Paul opened it on the rocks while Martin kept Danny back. Inside were papers. Logs, really. Dated entries in handwriting that got shakier as the pages went on. The last entry was from October 2013, which if you're keeping track was exactly eleven years ago. The entry said: "Nine eggs moved to island. If this doesn't work, ring the bell." The signature was illegible. Water damage, maybe, or just bad penmanship. But Martin knew whose handwriting it was. So did Vera. It was Lawrence Gannet's, the biology teacher who'd lived in the blue house on the eastern shore, the one that's been empty longest, the one where paint peels in strips like skin after sunburn. Lawrence disappeared in 2013. His car was found at the landing. People assumed he drowned, though the lake gave up no body. The investigation lasted three weeks. Then it just stopped. The detective from the county said there was nothing to investigate without evidence of foul play, and a man who walks into a lake of his own accord isn't a crime scene. But here's what Martin remembered, standing there with Paul and Vera and Danny on the rocks: Lawrence had been studying the herons. He'd had a theory. He'd given a presentation at the village hall about it, one of those potluck-and-PowerPoint things where twelve people show up and six of them are asleep by slide three. The theory was that the herons weren't just birds. That they were connected to something older in the lake. That the lake had been their home longer than the village had been anybody's home, longer than the houses, longer than the lumber mill or the railroad grade or any human construction. He'd said they were guardians. That was his word. Guardians of what, he wouldn't say. Or couldn't. Now Paul stood there holding the satchel, and Vera was looking at the island, and Danny was asking if he could keep the rope, and Martin was thinking about Lawrence Gannet walking into dark water with a cage and a satchel and a plan that required someone to ring

a bell if it failed. Nine eggs, the log said. The island. And Mrs. Oleander, who nobody'd told about any of this yet, had counted nine herons that morning, circling. Martin put the satchel in his truck. He told Paul not to file a report yet. He told Vera to keep Danny quiet. Then he drove to Mrs. Oleander's house, because someone had to tell her what she'd been watching hatch.

Chapter

Four

written by Dan Okafor

Mrs. Oleander was spreading peanut butter on toast when Martin knocked. Not the front door, the kitchen door, which meant he didn't want her husband involved. She wiped her hands and let him in without asking what he needed. Martin looked like he'd aged a decade since Tuesday. "You've been watching them," he said. "The herons." "Yeah." He set the satchel on her kitchen table, between the butter dish and a stack of unopened mail. "We need to talk about what they are." She poured him coffee without asking if he wanted it. Martin drank it black and too hot, the way men do when they're working up to something difficult. She waited. The toast was getting cold. Outside, a nuthatch worked its way down the oak trunk in that backwards way they have, stopping every few seconds to wedge something into the bark. "Lawrence Gannet had a theory," Martin said. "I remember. The potluck. He had charts." "You stayed awake?" "I found it interesting." She had found it insane, actually, but Lawrence had been earnest and that counted for something. He'd talked about sediment cores and migration patterns and a geological survey from 1891 that mentioned "unusual aquatic formations" near the island. Most people assumed he was lonely. Obsession looks a lot like loneliness from the outside. Martin opened the satchel. The pages inside were brittle at the edges, yellowed. His hands shook slightly as he laid them out. "We pulled this up an hour

ago. From the lumber landing." She read the entries. They were clinical at first, then desperate. Lawrence had been tracking heron nesting behaviors for three seasons. He'd found something wrong. The eggs weren't hatching. Every nest failed. By the spring of 2013, there were only nine herons left, and Lawrence believed they were the last. Not just here. Anywhere. "Guardians," she read aloud. "Of the lake's memory." "Yeah. That part." Martin tapped the page. "He thought the lake was older than maps show. That it's been here since the glaciers, maybe before. That the herons were part of how it remembers itself." "Remembers what?" "Doesn't say." Martin flipped to the final entry. "But he moved eggs. Took them from failed nests and put them on the island, did something to them. Then wrote this." If this doesn't work, ring the bell. "Vera rang it," Mrs. Oleander said. "The same night. Lawrence must have told her to. Must have said if he didn't come back by dark, or something like that." Martin's coffee cup was empty. He stared into it anyway. "By morning every adult heron was gone. People figured they'd just moved on. Nobody thought to check the island." Mrs. Oleander looked out her window. The lake was smooth, colorless. Nine birds. She'd counted nine. "He died, didn't he. Lawrence." "Probably. Yeah." "And whatever he did to those eggs worked." Martin nodded. "Eleven years. That's how long it takes." She thought about the way the herons flew. The circles they made at dusk. The way they distributed themselves with such precision around the shoreline, like points on a compass. Like they were measuring something. "What happens now?" "I don't know." Martin stood, collected the pages. "But people are going to notice. Village council meets Friday. Someone's going to ask why the herons are back, and I'm going to have to decide whether to tell them this." "Don't," she said. The word came out harder than she meant. "Why not?" "Because they'll want to study them. Or protect them. Or put up signs. And the herons didn't come back to be watched." She surprised herself with how certain she sounded. "They came back because Lawrence made it possible. Because he gave them something. And we don't know what they're guarding, but whatever it is, it's not for

us." Martin looked at her for a long moment. Then he put the satchel under his arm. "You'll keep walking?" "Every morning." "Let me know if anything changes." After he left, she ate the cold toast standing at the window. The nuthatch was gone. On the lake, a single heron stood in the shallows, neck curved, watching the water. Mrs. Oleander watched it back, and thought about Lawrence Gannet walking into the dark with his impossible faith, and wondered what exactly hatches from an egg that's been touched by drowning.

Chapter

Five

written by Colin McAteer

The hardware store closes at five, but Martin is still there at six-thirty, reorganizing paint chips. He's been moving the same rack of samples for twenty minutes, arranging them from warm to cool, then back again. His son-in-law Paul sits on the counter eating chips from the vending machine. "You going to tell council?" Paul says. Martin slides Weathered Barn between Mushroom Cap and Slate Dust. "Haven't decided." "Vera thinks you should." "Vera rang the bell. She's got skin in it." Paul crumples the empty bag. "What's Mrs. Oleander think?" "She thinks we should leave them alone." "Them meaning the herons." "Yeah." "Or them meaning whatever the herons are guarding." Martin stops moving paint chips. Outside, the streetlight flickers on. A car passes, headlights sweeping across the window display of snow shovels and ice melt. Nobody buys snow shovels in November. They wait until the first storm, then panic. "Lawrence's logs mention the survey," Paul says. "The 1891 one. You know where that would be? County records?" "State archive, probably. Why?" "Because I pulled water samples last month. Regular testing. And the mineral content is wrong." Martin turns. "Wrong how." "Higher alkalinity than it should be. Trace elements that don't match the watershed. It's subtle. Wouldn't notice unless you were comparing year-over-year." Paul hops off the counter. "But it's different. Changed. Since the herons came back." "Changed in what direction?" "Older."

Paul shrugs when Martin stares at him. "I mean the composition. The ratio of dissolved solids. It's more consistent with deep aquifer water. Glacial melt. Not surface runoff." Martin locks the register. "You're saying the lake is pulling up old water." "I'm saying something is pulling it up. And it started five weeks ago." Which is when Mrs. Oleander saw the first heron. They lock up together. Paul drives north toward his house; Martin drives south toward the lake. He doesn't plan to. His hands just make the turns. The lumber landing is empty, the rope gone. Martin took it with him, coiled it in his truck bed. Evidence of what, he's still not sure. He walks out to the end of the landing. The boards are soft, spongy with rot. Someone should condemn this dock. Someone should tear it down before a kid falls through. The water beneath is black. No moon yet. Martin crouches, touches the surface with two fingers. The cold goes straight to bone. A heron lands six feet from him. No warning. Just the sudden displacement of air and the click of talons on wood. Martin freezes. The bird is massive this close. Four feet tall, easy. Its eye is yellow and reptilian and utterly uninterested in him. It stabs into the water between two boards. Comes up with a crayfish, crushes it, swallows. Stabs again. The rhythm is mechanical. Stab, crush, swallow. Stab, crush, swallow. Martin counts eleven crayfish before the heron stops. Then it turns its head and looks directly at him. Not past him. At him. Martin's mouth goes dry. The heron's beak is slightly open. He can see the serrated edge of its tongue. Neither of them moves. Somewhere across the lake, another heron calls. A harsh, guttural sound like a gate hinge. The bird in front of him doesn't respond. Instead, it steps sideways. Once. Twice. Deliberate. It steps until it's standing exactly where the rope was tied to the iron ring. The ring Lawrence used. The bird looks down at the ring, then back at Martin. Then it lifts off. Three wing beats and it's gone into the dark. Martin stays crouched until his knees ache. Then he stands, pulls out his phone, texts Paul. "Find that survey." He walks back to his truck. The satchel is still in the cab. He opens it under the dome light, reads through Lawrence's entries again. On the fourth page, he finds something he missed before. A sketch.

Rough, unlabeled. It shows the lake from above, the island in the center. Around the shoreline, nine marks. Nine positions. Martin pulls out a county map from his glove box. Unfolds it across his steering wheel. The marks on Lawrence's sketch align with features. The collapsed boathouse. The lumber landing. The spring-fed shallows. Seven others. Nine stations. Nine herons. He starts the truck. Council meets Friday, but Martin knows what he's going to say now. Nothing at all.

Chapter

Six

written by inkwell_amy

Martin drives. He takes the shore road, window down despite the cold. The lake passes on his right in pieces: black water, white stones, the skeletal shapes of empty houses. He's counting. First station: the boathouse. He slows. A heron stands on the collapsed roof beam, visible against the tree line. Second: the spring shallows. Another bird, knee-deep, motionless. Third: the lumber landing behind him now, where the heron showed him the iron ring. He keeps driving. The road deteriorates past the public boat launch. Pavement gives way to gravel, then dirt. Nobody maintains this section. The summer people are gone and the year-rounders don't come this far. Martin's truck bounces over ruts. His headlights catch a deer, then lose it. Fourth station. A small dock, privately owned, belonging to the Hendersons who haven't been back since 2015. The heron there doesn't move as Martin passes. Fifth: a rocky outcrop where teenagers used to jump. The bird perched on the highest stone. Martin pulls over at the sixth station. Gets out. This one is the old swimming beach, roped off now because of algae blooms. The heron stands in the shallows where the rope used to float, marking the safe zone. Martin walks down to the waterline. The bird doesn't acknowledge him. It's facing the island. They're all facing the island. Martin turns. From here he can see three other herons, each at their station around the lake's curve. Every one of them oriented inward,

toward the dark hump of land and cedar. He pulls out his phone. No signal this far out. He takes a photo anyway. The flash makes the nearest heron flinch, but it doesn't fly. Just resets its position. Exact same spot. Martin gets back in the truck. Keeps going. Seventh station: the inlet where Blackwater Creek feeds the lake. The heron here is smaller, darker. The one Mrs. Oleander described as blue in certain lights. It stands where fresh water meets still, right at the seam. Eighth: the eastern shore, below Lawrence Gannet's blue house. Martin kills the engine. Looks up at the structure. Every window is dark. The FOR SALE sign blew down two winters ago and nobody bothered putting it back up. The heron on this beach is the largest he's seen. It watches him climb out of the truck. Martin walks to Lawrence's back door. Unlocked. It's always been unlocked. He's checked it before, over the years, making sure kids haven't broken in to drink or worse. Inside smells like mildew and mouse droppings. He doesn't turn on lights. Doesn't need to. His phone screen gives enough glow to navigate. Lawrence's study is exactly as the county detective left it. Books on glaciology. Maps pinned to cork board. A desk calendar still showing October 2013, the last three days crossed off in red ink. Martin opens the desk drawers. Old bills. Pencils. A fossilized sandwich. Bottom drawer sticks. He yanks it. Something shifts, and a false bottom lifts. Beneath it: another journal. Smaller than the one in the satchel. Personal. Martin sits on the floor and reads by phone light. The entries are scattered, undated. Lawrence wrote when things happened, not on schedule. Most of it is observations about heron behavior, water temperature, failed nests. Then, three pages from the end: The lake is forgetting. I can measure it. pH rising. Certain insects gone. The herons know. They're trying to remember for it, but they can't. Not anymore. Not without, The sentence ends. Next entry: Took the eggs to the island. Nine, one from each nest. Used the water from the deep place. The spring beneath the spring. If Vera was right about what's down there, if the old stories are even half true, the eggs will take it in. Become it. The herons won't be birds anymore. They'll be, Again, unfinished. Final entry, dated October 29, 2013: Tonight. If I don't

surface by dark, Vera rings the bell. The adults have to leave. They can't be here when the eggs hatch. Can't interfere. The new ones have to imprint on the lake alone. On what the lake was. God forgive me if this doesn't work. Martin closes the journal. Outside, the heron calls. Not the harsh sound from earlier. Something else. Softer. Almost like wind through reeds. He pockets the journal. Leaves through the back door. The heron is gone from the beach. Ninth station. He has one more to check.

Chapter

Seven

written by Priya Nair

Martin drives back the way he came, but faster. The ninth station is on the western edge, where the old rail grade used to cross the marsh before the lumber company went bust. He knows this without checking Lawrence's sketch again. Knows it the way you know where your own kitchen is in the dark. His truck bottoms out on a pothole. Coffee from this morning jumps out of the cup holder. "Great," he says to nobody. "Perfect." The rail grade is a berm now, grown over with sumac and goldenrod gone to seed. He parks where the road ends and walks the rest. His boots squelch in mud that shouldn't be here. It hasn't rained in a week. The ninth heron is standing in water up to its belly. That's wrong. The marsh is usually six inches deep, max. Now it's pushing two feet. Martin stops ten yards back. Watches. The bird isn't fishing. It's just standing there, head down, beak almost touching the surface. Like it's listening. "What are you hearing?" Martin says. The heron lifts its head. Looks at him. Then it opens its beak and makes a sound Martin's never heard from any bird: a low, resonant note that vibrates in his sternum. The water around the heron's legs ripples outward in perfect circles. From the island, eight other herons answer. Same note. Harmonizing. The hair on Martin's neck stands up. He pulls out his phone. Still no signal, but he opens the voice recorder anyway. Hits record. The sound continues for eleven seconds, then stops. The water stops rippling. The

heron goes back to its listening position. Martin plays back the recording. His phone plays nothing but static and his own breathing. "Of course," he says. He pockets the phone and does something stupid. He walks closer. Right up to the edge of the marsh. The heron doesn't react. Martin crouches, puts his hand in the water. It's warm. Not sun-warm. Warm like it's coming from below. And there's a current, faint but definite, pulling toward the island. Martin stands. His hand is dripping. In the phone light, the water on his skin looks thicker than it should. Almost oily, but not quite. It doesn't smell like anything. He wipes it on his jeans. Bad idea, probably. Too late now. The heron shifts its weight. Steps forward one pace. Steps back. Forward again. It's pacing. Or dancing. Or marking something. Martin backs away slowly. Gets in his truck. Locks the doors, which is ridiculous because what's a car door going to do against a bird that might not be a bird anymore, but it makes him feel fractionally better. He drives to Vera Kowalski's house. She opens the door in a bathrobe and reading glasses, holding a mug that says WORLD'S OKAYEST GRANDMA. Danny got her that. "It's nine-thirty," she says. "I need to know what you and Lawrence talked about," Martin says. "Before he went into the lake. What he told you." Vera looks at him for a long moment. Then she opens the door wider. Her kitchen is the opposite of Mrs. Oleander's: cluttered, loud with the television in the next room, grandkid drawings held to the fridge with alphabet magnets. Vera turns off the TV. Pours Martin tea without asking. It's chamomile. He drinks it anyway. "Lawrence came by that afternoon," Vera says. "October twenty-ninth. He looked terrible. Said he hadn't slept in three days." "What did he want?" "He wanted me to promise something." Vera sits across from him. "He said if he wasn't back by sundown, I had to ring the bell. The church bell. He said the sound would drive the adult herons away. That they had to leave before the eggs hatched, or everything he'd done would fail." "Why you?" "Because I was the only one who believed him." Vera's hands are shaking slightly. "About the lake. About what's underneath." Martin leans forward. "What's underneath, Vera?" She looks at her tea. "My

grandfather worked the lumber mill. 1940s. He was part of the crew that tried to dredge the channel deeper so bigger boats could come in. They got down forty feet and the drill hit something." "Rock?" "That's what they thought. But it was smooth. Curved. And warm to touch, even through forty feet of cold water." Vera meets his eyes. "They pulled the drill up and never tried again. My grandfather said the foreman had them pour concrete over the spot. Sealed it. Told everyone it was structurally unsound." "What did they hit?" Vera stands. Opens a drawer. Pulls out a photograph, creased and faded. Shows Martin. It's a drill core sample. The rock is black and striated, but in a pattern too regular to be natural. Too deliberate.

Chapter

Eight

written by wordsbylena

Martin counts the striations. Seventeen visible lines, each separated by 3.2 millimeters if the ruler edge in the photograph is accurate. The pattern repeats three times across the core's diameter, which makes it fifty-one total, divisible by seventeen, divisible by three. He sets the photograph on Vera's kitchen table. Aligns it parallel to the table edge. "The concrete held," Martin says. "For eighty-four years." "Until." "Until five weeks ago." Vera sits. "Paul's water samples. The minerals coming up. That's not aquifer water, Martin. That's what's under the seal." Martin does the math. Five weeks is thirty-five days. Mrs. Oleander saw the first heron on day one. The second on day six. All nine visible by day twenty-three. Eleven years since Lawrence drowned. Eleven years equals 4,015 days, plus three for leap years. 4,018 days for eggs to gestate, or hatch, or become. "The herons broke it," he says. "Or they're letting it break." "What's the difference?" Vera refills his tea. He hasn't touched it. "Lawrence thought the lake was a container. That something old was put here, sealed here, and the herons were the lock. As long as they remembered how to be herons, the thing stayed contained. But they were dying out. Forgetting. So the lake started forgetting too. Started becoming ordinary." Martin picks up the photograph again. The drill core is eight inches long, two inches diameter. The scale written in pencil at the bottom says the actual object extended deeper than they

could measure. Depth: 40+ feet. Temperature: 54°F at surface of contact. He calculates volume if the object is cylindrical, spherical, conical. Insufficient data. "Lawrence gave them lake water," Martin says. "From the deep place. From whatever's sealed." "He made them part of it. So they'd remember for it. Be it, maybe." "And now they're standing guard at nine positions." "Now they're standing guard." Martin spreads Lawrence's sketch next to the photograph. Marks each station with his finger. Counts the distances using the map scale. Each heron positioned 1.4 kilometers from the next, measured along the shoreline. Total circumference 12.6 kilometers. The island at center: 0.8 kilometers from each station. Not exact. Close enough for deliberate. "I need to see it," he says. "The island?" "The seal. Where they drilled." Vera shakes her head. "Forty feet down in November water, you'll die of cold before you find it." "Paul has sonar equipment. County gives him a boat for the water testing." "Martin." "I need to know what they're guarding." He stands. "Lawrence died for this. The herons came back for this. And something is breaking through and I need to see what." "And then what? You'll tell council? Get the state involved? Bring in researchers?" Martin thinks about the heron at the lumber landing. How it showed him the iron ring. How it stood exactly where Lawrence's rope had been tied. "No," he says. "But I need to know." He leaves Vera's house at 10:47 p.m. Drives to Paul's. Wakes him by throwing gravel at the bedroom window like a teenager. Paul comes down in sweatpants and a shirt that says WATER YOU DOING. "I need your boat," Martin says. "Now?" "Now." They launch from the public ramp at 11:20. The water is glass. No wind. The boat motor sounds obscene in the silence. Paul cuts it fifty yards from the island and they drift. "Where?" Paul says. Martin pulls out his phone. Opens the GPS. He's marked the location from old mill records he found three years ago when researching property lines. "Thirty feet southwest of the island. Should be right about," Paul's sonar pings. He stares at the screen. "What." "There's something," Paul says. "Forty-two feet down. But it's not rock." "What is it?" Paul adjusts the sensitivity. The image sharpens. The object is vast. Curved. Extending beyond the sonar's

range. "It's moving," Paul whispers. On the island, all nine herons begin to call. Not the harsh sound. Not the harmonizing. Something new. A rhythm. Three short calls, two long, three short again. They repeat it nine times. Then silence. The sonar shows the object rising. One foot. Two feet. Three. Martin counts: thirty-nine feet deep now. Thirty-eight. Thirty-seven. "Start the engine," he says. Paul's hands are frozen on the sonar screen. "Paul. Engine. Now." The water around the boat begins to warm.

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