



a Short Story

SHALLOW ISLAND

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As our world changes in the blink of an eye, the words of this story are assisted by AI; the story itself was created, designed and constructed by the author.

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This story came to me while I was visiting my father-in-law in Canada. He told me about a boating accident of similar circumstances to the story that had happened the year before. I hope you like it.

Forward

Loon Lake stretches quietly along the edge of Algonquin Park, a narrow body of water cradled by dense, whispering forest. In summer, it becomes a retreat for retirees, those seeking stillness, routine, and the comfort of gentle days. Cedar trees line its scattered islands, their scent drifting lazily across the surface. But the lake is not as peaceful as it appears.

Locals speak of something beneath it, something old. On nights when the moon hangs full and heavy, the calls of loons echo endlessly across the water, hollow and mournful. And sometimes, carried on the breeze, there is another scent, faint, metallic... like blood.

SHALLOW ISLAND

That day, the moon was already visible, pale and swollen in the daylight sky. The air was warm. The lake is inviting.

Juno and Jake drifted near the shallows, taking turns with a single fogging mask as they searched the lakebed for lost golf balls, remnants from careless cottage renters.

They surfaced together, treading water.

“Did you see that?” Juno said suddenly.

Jake squinted. “See what?”

“There’s something down there.”

“Another ball?” he asked, hopeful.

She shook her head. “No... bigger. White. Like... cloth.”

Jake hesitated. “Go check.”

Juno inhaled deeply and slipped beneath the surface. The water cooled as she descended. About twenty feet down, the lakebed came into view, dark, silty... undisturbed and there it was. A white shirt.

Perfectly spread across the bottom, as if laid out with care. Even through the wavering

light, she could make out a symbol printed on the chest, a loon. Her lungs burned. She pushed upward.

“It’s a shirt,” she gasped.

Jake frowned. “Should we grab it?”

Juno shook her head. “No... It’s weird. I’ll just look again.”

“No, wait. Let me,” Jake said, reaching for the mask.

Reluctantly, she handed it over.

Jake descended.

The cold came quickly, unnaturally so. By the time he reached the lakebed, it bit into his skin like ice. The shirt lay exactly as Juno had described. Perfectly still as if it wasn’t empty. He drifted closer, extending a trembling hand. The water around it felt thicker now... heavier. His finger brushed the printed loon. The shirt moved. Not with the water, but against it.

In an instant, the fabric collapsed into the mud, then surged upward as something beneath it rose. Arms burst free from the silt.

Hands clamped around Jake's throat. The grip was absolute, crushing and unyielding.

His last breath vanished in a silent scream as the thing pulled itself upward, a torso wearing the shirt with no head.

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Long before the lake was feared, it was simply beautiful. One day, a couple came here for a picnic on one of its small islands. The husband had planned it carefully, a final attempt to salvage what remained of their marriage. His wife had already chosen to leave him. He knew, and he could not bear it.

The thought of being alone hollowed him out, fed by old wounds, his mother leaving, his sister locking him in darkness as a child. Abandonment was not just a fear; it was a prison he carried with him.

So he begged, clung and smothered her, and she simply pulled further away.

They arrived at the lake under a bright, forgiving sky. Everything seemed calm. Until the first crunch, it came as he reversed the

boat trailer into the water. Both of them heard it, but when they looked, there was nothing, no damage and no obstruction.

They launched out onto the lake, and she sat at the bow, eyes closed, wishing the day would end. Her job was to look out for submerged rocks. The second crunch came without warning. The hull struck a submerged rock. The boat lurched forward, and slowly the water seeped in.

His frustration ignited instantly, sharp, bitter words spilling out.

“You weren’t looking!” He hollered.

She snapped back. The argument escalated, rising with the water at their feet. Then he said it. One word that shattered everything. She stood, rage overtaking reason, and shoved him. He fell backward into the churning water. The motor blade caught him instantly; the cut was clean.

His body sank beneath the lake, headless... the white shirt hovered around him, marked with the image of a loon.

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Juno waited for a while, longer than he could breathe. Bubbles broke the surface. Then Jake emerged. But something was wrong. He didn't breathe, he didn't move. His face was frozen in a silent, endless terror.

“Jake?” she whispered, swimming closer.

She reached out and touched him. His head twisted, too easily, too far, and it rolled back, and became free.

Her scream tore across the lake. The loons answered.

Later, Juno sat at the shoreline, wrapped in shock, deaf to the chaos around her. Police divers searched the water. Found nothing. She stared out across the lake.

A week earlier, she had told Jake she was leaving, moving to Toronto. Starting over. He hadn't been heartbroken. Just afraid, afraid of being alone.

That fear had consumed him. Twisted him, driven him closer... and pushed her further away. Now he was gone, or was he?

Loon Lake remembers the fish that vanish,
the cries that echo, the bodies that surface...
and those that don't and when the moon rises
full and watchful above the water, something
stirs below. Searching, reaching, for the one
thing it fears most,
 Being alone.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Over the last 20 years, I've started to write things down; my father published many books, so there must be some interest there. I've been writing fiction as a hobby and to improve my writing skills, keeping diaries of our travels. At first, it was handwriting, and now it's in electronic form. I once attended a writing forum, and the lecturer said that to be a good writer, you either need to be extremely talented or write one million words. It's daunting, I know, but I'm not there yet. Perhaps it will be two. I'll let you be the judge.

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