

## Holly, Ivy, and the Mist Isle Tow

“Shit. Shit! FUCK!”

There were lots of things Holly loved about living in Michigan, but nothing more than the winters. She was an avid snowmobiler, and Michigan features not only miles upon miles of snowmobile trails Up North, but also Holly’s favorite snowmobile terrain - frozen lakes. If you get a good freeze, most of the surface of the Great Lakes is covered with ice thick enough for ice fishing, snowmobiling, you name it. Some people even take their trucks out on the ice to drive the world’s most slippery donuts.

Holly’s favorite part of driving out onto the ice was the *emptiness* of it all. The lakes are big enough that you can look around and see no evidence of other humans except the tracks you left, and on a windy day you can’t even see those. It brought Holly immense inner peace despite the cold.

*Or at least it did until my snowmobile crapped out in the middle of the lake.*

Holly pulled out her phone to look up a tow service. No bars. *Looks like I’m far enough out I can’t reach a tower.* She stowed her phone and started to pace to keep warm. *I can’t count on the Coast Guard finding me - nobody knows what I’m doing today to report me missing to them. And I don’t think I could spend more than one night out here – if that.*

Holly passed the first hour of her time admiring the sculptures nature carved from the tall frozen waves of Lake Michigan. As the day passed, the wind began to kick up a swirling mist of snow from the frozen lake. Holly retreated to her snowmobile, hoping to use it for some cover to keep herself as warm as possible.

When the wind died down and the mist cleared, Holly noticed something in the distance - a beacon from a lighthouse. *Out here? That has to come from an island of some kind.* Holly didn’t remember there being an island here, but if she was going to have to stay the night on the lake, a lighthouse was much better shelter than the open ice.

The mist that had faded when Holly first saw the lighthouse’s beacon persisted on the island itself, coalescing into a dense fog as she approached the building. The door was cracked open, but Holly saw no signs in the area that the building was inhabited or attended other than the beacon, whose light became harsh when diffused through the mist. She pushed the door open. “Hello?” Her voice echoed through the lighthouse, but nobody replied. “My snowmobile broke down a little ways away, and I need somewhere to stay until I can get a ride.” Silence, save the wind whistling outside. “May I stay here? Do you happen to have a working phone?” No response.

Holly walked into the lighthouse, comforted by the relative warmth of the building. She glanced around in vain hope for a phone, and her eyes widened. The lighthouse was filled with assorted treasures of the freshwater deeps, carefully labeled but sorted haphazardly:

[Unopened package, *SS America*, 1928]

[Heated coal, *O. M. McFarland*, 1937]

[Unspecified pelt, *Le Griffon*, 1679]

[Bell (real – museum's is fake), *SS Edmund Fitzgerald*, November 10, 1975]

There was even a two-seat airplane that... somehow fit into the lighthouse? [Aero L-39 Albatross, July 3, 1998]

*Uh-uh, I've seen this movie. Don't play with the toys, don't read the Latin. Find a phone, make the call, get the fuck out.*

Holly started looking for a phone. She found it, on a labelled desk ([Desk built from lumber, *Miztec*, 1921]) with a label of its own - [Nokia 3310 (functional), *True North II*, 2000] Holly barely recognized the object as a cell phone - it looked more like something you'd give a child as a toy rather than an actual phone. *Still, if it works...* There was a phone book on the desk next to the phone, and Holly found a number for "Ivy's Extractions - dedicated and discreet removal of winter sports equipment from inconvenient places. OPEN 24 HOURS UNLESS ASLEEP" Holly called it.

"Yeah?" It sounded like Holly had barely escaped the UNLESS ASLEEP part of the listing.

"Is this Ivy's Extractions? I've got a broken down snowmobile on Lake St. Clair. I've got a GPS if you need coordinates."

"Nah, I pinged it off your phone. I can be there in 30 minutes. Are you currently safe?"

"Yes, I'm in a lighthouse."

Holly heard a pause on the other end of the line. "Ooookay. Don't leave unless you become unsafe. If you're not by your vehicle, don't go to it; I'll pick you up and I'll drive you there."

Holly hung up and put the phone back by its label. *She got a GPS ping off a Nokia 3310 that sank in Lake Huron almost 25 years ago?* She sat in a chair by the desk, not seeing the label, [Captain's Chair, *Northwest Orient Airline Flight 2501*, June 23, 1950]. She jumped up, overwhelmed by the sudden sounds of screaming and sensation of drowning - sound and sensation that ended as soon as she was no longer in contact with the chair. She banged her hip on the desk, and turned in horror as she heard a rattling noise. She dove quickly and caught the falling vase *just* before it hit the ground. A cloud of dust came off the vase as its fall stopped, and Holly started coughing as she caught a lungful.

She climbed to her feet and put the vase back on the desk next to its label – [Undamaged vase, *SS Carl D. Bradley*, 1958.] *Damn, an intact vase from a shipwreck could be worth a lot of money. Actually, I bet a lot of this stuff would be worth a lot of money if I could convince Ivy to put it on her truck.* Holly coughed again in an attempt to dislodge more of the vase's dust. *Wait, what am I \*thinking\*? The plan was touch nothing and get the fuck out! Besides, it would be a lot of work to get all this junk out of here, only to find out that it's worthless...*

Holly got the sense that the lighthouses whatever it was, was starting to get to her. That sufficiently qualified it as “unsafe” per Ivy’s instructions. She checked her watch. Thirty minutes, no Ivy. She coughed again. *You know what? I’m cold and I want to go home. It’s time to go Karen on this girl.*

Holly picked up the phone and dialed the number for Ivy’s Extractions. It went to voicemail without ringing. “Hey! You said you’d be here within thirty minutes! I don’t know what’s going on, but you need to GET YOUR ASS OUT HERE!” *There.*

Holly started to leave, coughing all the way. *Ugh, I hope I’m not coming down with something.* On the way out, she noticed a faded sign reading “ORA HOUSE SERVICES” and a partial phone number. She ran her finger across the sign, leaving a streak in the layer of dust covering the sign. *Oh my God, if my house cleaning services left a place looking like this, I would not be advertising.* She left the lighthouse to go back onto the frozen lake.

The transition back into the cold and mist triggered another bout of coughing. *I need to get some water in me - shit, it’s back at the snowmobile. I don’t know when Ivy’s going to get her ass here either.* She sat on a large stone by the island’s frozen pier. *How long has it been since I’ve eaten? Girl, if you’re going to be out doing winter sports, you’ve got to put something on this toothpick of a figure you have!*

Holly’s famished reflections were interrupted by the sound of a truck engine. Shaken out of her stupor, she jumped and waved, triggering a coughing fit. She sat back down on the rock as a variety of thoughts arose unbidden and fought for Holly’s attention.

*...how dare she not let us know she was going to be late...*  
*...what a gorgeous truck...*  
*...would she give me a discount if...*  
*...a nap sounds good...*  
*...a sandwich...*

Ivy parked the truck and got out to greet Holly. She was caught flat-footed when the snowmobiler jumped off the frozen wave she was seated on and shouted, “Oh my gosh, thank you for coming! I could just *kiss* you!”

Then Holly, after pulling down her scarf and Ivy’s, did.

After the kiss, Ivy coughed at her throat’s sudden exposure to the cold, dry winter air. *what... the... FUCK was that about?* She took her phone out and shook it at Holly. “You’ve got a lot of *fucking* nerve calling me out here so late, leaving me bitchy-ass voicemails for taking longer than I thought to *find* your lost ass out here, and then treating me like I’m your fuck-buddy when I arrive?” Ivy coughed again. “If your money wasn’t so damn *green*, I’d have half a mind to leave you here and just call the Coast Guard.”

Holly stepped back, a horrified expression on her face. “Oh my gosh I am so sorry. I don’t know what came over me, I don’t usually get that angry *at all*. My emotions are all over the place today; I must be over-stressed about my snowmobile.” She coughed a couple more times, then put her scarf back over her face. “You know, we don’t really *need* to get the snowmobile; I’m sure they’ll just junk it anyway.”

Ivy walked to her truck. “*No way*. You called me to move a snowmobile, and if I don’t do that, I don’t get paid and you’ve wasted my time and money.” She got in and opened her passenger door for Holly. “Well?”

Holly sighed and climbed in. “Okay, okay, don’t see why you’re in *such a hurry*.”

Ivy glared at her. “The cold? My time? Wanting to make my buck and put *whatever this weird shit is* behind me once and for all?”

Holly looked taken aback. “What weird shit?”

“Are you serious? You call me, from the middle of a lake where I don’t currently have service, and ask me to pick you and a snowmobile up from a lighthouse that isn’t here? You don’t think that’s weird?”

Holly, struck by another coughing fit, points out the window. “Of course there’s a lighthouse, it’s right fucking-” Holly finally looked. There was no lighthouse, just a tall frozen wave that could, if you squint, look spire-shaped. “That’s weird. It had to have been here. How could I have called you from a phone I found inside a frozen wave?”

Ivy shook her head. “Whatever, weirdo.” She put the truck into gear and drove, slowly to accommodate her worsening cough, to Holly’s snowmobile. She loaded it up, then got back in the truck and gave a low whistle. “Damn, girl, that’s one *impressive* machine to leave on the ice unattended. I’ve been thinking about getting one like it. You’d have been kicking yourself in the morning.”

“Whatever, can we just get me home so I can get into some warm clothes and get past this day?” Holly pleaded.

Ivy drove the rest of the way off the lake in silence.

## THE NEXT MORNING

“Fuck!” A man in a Coast Guard jacket sat on his snowmobile, holding a rusty compass whose needle pointed at the lighthouse. He spoke into an old-looking radio mounted on his vehicle; the engraved plate on its side read SS ARTHUR M ANDERSON. “Someone was definitely here, and they definitely went in. Fucking beacon. I told you we need a permanent sentry here in the winter!” The voice on the other end of the radio buzzed back scolding. The man sighed. “I know, I know. Just... let me get inside and see what the damages are, McSorley. We’re both getting too old for this shit.”

He walked inside the lighthouse and tapped three letters on the dust-streaked ORA HOUSE SERVICES sign. The sign glowed as time seemed to flow backwards and it was restored to its original state, advertising PANDORA WAREHOUSE SERVICES. The agent lifted the sign and opened the safe under it. He rummaged through the papers. “McSorley? The good news is that at least everything’s still here. They just used the cell phone, sat in the chair, touched the sign, and... oh fuck, here’s the bad news. They touched the vase.” The radio

squawked in alarm and anger. "I know, I know. I'll get on it right away. Hopefully the twelve-hour head start doesn't give them an opening to get over the horizon."

William Morris sighed. He was the oldest of the Coast Guard's Ghost Fleet captains, and unlike younger captains with even higher debts than his - like McSorley - he'd never been able to move up the ranks or pay off what he owed to Mishibijiw. And if he couldn't find the *Carl Bradley* vase's escapees - all seven of them - he'd be up for stop-loss. Again.

## TWO WEEKS LATER

*You know, once we got our emotions under control, Ivy wasn't that bad,* Holly mused as the two women got ready for their New Year's Eve Party. Although they'd been trying to stay incognito since leaving the lighthouse - and Ivy now recognized there was in fact a lighthouse - they decided to spend the night celebrating together as they released the last of their brothers and sisters. *And after this, I can get out of this icebox and go somewhere I can put this beach body to use.*

Ivy glared at Holly waiting for her to finish getting ready. *Ugh, you'd think Holly would at least admit that without me, she'd have been caught.* After all, it was *Ivy* who'd spared Holly from collapsing under the weight of all their siblings, *Ivy* who'd found the Ghost Fleet sniffing after them, *Ivy* who'd sold her entire business at a loss to shake the scent, and even *Ivy* who'd gotten she and Holly tickets to an exclusive party under assumed names. But who did their brothers and sisters thank after they were set free? *Holly. Well, at least tonight she'll be useful as a decoy.* Ivy stopped, made herself take a deep breath, and gave a small volitional cough. *No. that's not me, that's my sister. She's getting stronger, and I need to make sure she doesn't take control. This life is mine.*

Both women had gone with dresses that fit their names, but the design styles they'd used were very different. Holly had chosen a dark green dress with a plunging neckline and a one-leg maxi skirt with straps and skirt in the shape of holly leaves and a sash accented by fake rubies. Ivy, on the other hand, had a light green sleeveless dress with a high neckline and dark green embroidery in a leaf-and-vine motif climbing her body. The leaves at the top of her dress were outlined in emeralds - real, not fake - and her earrings matched.

In the rented limousine on the way to the event, Holly and Ivy did not talk - discussing the plan would give it away to any listening ears the Ghost Fleet may have available - but instead silently reminisced about their brothers and sisters who had already been rehomed.

Ivy's plan to liberate their siblings - and keep them all free - had been elegant. If she and Holly found homes for their siblings where they'd have been expected anyway, they'd be more welcome and it would be harder for the Ghost Fleet to find them. Ivy had worried that she'd left too much of a trail herself, but it turned out that cash could buy a lot of silence.

*They'd rehomed one brother right away. A police officer had pulled Ivy over on the way home from the lake, and a slight cough on her driver's license had given her brother the chance he needed. He'd squandered the opportunity stupidly, like always, by showing his nature at the wrong time, but that was the beauty of putting him there - cops got away with that all the time.*

*A sister had been rehomed at a local political rally Holly's attended. She'd said that there were so many suitable homes so tightly packed together that she wasn't even entirely sure where she went, just that she was gone.*

*They'd left another brother at a buffet restaurant - again, they weren't sure with who, but the glass over the salad bar didn't protect it as well as people thought.*

*Their final brother was left with a man on the street who'd asked for a cigarette. Neither Holly nor Ivy smoked, but Holly bought some, lit one in her mouth, and unburdened herself of her last sibling.*

Ivy felt another pang of jealousy - this was *her* plan, but Holly'd been able to get rid of her three siblings before Ivy could dispense of her two - she took a deep breath and calmed down. *One more night, and this will not be your problem anymore. You can do this.*

The party was, as expected, extremely boring except for watching every man flirt with Holly and watching Holly decide which one (or more?) she'd allow to be successful. For the first time, Ivy allowed herself to think that this wasn't a great plan - *too many people celebrating, too few complaining*. She took another deep breath to control her sister and headed toward the bar.

Ivy stopped in her tracks. Sitting at the bar was a man in a Coast Guard uniform who was too old and more importantly too *plain* to be someone invited to this party, was sitting at the bar, at least four drinks in, complaining to anyone who would listen about the injustices of military hierarchy. But "anyone who would listen" seemed to be an audience of zero - not even the bartender was paying attention unless the captain was specifically ordering a drink.

Ivy's eyes widened as she felt a cough surfacing. *Down, girl! Do you want to get caught, or are you going to listen?* The urge diminished, and fully in control of her faculties, Ivy thought fast. She texted Holly - *It's on, and it's going to be coming in hot. Make your choice and get out of here.* Ivy didn't check for a reply - *at this point, if Holly gets caught, it's her own fault* - but instead grabbed a fresh glass of champagne. *You. Out. Go home, but not too fast.* She breathed gently across the top of the glass and handed it to a waiter. "Can you please send this drink with my compliments to the Coast Guard captain sitting at the car?" The waiter's eyes strained as he struggled to look at something they did not want to see, but Ivy's description was too exact.

## **FIVE MINUTES LATER**

Captain William Morris, stirring from his introspections, found himself in possession of one glass of champagne. He was confused, but not suspicious enough to turn down a free drink. After taking a sip, he gasped, the envy of being outsmarted *again* taking hold as Holly and Ivy's last sister finally found a suitable home. He stood up and looked around for his "benefactor". *If I'm going down, I'm at least going to take her in with me!*

But Ivy was already gone.

## **EPILOGUE – THAT NIGHT**

Captain Morris dreamed of the *William F. Sauber's* final minutes. As his ship began to slip beneath the water, a wave rose, taking the shape of a panther. *Mishibijiw*. The great cat spoke to him:

“Oh, so *this* is how the fat cat keeps captains on the roster. Indentured servitude.”

The young woman standing next to Morris at the helm was new to the dream. Her faded green skater dress was frayed, and her tall black combat boots were scuffed. Her face, plain but not unattractive, wore little makeup and the look of someone who expected to always be second best. Her hair was tidy but unstyled.

Morris argued. “I lost my ship and its cargo, and owed a debt, and the lakes offered me a chance to pay it off.”

“Let me guess – you’re given a series of jobs to do, and once you do them, you’re free, but every time you fail, you owe more years?” Morris nodded. “Bro, that’s called *debt bondage*. The cat’s gaslighting you to keep you enslaved, and let me guess, he’s got people younger than you, who didn’t work as hard, overseeing your labor?”

Captain Morris stared. She’d described McSorley to a T. “Who are you, miss?”

The young woman’s green eyes flashing in the dream’s light. “Just someone who wants to sink this busted institution, ship by ship, until the oppressed people of these lakes can get what they deserve.” She smiled and offered her hand. “You in?”

Morris looked at the hand. For one hundred twenty-three long years, all he’d wanted was only what he’d deserved. He took it and gave a firm shake.

Captain Morris woke up. After all these years, he still needed to use the bathroom after dreaming of the waves. He looked in the mirror, and noticed a new hint of green in his eyes. He smiled. *That’s right, Captain Morris. Time to get to work.*