

SUMMER'S END

JOEL A. SUTHERLAND

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THREE

July 5

Jacob ran as fast as he could, but it wasn't fast enough. He leapt over roots and rocks and ducked under low-hanging branches. His heart pounded against his chest. His lungs burned and wheezed. He pumped his legs harder, swung his arms quicker, and yet he was too slow.

He was going to die.

The creature closed in on him.

Miraculously, Jacob reached the edge of the woods before he was caught, but then—

He came to a skidding stop and ground his feet into the dirt. He had nearly run straight off the edge of a cliff. He peered wildly over the ledge. The drop appeared to be more than five hundred metres. It felt like he was balancing atop the tip of the CN Tower. Below — far, far below — was a cool blue sheet of water, solid as concrete and calling his name.

Jacob spun around, but it was too late.

The bunny burst through the treeline and flew through the air with a mad shriek. Jacob raised his arms to block his face and caught the bunny in his hands. He tumbled backwards and they both fell down, down, down . . .

Jacob woke up before he hit the water. It took him a moment to realize he'd been dreaming. In his hands he clutched Mr. Jingles. He tossed the teddy bear aside and stared at his ceiling as he waited for a lingering feeling of vertigo to pass. Slowly, his heart rate returned to normal.

“Stupid bunny,” he mumbled.

He grabbed his phone off the bedside table and checked the time: 10:07. He texted Ichiro,

whats up

then played a few games of Angry Birds, but he couldn't focus enough to do much damage to the green piggies. He casually tossed his phone on the bed beside him, then rubbed some sleep out of his eyes.

His phone dinged. Ichiro had texted back.

the sky

lame

I want to go back
to the island. you?

A moment later, his phone chimed again.

Definitely.

Dreamt about it all night.

Let's go when I get back
from my aunt's house. k?

k

He opened a browser and searched “Sepequoi Lake.” He was right about the name. He tapped a map and zoomed in. He could see the short waterway that connected it to Passage Lake. There in the centre of the small lake was the island they had discovered. He zoomed in as far as the map would allow, hoping a name would appear, but none did. He switched to satellite view and the island turned brown and green, but Summer’s End wasn’t visible — the house must have been obscured by the island’s tall trees. Jacob’s stomach growled. He turned off his phone and went downstairs in search of food.

The kitchen was filled with the rich aromas of bacon, eggs, cheese and fresh-ground coffee beans. His mother was sitting at the table, sipping from a steaming mug and working on a newspaper crossword puzzle.

“Sleepyhead,” she said, without looking up when he entered. A mid-morning sunbeam cut a path across the centre of the kitchen table.

“It’s, like, ten after ten,” Jacob said. “Most of my friends don’t get up before noon.”

“Huh?” She looked up from the table and frowned at her son, then a look of understanding softened her face and she laughed. “Oh, no, not you. A ten-letter word for a tired person. Sleepyhead. It’s twenty-seven across.” She tapped her finger on the crossword puzzle.

“Ah, I see,” Jacob said, raising his hands and smiling. “All is forgiven.”

“Well, thank God for that.” His mother returned the smile and turned back to her crossword. “There’s breakfast casserole in the oven. Help yourself.”

“Thanks, Mom.” Jacob wasted no time grabbing a plate and scooping a piece of casserole. Steam escaped from between the layers of bread, and gooey processed cheese melted out onto the plate. It was his favourite breakfast. He poured a glass of orange juice, took a sip and began to feel a little more human. His weird bunny dream had faded away to oblivion.

After he’d polished off his first helping of casserole and returned to the table with his second, his mother put her pencil down.

“So, are you going to tell me why you were late getting home last night?”

“Uh . . .” Jacob stalled, then decided there was no need to lie. He hadn’t done anything wrong. “You had to work late so I didn’t think you’d mind. How’d you know?”

“I called your cell but you didn’t answer, so I called home and you didn’t pick up.”

“Why?”

“I couldn’t find my necklace and thought it might’ve fallen off outside. I was hoping you could check for me. And don’t change the subject.”

“Did you find it? Your necklace?”

She pulled the necklace out from under her shirt collar. It was a silver chain with a green gemstone pendant. “It was in the dish on my nightstand when I got home. I guess I forgot to put it on. And once again, don’t change the subject.”

Jacob raised his hands in mock surrender and laughed. “All right, all right. I can’t get anything past you, can I?”

“Of course not. I’m your mother.”

“Well, here’s the truth,” he said, deciding to only share *half* the truth. “Ichiro got this awesome new canoe — he gave it a dumb name, but it’s still awesome — and we took it out on the lake. It was pretty awesome, and time just kinda slipped away. But I knew you picked up an extra shift so I thought it was no big deal. Did I mention how awesome it was?”

“Yeah, I think you covered that. But why didn’t you answer your phone?”

“It didn’t ring.” Jacob took his phone out of his pocket and checked his call history, then showed the screen to this mother. “There’s no record you called.”

“That’s weird.” She looked at her own phone’s call history. “Right here, it shows I called you at 6:06.”

“We were—” Jacob stopped speaking. He’d been about to say “on the island,” but decided to rewrite

history, only slightly. “We were paddling home at that time. Technology, eh?”

“Yeah, I guess. Well, I’m glad you weren’t ignoring me. This is silly, but when you didn’t answer I thought of the Kalapik for the first time in years.”

“I’m not a little kid anymore, Mom. You don’t need to worry about me.”

“I’ll worry about you for as long as I’d like, which will be forever, FYI. It’s what we moms do.”

“It’s funny,” Jacob said, although it wasn’t actually funny at all, “Ichiro talked about the Kalapik yesterday too.” He shovelled another fork of casserole into his mouth, fearful he might soon lose his appetite thanks to the direction the conversation was headed, and not wanting to waste a bite. “It seems a little twisted to lie like that to kids, don’t you think?”

His mother sighed. “I used the Kalapik as a way to keep you safe when you were too young to go into the lake on your own. All the parents in town did the same, including mine when I was young. You’ll understand when you have kids of your own, Jake. You’ll do anything and say anything to keep them safe.”

“Even lie?”

“Yes, even lie. And the Kalapik is only a white lie. So many kids have disappeared without a trace over the years.”