

# **Lions and Christians**

## **A Bill Reyner Mystery Adventure**

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# *Chapter 1*

## *Up North*

Now you have to realise Jane Overland is the kind of woman who puts the fear of hell into normal men like me. She is tall, thin, tremendously made up and unbelievably forceful. Talk about a flasher, man! just three minutes with her and you would have seen it all. I just don't know which way to look when she's around. Yours truly is definitely a man of the world. I've been there, seen it and have the T-shirt. Death and danger are my two middle names. But Jane Overland is harder to face than a loaded gun. She took my last escapade and syndicated it. For my trouble she paid me fifty grand. I mean ... like ... fifty gees it is total chicken feed. I spent more than that on clues and overheads, not counting the loss of my Rolls-Royce.

Why bother to mention Jane Overland at all? Well, I gave up detecting at the conclusion of my last case. Oh, sure, I made a good profit, several million in fact. But all the legwork and the danger, all that kind of junk goes against the grain. Newf on the other hand, well ... his real name is North East; sounds like a compass reference. Anyway, while I was finishing off my pilot's licence he did a little work for Jane. Newf's a good lad; tall, thin and obviously not as smart as myself. Nonetheless, he is a cracking good detective and he knows how to open safes, locks, doors and all that kind of menial crap.

Anyhow, to get back to Jane Overland, she made an appointment with Gran to see me. Gran's my guardian and one-third partner in Reyner Investigations Ltd. As much as I dislike Ms Overland one just cannot let Gran down; she's a dear old girl – Gran that is, not Ms Overland. It was late June when I managed to squeeze Jane in between flying practice. She came to our house in Dundas. Thank God I had already finished my supper when she arrived.

As I sat in the living room nibbling on my fingernails I heard Gran leading the woman into the house. In a very short time they confronted me. Jane wore her usual type of clothes. She had on a leather skirt no larger than a handkerchief and a blouse made from the minimum amount of material, almost totally transparent. Sickeningly, there was also a skimpy black bra – God knows why, she's got nothing inside it – and a frilly pair

of knickers in flesh pink; probably knitted from 18 inches of silk. To cap off the ensemble was a ridiculous black hat that could double as a parachute. Talk about the wicked witch of Dundas Mountain. In her usual fashion she stood there with one foot on a chair, flashing everything to all and sundry.

‘Now, young man,’ she said. ‘I have a job for you.’

‘Can’t you stand like a normal person?’ I said, trying to look elsewhere.

She sort of giggled and flopped down onto the chair. ‘You are a silly boy. What would you do in a nudist camp? As I said, I have a job for you.’

‘Sorry, I’m too busy. I fly now. I don’t do any detective work. If you want a detective you’ll have to talk to my partners, Gran and North.’

‘Listen, boy. I want the best. You’ve proved your ability time and time again. I want you. Now are we communicating on the same level?’

‘Not even on the same planet, Ms Overland. You couldn’t afford me.’

She smiled. ‘I don’t have to, boy. You’re the best when it comes to mass murderers. That’s the reason I want you.’

I really didn’t like her South African accent or whatever it was. She put me on edge and scared the hell out of me. In reality, she was just a second-rate newspaper reporter who made money writing stuff for syndication, whatever that means.

‘I can’t work for less than a million. If you can’t afford that, well then you’ll just have to find someone else.’

She leaned forward and pursed her lips. Gees! you could see right down to her navel.

‘Darling,’ she said, dragging out the word. ‘A mere million?’ She opened her bag and extracted some papers. ‘These are rewards totalling one point five million. I believe they all relate to the same case. Solve one and you’ll solve them all. I want 10 per cent, plus syndication rights. You keep me informed all the way and I’ll do all the communications and paperwork.’

‘As I said, I’ll be collecting my new aeroplane in a few days. I fly, I don’t detect.’

She grabbed my wrist. ‘Perfect, darling. Get a plane with floats, it’ll be perfect.’

‘Why can’t you take no for an answer?’

‘Darling boy, no one says no to Janey. I’ve booked you and North into the Pauldrake Lodge on Ghost River. How’s a week’s fishing and hunting sound?’

It was my turn to laugh. ‘Ghost River. Is there such a place?’

She leaned forward and kissed me. Yuck! I'll have to get my face sterilized.

'Darling,' she said, 'I knew I could count on you.'

I did not remember agreeing. But a nice little holiday on Spooky River might hit the spot. 'Alright, alright. So what is this case, should I decide to accept it?'

She tossed the papers onto a nearby chair and then threw herself into another. The woman landed like a sack of oversexed monkey nuts. 'I trust you implicitly,' she said in a wheezy voice. 'North will go with you.'

'What about you?'

'I have work to do here, but I may pop in.'

Wow! I sure hope to hell she quickly pops out again. 'Sure, babe, this will be a no-sweat mission. What exactly am I looking for?'

Jane settled into a comfortable position and looked through me with those steel blue eyes. 'I have reason to believe people are being abducted and taken to an unknown destination where they are cold-bloodedly murdered. That list of missing people is just the surface. I think the numbers could mount into the hundreds. You have to find out the destination and then eliminate it.'

'Oh sure. No sweat. Just how do you think I can manage the impossible?'

'With my guidance, dear boy, you will perform the impossible immediately and miracles even sooner. I have booked you into the Pauldrake Lodge because I have reason to believe that to be the destination of the abductees. Your trip is a reconnaissance mission. Learn what you can and return without tipping your hand.'

'Then what?'

'Then, dear boy, we will consider our options. I have something to show you when you return.'

I hope it's not normally clad in leather, I thought.

There is no denying that Jane is a good organizer. She had everything planned down to the last detail. A few days later, Newf and I took a limo to Port Dalhousie where a privately hired floatplane awaited us. The pilot seemed very friendly and informative. After I explained that I was also a pilot and awaiting the delivery of my own machine he let me take the controls for a while. Surprisingly, we discovered that there really was a place called Ghost River and it is in Ontario. The place was so far north that I expected to see Santa with his elves waiting to greet us.

Having lived in Ontario all my life I never realized how big it is. We flew almost directly to Sioux Lookout in about four hours. Man! primitive doesn't come into it. Oh, these people had everything, no problem there,

but they enjoy having no amenities. I mean, like ... I've seen shopping centres bigger than this town. We refuelled and off again. From up there the entire world looked to be covered in water. This time we flew low and almost due east. After about twenty minutes we swooped in over a river and made a smooth landing on the water.

The pilot used the plane like a taxicab and motored to shore. A huge house in exquisite gardens lay at the end of a long jetty. There were three other aeroplanes moored there and maybe a dozen boats. The house was at least four times larger than the one I owned on Fiend's Rock. A young man moored us at the jetty and we disembarked.

'Straight to reception, sir,' the young man said. 'I'll handle your luggage.'

'Wow, look at that, Newf. Gran would be proud of us.'

Inside the building was like any regular hotel. They had a carpeted foyer, a reception desk and pointless pictures and ornaments littering the walls. A very pleasant and good-looking woman smiled at me from behind the desk. The whole place looked immaculate; so did she.

'Would sirs like refreshment or would you prefer to book in now?'

Wow, a bit different to the last hotel I was in. I smiled back at her.

'Thank you. We'll book in first.'

'It would be a Mr Reyner and Mr East,' she said all knowingly.

'Correct.'

'If sirs would kindly sign the register, I'll arrange for your luggage to be sent up. Here's a list of activities. If you wish, a councillor will assist you in deciding your interests.'

'Thanks.' I took the little booklet and Newf got one as well. The thought suddenly struck me, who the hell's paying for all this?

A couple of young men came running, one looked at me and said, 'Please follow me, sir.' He led the way to the elevator. Newf got left behind, but we did not wait for him. It didn't matter as it turned out that there were two elevators and we all reached the fourth floor within moments of each other. My personal guide led me to my room, which was right next to Newf's. Not counting the bathroom, I had a two-room suite. There was a very nice bedroom with double bed and a sort of lounge-cum-living room. I went for my wallet.

'No, sir. We're not allowed to accept gratuities. If you need anything just use the house phone, sir.'

'How come there's no cars in the parking lot?'

He smiled a very warm smile. 'No roads, sir.'

The young lad left. I looked around the sumptuous room. The decor looked mid twentieth century, with nothing bulky and nothing overdone.

It was all very tasteful and expensive. The paintings on the walls were prints of some of the masters; not my cup of tea. What the hey – it's all on the house. Or at least I hoped it was.

A gentle tap-tap came to my door. I assumed it was Newf and hurried to open it. You wouldn't believe my shock when I saw who stood there. It was Jane bloody Overland, for Christ's sake. I should have slammed the door and ran and hid. 'Hi,' I gasped weakly.

'Not pleased to see me, sweetie?'

'Sure. I'd invite you in but I just had the room decontaminated.'

She smiled and marched in, closing the door behind her. 'Remember, my boy, you are here for a purpose. And as I am footing the bill I want work, not play.'

Man! that was a relief. I sure as hell didn't look forward to playing any tunes on that old fiddle. 'Oh good,' I said.

'As far as anyone here is concerned,' she said, 'we don't know each other. I just came to warn you. Is that clear?'

'Sure. Warn me about what?'

'That you don't know me, silly boy.'

In a thankful moment she opened the door and vanished into the interior of the lodge. As I was closing it again Newf turned up. 'Was that 'oo I fink it was?'

'Yeah, come in. She says we don't know her. What's your room like?'

'Great. Did you see the activities?'

'No, I haven't had time with all these bloody visitors. What activities?'

'There's 'untin', fishin', shootin' practice. They've even got a show in the main lounge later on. And there's a casino. I didn't bring a load of loot wiv me, did you?'

'The boss lady said we're not here to have a good time, we're here to work. So where's our bloody luggage?'

'Ah, cheer up, Bill. Let's do a bit o' lookin' abart. What you say?'

'Sure.'

What I needed to find was the bar. I could sink a couple of expensive beers. That would put me in the right mood after all that flying. Together, we set out on an exploratory mission. Maybe talk to a few of the natives and see if there were any decent-looking women in the joint. We found the bar without any difficulty.

After settling in to watch TV with a grand beer a man walked up and sat with us. 'Greetings, gentlemen,' he said.

'Hi.'

‘Here at Pauldrake Lodge our only interest is the enjoyment of our patrons. For today, I’m the entertainment supervisor. What kind of thing interests you?’

I took a good swig of my beer. ‘Wine, women and song. So far I haven’t seen much of any.’

He grinned to be polite. ‘We run a legal and clean house. However, we do try to accommodate our guests as best we can. How about a fishing expedition?’

‘Nah, got one.’

‘Canoeing?’

‘Nah, too much like hard.’

‘We have a hunting expedition going out first thing in the morning. Would you like that?’

‘Nah.’ I didn’t want to be too negative, but really. ‘I’ve only just come from Hamilton; a nice long rest appeals to me most at this moment.’

‘Well,’ he said sadly. ‘Most gentlemen bring their own young ladies. I assume you’re alone.’

‘Yeah,’ Newf said in his usual stupid way. ‘We’re alone together. It’s a works outin’, yah see. No broads allowed.’

‘Well, we’re not into that sort of thing. We do offer many exciting pastimes, diving, flying or boating. But if it’s young ladies you are looking for, you should try Lion’s Lodge.’

‘Flying?’ I questioned.

‘Yes, you know – aeroplanes.’

‘Can I fly it?’

‘Are you a licensed pilot?’

‘Oh, sure.’

He smiled and nodded his head. ‘Certainly. Our pilot will have to go with you. Don’t want anyone getting lost in the wilderness up here.’

‘Great.’

‘I’ll arrange a flight for you tomorrow. Anywhere in particular that you’d like to go?’

‘No.’

‘I’ll have room service call you with the time and arrangements. Alright, sir?’

‘Sure.’

Man! now that’s what I call exciting: flying. Since I learned to fly ... well, there’s nothing like it. This was going to be a holiday to remember. Real bush flying, Man! Newf was not impressed and didn’t want to come with me. I don’t think he trusted my flying ability. And to think it was me



who taught him how to drive and it wasn't me who smashed my Rolls-Royce into a thousand unrecognisable fragments.

Newf booked himself into a hunting expedition. That sort of thing is far too primitive for me. They would set out at 6.00 a.m. I mean that's the middle of the night. Then they canoe miles downriver, or up, and struggle through the bush to shoot some poor defenceless animal that's too big to bring back in the boat. What a ridiculous way to spend a fine day. Now I'm going flying, that's civilised. And to boot, it starts at a civilized hour, like noon.

Newf and I spent the evening in the games room. Never saw Ms Overland again, thank God. They had every conceivable game down there: pinball, tenpin, darts, pool, foosball and dozens of games I'd never seen before. They also had a cinema, though we didn't participate. Newf is a crafty twit; he beat me at almost every game we played. I reckon he must cheat with the scores as he can add up faster than me.

I slept so well and soundly the maid had to wake me up at eleven thirty. I guess it's the air up there, no smog or motor fumes. By the time I got showered and dressed it was gone half past twelve. The manager said not to worry as my pilot had no other engagements, so I had a nice hearty breakfast before we left.

When I eventually walked out to the dock, it was almost two in the afternoon. The pilot sat in a deckchair with a beer in one hand and cigarette in the other. He was stripped to the waist and enjoying the sunlight with a Walkman plugged into his ears.

'Hi,' I said. 'I do hope I'm not disturbing you.'

He slowly pulled off his headset and smiled vaguely. 'Mr Reyner?'

'Yes.'

'Great. She's fuelled up, hot and handy, so to speak. Where d'you wanna go?'

He seemed a nice enough chap, probably about my age, certainly no more than twenty-five. 'I don't know, just fly I guess.'

'Sure. Ever taken off on water before?'

'You mean as pilot?'

'Yeah.'

'No.'

He grinned and downed his beer, flicking his cigarette into the water. 'They said you had a pilot's lenience.'

'Yeah, I do.'

'Good. You fly I'll watch. Okay?'

'Sure.'

The plane was a nice modern-looking Piper with single engine. I climbed into the driver's seat and awaited my companion.

'I'm Geoffrey,' he said. 'But people call me Tinker.'

'Tinker?'

'Yeah, cuz I can't stop tinkering with things. Anyhow, stick this headset on; it's got noise-cancelling microphones.'

I put on the headset and he talked me through the start-up procedure. I can't begin to explain how exciting it all felt. He must have unhitched the moorings just before he got in, as I could see we'd drifted a bit in the wind by the time the engine started. It felt strange – more like driving a powerful boat than an aeroplane. I pointed her upwind and throttled up. It was truly beautiful as she gently lifted clear of the water and climbed into the brilliant blue sky.

The headset was a really nice idea; you could talk over the roar of the engine. The pilot showed me how to set the mixture and adjust the trim. It felt great up there in the sky wondering how Newf was getting along paddling his canoe.

'Now, if they only had women at this lodge it would be perfect,' I said, just making conversation.

Tinker laughed. 'At Pauldrake you have to bring your own. I'm told that Lion's supply them, though. They're not like our lodge.'

'Why?'

'To start with they charge ten times as much.'

'Wow! So where is this Lion's place?'

Tinker pointed roughly north. I banked her over and changed heading. Even if I wasn't staying there I thought I'd take a look-see. I pulled out my GPS, turned it on and placed it on the dash. The pilot laughed and pointed to the on-board GPS. I knew that, but I wanted to mark Lion's because it sounded like the kind of place I may wish to visit in my own plane.

# *Chapter 2*

## *Insanity*

Jane Overland has the cheek of old Harry. Man! what a broad. Would you believe she even changed the order on my plane! Though, they didn't do anything until they had contacted me. She had asked them to put floats on it instead of wheels. I agreed; having seen the many landing sites all around the province I figured water landing would be the best. That has to be a first – me agreeing with Jane. Of course, it delayed delivery and I still had to find somewhere to park it. I found somewhere up in Lincoln, a boatyard that also looks after floatplanes.

One thing I don't like is a load of cloak-and-dagger stuff. I like everything out in the open where I can see it, but Ms Overland revels in the esoteric and secret sort of crap. She arranged for Newf and me to visit this secret location, which later I deduced to be in the Beverly swamp area. I mean like how secret can a house be in a swamp, especially to a man with a GPS. Jane might be a good reporter but she was real dim when it came to life. She made us sit in the back of a closed van, so we couldn't see where we were going. Big deal! We drove for over half an hour, round and round, up and down. I know we went up the mountain because my ears popped. At length we drove up an unmade road; I could tell because of the speed and the roughness. Then we stopped, the engine was shut down and prissy knickers came and opened the door for us get out in our secret location.

'This is the place,' she said. 'We'll enter by the back door. Please, follow me.'

I pulled out my GPS and hoped I could catch enough satellites before we entered. I dallied about at the back door as long as I could then pressed Mark, so I would know where this secret house was actually located. I don't think Jane Overland even knew what a GPS was.

Inside seemed quite nice; the lights were already on and another geezer was there to welcome us. The guy looked a bit like an undertaker, all in black, with silly half glasses and a real miserable face. He looked like he'd been suckled on lemons.

'Are these the two?' he said in a low and secretive tone of voice.

Jane nodded. 'Is everything set?'

‘Indeed.’

She led the way into another small room, probably a sitting room or maybe a living room. It had one sofa, two easy chairs and four polished wooden chairs. Jane indicated for us to sit on the sofa. The undertaker walked into the room; he looked very pensive and had a deep scowl on his face.

‘How much do these two know?’ he asked, looking at Jane.

She dropped herself in her usual flashy way onto one of the easy chairs, crossed her legs and smiled. ‘They can be trusted. I told you that.’

‘But how much do they know?’

She crossed her legs the other way, flashing everything en route. ‘Nothing.’

The undertaker licked his lips and then stroked the back of his neck as if trying to give birth to a thought. He pulled a polished chair over and eased himself down onto it directly in front of us. ‘I am Daniel McIntyre.’

‘Yes?’ I encouraged. ‘So?’

‘Oh, well, I am a psychiatrist you see.’

‘Big deal.’ I looked at Jane. ‘What’s going on? You guys think I’m nuts or something?’

Jane shook her head. Somehow she looked sad; her eyes were downcast and her expression less energetic than usual. ‘Just listen,’ she whispered softly, ‘and learn.’

I sighed. ‘Okay, I’m all ears.’

‘I suppose I will have to bring you up to date,’ Dan said and then took out a handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his face. ‘Earlier this year a trapper was moving camp just as the Ghost River began thawing. He moved eastward and came upon a very strange thing. He found what at first he thought was a bear’s lair. A cave in the rock, way down near the waterline. On further investigation he was attacked most viciously, but was neither by a bear nor even a wild animal. He was severely wounded by a human.’

I began to fidget, as the story seemed boring. ‘Another Mowgli story, is it?’

He looked at me with a sort of sickly smile. ‘Not quite. The trapper managed to find his way back to Sioux Lookout. But instead of reporting the strange event he reasoned there would be more money in it if he could sell either the story or the creature to a newspaper.’

‘And that’s where Ms Overland comes in, is it?’

He frowned at me as though I was disturbing his concentration. ‘No. He wrote a letter to an American magazine, but before an answer was received someone murdered him. Or at least he died violently. The

reporter from the American magazine stayed at the Pauldrake Lodge and made enquiries. He was unable to come up with anything. All would have been forgotten but for the fact he, too, disappeared without trace.'

Although he was staring hard at me I didn't say anything. Newf broke the silence.

'An' then what 'appened?'

'About 40 miles downriver a logging camp found a child dying in the wilderness. The boy was flown to Sioux Lookout and consequently to Toronto Children's Hospital. The child was suffering from severe psychosomatic trauma. I volunteer each month to help such poor children.'

'And you live in Toronto?'

'No. I live in Ancaster and work at the Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital.'

'Oh the nut-bin, the OH.'

He glared at me over the top of his half glasses. If looks could kill I would be pushing up daisies. He continued as if trying to ignore my remarks.

'It was during one of my sessions with the child that a very frightening thing came to light. The child mentioned a horrific occurrence.'

'Yeah, like what?'

He looked at Jane and she nodded her approval. 'Murder on a scale heretofore unheard of. At least not since the Holocaust.'

'From a kid and nutcase to boot?' I commented, trying to show my disbelief.

Jane stood up and sauntered in front of me. 'The American magazine has offered a reward of half a million for the answer to the mystery of their lost reporter. Does that interest you, Mr Reyner?'

'I don't think it's worth risking my life chasing wild geese on the word of a lunatic child. The money's not important. What is, is the truth. If this sort of thing is going on, how come no one knew about it? Why aren't the authorities doing their bit and what's it got to do with me, anyway?'

'I know about it,' Jane snapped.

'Yes, well ... Why has nothing been done by officialdom? It all sounds very fishy to me.'

Jane sighed. 'It is. I've hired you. Now let's stop farting about and get on with it.'

'I have to get my mind settled. First, I would like to know how you know all this and why the fuzz haven't taken over.'

Jane cupped her brow with both hands and then stroked her hair back. She stood in front of me and placed one of her feet directly on my

knee. 'Listen, boy, you have muscles, brawn and bravado. I have the brain. Just take my word for it and worry about solving it and staying alive. Now, are we communicating on an even playing field?'

I'd admit to anything to get her off me. 'Okay, okay. So why don't you get on with it?'

She took her foot off my knee and swung around. 'Tell him, doc.'

Daniel McIntyre carefully adjusted his glasses and coughed to clear his throat. 'I used hypnotism on the boy to discover the origin of his malady. Mental regression, you know.' He stopped and you could see the perspiration growing on his forehead.

'Yeah?' I encouraged again.

'I think it may be better if you experience it firsthand. Ms Overland thought it would be more impressive. You must not raise your voice and any questions should have a yes-no answer.'

'You've got the kid here, then?' I asked in surprise.

He nodded. 'Please, follow me.' He led us into another room. I noticed that this door was locked. Inside, the lights were dim and a boy of about twelve or thirteen lay on a bed. McIntyre indicated the chairs arranged two on either side of the bed. The kid lay on top of the covers wearing shorts and shirt. He looked unconscious.

'Is he alright?'

McIntyre sat and then eased forward and checked his patient. 'He's sedated. When everyone is ready we'll begin.'

I looked around and all were seated comfortably. 'Go on then.'

McIntyre opened his little bag and extracted a syringe and a vial. He loaded the syringe and then rubbed some alcohol on the kid's arm. After giving the boy a shot, he placed everything on the bedside table and checked the kid's pupils.

'We'll be ready in a few moments. Now, no sudden or violent noises.'

We all nodded in agreement. I really didn't like all this hocus-pocus and didn't know what to expect. After a short time the quack took the lad's hand and gently rubbed it.

'Now, David, I want you to relax. We are all friends here. You are feeling warm and cosy. What do you remember?'

The kid moaned a couple of times but didn't say anything.

McIntyre continued speaking softly. 'Listen carefully, David. You are going back, back, remember the lions ...'

The child snapped his eyes open. I thought they would bug out of his head. He could sure see something terrible, but only in his mind. I felt uneasy and had to look behind me to make sure the kid hadn't seen something in the room that I had missed.

‘Tell me what you see, David,’ the quack said, holding the little guy’s hand.

‘I can see them now. The poor people, I can see them all.’

‘Tell me what you see, David.’

‘It’s the lions.’ His breathing quickened as though he was running. ‘The lions. Blood.’ He screamed, almost scaring the hell out of me.

‘It’s alright, David, I’m with you. There is nothing to fear. Let’s go back farther, gently back, back. What do you see now?’

‘Hunters, hunters with guns.’

‘And what is happening, David?’

‘They’re after me, they’re after me.’ The kid screamed and clutched his left shoulder, then sobbed bitterly.

‘Do we have to do this?’ I asked, trying to keep my voice down.

McIntyre soothed the lad’s brow. ‘There, there, David. You’re safe now. You relax and sleep.’ He turned to me. ‘I’ve put the boy under dozens of times. He always has the same start, lions and hunters. Though over the weeks I have put together an approximation of what happened to him.’

I shrugged. ‘So?’

McIntyre nodded to Jane, who said, ‘Come along, gentlemen, let’s retire to the lounge.’

We exited the bedroom and Jane quietly closed the door, leaving the doctor in the room with the kid. She then led us back to the room with the sofa and easy chairs. Without asking she walked over to the drinks cabinet and poured me a whisky. She handed me the drink and said softly, ‘Sit.’

I took the glass and sat on the sofa. ‘I’d rather have a beer.’

‘Be a man for once; drink a man’s drink.’

‘Well I really don’t see what all this has to do with anything. Do I have to drink this?’

She snapped the tops off a couple of beers. Handing one to Newf, she sucked on the other and fell into an easy chair. After a few moments just observing me she said, ‘Let me tell you what happened to David.’

‘Only if I get one of those beers.’

She exhaled noisily and swapped my whisky for her beer.’

‘Thanks.’ Whisky is okay but beer’s more relaxing. I settled back to listen.

‘The kid was captured in Saskatchewan, taken by plane to a destination unknown and there his parents were murdered. Somehow he escaped and the bad guys hunted him down. It was during this that he got a rifle bullet through his shoulder. The bullet went right through; the only damage was a neat hole in his scapula. Bleeding and frightened, he

managed to elude the hunters and then at night he swam to a different shore.'

'Like, with a bullet in him?'

'It happened,' she growled angrily. 'For almost a year he survived in the wilderness and in late summer of the next year he was found by the trapper.'

'Crap!' I said in disgust. 'The temperature up there gets better than eighty below. No inexperienced kid or even adult could survive. It's absolute crap. I sure as hell don't believe a word of it.'

'Doctor McIntyre has documented the entire adventure. It is most certainly true. The kid survived. I've seen the X-rays; he has a hole right through his shoulder blade. Now he's off his stick, the doc thinks he could probably be rehabilitated and that's what we're going to do.'

'And on the strength of the word from a loony kid, you want me to risk life and limb up in the frozen north?'

'It's not frozen at the moment. If the story is fiction then there is nothing to fear, Mr Reyner. What do you say to that?'

I had to think for a moment – mull over the project, analysing the theory. 'You think Pauldrake Lodge has something to do with it?'

'Yes.'

'Nah. Doesn't make any sense. Why would anyone go to all that trouble to kidnap a family and murder them without reason? It's crap. There's no profit in it. The cost would prohibit such a thing. The kid got lost with his parents and had nightmares about lions and hunters. McIntyre's got you on a string. What's his game? Fame and fortune, maybe.'

'What if it's true?' Newf asked suddenly.

'Course it isn't. There's only three reasons for killing: revenge, jealousy and profit. I can't see any in this story. It's crap and besides, there are no wild lions in northern Ontario; at least none I have ever heard of.'

'What about all the other disappearances?' Jane said, smiling that "I know it all" smile.

'You can't tie them into the same area. I think you're grabbing at straws. Now, if you just want me to find out how the kid got there in the first place, well I can see some reason in that. But I don't work cheap.'

'What happened to the trapper?' she said softly as if trying to tantalize me. 'And then there's the magazine reporter, what happened to him and why? Cheap doesn't come into it, Mr Reyner. Find the reporter and we're each a quarter of a million US dollars richer. Does that stir your fancy?'

'Why does you fink it's Pauldrake Lodge?' Newf asked.



Jane grinned. ‘Simply because the kid was found on the opposite banks of Ghost River. He said he did some swimming.’

‘Alright, but I’d like a motive.’

She shook her head sadly. ‘Motive, capability and opportunity. None of which can I offer you. I have one escaped victim and I have reason to believe there are dozens more. If we discover the crime we will find the motive. Are you with me, dear boys?’

‘Why all the secrecy?’

‘At least four people have vanished already. If the child’s whereabouts is kept a secret they won’t know who they are after. I really don’t want to find myself confronting the missing. Where, who, why and how the boy is, is my secret and will remain that way until you bust the case wide open. The police are a nonentity. They don’t know a crime has been committed and who am I to tell them?’

‘How do you know where the boy came from?’

‘My concern, only,’ she said. ‘Just take it from me – the boy is genuine and the story is true. I know who he is and the name of his parents. I even know his home address, but if I hand him over to the authorities ... well ... who among them can I trust? I know I can trust you and North.’

‘What do you mean four people have vanished already?’

‘His parents disappeared, too. They were all taken to somewhere near Ghost River and for reasons unknown, murdered. Don’t bother yourself with the reasons. If you can find the bodies, find the place, then I’m sure we’ll find a plausible explanation.’

Of course, when I got back to Dundas I told Gran all about it. Everything I knew, which wasn’t very much. In her usual calm and all-knowing way she suggested I should book a weekend at Pauldrake and this time keep a lookout for suspicious things, the like of which she could not say.

‘Have a look-see if it is possible to swim the river,’ she suggested. ‘Talk to some of the old trappers if you can find any and ask them what they think about the possibility of surviving the winter up there. And if so, how?’

I had to hand it to Gran. No matter what, she would come up with a bunch of things to do. First, I phoned enquiring about my plane. Thursday, the man said. So I could go pick it up on Thursday. Arrangements were already made to berth it at Lincoln just down the coast a bit. Man! I couldn’t wait. This was going to be the most incredible time of my entire life. Next, I phoned Pauldrake and made reservations. I figured two rooms would be okay. Already, I was planning in my mind’s

eye how, what and even when. Trappers must make a fire to cook their grub. All I had to do was look for smoke along the river and land nearby.

Newf would be excited when I told him we were off to the great north again. He really liked that ridiculous hunting trip, even though they didn't catch anything. At supper that night, when we were all seated at the table, I broke the news.

'Newf,' I said. 'We are going back to Pauldrake this Friday. I'm flying us there in my very own plane.'

'I ain't goin',' he said.

'Well of course you are. It's for the case we're working on.'

'Sorry, boss. I arranged to take Mary out this weekend. No can do.'

'You realize that if I paid you, I'd have cause to fire you?'

'Yup, but no can do; not this time, boss.'

I really didn't want to go alone. 'What if I say Mistress Mary can come, too?'

'Nope. I told you. Arrangements already made.'

'Gran, make him come with me. Isn't there something in the contract that says he has to do as he's told when we have a case on?'

She smiled. 'I'm afraid not, William, dear. Would you like me to come with you?'

Now there's a thought. No – I didn't want Gran to come with me. What if I met a broad? I couldn't think of anything more terrible than taking Gran on a trip like that.

'Sure, Gran, why not.'