

Chapter Four

"Fish, Whistles, and Cherry Pie"

Newton is the Pend Oreille county seat. The total land area of the town is about one square mile. The town area is actually split in two by the Washington-Idaho state boundary. The Washington side is Newton, the Idaho side is called Oldtown. The towns are divided by State Avenue, other than that they're really the same town.

The Pend Oreille River runs northwest from Lake Pend Oreille in Idaho and forms the town's northern boundary. The lumber mill is located across the river in Idaho but most of the employees live in Newton.

It was Sunday and like most good Lutherans, the Larsons went to church. I think our family had been Lutherans ever since Martin Luther wrote his ninety-five thesis in 1517. Mom's side of the family was Norwegian and Dad's side was Swedish. This blending of cultures did occasionally effect our family harmony, especially when it came to the proper way to prepare lutefisk, but in the end we were all Scandinavians and good Lutherans to boot.

Our church was located kitty-corner from St. Anthony's Catholic Church. Mass and our Lutheran service both started at 10 o'clock. We drove to church. The O'Clannihans lived two blocks from their church and always walked to mass.

As we got out of the car I saw Lucy and her family nearing St. Anthony's. Lucy's mom was carrying her new baby and Lucy was holding the hands of her twin three-year

old brothers. Her dad was bringing up the rear with the other four girls. She saw me and with her good Christian attitude, looked away. I looked at her and noticed she looked a little different. I guess it must have been her new purchase from Spokane's Crescent department store that enhanced her looks.

My parents, sisters, Janet and Tammy, and I entered our church and as always sat in the same pew near the back. To say I enjoyed church would not be truthful. Fortunately we never stayed for Sunday School and since we sat in the back we were able to make a quick exit. I always felt better after attending our services. I wondered if it was because I felt the Spirit or because it was over and now I could do what I wanted.

Like every other store in town, the feed store was closed on Sunday. It was spring and the fish were biting in the Pend Oreille River. I had told Jeff, the day before, if he wanted to go fishing to meet me at Union Avenue and 3rd Street at 1:00 o'clock. I rode my bike with Boots following to the rendezvous point where I found him waiting. We had our tackle boxes in the baskets hanging from our bikes' handlebars. We held our fishing poles in one hand and steered with the other. We rode up to the north end of Union and walked the short distance to the river shore across from Kelly Island. The water was deep here and I knew the trout might be biting even if it was afternoon.

We were both using lures and soon caught our limit. I was surprised that the fishing was so good this time of day. I told Jeff that I had told the chief of our volunteer fire department, Gus Gustafson, that we might be by to see him if we caught any fish. Jeff was fine with that and the three of us headed over to fire station next to the city hall on South Washington Avenue.

Gus was about 80 years old and pretty much lived at the station. His wife had died about 10 years earlier. He had a Daughter that lived in Sandpoint, Idaho, about a 45 minute drive to the east, but he didn't see her much. He was sitting in a metal lawn chair underneath the awning in the front of the building. He loved to whittle and was making a silent wooden dog whistle. As soon as Boots saw him she took off running. I could see him blowing the whistle as we got closer to the station.

Jeff looked at me and said, "Howdy, that's one of the shrillest whistles I've ever heard, it's got to be one of those silent dog whistles."

"You can hear that? I couldn't hear a thing but I know Boots heard it."

He answered, "Yes, I can hear most things that a dog can, sometimes I think I can hear even more."

As we peddled up to the station Gus got up, petted Boots, and said, "Looks like you boys have been fishing, catch anything?"

I held up my creel, opened it and showed Gus the fish inside. "Gus, this is my friend Jeff Carpenter, we both got our limit up by Kelly Island."

Gas looked at Jeff and said, "It's nice to meet you. You boys want to come inside

and we'll clean those fish and fry 'em up while they're still fresh?"

We looked at each other and said, "Swell, it's almost 3 o'clock, would it be okay if watched the Roy Rogers Show on your TV will we do it?"

Gus laughed and said, "Sure, I wouldn't dream of missing the show. It's sure going to be great having Roy here for the Rodeo." He handed me the whistle and said, "Here's this is for Boots."

I thanked Gus and asked him, "How do you make these if you can't hear them?"

"It took me a while to figure it out. I've been whittling whistles since I was a kid. We use to have a firehouse dog here at the station, a Dalmatian named Gladys, named after my mother. I messed up a whistle and cut the exhaust hole too narrow. When I blew it I couldn't hear anything but the dog started howling and then quit as soon as I stopped blowing. I made a few more and found one that worked without hurting the dog's ears. I thought you might like one for Boots."

I thanked him again and then we went into the firehouse kitchen, cooked up a mess of trout and sat down in front of the TV and ate them along with Roy, Dale, and the rest of the cast.

After the show was over we washed the dished and clean up while Gus and Boots sat outside in front of the station. Jeff asked if I'd like to come over to his house and meet his mom. He added that she'd just baked a cherry pie. Since cherry pie is my favorite I said, " Sure, I'd like to meet your mom."

We thanked Gus and headed over to Jeff's house. He and his mom lived on Third

Street, just west of Cass Avenue. We parked our bikes and I told Boots to wait in the front yard. She laid down and I followed Jeff to the porch. It was a warm afternoon so the front door was open leaving just the screen door closed. It was locked with a door hook. His mom was in the kitchen and heard us knock. She came out and unlatched the door.

We walked in to the living room and she said, "Hi Jeff, is this your new friend?" He said I was and then she smiled at me and said, "It's nice to meet you Howdy."

I couldn't help but stare. Jeff certainly got his looks, especially his ears from his mom. She was short, had long blonde hair from which her ears stuck out. It made her look a lot like Pearl Pureheart from the Mighty Mouse cartoons I'd seen at the Roxy. I smiled at her and said, "Gee, I'm sure glad you guys moved to Newton. I haven't had a friend my age since my cousin Jimmy moved to Pasco."

"We'll that's swell Howdy, seems like you and Jeff have a lot in common. Come on in to the kitchen and I'll fix you some pie."

Jeff and I smiled at each other, followed her into the kitchen and sat ourselves at the table. His mom pulled a box of ice cream out of the freezer compartment of their refrigerator. She set it on the table and got three plates from the cupboard, a knife, a big spoon, and three forks from the silverware drawer. She grabbed the pie from the counter and sat down with it at the table and cut a big piece for each of us. She added a couple scoops of vanilla ice cream and handed each of us a plate. We dug in, and I'd hate to tell my mom, but this was the best cherry pie I'd ever eaten.

We took a few bites and then his mom looked at me and said, "Howdy, you brought your dog, Boots. Jeff has told me that she's a sweet girl. Why don't you bring her in?"

"How did you know she's with us?" I asked.

"I can hear her panting in our front yard, can't you? Now go get her." she coxed.

I smiled and went out and brought her into the kitchen. I told her to sit and asked Jeff's mom to shake her hand. She put her hand out and Boots raised her paw and the two shook. "What else can she do?" she asked.

"She's so smart she can learn new tricks real fast. You ask her to do something."

Jeff's mom asked Boots to do all the regular dog tricks like, roll over, pay dead, and speak. Boots looked at me for approval and I told her it was okay. She did as she was asked and then I told her to go back outside. Jeff's mom said the screen door was hooked and she'd undo it for her. I told her to wait and see what Boots would do. Boots walked over to the screen door and pushed it with her paw. She discovered it was locked and looked up and saw the hook. She hopped up on her hind legs and pushed the lock up with her front paw. The door swung open and she walked out and laid down by my bike.

Jeff and his mom looked at each other and then at me. Mrs. Carpenter said, "I've never seen a dog that smart."

"Oh that's nothing, she's the smartest dog in town, maybe the whole world. She can do a lot more than that. Mrs. Carpenter, this is the best pie I've ever had. I'm sure glad I got to meet you, but I've got to get home."

"Howdy, you're welcome here anytime. Please come back soon."

Jeff saw me to the door. I told him I'd see him at school tomorrow. He said he was going to walk from now on. I told him I'd walk with him since his house was almost

on the way. He thanked me, and waved goodbye and shouted, "I'll see you in the morning."

I waved back and road off home on my bike with Boots in the lead.

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