

A fast paced action/adventure, steeped in mythology and modern science. Join Pat Donovan, a retired Navy SEAL, as he races to solve the mysteries of the lake, and save the life of his friend, Dr. Christine Mills.

Deep Lake

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Deep Lake

A Pat Donovan Adventure

by C. P. Donohue

Parental Discretion Advised

This work contains adult themes.

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The Long Sleep

Deep in the Ocean 200 Million Years Ago

She was a favorite of Poseidon, his pet as it were, although she served a noble purpose. She purred contentedly upon his lap as he caressed her with his left hand while he dealt out his mighty justice with his right hand gripped firmly on his sparking trident. Mor-Ra-Tu he named her, his rumbling deep voice echoing through the underwater canyons shaking even the mountainous islands above his domain when he called her forth...“Moor-Raaa-Tuuu!”

He was ageless but she was even then much older, time into time, as the mermaids and sirens proclaimed. Her duty was to cleanse him and keep him pure of body, her silvery tentacles clearing the detritus of the deep from his scaly bulk while he rested on his lavish throne. She knew not, nor did she care, that her simple station had earned her immortality as mighty Poseidon fed her the ambrosia of the gods from his golden goblet. But the richness of this feast cast her into a deep sleep from which even Poseidon could not wake her.

His grief was long, and finally accepting his loss, he placed her in a special secluded cavern where she would be safe unto eternity while she slumbered. Then in his anguish, he slung his mighty trident carelessly across the wide ocean, striking the cleft of the one massive continent which split forming a deep fissure from the blast. The sea flooded into the wide ancient basin in a furious rush, lowering the ocean level many cubits and stranding Mor-Ra-Tu forever as the continents groaned and parted. Poseidon rested once again upon his mighty throne, his trident having been returned by the sea sprites and

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selkies, as his salty tears gradually replenished the ocean levels over the next 200 million years. He slept fitfully through the eons as the continents ground their way apart, ever shifting and ever changing. Poseidon's recurring dreams were only of Mor-Ra-Tu and that time when they would be reunited and he would once again raise his silver locks high above the oceans and reclaim his domain with Mor-Ra-Tu resting upon his mighty shoulder.

Chapter 1

A Great Place to Die?

Back to the Present

“Almost there,” Pat thought, as he passed the billboard. *“Looks like the locals are having some fun,”* he mused, as he chuckled at the defaced sign. *“Kids I’ll bet!”* he said out loud, with a big laugh. *“Deep Creek, A Great Place To Live”* the sign had once proclaimed, but the *“Live!”* had been crudely crossed out and *“Die!”* had been added in drippy red paint.

“It had been a long drive all the way from Norfolk, Virginia to the Great Smoky Mountains,” he thought, as he pulled his old K5 Blazer up to Mom & Pop's Diner. *“A shiny diner, I haven't seen one of these in years,”* Pat reminisced. Walking through the front door was like taking a giant-step back in time. The diner had all the ambiance of the original 50's establishments. It also included an even earlier era soda bar with ornate refurbished chrome taps, in the form of fantasy animals.

As he playfully spun himself down onto the rotating counter stool, as he often had done in his youth, his reminiscence was interrupted. He was rudely snapped back to reality by the approach of a gorgeous young woman. Her thoroughly modern good looks contrasted sharply with the historic aura of the diner, to be sure. She was wearing extraordinarily tight, low slung, blue jeans, faded in just the right places. Her snug blouse, *“are they still called rib-ticklers?”* Pat wondered, as he was treated to a plentiful view of her seductively taught abdomen. She sported two tattoos, one on each hip and a shiny piece of dangling navel jewelry.

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“Hi, I'm Jaime,” she purred through lush full lips as her alert green and golden eyes scanned Pat meticulously. “Would you like a menu or do you already know what you want?” she asked strangely.

“Augh!, he don't need no menu if he's as hungry as he looks,” said the big burly guy while sitting down heavily on the bar stool beside Pat.

“Howdy, I'm Darrell, that's with two r's and two l's,” he said, sticking out his beefy paw in Pat's general direction. “You probably want what I'm hav'in.”

“That would be the country steak and four eggs, over easy, with extra biscuits?” asked Jaime knowingly.

“Sure thing, Jaime!” responded Darrell.

“OK, me too!” said Pat, “but make mine with just two eggs and a couple pieces of toast instead of the biscuits, please.”

“Done and done,” said Jamie efficiently, as she turned seductively towards the kitchen. Her long straight black hair hung to her waist as she glanced over her shoulder, watching Pat, as he watched her.

“*Hmm!*” Pat thought, as two more of Jaime's tattoos popped into view. A star on her left hip and the oriental symbol for eternity on her right hip, that Pat recognized from his two tours as a U. S. Navy SEAL, stationed in Japan.

“Sure makes you hungry don't it?” snickered Darrell, in a low voice, as Jaime sauntered casually towards the kitchen pass through window, displaying her shapely derriere. Pat noticed as she daintily applied a drop of perfume to each side of her long throat from the clay vile that dangled from her hip on a braided leather cord.

“Yea, kind of,” responded Pat.

“Quite a story there too,” said Darrell. “Jaime and her twin brother, Kyle, were in a nasty auto accident a couple of years back. Jaime was thrown through the windshield, and Kyle was in a coma for months.”

“Oh, plastic surgery, huh?” asked Pat.

“Not a stitch!” Darrell exclaimed.

“Wow, she's certainly a beautiful woman, and I didn't notice any scars on her face at all,” said a surprised Pat.

“And I'll bet you couldn't find one with a magnifying glass,” responded Darrell with confidence.

“Something of a local miracle then?” Pat mused.

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“There’s lots of stories like that, around here!” Darrell sneered suspiciously, as Jaime shortly returned with the steaming hot plates and placed them on the counter, offering Pat a tantalizing glimpse of her perfectly formed cleavage. Pat tried to keep his attention on her face. “*Not a scar to be seen!*” Pat thought to himself as she bent brazenly toward him, their faces only inches apart, while she gazed deeply into his dark, gunmetal blue eyes! “*Nothing shy about this one,*” Pat observed as the hint of her perfume waft in the still air. “*There was something familiar in the aroma,*” Pat thought absently as his mind drifted into a long forgotten void.

“So, are you here for a little vacation or just some sight seeing?” Darrell’s voice boomed, snapping Pat back out of the odd sensation.

“Neither,” replied Pat, “my grandparents owned a little cottage above the lake off of Watia Road. When they passed away recently, they left it to me, so I came to check it out. Great view of the lake from up there,” Pat commented.

“Hey, I know that place!” interjected Darrell, “that’s got to be the old Fee cottage isn’t it?”

“Yea, that’s right, I spent several summers with them at Deep Creek when I was young and I always loved it here. I thought I’d at least come up and see it again, maybe look up some old friends, if they’re still around.”

“Who ya look’in for?” asked Darrell, “I know everyone around these parts.”

“Well, I was curious to see if Christine Jacobs is still in the area,” tested Pat cautiously.

“Oh, you must mean Christine Mills?” Darrell snickered. “You can find her up at the old Deep Creek Hospital.”

“Sounds about right, she always wanted to be a nurse,” said Pat.

“Well, she’s that and then some, now!” Darrell chuckled. “I’d tell you more but maybe it would be better if you checked it out for yourself?”

“By the way, what’s your last name?” Pat asked.

“Mitchell!” Darrell replied in his usual booming voice.

“Hey, I remember you now,” Pat said. “We used to swim together over at hot springs. Your family had that big farm up on the north end

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of the lake. I guess I didn't recognize you since you seem to have put on a couple of pounds since then."

"Yea, or maybe a couple hundred!" Darrell laughed heartily.

"I'll be right back with more coffee and your water guys," Jaime said, sticking a pencil into the straight black hair above her ear.

"Now, you know I don't want no darn water, Jaime!" said Darrell abruptly. "And I brought my own coffee just like usual," he said, slapping an oversized thermos on the counter.

"Sure," said Jaime in a bored tone of voice. "I'll bring you a nice warm coffee cup then," she said, her lips revealing an amused smile.

"That'll be great!" Darrell said politely, "thanks Jaime!"

Their breakfasts soon cooled enough to be eaten and Pat was impressed at what a tasty and hearty meal it was. Pat, didn't think he'd be able to finish it all but he did, and handily. Darrell, had no problem at all and slurped it down like it was just a morning snack.

"Well, gotta go cut hay!" Darrell said abruptly. Rising from his stool he slapped a crumpled ten dollar bill on the counter, saying loudly, "Jaime, keep the change! See ya around town, Pat."

"I've got to ask you one thing before you go," Pat requested. "Why no coffee or water?"

"Oh, haven't you heard the local saying yet?" Darrell asked.

"Guess not," Pat replied.

"All of the folks around these parts will tell you the same thing... *There's something in the water!*"

Chapter 2

Reunion

Taking his time, Pat ambled through the small town of Deep Creek, nestled on the southern shore of Deep Lake, recalling all the fun times he used to have there in his youth. The old A&P Grocery store was now a Nick's with some upscale merchandise, a liquor isle and a fancy deli counter. The Soyer's Feed Store was still there but now shared the building with a fashionable ladies boutique. The same old hardware store had somehow survived the years and the Dino gas station was still there also. It even had the original gas pumps. "*How the hell do they keep those pumps working?*" Pat wondered idly as he pulled in for a fill up.

"Now let's see, it should be only about 12 more miles to the cottage," Pat remembered, as he down shifted his old Chevy Blazer for the climb.

"Yup, 12 miles exactly," he noted, as he pulled into the steeply curving driveway that he had chugged up on foot so many times, years before. As he pulled around the final curve, the driveway flattened out, running past the front entrance of the cottage to a large parking area beyond the cottage and out buildings. He deliberately avoided looking to his right as he knew he wouldn't get much done once he got caught up gazing at the majestic mountain and lake view.

A quick walk around the quaint cottage revealed that it was not in too bad a shape after all. The roof needed a little attention, as always, and the rain gutters needed cleaning but with a little TLC the place should be just fine. "*Going to have to cut the grass pretty soon,*" he thought idly, as he rounded the final corner from the back of the cottage and the wide mountain view was revealed. "*Wow, it's even prettier than I remember,*" Pat mused to himself, as he sauntered across the driveway to the small front yard. As he drew closer to the steep front edge of the

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yard, Deep Lake came into view, reflecting the mountains crisply in the deep blue-green water below.

"I'm going to have to get some lawn chairs, maybe a picnic table," he thought idly. *"Something tells me that I'll be spending a lot of time out here."*

Tearing himself away from the ever changing view, as the sunlight and cloud shadows made constantly shifting patterns across the mountains, he walked toward the quaint natural stone cottage. The little screened in front porch was flanked on both sides by twin natural stone fireplaces. Turning the door key he entered what he remembered was the living room.

As he anticipated, it was still adorned liberally with familiar antique furniture, much of which Pat had himself refinished in his youth. There, on the wall to his left was the large pastel painting of his sister, Sherry, in her ballerina outfit, that Pat had painted while in art school, so many years ago. To the right was a small kitchen area which hadn't seen much use since his grandparents had added the large room onto the right side of the cottage which served as an open country kitchen, dining area and family room with large screened windows on three sides. His grandparents had also added a similar large room onto the back of the cottage, which was used as a library and general recreation area. His grandparents, having been prodigious readers, had numerous volumes of books on the packed bookshelves across two walls of the spacious room.

As he opened the door at the end of the hallway, into what had been his grandmother's bedroom, he had to stare in awe at the massive four-poster antique bed that dominated the room. Commonly known as "cannon ball" beds in their time, this one was particularly unusual as it had large mushroom carved shapes at the top of each of the four grand pillars. The massive headboard had been hand carved from a single piece of maple. The modern mattress was custom made, he remembered from his last visit. The mattress was so high off the floor that his little five-foot tall grandmother had to use a small ladder to get into it. Pat himself, had a difficult time getting onto the bed despite being over six feet tall. Once there, he stretched out and found that his feet and a good part of his legs hung over the end of the bed. He also

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noticed, that at some time in recent years a wall separating the bedroom from the fireplace had been erected, forming another tiny bedroom on the opposite side of the wall. "Now that's got to go!" he said out loud to himself as he mentally surveyed what was to be his first of several carpentry projects around the property.

Checking out the little room where the other fireplace was located, he noticed that the opening of the fireplace had been sealed off, but it would be an easy job to fix that. A quick inspection of the country kitchen, as his Nina had called it, revealed that the water was turned on and the fixtures were working. Both the refrigerator and the freezer were running but completely empty. "*Better get some supplies in here,*" he thought as he headed outdoors to his Blazer. "*But since it's only 10:00 AM I think I'll stop by the hospital first.*"

The Deep Creek Hospital was located on an adjacent corner of the lake about ten miles away, but the slow curvy process of mountain driving made it seem farther. Differing dramatically from the bustling, busy, big city hospitals he was used to, this sleepy country hospital had hardly changed at all in the last 20 years. There were a few other cars in the parking area when he brought his Blazer to a stop. As he ambled up to the reception area, he was greeted warmly by the friendly receptionist.

"Can I help you?" she asked coyly.

"Yes, I'd like to see Christine Mills if she has a moment, but I don't have an appointment."

"Oh, I don't think that will be a problem," she said with a smile.

"Thanks," said Pat, "I can wait if she's busy with patients."

"No problem at all," the receptionist said, as she carefully fingered the intercom button with her perfectly manicured nails.

While Pat walked casually to the empty waiting area he heard the announcement from the loud speaker down the hall.

"Doctor Mills to reception, you have a *visitor!*"

Two things struck him as unusual about the announcement, first being that the receptionist had paged a doctor and second that she had stressed the last word, *visitor*. Before he was even fully seated he heard

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the sound of crisp high-heeled footsteps approaching rapidly from the far end of the long, wide corridor.

Pat recognized her immediately! Her thick, wavy, reddish brown hair was longer now, cascading down the back of her long white lab coat, and she had filled out significantly, but in a good way. The slightly graying hair at her temples completed her professional air and her handsome face beamed as she recognized him, also.

"Well I'll be!" she said, "Dr. Pat Donovan!"

"Doctor Christine Mills, I presume?" he said formally, with a sincere smile.

She approached so quickly that he thought for a moment that she would rush into his arms with a big hug. But she pulled up abruptly, perhaps sensing that the receptionist was only pretending to file her nails while smiling broadly and glancing in their direction out of the corner of her eye.

"Let's not start the Dr., Dr., thing please," Chris said in her familiar cheerful voice. "I heard from your grandparents that you had earned your Ph.D."

"Yes," he agreed, "I somehow managed to bumble my way through all those boring marine biology classes."

"Now don't be coy," she responded, "I've heard that you are quite the expert. Come on down to my office and we can catch up on old times," she said as she spun around gracefully, leading him briskly back down the hallway with her familiar long legged strides.

"Thanks for the *page!*" she called sarcastically to the receptionist on her way past the waist high, partially enclosed booth.

"*Any time, doctor!*" the saucy receptionist answered with a sly, mischievous grin.

"Sorry about the receptionist," Chris said as she led Pat through the door to her large neatly furnished office. "We have an all female operation here, it's been that way for a couple years now and we girls have developed our own kind of shorthand. By the receptionist's somewhat unusual page, she only meant that there was a very attractive man here to see me. I heard that you were in town," Chris said, "so, how long have you been back in Deep Creek?"

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Pat had to laugh out loud. "Since about 8:00 AM," he replied, still chuckling loudly. "I see that news still travels like the speed of light here in Deep Creek," he added teasingly.

"Oh yes, that hasn't changed a bit!" Chris admitted, joining the laughter. "And you looked me up this quickly?" Chris tested warily. "Well, I ran into some luck down at Mom & Pop's Diner in the form of Darrell Mitchell, do you know him?"

"Know him? He's my worst patient! He's been avoiding his annual checkup for the past six months! How does he look?" she asked, with genuine concern.

"Well, when he first walked in the diner I estimated him at about a biscuit shy of 300 pounds, but by the time he finished his massive breakfast, including several sourdough biscuits, I'd say he's well on his way to 310 now."

"Damn!" Chris exclaimed.

"Really Chris, I wouldn't worry about him to much, he looks as healthy as a plow horse to me."

"Well, he is quite healthy, but I have to counsel him about his weight, his drinking and his smoking, and all of his other bad habits since it's my job," she said, softening slightly. "So, are you staying at your grandparent's cottage?" Chris asked coyly.

"Yes, I just came from there and the old place looks good. I'll be picking up some provisions and supplies on the way back."

"Are you planning to be here for a while then?" Chris asked expectantly.

"Yes, I've finally got some time on my hands for the first time in my life, now that I'm retired from the Navy. I thought I'd come back and do some research on Deep Lake."

"Are you planning on doing some diving, then?" Chris asked excitedly.

"As soon as I can!" Pat said. "I've been riding a desk for the past two years and I can't wait to get wet again. I'm planning on making a preliminary dive tomorrow. By the way, you wouldn't know where I could rent a boat would you, Chris?"

"Yes, but I have a better idea!" Chris said, "we can use my boat. I'm off tomorrow anyway, so it's no problem at all."

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“Thanks for the offer,” Pat replied hesitantly, “but do you think it's going to be big enough?” I have a lot of diving gear.

“Oh, I think it will be plenty big enough,” Chris said with a teasing grin. “If you remember Shipwright Harbor that's where I keep her.”

Pat had to laugh out loud again. “Yea, that's the place where we used to go and watch all the weekend sailors crash their boats into each other when we were kids. If I remember correctly that's the place we used to call Shipwreck Harbor, isn't it?”

“The same!” Chris chuckled. “Let's say about 10:00 AM, just ask anyone at the marina for the *Proud Mary*.”

Chapter 3

Home Alone

Picking up a few groceries on his way back to the cottage, Pat remembered that his grandfather “Papa” had always kept a grill around the place. *“It had to be there somewhere,”* he decided, so he picked up some charcoal and a nice steak for a leisurely cookout while looking forward to spending some time relaxing, all by himself.

True to form, his grandfather had an old but reliable Weber grill tucked away in a corner of the tool shed, along with some lawn chairs and a whole array of handyman tools which brought back fond memories of his days working alongside his Papa around the cottage.

The steak tasted great, smoked with the mesquite chips he had also found in the shed. After soaking in the view from his little front yard into the evening hours, Pat decided to retire to the cottage and maybe check out the news. But after turning on the old TV and wrestling with the rabbit ears, liberally covered with tin foil, trying to get a good picture, he decided to hit the hay early. In spite of an easy day he was exhausted. *“Must be the mountain air?”* he supposed as he lay down on his grandfather's big bed in the corner of the library where he could stretch out comfortably. *“Maybe, I ought to check out the liquor cabinet and see if there is any Old Grand Dad left in there?”* he thought as his head hit the pillow and his eyelids slammed shut.

Pat woke with a start and wondered where he was for a long moment as the bright moonlight cascaded in from the windows above, casting unfamiliar shadows around the room. *“Whew, I didn't even have a drop of bourbon last night,”* he thought as his mind grasped for reality. A glimpse at his oversized divers watch shocked him back to the present. *“3:05 AM and I've already slept for over seven hours,*

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something I haven't done in years," he thought as he relieved himself in the tiny bathroom.

"Think I'll see what the view looks like in the moonlight!" he decided, as he started to put on his jeans. *"Wait a minute, why bother?"* he almost laughed to himself. The view of the lake was stunning, as he stood there naked in the light of the full moon. He had a clear view, some 40 miles up the lake to the high mountains to the north that sheltered a fast running river, favored by local kayakers. *"The mountain air at this altitude was a bit chillier than I had anticipated,"* Pat thought, as he felt the goose bumps running up his bare legs, arms and back. *"Maybe those jeans and a jacket would be a good idea after all?"* he decided, as he started to turn back toward the cottage.

Just then he caught a glimpse of something unusual. Snapping his head back, he noticed a dim phosphorescent glow from the middle of the lake to the north. Over the next couple minutes it grew brighter and Pat could see that the glow also proceeded up the east and northwest branches of the lake as well. Then there was a flash, that began in the center of the lake and trailed off into the east and west branches, then suddenly, all was normal again.

"What the hey? One of his grandfather's terms," he reminisced, since his Papa never cursed, as his eyes strained through the night. Using his BUDS (Basic Underwater Demolition School) field training he took his eyes slightly out of focus to allow his night vision to become more effective, and there it was, a furious bubbling in the dead center of the lake that lasted for a full minute and then gradually diminished. Although Pat's military training had taught him to ignore discomfort, he was now freezing. As he climbed back into bed, pulling up an extra blanket, he doubted that he would be able to get back to sleep again, while his mind raced through a replay of what he had just witnessed. He was wrong!

The huge eel like creature slithered between his bare legs, then wound around his waist and chest. It's scales ripped at his flesh while a school of barracuda smiled through their toothy grins in anticipation of their gory feast, soon to come. Pat was weakening from the strain of holding the monster's jaws away from his throat as it's fangs slashed away and the monster's coils squeezed yet another breath from his

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tortured lungs... The clacking of the ship's bell came from far away. "*It won't get here in time!*" Pat thought, "*though it sounded nearer now...*" Pat wrenched himself awake! "Just in time!" he said out loud as he stared at the antique alarm clock, wildly vibrating it's way toward the edge of the side table next to his bed. "*Wow!*" he thought to himself as he sat on the edge of the bed and massaged the back of his neck. "*I haven't had that kind of nightmare in years!*" he admitted to himself as he quickly dressed and headed toward his front lawn.

His next thought was of his meeting with Chris, as he pictured her long burnished red hair flowing down her back. But than another tantalizing thought, of haunting golden-green eyes and shining straight black hair, rudely encroached on his reminiscence as he deeply inhaled the warm, light breeze blowing up the mountainside from Deep Lake.

Chapter 4

Exploration

The *Proud Mary* was indeed plenty large enough. A sleek 28-footer with twin engines, it had a low deck in the stern and a wide swim platform that would be very handy for the dive, Pat noticed, as he approached the graceful yacht.

“Ahoy the boat, permission to come aboard?” shouted Pat, before he realized he wasn't in the Navy anymore.

“Permission granted!” Chris said with a giggle as she leaned over the flying bridge high above, a big grin on her face. Her long, thick, dark-reddish hair glimmered in the full sunlight as it cascaded over the bulkhead.

“Sorry about that,” he said blushing. “Old traditions die hard.”

“No problem, I'm enjoying it immensely, hop aboard sailor,” she said, as he hoisted his two heavy sea bags over the gunwale.

“Where to?” Chris asked.

“I thought that hot springs may be a good place to start,” Pat suggested.

“Sounds good to me,” Chris said, as the big twin engines roared to life.

“I'll cast off the mooring lines,” Pat said, as he headed to the stern.

“Unless you're in a big hurry, I thought we could make this a leisurely get reacquainted cruise,” offered Chris, on their way out of the harbor.

“Just what I was thinking,” said Pat, as he watched her expertly handle the boat's engine controls.

“Very nice boat!” Pat complimented. How long have you had it?

“Thank you, I've had it for about 2 years. She's a gift from my ex-husband,” Chris said, matter-of-factly. “He bought the boat mainly for business reasons so he could take his real estate clients out and get

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them alone for a while, so he could make his pitch, but he was scared to death of it. So I wound up getting it in the divorce settlement,” she grinned.

During the cruise Chris acted as tour guide, pointing out her large A-frame house directly on the edge of the lake and various other areas of interest.

“Wow, what is that?” Pat asked in amazement as he grabbed the binoculars and focused on a massive structure built into a natural limestone point on the edge of a cliff, just a few miles west of Deep Creek.

“Oh yes, we locals call it the Fort. It's owned by a guy in the sea food business from South America, or somewhere. He even has his own landing strip up there on the ridge. The complex is completely self contained and he even has his own doctor and medical staff, or so I've heard.”

Pat scanned the small harbor in front of the Fort seeing a very large yacht, several small fishing boats and even a couple of sleek Cigarette boats.

“The guy must have plenty of money!” Pat commented.

“Oh, for sure!” Chris agreed. “His armed security guards will frequently come out and chase away anybody that they think is getting to close to the property. So he's not very popular with the locals.”

Pat couldn't quite put his finger on it but there was something that bothered him deeply about the Fort.

As they approached Hot Springs, Pat excused himself to put on his diving gear. When he emerged he was surprised to see that Chris had also donned her shorty wetsuit.

“Hope you don't mind if I tag along on your dive?” she asked.

“It'll be great to have some company,” Pat told her earnestly. “Why don't we anchor out about 100 yards in about 40 feet of water,” Pat recommended.

“Aye, aye!” Chris said with a giggle. “I'm really enjoying all this nautical talk,” she confessed, blushing slightly,

Pat helped Chris put on with her single tank aqua lung then stepped into the cabin to get his diving rig.

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“Oh my!” Chris exclaimed, when she saw the huge contraption he was to wear on the dive. It had oversized twin tanks and some other gizmos securely strapped to the frame. The mask, tucked under his arm, was the full-face type and the flippers in his other hand must have been four feet long. He had the largest knife she had ever seen strapped to his right thigh. Pat had to laugh at Chris' astonishment.

“I know it looks ridiculous,” Pat said, through a wide grin. “But, this is what the well dressed Navy SEAL wears to go on a dive.”

After they both shared a hearty laugh, Pat said, “and now for my next act!” He twisted the fancy round buckle on the belt at his waist and pushed it in. Suddenly the fiber-optic piping built into his dry suit lit up with a vibrant red color.

“Oh, I have to have one of those,” Chris exclaimed.

“Well, I'll see that you get one then,” Pat said sincerely.

“My, one of those wet suits has to be quite expensive,” Chris said seriously.

“Oh, they *are* expensive,” Pat assured her, “but since I hold the patent and own the company that manufactures them, I don't think it will be much of a problem to get you one.”

“Wow, now I'm really impressed,” stated Chris.

“Well thanks,” Pat said modestly, “but I am proud that I've left the Navy with something they can use effectively on their missions. Not to show off but...Pat said, as he twisted the belt buckle and pushed it in again, and the piping became blue. “That's so that the different dive teams can visually identify each other by using different colors. It also has a setting for sending messages by tapping the buckle, kind of a Morse code thing,” Pat continued. “And this adaptation is for the commercial market...” When he twisted and pressed the buckle again, it made a kaleidoscope of colors that throbbed through the fiber optic piping in the wet suit. “It's called a Light Suit in the Navy, but we are marketing it commercially as The Flasher.” Catchy huh?” he asked laughingly. “Of course this dry suit is overkill for the warm waters of Deep Lake but I need to check out some of my latest modifications. So, do you go diving much here in the lake?” Pat asked, trying to ascertain Chris' diving experience level.

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“Truth is, that I haven't been diving in years and I figured I couldn't pass up this opportunity to tag along with you.”

Pat helped Chris out onto the swim platform then climbed out himself and prepared his diving mask as he did a quick manual check to make sure that Chris' SCUBA gear was in order.

“Let's get wet!” Pat said, as he made the final adjustments to his mask, slipped on his oversized flippers and clipped a large net bag containing several plastic jars to his weight belt.

They entered the water together as Pat grabbed Chris' hand. The water temperature had to be at least 75 degrees, a pleasant difference from all of the cold water dives Pat had made in the service, he reminisced, as they gradually swam deeper. At about 50 feet they neared the steeply sloping lake bed. Pat's initial observation was that it was a very healthy environment. Numerous fish and marine plants abounded, with the fish darting across the silty lake bottom. The topography of the lake bottom fell off sharply into the deeper sections of the lake. Pat checked the large divers watch dial on his left wrist often, to ensure that Chris stayed well within the limits of the dive tables that he had memorized.

Pat would flash Chris occasionally and he could see that she was probably laughing into her regulator, which had to be straining her valuable single tank air supply. At just about 90 feet Pat came roaring up from behind her to check the air pressure gauge that hung loosely at her side. The lights on each side of his dive mask were on now, casting peculiar shadows on Pat's face. As he pointed upward, Chris shook her head no, pointing towards the center of the lake. Pat responded with an emphatic *no* head shake, then showed her, her own regulator pressure gauge. Again, he pointed upward and this time she reluctantly complied. As Pat carefully ensured a nice slow ascent, their trip to the surface seemed like an elegant water ballet to Chris. She hardly noticed their decompression stops as they slowly circled each other, amongst the billowing of their own sparkling bubbles through the crystal clear waters of the lake.

Chris was surprised that they had surfaced so close to the boat. As Pat helped her up onto the swim platform, he said, “I have some air left

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and I'd like to go back down for a few more samples, if you will be OK here alone for a few minutes."

"You go right ahead," Chris said. "There's not too many pirates around these parts anymore," she added, laughing heartily.

"Alright then, see you in about 30 minutes," Pat said as he adjusted his facemask and pushed off the swim platform smartly.

If the first dive was fun, this one would be all business. Pat's powerful leg strokes propelled him out smoothly about 50 yards towards the middle of the lake. "*How can anyone stay afloat with all that equipment?*" Chris asked herself, as she watched Pat's muscular legs and long flippers raise into the air abruptly. An odd chill ran through her as she sat alone and watched as Pat was swallowed up headfirst by Deep Lake.

As Pat blasted through the 100-foot depth on a steady incline towards the center of the lake, his body and the air and gasses in his tanks compressed so that he dropped like a rock, only occasionally needing to adjust his direction with a few casual leg kicks. At about 150 feet he paused noticing a subtle change in the lake environment. "*Things were looking more like a salt water environment than fresh water at this level,*" he noticed suspiciously. Pat grabbed another vile and collected several more samples, carefully marking each container. Pat was thinking that he shouldn't go much over 200 feet on this dive, but conditions were so good, and the lake so clear, he decided to push it, just a bit. At the 250-foot level, things were looking very much like a saltwater environment. Pat hurriedly took several more samples, again being careful to mark each of them. "*I better be heading back up now,*" he thought, as he realized that he had gone, too deep for too long. He rose gradually and dove back down 20 feet often, a trick he had learned in the SEAL teams that, at least partially, avoided the effects of the bends. He stopped often, and checked the dive computer on his right wrist frequently.

When he finally broke the surface, Chris was standing at the boat railing, directly above him. She had her binoculars poised at where he had first disappeared on his dive.

“Sorry to worry you!” he said as she flinched, hearing his voice so near the boat.

“I couldn't see your bubbles!” she said, obviously frustrated.

He checked his dive watch and found that he had been down for only 40 minutes. “*Not that unusual,*” he thought, but he did feel guilty about causing Chris' concern for his safety.

“So sorry, I'm late! Does this mean that you're not going to give me a ride home?” he asked jovially, trying to lighten her disposition. “Of course not silly, but get your butt on board before I change my mind!” she responded, with a forced smile.

Pat could tell from her sullen mood, that Chris was still miffed at him. She flatly refused his offer to refill the *Proud Mary's* fuel tanks replying to his offer with only a chilling glare.

“Look Chris, at least let me buy you dinner, if you know a good place to eat?”

“Now that sounds like an offer I can't refuse,” she said finally with a sincere smile, “and I know the perfect place.”

Something caught Pat's attention, out of the corner of his eye, as they cruised leisurely back across the lake.

“One more favor, if I'm not pushing it?” he asked carefully.

“What'cha need now, sailor?” Chris asked, jovially.

“If you could pull up near that white buoy to starboard, I'd appreciate it,” he said, still spying the buoy through the binoculars.

“Well, since you are sounding so nautical about it, why not?” she said teasingly, as the boat circled and pulled up next to the buoy.

“This time, I promise I'll be back within four minutes!” Pat said, as he quickly peeled off his T-shirt and deck shoes and smoothly dove off the flying bridge. He cut the water cleanly next to the buoy before Chris could say anything.

The force of the dive from the high bridge, accompanied by a few efficient leg kicks easily took Pat to a depth of 30 feet. “*Very interesting!*” he thought as he gradually regained the surface.

When he popped back up to the surface, within only a couple minutes, he saw Chris timing him with her wristwatch. Pat hurriedly climbed aboard and grabbing the boat hook he snagged the white buoy, pulling it on board rapidly.

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“Pat, that thing has to belong to someone!” Chris warned.

“It does indeed!” said Pat, as he pulled a torpedo shaped object out of the water and turned it around for Chris to see. The bold but faded letters stenciled on the side of the object read “PROPERTY OF U. S. NAVY.”

A fast paced action/adventure, steeped in mythology and modern science. Join Pat Donovan, a retired Navy SEAL, as he races to solve the mysteries of the lake, and save the life of his friend, Dr. Christine Mills.

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