

During the 4th of July week, Conrad Ahabson and family set out on a camping trip to Sebago Lake Maine. Conrad is warned by a mysterious employee who prophesizes four evil events that will befall him that leads to a surprise ending.

Camping With Moby Dick: Sebago Lake, Maine

By Santo Branciforte

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Camping with Moby Dick

Sebago Lake, Maine



Santo Branciforte

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Chapter Fifteen:

UNCLE NICKY'S SECRET

After the game, David and Izzy showered and headed out to rendezvous with their friends. The rest of the night would be spent driving the rangers crazy. The LaPortes invited Conrad, Bekah, QC and Jez over to their campsite to enjoy the remainder of the evening around a roaring campfire, putting down some LaBatts.

Rummaging through her Clinic Box back at the Narwhal, Rebecca found an Ace Bandage and wrapped up Conrads swollen ankle. It was now dark as the Ahabsons walked, or in Conrads's case, limped, over to the LaPorte's site. They were holding hands and quietly enjoying the warm evening stroll through the pine wooded park. The peaceful atmosphere had cooled Conrad down somewhat, but he was still smoldering beneath his calm exterior. Almost every campsite had a crackling fire surrounded by people in lawn chairs. Hanging lanterns could be seen everywhere, giving the campground a nice mellow glow.

The Ahabsons, along with QC's family, arrived at the LaPorte's campsite and the uninhibited greetings from the French-Canadian family began.

"Bonjour, Conrad. Bonjour, Rebecca."

The greetings went on until every one of their guests had been kissed and hugged, and a red cup full of beer or wine installed in their hand. Ouvrey had built a roaring fire in the fire

pit and hung up a string of battery powered colored lights overhead.

Naomi LaPorte was leading a group of children in some games over by the picnic table and Jonah quickly joined in. She had them clapping their hands and singing French children's songs. Meanwhile, the adults were sitting around the fire laughing and talking about the baseball game. The strong Canadian beer was putting Conrad, who was taking the brunt of the joking, in a mellow mood and he took the teasing good naturedly. He turned toward Ouvrey and asked if he had been out fishing in the lake yet.

"Yeah, Conrad, I went out tree day ago."

"So how did you do?"

"Well, I bought a lure from Gestas, supposed to catch beeg fish..."

"You mean," Conrad interrupted him, "Homer?"

Rebecca, obviously in some discomfort, stood up, flashlight in hand, and announced that she had to go to the bathroom. "Sorry, but that beer just goes right through me."

"Yeah," agreed Jez. "Wait, I'll go with you."

Resuming his conversation with Conrad, Ouvrey said, "Yea, dats the one. Everyone talk about dat one. E tells me where to go but I don't catch no ting in that spot. Den, I lose the ting on the bottom in twelve feet of water!" Ouvrey takes a long sip from his beer, "We move around and catch a couple small ones near some rocks closer to the island."

With his wife out of earshot, Conrad says in a low voice, "Let me ask you a question Ouvrey, how much did you pay for the lure?"

"Oh, I pay eighty-five dollars American for dat one. But I tell you some ting Conrad, dat fish ees down dare. We see him on fish finder. Beeg, beeg fish. But, Conrad, you know some ting about dose big fish doncha? They only ungry once in a while. When dey eat, dey eat beeg tings. Dey don't bother with little tings. They so beeg dey very lazy, but when dey eat, dey want something beeg! I telling you Conrad, the man who catches dat fish is just gonna be lucky. E gonna be in the right place at the right time when dat Omer is ungry."

Now Conrad is getting nervous. Wondering how many more fisherman Gestas has given out the location of Homer to, he decides to go out again the next morning. Conrad thinks about inviting Ouvrey to come, but quickly changes his mind as he just could not tolerate the Frenchman catching the object of his obsession, the prize of the lake that would make him a celebrity in the whole region. Furthermore, he believed himself to be the chosen one.

Instead, he decides to ask QC as his new friend has no interest in catching Homer. He would also be useful in case Conrad snagged the expensive swim bait again. Alone with his thoughts, he feels a hand on his shoulder. It's Rebecca.

"Conrad," she said, "what are you thinking about? Ouvrey just asked you a question."

"Huh?" Conrad grunts. "I'm sorry, Ouvrey, I was just thinking about something and spaced out for a while."

“He asked you what you thought of the Hartford Whalers last year.”

Conrad and Rebecca were big Hartford Whaler hockey fans and Ouvry’s family were big Montreal Canadian fans.

“They didn’t do so well last year; I think they need a better goaltender.”

“Yeah,” agreed Ouvrey. “Da one dey got now couldn’t stop duh puck wid a sheet of plywood.”

A moment later, the unmistakable crunching sounds of two people walking on the gravel road by the LaPorte’s campsite interrupts the conversation.

“Good evenin to yuh. Hope evry things okay.” It was Uncle Nicky partnered up with another ranger by the name of Bob.

“Hey, Uncle Nicky,” shouted Rebecca, knowing how much he loved attention. “You know any scary stories to tell us tonight? Why don’t you come on over here, have a seat by the campfire, and tell us one.”

The gregarious ranger needed no further encouragement. He walked over to an empty chair by the crackling fire and sat down next to Silvie.

“You go along without me Boab,” he said to his partner. “I’ll catch up with yuh latah.”

Ouvry offered him a LaBatts which, ignoring the illegality of the request, he promptly refused. “Oh no, no, can’t do that while I’m on duty.”

Settling in, he asked the campers if they knew the story of how Witch Cove got its name. No one knew.

“Well, suh, you know now that the part of the campground we call Witch Cove was added later in the early 1960’s. Beforah that it was privately owned by the old widda Bitgoode and known as the Bitgoode property. She lived there in a rundown old shack with her son. Her husband, Klaus, died when he was very young from some strange disease, hard telling not knowin what it was. He was a biologist and worked at the old Fedallah Biology laboratory on Fry Island. A mysterious place. Lots of cages with animals that could be heard screeching at night. No one from round hearh knew anathin bout it.

“Well, the Widda’s property was surrounded by a pack of very large dogs, some say mebbe they was wolves. An eerily silent place where strangely, no one ever heard birds singin or crickets chirping round theyah either. Now, the old woman was as ugly as sin and her son, name of Bruno, had a lot of featurse resemblin a monkey. People from rond the arerer recollected he was a hairy little devil with real long arhms, big ears, sharp crooked teeth and walked all hunched ovah like. Couldn’t talk much, jes some E-E-E sounds come outta his mouth. The locals called him Monkey Boy behind his back.

“Lots of strange things happened in the areah like pets mysteriously missin or children comin down with severe stomach pains and rashes which the doctors couldn’t explain. People’s gardens wouldn’t bear fruit and the like. Also, lots of stuff reported stolen. People in town began to blame the bad occurrences on the old woman, callin her a witch and rec’nin her deformed son must have been the child of the Devil.

“Well, surh, one summers dee on the Fourth of July, sometime in the early 1950s, a newlywed couple on their honeymoon were camping at the state parrk heah. Desirin privacy, they chose a site in Naples beach that bordered the old Widda and her son’s heavily wooded property, now known as Witch Cove. After they set up their tent, they went out to a local restaurant for dinnah.

“Now, turns out, the witch’s son was employed at that same restaurant as a busboy due to his rather special abilities. Of course, the owner didn’t pay him much even though he could do the job of two fellahs. People say he could strip an entire table full of dishes and bring them back to the kitchen in one trip.

“When the newlyweds arrived at the restaurant, they were greeted by the owner who could tell they was staying at the campground by the way they spoke and dressed. They introduced themselves as Dwight and Angelica. He pointed to a table full of empty dishes where a large family had just dined and told them that as soon as this table was cleared, they could sit theyah.

“Suddenly the owner began clapping his hands and shouting, ‘Bruno! Over here Bruno! Get this table cleared! Come on boy!’ From out of the kitchen hobbles the Widda’s strange son who proceeds to scoop up all the dishes, silverware glasses and napkins, miraculously balancing everythin on his extra-long hairy arhms and hands. I tell yuh, it was an amazing display of balancin and co-ordination worthy of a spot on the Ed Sullivan show!

“The astonished newlyweds began laughing uncontrollably at the poor boy, pointing their fingers at him and hurling insults.”

“Oh my God!” Dwight shouted. “He looks just like a monkey!”

“Well don’t yuh know,” the ranger continued, “jes because the boy was deformed in all didn’t necessarily mean he didn’t have feelins. He got real angry at the cruel man, showin his teeth an hissin at him. They say he might have attacked him right there if it wasn’t for the owner who calmed him down by offering him a piece of fruit.

“Please, the owner begged, I’m afraid I’m going to have to ask you to return to the campground if you don’t stop insultin my waitstaff.”

“Well, the odd boy’s large ears picked up when he heard the familiar word: “Campground.” With a mischievous smile he hobbled back to the kitchen, with all the plates cups and saucers, glasses, silverware, and the fruit in his mouth, never dropin so much as a toothpick.”

By now, the guests were eerily silent, and Uncle Nicky knew he had them eating out of his hand.

“So,” he continued, “Dwight and the lovely Angelica finished eating, did some exploring around town and returned to the campground at dusk. They watched the fireworks display on the beach, then went back to their tent and played “Pitch” until both got sleepy and decided to retire. Now, sometime in the middle of the night, Angelica had to use the bathroom. Not wanting to disturb her sleepin’ husband, she crept out of the tent alone with her flashlight and headed out towards the bathroom. Upon hearing some noises from up above in the trees, she became frightened.”

Uncle Nicky then pointed up in the air and with a loud whisper, said, "Just like that!" Which made all the guest's hair on their arms stand up.

"Not knowin his wife wasn't there; Dwight was sound asleep in the tent and thought he heard screams but figered he musta dreamed it and didn't pay it any mind. Well, doncha know, the lovely Angelica was never seen again! Of course, all the campers and townspeople searched and searched the areah for days but alls they found was her flashlight, still lit up, the next dee.

"The police was called in to investigate the Widda's property but they say the house and surrounding property smelled so foul of dead animals, sewage and garbage — not to mention her savage dogs — that a thorough investigation was never done proply, what with the cops bein scared to death of the place.

"Now, for many years, old Dwight would make a pilgrimage every Fourth of July, and camp at the same site where his beloved wife had disappeared. He could be heard late at night gently calling her name."

Here the ranger cupped his hand and put it up to his mouth: "AN- GEL- ICA! AN-GEL-ICA! AN-GEL-ICA!" Which gave everyone goosebumps.

"Then," Uncle Nicky continued, "in the early 60's, on the Fourth of July, on a night with a full moon, just like this hearah night and right after the old Widda died, Dwight was callin out his wife's name as he had done so many years beforah, when he heard a rustle in the trees above him. "AN-GEL-ICA! AN-GEL-ICA!" He heard branches crackling, and the sound got louder and louder! "ANGELICA? ANGELICA!" He shouted.

“Then, without warnin, somethin with long hairy arms dropped down from outta the tree right in front of him! At the same instant, a huge multiple skyrocket exploded, brightly illuminating the area, leaving an extremely frightened Dwight to gaze upon a nine- or ten-year-old girl having all the features of a monkey. She was making unintelligible sounds. “E-E-E-E!” A stunned and horrified Dwight saw somethin familiar around the creature’s neck and grabbed it.”

The ranger fell silent. After about fifteen seconds, an extremely frightened Eva LaPorte asked, “What? Uncle Nicky, what was it? “At that moment, Uncle Nicky reached into his pocket and pushed his thumb and forefinger into Silvie’s face, yelling, “IT WAS THIS! ANGELICA’S WEDDING RING!” The dramatic effect made poor Silvie scream. She clutched at her heart and playfully beat on the ranger, “I I I I FILS DE PUTE, TU M`AS FAIT PEUR!” All the guests applauded and laughed and with that, a very satisfied Uncle Nicky thanked everyone and departed.

QC and Jez left first with a sleeping Jonah cradled in her arms. Before he left, Conrad and QC agreed to meet at eight o’clock the next morning to go fishing.

With the party breaking up, Conrad and Bekah thanked the LaPortes for their hospitality and headed towards the bathrooms before returning to their camp site. On the way, they were startled by a family of skunks walking across the road. They were single file, the two adults in front, followed by the younger ones. Conrad and Rebecca did what every Sebago Lake camper does when confronted by the striped critters, they froze. Skunks are very common in the campground and always come out late at night to forage. Campground skunks are used to

people and spray attacks are uncommon, but they will, of course, spray if they feel threatened.

After the skunks passed and made their way into some bushes, Conrad and Rebecca continued their journey to the bathroom. Rebecca, as always, was the last one out.

“The stars are out tonight,” she said. “What do you say we go for a midnight swim?”

Conrad quickly agreed. Midnight swims were another highlight of the family’s Maine vacation. They never stayed up that late, but the name “Midnight Swim” applied to any nighttime swimming. The water, having been exposed to the hot sun all day, was at a perfect temperature. The couple walked back to the campsite holding hands and changed into their swimsuits. Fireworks could be seen and heard in the distance.

Whenever there was a clear night at the campground, star gazing at the beach was a favorite activity for the campers. The wide expanse of the lake, void of trees, made the view of the sky rival a planetarium. Conrad and Rebecca arrived at the moon lit beach and slowly slipped into the warm water. They took in the spectacle like two lovers in a movie. They came together and kissed.

“Tomorrow’s the Fourth,” said Rebecca, her arms around his neck. “Supposed to be a beautiful day. We can come out here on the beach at night to view the fireworks display.”

The full moon and clear starry night sky provided a beautiful glistening light show on the water. Tiny shimmering lights reflected off the surface like thousands of people in a torchlight parade. They kissed again.

There were other couples, shrouded in darkness, spread out all along the vast waterfront, as well as the crowd of kids Izzy and David were hanging with, and, of course, Uncle Nicky prowling around in the background.

Uncle Nicky now had a mission. He was resolved to find the group of teenagers who were setting off all the loud fireworks. The children playing with sparklers was okay, they even sold them in the little red store. He was after the gang that possessed the heavy-duty M-80's, bottle rockets, Flying Spinners, and Aerial Repeaters.

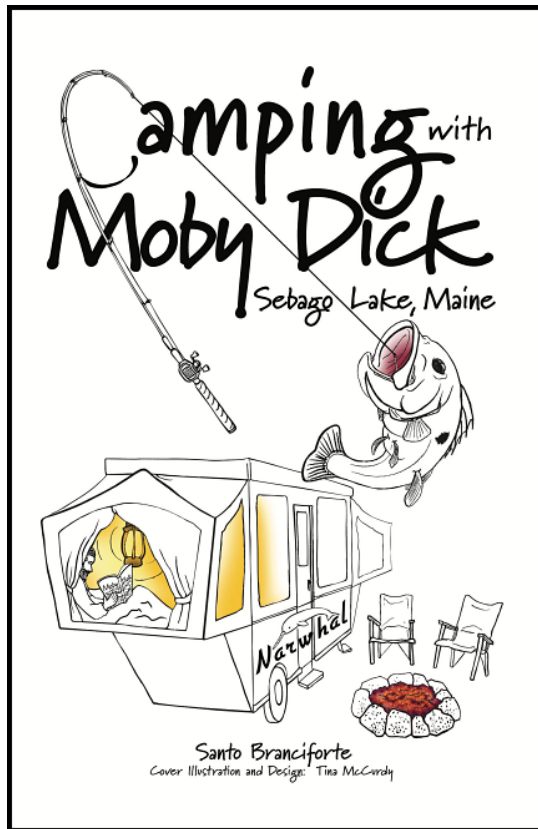
Ranger Nick also had a secret. All the fireworks that he confiscated throughout the year would end up at his house. At the end of the camping season, friends and relatives would get together at his place and be treated to a spectacular display of confiscated pyrotechnics.

Unfortunately for him, the group of mischievous teens he had to deal with this week were old veterans. They knew all the places he would check and always managed to stay a few steps ahead of him. Junny and Paulie brought a huge cache of fireworks from home and showed the group a new trick: how to make a time delay fuse. This involved pushing the fuse inside a lit cigarette. The glowing end of the cigarette would take a few minutes to burn down until it ignited the fuse, giving the teenagers plenty of time to get away from the area.

It was now a little past ten thirty and Conrad and Bekah, as with most of the other campers, trickled back to their campsites, leaving the star-filled night to the troublemakers and Uncle Nicky. It was especially late for Rebecca, and she went right to bed.

Conrad decided to curl up in his bunk and read before retiring for the night. He fumbled around, eventually finding a comfortable position for his swollen ankle, and began reading. He was within a few chapters of finally finishing Melville's classic American novel which brought about a great sense of accomplishment to him. After all, he had been reading "Moby Dick" on and off since college. The latter part of the book was also more interesting and contained a lot more action than previous chapters where, for instance, Melville would write endlessly about the physiology of the sperm whale's head.

The novel finally takes on an adventurous tone of the sea with brave whaling men hunting down the largest mammal on earth, led by their mad captain seeking revenge. Conrad was tired, however, and could only manage a couple of pages before falling asleep. A shrill whistle could be heard in the distance and then a loud retort, quickly followed by a colorful burst of green, blue, and white sparkles high up in the heavens which then fell back to earth with a crackling sound before disappearing in the clear black Maine sky. The campground, however, soon returned to the stillness of the crickets, peepers and the gentle sounds of the waves lapping on the shore.



During the 4th of July week, Conrad Ahabson and family set out on a camping trip to Sebago Lake Maine. Conrad is warned by a mysterious employee who prophesizes four evil events that will befall him that leads to a surprise ending.

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