

*The small town of Egg Harbor is wracked by the disappearance of a young resident. The tourist area, while in the off season, is devastated. Bailey Welch, Chief Investigator for the Door County Sheriff's Department is chief investigator.*

**Egg Harbor**  
By Ronald Conradt

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A JON BURKE DOOR COUNTY THRILLER

# EGG HARBOR



RONALD CONRADT

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# 1

She sat near the Welcome sign, holding a piece of cardboard that said, “**Need money for food. Please help if you can.**” She had long red hair and fair skin. She wore a long-sleeved t-shirt that was a faded blue and jeans that had more holes than a New York rental agreement. The knees were torn to reveal more fair skin, though a moderate tan showed through. It was hard to tell if the jeans were old and worn or just off the shelf at Macy’s, since torn jeans brought a premium price.

Jon Burke was slowing down the old Blazer, entering Egg Harbor on the Bay side of the peninsula. He happened to be driving to the residence of an old friend, hoping to do some Walleye fishing. Duke Evenson had been having some health problems, but he had called his junior fishing partner at Hillside High School where Burke served as principal. The fall session was in full swing and Burke had no vacation days remaining on his contract, save the Christmas break and that was not conducive to Walleye fishing because the Bay might be frozen over and even if it wasn’t, the weather was bitter cold and the winds made it difficult to endure.

He was taken by the image of someone panhandling in the peninsula. He had never seen anyone engaged in the time-honored activity that was often seen in larger cities, particularly out east. He took a long look at the young woman, guessing she might be twenty-five, more likely twenty. He wondered what circumstances might have caused the girl to be begging, particularly in late September.

He continued on his way, turning off Highway Forty-two, making the short jog to Duke and Tori’s clapboard cottage on the water. It was

Saturday and the temps were in the sixties, with a mild breeze blowing from the west, perfect for drifting for Walleyes. He shut down the old Blazer and slid out into the early morning sun. It occurred to him that it had been about seven o'clock when he drove into Egg Harbor, making the panhandler an early riser. His reverie was broken by Duke who came around the corner of the cottage. "Thought I was gonna have to do a wake-up call at the Burke household."

Burke laughed. "Since the days are getting shorter, I almost overslept, waking without an alarm clock at four o'clock and getting my butt out of bed. But I'm here and ready to go." He noticed a heavy dew on the grass and cloudy skies, but the wind was moderate, allowing them to go out a few miles on the bay and drift along the drop-offs for Walleyes.

Duke helped him with his equipment as they headed for the pier behind Duke's cottage. The fishing boat was sitting quietly in the water, low rollers coming in and raising the craft a bit. Duke had wiped off the dew on the boat and the seats were dry as well. They walked back into the cottage where Duke poured coffee into an insulated thermos-cup, adding some milk for Burke. Duke grabbed a small cooler that contained some beverages and sandwiches he had made fresh.

"Let's go get 'em." As they turned for the door, Tori emerged from the bedroom, a robe covering her pajamas. She smiled and said, "Good morning, Jon. Duke figures to get you in position to catch some nice fish. Don't let me down because we only have half a dozen bags of frozen fish in the freezer. We don't want to run out." She giggled as she said it.

Burke smiled. "All he had to do was mention Walleye fishing and I was already salivating." He reflected that his canine friend, Louie, had walked to the door ahead of Burke when he was leaving, hoping they would be jogging in the early dawn.

They headed out to the pier and jumped in Duke's boat to catch some tasty Walleyes.

Marcie Founder walked back to her cubby hole in an abandoned shed a block from where she had been panhandling. This was the first time she had gotten up early to try to catch the people going to work, thinking they might be inclined to give up a few bucks for a needy person. She had netted about twenty-five bucks including a five dollar bill from one generous donor. She had to admit that people in the peninsula, while thoughtful and generous seemed to watch their money more closely than those in Chicago, though the people down there had been rude and mean. She was tired and, after a nap, she would go out again to try her luck. She had been in the peninsula for a month, coming up from the Windy City with a girl-friend. They had left the big city without telling anyone, each with a couple hundred dollars, deciding to travel and perhaps work along the way, but after two weeks, her friend got homesick and left to go back to Chicago.

Marcie was alone and she had decided not to ever go back home. Her mother had met a guy who moved in with them in an old house near the center of the city. Marcie didn't like him, in fact she hated the guy. He had made moves on her several times when her mother, a Registered Nurse, was at work. When she refused his advances, he hit her across the face and told her she would eventually come around. She was not about to put up with a slimeball like him. She packed her backpack and left home. She had not talked to her mother for over a month and knew that if she told her about her boyfriend's behavior, her mother would never believe her. Her biological father had moved to the west coast and she had heard he remarried but she doubted that. He was a philanderer who drank and spent evenings in bars and dance clubs. He was a sales rep for a machine tool company and was on his own as far as his days went. The plain fact was her mother, in spite of

being a good provider and generally a caring person was a poor judge of men, that is good men.

Her younger brother was in high school. He had his friends and he played basketball and ran track so he had reasons for being there. Besides, her mom left him alone and since he was at practice so often there was little chance for the boyfriend to boss him around.

She had friends at the junior college that she had attended but they were not the kind who lived in the neighborhood or those you could tell your innermost secrets. She missed that part of her life. So far no one in the peninsula had approached her or given her a hard time except for a couple of women who gave her money but told her to get a job. She was mulling over the concept.

She pulled away the two boards that enabled her to get inside. The floor was concrete, cracked and dirty but it was out of the rain. She had laid out her sleeping bag, purchased a rubber air mattress that made the floor tolerable, and used her backpack as a pillow. She was getting enough money to eat twice a day but even saving enough to go to the laundromat was challenging. Her best day had brought her eighty dollars. As the year entered the cooler fall months, she noticed less traffic and fewer dollars from those who did stop. She wondered if it was against the law to panhandle in this part of the country. Whether or not it was, she couldn't take the time to worry about it. Winter was fast approaching and the garage was no Hilton, not even a Motel Six. She would have to do better. She had exactly three pairs of jeans and four or five tops, socks, and the running shoes she was wearing. Not the wardrobe of a debutante for certain.

## 2

Duke Evenson and Jon Burke drifted for a couple of hours, picking up several nice Walleyes. The wind had picked up and changed direction so the drift they had been using no longer worked. Duke dropped the trolling motor and they zig-zagged along the drop off, picking up a couple more. It was noon so Duke broke out the sandwiches and a couple of sodas. They used crawler harnesses and jigs as they continued their quest for a couple more fish to fill out their limits. The wind continued to build and the rollers became large enough to limit vision to the north and south as they fished. Finally Duke said, “Jon, we’re not getting what we want from the wind. It might be time to bunch it and head in, what say?”

Burke, who normally wasn’t bothered by rocking boats in rough seas, nodded. “I agree. Don’t mind admitting that my stomach is about a half-roller behind the boat.”

Duke smiled. “This water will do a number on you if you let it. We’re going to have to go slowly for a while to get closer to shore so we don’t take on water.”

With that pronouncement, he turned the boat ninety degrees and they headed back to shore. True to his observation, the waves broke over the bow and that necessitated some seamanship to keep things straight. As it was, Burke got wet. He took the first wave in the face, carrying the force of a five-gallon pail full, then turned his back to the bow and saw the smile on Duke’s face. He felt the same way since it was the price you paid when you fished on the Bay in fall.

They had been out about five miles but it seemed longer. The water was cold and it was pushed by a wind that now approached twenty miles per hour; Not stormy seas by any measure, but rough enough to make one uncomfortable. They continued to move toward

shore, twenty meters forward, ten meters back, until the angle of the shoreline provided some relief from the wind and Duke could open up the throttle and the boat planed on the crest of the diminishing waves. Five minutes later they were easing into the area in front of the pier. Burke secured the boat, making certain the bumper buoys were between the craft and the pier while Duke turned everything off and pulled the Walleyes from the livewell.

Burke's stomach had returned to normal as he grabbed his fishing gear from the boat and carried it up the incline to the cottage. Tori saw them on the pier and came out to see how they had fared. She saw Duke carrying his net with several fish inside. "Looks like they were biting! Oops, I guess I should know that when Duke goes fishing they always bite."

Burke knew what she said was prophetically true.

They had six fish, the smallest was eighteen inches and the largest was twenty five inches. Only one fish was a female and that was good because they wanted to leave the spawners in the Bay to ensure that the population continued at a good level.

They cleaned the fish and counted twelve fillets, with a total weight of ten pounds. Duke said he didn't want them but Jon insisted they split the fare. Tori, who had been watching from some distance, said, "Jon, you have to take them or Duke will be over his possession limit." Duke chimed in that she was right.

Burke headed to the cottage with the fillets, deciding to stay in the new dwelling overnight before heading back to the Valley.

He drove into his yard at the Cave Point cottage and took a good look at the place. It was complete and though there were some items that he and Lacy were going to add, it was furnished and fully working. The building looked fantastic but the area directly around the place was what one would expect right after a new structure was erected.

He carried his fish in first and added water to the freezer bags so the fillets were immersed in water, then sealed the bags and placed them in the refrigerator's freezer. The new appliances looked great and the lighting in the kitchen was really outstanding, lending to a nice atmosphere. Burke had never seen the need for a cottage before he bought one on this lot, but over time it had become his getaway, his sanctuary of sorts, and he looked forward to time spent here. The place still had that new smell and that brought a smile to his face. The fireplace had yet to see its inaugural fire. He would wait for the time when Lacy and he could do that together.

He turned on the furnace, moving the digital thermostat to sixty-eight degrees. The living room looked great with the large rubble stone fireplace and rustic mantle as the centerpiece. A large round rug lay upon a polished hickory plank floor, the woodbox on the side filled with birch firewood he had split and dried himself. He collapsed on the couch, and as he leaned back his cell phone warbled. He looked at the screen: Lacy. "Hello, Misses Burke."

She laughed. "At least you're still claiming me. Where are you?"

"I'm at the cottage, sitting on the sofa, inhaling the fragrant smell of new stuff."

"Don't move. Louie and I are on the way."

She drove in the lot just twenty minutes later, by all measures, a record. She opened her car door and the big lab jumped from the passenger's side and cleared the driver's seat, landed on all fours and sprinted to the cottage, the scent of Burke clearly in the air. A single bark caused Burke to come to the door of the little entryway. He swung open the storm door and Louie squeezed in through the opening followed by Lacy who gave him a hug and a kiss.

Burke had missed his new wife. They had been married for nine months and spent only half of that time together since she still owned her cottage at Rowleys Bay and worked as one of the top real estate

agents in the peninsula and Jon was the principal at Hillside High School west of the Fox Valley. Summers were the peak of the realty market so Lacy was busy during those months while Burke was busy for the month of June and took his vacation usually during the month of July.

She walked into the cottage and inhaled the smell of the new building. “Honey, I love this place. Have you broken in the new fireplace yet?”

He shook his head. “I’ve been waiting for the right moment.”

She looked at him. “Is tonight the night?”

“Could be. It is supposed to be thirty-five tonight, so I guess we could use it to take the chill off the evening.”

She sat on the new couch. Louie lay on the big rag rug, his tail wagging incessantly and rhythmically. Burke had begun to stock the cabinets with some of the necessities, paying particular attention to spices and items he regularly used in cooking.

He walked into the living room and found her examining a bookshelf that he had furnished with favorite novels and others that discussed the history of the area.

“Looks like you’re getting the little items taken care of like favorite volumes.”

She smiled as she flipped through a history of the Nordic explorers and their penchant for the area.

“That’s rainy day stuff. I picked up some of those copies at the used book store.”

Burke walked into the living room and sat next to Lacy and the dog. “By the way, I noticed a young woman panhandling as I drove into Egg Harbor. First time I’ve ever seen someone asking for money. She looked maybe twenty or so and had a sign that asked for money for food, something like that.”

Lacy tilted her head, “Wow, in all the years I’ve lived in the area that might be the first time I’ve heard of anyone out asking for money. Did she look needy?”

“What did you mean? How does needy look? I couldn’t tell by her clothes or her overall look. She looked like most any young woman might look. Torn knees in her jeans, faded long-sleeved t-shirt, tennis shoes with no socks. Could be she just needs a few bucks to carry her over until the next payday.”

Lacy inquired as to exactly where the girl had been and added, “I’ll have to swing across the peninsula and drive past that area. Maybe she’ll be out there. Maybe I can hire her for some part-time cleaning.”

Burke liked that idea. “I think It would be a nice gesture if she needs help.”

They watched the news broadcast from Green Bay and picked up by a translator tower near Sturgeon Bay. The new flat screen was connected to a digital antenna located in the attic of the cottage, suspended by some heavy duty monofilament line with a length of plastic tubing that ran all the way down into the crawl space where Burke had connected it to a distributor that amplified the signal and enabled each bedroom to have a wall jack as well as the living room.

Lacy helped Burke put away a couple boxes of kitchen materials and mixes along with a mixer, a toaster, and a coffee maker. The rudimentary elements of the kitchen were coming together. Burke had purchased an air fryer counter-top model that he would bring from home the next time he came up.

The sun was going down around seven o’clock so they decided to start a fire in the new fireplace. The grate and tools used to manipulate the firewood were new so he started with a small fire, opening the damper to let more air into the firebox, then turning it down a bit. They closed the glass doors and watched the fire as it warmed the room. Louie seemed to be fascinated by the fire as well, even though he had

experienced many at Lacy's cottage. It was hard for Burke to contain a smile as he watched the flames move about in the fireplace, but it was bittersweet when he remembered the old place that had sat where the new building was situated.

Lacy got a bottle of wine from the fridge and popped the cork. They toasted the new cottage and especially the new fireplace. They turned in just before midnight, leaving a few glowing embers.

Saturday morning Burke got up around seven o'clock, a bit later than usual, and brewed coffee. He let Louie out for his morning relief and during the brief respite he filled the dog's bowl with water and a second bowl with dog food.

After one of Burke's great breakfasts, the three headed across the peninsula to Egg Harbor. The village was picturesque with Peninsula State Park to the south and a beautiful vista of the Bay of Green Bay. As they drove into town, Burke pointed to the place where the young woman had been sitting. There was no one sitting in the area this morning. That led to some speculation by Lacy. "Maybe she didn't do well in that particular area so she's headed to another town or maybe left the area completely."

September was considerably quieter in Door County since eighty percent of the summer population had returned to their homes. Many of the boutiques were having sales to rid the shelves of what little inventory that remained. For those who had stayed behind great buys were to be had, though the most popular items had been exhausted at least a month ago. Lacy, though well-compensated for her work liked to shop during September. She knew several of the shop owners and they were happy to see a fellow peninsular take advantage of the great buys. She had asked Jon if he would be willing to spend some time with her as she looked for great buys and he was reluctant to refuse since she hardly ever asked him to accompany her on such missions.

Louie on leash, Burke followed his wife as she traversed the plethora of shops in the beautiful little village. The big dog was satisfied to be with his favorite people and also interested in other canines, which he stared at with curiosity but only passing interest. Burke noticed that the village had, with considerable difficulty, buried the power lines that serviced the small community, the picture one saw was one of historical imagery, pastoral and lovely. The effort had produced a cleaner visage. He had learned, by talking to several local residents, that because the village sat on solid limestone, the effort had been costly and time-consuming but the end result was one that everyone enjoyed. Digging through the rock had been dirty and expensive.

Burke took the opportunity, while Lacy was in shops, to sit on one of the many benches provided for weary shoppers. Louie was happy to oblige as well while many of the little kids gravitated to the Lab to pet him. Louie appreciated the attention and slowly wagged his tail as parents asked if it was alright to show the dog some affection. Burke, while ever alert to those who might not be friendly, nodded and said, "He likes little kids." He laughed as he thought of a fitting finish to the statement: "He had one for breakfast this morning." Burke thought the gallows humor was worthy of remembering but he knew the love that Louie had for people of all ages and he couldn't remember anyone ever being mean to the big dog. Once in a while, Louie would whine a bit when they petted him and Burke knew that it was in the dog's personality to show affection his own way, by either licking his admirer or whining slightly. Whatever the environment, Louie was ever the gentle dog.

While relaxing on the bench, Burke happened to glance down the street, seeing the panhandler walking down the sidewalk, carrying what appeared to be a bag of groceries. He was mesmerized by the image he had seen of her sitting on the grass at the edge of the village,

the hand painted sign leaning against the Welcome greeting. There was always a story and he wondered if she was homeless or just using a time-honored methodology to get some easy money. For Burke, the effort was not something he would consider if he was in dire straits but as a guy in the field of education he had seen a lot. Everyone had different standards and means of getting to his or her objective. Who was he to say what was right or wrong?

He watched her walk on the other side of the street, carrying the bag, passing Casey's Barbeque, continuing south. She never stopped to look around until she reached the end of the main drag, then crossed over and continued walking, again never looking back. He did notice she had on the same clothing he had seen her wearing the previous day.

She had disappeared by the time Lacy emerged from the boutique with a sizeable package in her hands. She sat next to him on the bench, smile on her face. "Want to see what I bought?" Burke knew never to refuse or reject that question. It was the manner in which it was asked rather than the actual words. "I would love to see what you bought."

She hauled out a beautiful laced top that was, as far as Burke was concerned, some kind of nightie. Before he could insert his foot in his mouth, Lacy smiled and said, This is a summer top, designed to be worn with the shorts I have in the bag. Do you like it?"

Burke did like it, he just wasn't sure he wanted anyone else to see her in it, but he nodded and said, "It's beautiful." Once again he bowed to the woman he loved.

"By the way, while you were in the shop, I saw the panhandler walk down the sidewalk across the way. She had a bag that looked like it might have held groceries."

"Where did she go?"

Burke pointed south "She kept walking, crossed the street, walked off the sidewalk and I lost view."

She got up and said, “Let’s walk to where you lost sight. I’m curious what she’s all about.”

They headed to the south, Burke wishing Louie would pick up the scent but he meandered to the end of the leash and then back toward the couple, happy to be out in the great outdoors.

They walked past the downtown stores, looking to both sides of the street until they were out of the village proper. Burke stopped them. “We’re at least a quarter mile past where she turned off the sidewalk.” The sidewalk had terminated a hundred yards ago and they were now in the country, older homes with gravel drives and no signs of the young woman.

As they walked back, Lacy was speculating about the panhandler: “Maybe she is a single mom, or maybe she is short on a few big bills that she needs help paying. I’m guessing she lives in one of the houses around here. Maybe she is helping out a parent or grandparent, Any of the above could be the reason. I’m probably making way too much of the whole thing.”

They reached the vehicle and Lacy jumped in the driver’s seat and said, “Thanks for coming with me, honey. I appreciate it, and Louie really appreciates your coming so he got to sit outside and watch people, something he really enjoys.”

They headed for Rowleys Bay and Lacy’s cottage. The area was one of the more remote of the places on the Lake Michigan side of the peninsula. After the fire that destroyed the Rowleys Bay Resort and Grandma’s Bakery and Restaurant, traffic past Lacy’s cottage had decreased by over fifty percent and it was unlikely that it would ever be rebuilt, at least in its initial grandeur.

She pulled into the drive and Louie, who had been outside for well over an hour, ran to relieve himself at his favorite spot. The couple sat at the picnic table while the dog worked the entire lot in his quest for new scents.

They talked about going out to a restaurant for dinner but Burke offered to cook up some meatloaf from a recipe he had perfected. He used some freshly ground chuck that Lacy had procured and added the necessary items to complete the formulation. Lacy cooked some fresh cabbage, along with a small portion of mashed potatoes.

An hour later, they were sitting at the table and looking at what had been a quick meal in preparation. The meatloaf was savory and had quickly become one of Lacy's favorites. It was one meal she always wanted a second helping of the main course. She held the mouthful for a moment, letting the flavor permeate her taste buds, smiled, and said, "Jon, you could spoil me with this conflagration. It is just so good. I know I said your fish was the best, and I do love the way you do a steak, but the flavor of this meatloaf is extraordinary." She slowly shook her head. "When I was little, my mother used to make meatloaf and I never really liked it. Oh, I ate it, but then my parents made it clear there was no alternative; eat it or go hungry. But this, this is so good, so very good."

Burke smiled. "Stop it. You're embarrassing me. It's what I bring to the marriage, my contribution."

"I just find myself drooling over the dish. Of course I run the risk of getting tired of it if you made it twice a week but it is incredibly flavorful. Let's let it go at that."

They sat in the living room and talked until eleven, then turned in for the evening. Sunday they would go to church and maybe head for a local brunch. There were still several restaurants offering the fare though the summer flock of tourists had gone home. Burke looked forward to that particular day and the ritual that defined it. He had to admit that he was somewhat ritualistic.

# 3

She woke in the middle of the night. She had to relieve herself. Leaving the comparative warmth of the sleeping bag was something she dreaded. She knew that as the weeks progressed, it would get colder. She knew she would never be able to tolerate temperatures below freezing. She had not clothing nor the constitution to endure such conditions. She had questioned her motives more and more as the days moved on. She thought about trying to hitchhike to a southern state where the winter would be more moderate. There were two huge problems with that thought: First, the idea of hitchhiking. The interstate highways were very tough to hitchhike on, and the idea of getting picked up by some psycho killer was hanging there in her frontal cortex. Second, she had little money so it might be prudent to work her way south, working a week, and traveling the next. What would she do for someplace to stay while she worked? Also, She might be limited to those businesses that were along major highways and most were service oriented, like working in a fast food restaurant.

She eased through the narrow opening at the back of the old garage, squatted against the peeling boards and let nature take its course. She was hungry and now she was shivering in the cold evening air. Her stomach growled and she was reminded that she hadn't eaten since lunch. She had picked up a half gallon of milk, some sausage, and some sliced cheese in the gas station on the edge of town.

She stopped and picked up a loaf of bread at the bakery, paying a premium price for it but she had grown to like that bread and she was happy to pay extra for the tiny bit of joy that she felt when she ate a slice.

She lay in her bag, unable to get back to sleep, thinking about things. Egg Harbor was totally unlike Chicago. There was an

atmosphere of safety in the village. People were friendly and took the time to say hello. It was too bad she hadn't taken the time to get to know anyone in the area. She could have rented a room, made enough to live on, and maybe even put a few dollars away. That was all water under the bridge and chances were slim that she would be able to get a job during the winter season. Nevertheless, she decided to ask around. Maybe she could find something, anything that would help her survive for the next five months. She put aside the idea of finding a guy to move in with. That was dicey. The thought of her mother's boyfriend coming on to her was so repulsive it made her shiver. She wondered if he was still with her mom. She regretted not having told her mom about the guy. It might have made a difference. She knew that her mother loved her and tried her best to provide for Marcie but she seemed to be working all the time and when she was home, she was doing laundry, cleaning, cooking, and caring for the boyfriend, who in spite of having a job as a delivery guy, seemed to be home most of the time and demanding attention and money.

She lay still within the warmth of the sleeping bag and listened to the occasional car or truck that passed. She thought about the old one-car garage she was hiding in and decided she would have to find something better. There was no other option. She had to find something that had running water and heat, and where she felt reasonably safe.

She had a small make-up mirror, all she had to view her face and make certain it was clean. She had a flash of what it must be like to be homeless and not worry about how you looked or smelled, or what kind of clothes you had. Marcie had never worried about those things when she was with her mom but this was different. She was alone and nearly penniless and that was a new dynamic. She wasn't going to reinvent herself because there was nothing wrong with the person she was. But she was alone, and she was facing difficult times.

She combed her hair and found a clean shirt. Her shorts were reasonably clean though wrinkled. She had brought some makeup with her when they left Chicago but decided not to use it.

She was hungry. She had eaten a sandwich and a small carton of milk yesterday for lunch but it wasn't enough. She left the garage and headed into Egg Harbor. Where there had been signage asking for help in several stores when she and her friend had arrived in town, there were none. Fully two-thirds of the stores would close for the winter, their proprietors going someplace warm for the winter months. Most either rented space in the sunbelt or owned property outright.

She walked past a boutique that was having a final clearance, a bad sign for someone looking for employment. Up ahead she saw a barbeque place, a bar that served smoked meat and was always busy in August when she walked by. She tried the door. It was locked. The sign in the window said they opened at ten o'clock. She checked her phone, almost nine. She walked on, checking more stores.

Across the street she saw the three buildings that comprised Main Street Shops. She walked over and across the parking lot, the main doors were open.

There were several vehicles in the lot so she was heartened and thought she might find something inside. She walked into the largest of the three and noticed that most weren't open yet. A quick scan about the interior confirmed that she would have to come back when the doors were open. The building was like a mini-mall, perfect for inclement weather with the ability to provide several types of stores within the confines of a single building. She liked it.

She walked back onto the street and saw a bench. She headed over and sat down, glancing up and down the street, watching increasing numbers of vehicles traversing Highway Forty-two. She continued to reflect on her situation, realizing that she had waited too long to do this. She had become a street person, not fully realizing the plight she

found herself in until it was too late. This was a desperate measure and an indicator of how she had allowed herself to degrade to the level she found herself within.

She was watching the front door of Casey's Barbeque, the establishment that served the pulled pork sandwiches. She and her girlfriend had eaten there when they first arrived in Egg Harbor, when they still had some money. She smiled at that. Though she had been prudent in her spending, it required substantial money to live in a tourist village during high season.

When a younger woman unlocked the front door of the bar-grill, she headed across the street and into the door. The woman, who looked to be around twenty-five said, "We're not open yet. We'll be open at ten o'clock."

Marcie smiled. "I'm looking for a job and wondering if there is something I can do."

The woman looked her up and down. "How old are you?"

"Twenty."

"You have proof of age?"

Marcie pulled her driver's license from her pocket and held it out for the woman. She looked at the picture on the card, looked at Marcie and said, "I am not the guy who hires and fires here, but he is looking for a bartender. Have you ever done that work? I doubt it but you would learn quickly and most people don't order fancy drinks here, mostly beer and soda, sometimes a mixer but it's not a demanding job in that respect. I will talk to him when he comes in, so can you come back maybe after lunch and I will let him know you are coming? The pay isn't great but there are tips, and most people do tip ten percent or more." The woman was almost out of breath, she was talking so fast.

Marcie said, "So, I guess you stay open all winter?"

The woman nodded and held out her hand, "I'm Caroline, and you are?"

“Marcie. I would be interested in the job. How many hours a week would it entail?”

“I’m not certain but I would think at least thirty hours. You would have to work some weekends. I don’t know if that works for you?”

Marcie had to resist smiling. “That works for me.” She was doing the math in her head, knowing that if she could rent a room reasonably, she could make it on that score.

Caroline, who was brimming with confidence, said, “I’ll put in a good word for you with the owner. Just show up after lunch.”

Marcie walked with a lighter step as she ambled into the fall sunshine. She had a shot at a job, and she was certain she could learn the trade.

She returned to Casey’s Barbeque at exactly one o’clock, met the owner, who asked her questions and listened closely to her responses. He gave her an application and led her through the many questions. “We’ll train you for a few days, see how it goes, and if it’s a good match, we’ll throw you into the fray.”

He told her that her existing clothing or similar clothing would be fine and also mentioned that he hoped she had warm weather gear since winters did get cold in the peninsula. She said she would dress appropriately. She was told to come in on Monday at noon.

She was smiling as she left the bar and grill. She had a job. She was going to make it on her own. One thing she had forgotten was to ask about the availability of any rooms in the village. She waited across the street for a while, sitting on the same bench, then made her way up to the Main Street Mall, a trio of shop she had entered earlier. She remembered a realty office located therein. There was a woman sitting at a desk in the small office. There was no one else around. She walked closer to the desk so the woman would see her. “Good morning. Can I help you?” She smiled while taking a good look at her visitor.

Marcie gathered her confidence. "I am looking for a person who might be able to rent a room by the month. I work in town and don't really want to rent an apartment by myself so a rooming house seemed to be a possibility."

The woman smiled. "I do know several people in town who, in the past, have rented rooms for a time. Do you have a figure in mind, one that would fit your budget?"

This caught Marcie off guard. "Well, not really. I am looking for a good deal, I guess."

"Where do you call home?"

"I'm originally from Chicago. A girlfriend and I came up early in July. She left in August and I decided to stay. I like the area."

"It is a nice area and I'm sure you'll like the people. May I ask how old you are?"

"I'm nineteen, soon to be twenty."

"Well, you are old enough to enter into a contract, even if it is month to month. Let me make some calls and I can get back to you. Do you have a cellphone number I can reach you?"

Marcie gave the woman her cellphone number and the lady responded by giving her a business card. Marcie left feeling she had a good shot at a place to stay.

An hour later Marcie received a call. A Mrs. Rynstadt who lived a block off Main Street would rent her a room. No pets, no smoking, and no men in the room at any time. The cost would be a hundred dollars a week unless she did her own sheets, then the rate dropped to eighty dollars. If she hurried, Mrs. Rynstadt could meet with her and they could do the deal. She smiled and headed for Church Street. It was a short walk and barely out of the downtown business area. Perfect location.

Mrs. Rynstadt turned out to be a woman not much older than her mother. She looked Marcie over carefully and invited her in. The house

was a two story, mostly white with some blue trim but nicely maintained. The lawn was nice and there were flowers along the front porch. It was quaint and Marcie had made up her mind she would take it.

They walked inside and Marcie saw a neat, nicely appointed kitchen with modern appliances, a dining room table that sat six, and an adjoining living room that featured dark oak plank floors with leather sofa and side chairs.

The woman showed Marcie to a chair and said, "I don't know if you drink coffee but if you do, I'm going to have a cup and you are welcome to join me." Marcie smiled and nodded so the woman rose and slipped into the kitchen. The coffee table featured several interesting books but the large screen television above the fireplace caught Marcie's attention. She felt right at home.

The woman brought the coffee and half a dozen chocolate chip cookies on a tray and set them on the table. "I took the liberty of bringing out some cookies I baked yesterday. Hope you enjoy."

They talked for a moment, Mrs. Rynstadt asking what she did for a job, where she was from, and whether she expected to stay in the area for long, then the woman stood, "Goodness, I guess you'd like to see the room. Follow me please." She led her down a short hall, passing a bathroom and turning into a doorway on the right side. "Here it is. I rented two rooms to girls from Romania for the summer but they left a couple weeks ago and won't be back until next May. I lost my husband four years ago and I don't really need the money but I do enjoy seeing young folks around and I enjoy doing some cooking for them. You would be my only boarder should you decide to stay."

The room had a standard sized bed, dresser, chest of drawers, and a flat screen television that Marcie judged to be about thirty-two inches in diagonal. The room was nicely decorated with prints, a painting, and some photos of what might have been family members.

Mrs. Rynstadt took her a few steps back down the hallway and pointed to the bathroom. “This would be your bathroom since I have one that is connected to my bedroom: An ensuite bath, I believe they call it. I sleep upstairs. My rules are few but there are no exceptions: No men, except in the living room, no alcohol, no drugs, and the door gets locked at midnight or before unless you make arrangements for a special evening. Also, no smoking in the house at any time. Do you smoke?”

Marcie shook her head, “No, I don’t smoke.”

Marcie liked the woman and wanted the room but she had barely enough to get by for a couple days without even thinking about paying for the room. She decided to be honest, laid out her situation and asked if it would be alright to pay her when she got her first paycheck. The woman smiled. “I’m okay with that. I trust you. I always give a receipt when you pay for your lodging so you have proof of payment. Let’s give it a try and we’ll see if you like it here.”

With those words, she reached into the front drawer of an Oak secretary and retrieved a one page rental agreement. “I won’t be asking you for any security money up front. I know that you’ll treat this place like it’s your home.”

Marcie signed the paper, shook the woman’s hand, and was now a resident of the Church Street two story. Mrs. Rynstadt said, “Do you have some luggage? I could drive you to your current place and we could bring it back so you can move in.”

Marcie did not want the woman to see that she had been sleeping in an abandoned building. “No, you’ve done so much for me already, I need the exercise so I will be back in a bit with my backpack.” She got up and left the house.

She was on cloud nine, a job, a place to stay, and the opportunity to experience some joy in what had been a trial of survival until today. She walked briskly, the sun peeking through partly cloudy skies and

the leaves beginning to turn. In Marcie's mind it was the most beautiful day ever.

An hour later she was unpacking her things when Mrs. Rynstadt popped into her room and told Marcie that the washer and dryer were at her disposal whenever she saw the need.

It just couldn't get any better.

# 4

Sunday morning it was overcast and quiet, one of those days when the threat of a storm was overtly hanging over the peninsula. Jon and Lacy headed for church with the promise of rain and the scent of moisture in the air. Louie was left looking through the window, knowing he was in charge until his masters came back. A few drops hit the windshield on the way to the small church in the rural countryside and it was beginning to rain harder as they sprinted to the portico that extended over the entrance.

The service lasted just about an hour. The storm had slowed and it was sprinkling as they left the building, making their way to Lacy's Jeep. Though it looked like it could begin raining any minute they decided to find a brunch in or around Sister Bay. They found the Chef's Hat and dined there. After lunch they headed back to the other side of the peninsula, noticing that the traffic had lessened since Labor Day. Certain restaurants continued to experience high traffic, mostly from locals and business owners who had yet to go south for the cold months.

The Chef's Hat served good food and at a reasonable price. Their Omelets were moist and flavorful and the other fruits and entrees were good enough to keep people coming back on Sundays. As usual, Lacy was recognized by many and the greetings were always friendly. Burke felt like a fifth wheel but he knew as long as he was with his wife he need not be concerned about acceptance.

After a piece of Cherry Pie to complete the buffet, the Burkes headed back to Rowleys Bay. The sky had brightened and patches of blue signaled a better afternoon. The air smelled of ozone, the product of a series of lightning bolts that had accompanied the storm. They pulled into the drive at Lacy's cottage and the silence was broken by

the barks of the big Lab inside. Burke opened the door and he leaped from the stoop, ran to his familiar tree to do his thing.

The original plan was to go over to the new cottage at Cave Point to do some organizing and continue to add to the list of things that would be part of the existing inventory of necessities. They decided to forego that chore and relax for the afternoon before they both headed to the Valley. Lacy had told her office mates that she would be doing work by computer for the upcoming week. She had no showings scheduled and unless someone called or emailed asking for one, she could do her work on the internet for the next five days. She had packed a duffel and had enough clothes for two weeks or more combined with those she already had left at the Appleton house.

Around midafternoon they left for the Valley. The temperatures remained cooler and the skies had been purged of rain clouds, with clumps of fluffy white popcorn-like orbs moving across the peninsula. They encountered little traffic going south and had noticed even less heading up to Door County. Louie was asleep in the back seat, having surrendered his perch as the shotgun rider to Lacy. They took the bypass north of Green Bay and were headed south on Highway Forty-one. As they got closer to Appleton the traffic increased. Burke was glad they were turning onto Richmond Street, then westward to the suburbs where his townhouse was located.

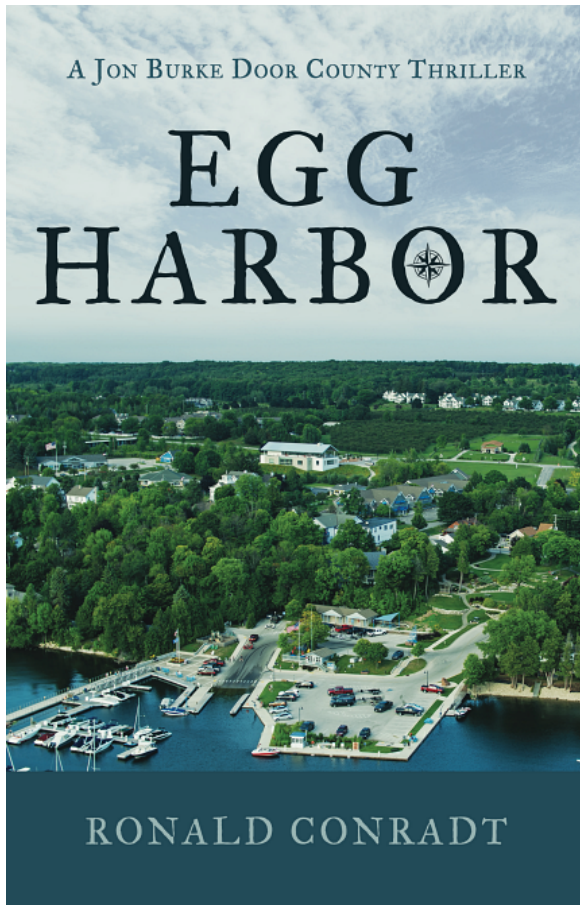
As in the Door County area, the Maples and Birches, along with the Oaks, were beginning to show color. It is the most beautiful time of year in the Midwest, showing reds, yellows, and oranges that contrast with the greens of the coniferous trees.

The bittersweet time following the beautiful color panorama is when the property owners have to rake the harvest of brown leaves covering the grass and find a suitable disposal for them.

Burke was no different. Raking and bagging leaves was a yearly ordeal that took most of a weekend even though his lot was a small one.

Lacy opened the rear passenger door and Louie jumped from the vehicle, scouring the area for new scents and some of the familiar ones. From the corner of his eye, Jon saw his neighbors looking out their windows, catching a glimpse and looking particularly at Lacy. Burke got along fine with his neighbors, even though a year or so earlier there had been a shootout at his property and the neighbors had to be evacuated for their safety. Their houses weren't damaged but Burke's house suffered broken windows, bullets lodged in the walls, and a door that had been smashed in. In spite of that violence, the people next door liked him and knew that he was an administrator in a local school.

The week ahead was going to be a good one. He just knew that.



*The small town of Egg Harbor is wracked by the disappearance of a young resident. The tourist area, while in the off season, is devastated. Bailey Welch, Chief Investigator for the Door County Sheriff's Department is chief investigator.*

**Egg Harbor**  
By Ronald Conradt

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