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The Stuff Dreams Are Made Of

Thinking it over, I would have to say that this story wouldn't have happened if I wasn't what you call psychic. I get feelings about people, sometimes in dreams but mostly in hunches that come into my mind suddenly and that turn out to be true. Mostly they're premonitions of death.

Like the time last year when the Robertsons asked our son, Gregory, who is seven, to go swimming at the lake with them. I said yes at first. Then I got a strong hunch that it was wrong and I told Gregory he couldn't go after all. Of course I couldn't explain why to a seven year old. There was an awful scene with him throwing a tantrum and having to be put in his room for the afternoon. At suppertime we got a call that the Robertson's car had gone off the road on the way back from the lake. Joey, who was Gregory's best friend, was killed but the rest of the family got off with broken bones. Since then I don't have nearly the fuss with Gregory I used to have: now he does what I tell him.

And Ralph takes me seriously when I say, "No, we can't do this or we can't do that." He goes right along with it.

Six years ago I was downtown Christmas shopping, rushing along the sidewalk like everyone else. There's a face, a dreadful suffering face, a woman with bleached hair, anguished eyes, crooked lipstick mouth, who goes by me in the crowd. As soon as she passed, the feeling came down on me, and I saw someone falling off a high balcony. I turned around but the woman was gone. I didn't know where. She could have been in any of a hundred places: on a bus, in a store, on another street. I kept on shopping but my head felt like it was being squeezed together by a pair of iron hands so I quit early and went home. It was a terrible night because whenever I slept I kept seeing a falling body over and over. In the morning there she was under the headlines. Her name was Chrissy Morgan: she had jumped from the thirty-sixth floor. I felt awful, sort of weighed down by guilt that I hadn't done anything to prevent it from happening but what could I have done? How in a big city could I have found her not knowing her name?

The next time I got a strong feeling about someone dying was after he was dead, not before. Ralph and I were in the kitchen eating lunch and listening to the news. When the announcer said a four year old boy had disappeared and there was a massive search underway—I said as matter-of-factly as I could with a revelation of that sort;

“He’s dead. He’s under a bush beside a lake.”

And Ralph said, “You’d better phone the police.”

I didn’t want to become involved with the police so Ralph phoned and told them to look for the boy under a bush beside the lake; there’s only one lake in the city. They found him that afternoon. I told Ralph not to give my name to the police. I didn’t want to be called everytime someone had his house broken into or his dog got lost. Besides, I have no control over these hunches: there’s no pattern to them at all.

These premonitions first started when I was fourteen, at least the only one I can remember clearly now was the dream I had and that happened the summer I turned fourteen. The dream had to do with an island we lived near back home in Nova Scotia called Oak Island. We had the farm on the shore opposite the island. It was a big farm with a long sloping hillside where my father grew hay for his Jersey cows. Even in those days Oak Island was well-known. There were magazine articles written about it with big glossy photographs which impressed me. I mean there I was living right across from a famous treasure island. They still hadn’t found the treasure and nobody knew for certain who had put it there, though people have been looking for it since the 1800’s.

Sometimes in the afternoons when I had nothing special to do, I’d go for a walk on the hillside and look across at Oak Island. Stretched out flat on the top of the slope, I’d narrow my eyes so I’d be squinting through the screen of golden hay stalks, imagining who had put the treasure there. Some said it was Spanish gold taken from galleons driven ashore in a hurricane. Others that it was the Crown Jewels of Scotland or France, I don’t know which. I myself liked the idea that it was pirates. We had learned in school how privateers and pirates used to raid the villages along the coast and then come to Mahone Bay to hide because there were so many hiding places between the islands. A lot of pirates captured ships with slaves aboard and I figured it was slave-labour that was used to bury the treasure with its tunnels and everything. It might have been a slave who put a voodoo curse on the island. The curse is that seven will die before the treasure is found. One man already died back in 1860 when he was scalded to death by a pump that broke. I first heard about the curse from a friend of my mother’s, Mrs. Nauss was her name, who told me about it one afternoon when she was quilting at our house. I

remember my mother frowning, trying to change the subject, she didn't approve of idle talk, but Mrs. Nauss went on telling me about it and about *The Teaser*. *The Teaser* was an American privateer ship that the crew scuttled rather than have it captured. Although it went up in flames somewhere back in the 1880's, Mrs. Nauss insisted she saw it out in the bay during thunder and lightning storms.

Some people like my parents scoffed at the idea of anything being on the island at all. They sort of considered the whole thing a joke, something they could sit in their porch rockers on summer evenings and jaw about. It was good for the gullible tourists, they said, though back then tourists weren't encouraged to visit the island because of it interfering with the searchers. Those who were determined to get on had to go around to the other side by boat. You couldn't see the place where they worked from my father's field because the island sort of snaked away at the treasure end, toward the sea. I don't know whether it was because my parents dismissed Oak Island or because we didn't own a boat that I never got to Oak Island until my Uncle John took me over the year I was fourteen. He came into the kitchen one day in August and said he was going across to see what Restall was up to. Restall was the one searching for treasure then. John asked me if me and my little brother would like to come along. My mother said he should have more sense than to go off and watch a wild-goose chase but she let us go.

It wasn't at all like I had imagined. I had expected to see a jungle, thick and dark but the cove where we landed was as open and full of sunlight as the shore we left behind. The hillside was not jungle-like but bare with humpy ground that looked like it had been pushed together by giant machines. There were deep pits filled with green sea water. My uncle told me to hold onto my little brother's hand, he was four, so he wouldn't fall into one of the pits. Then he went and stood looking down into the pit nearest the shore and waited, I wasn't sure for what. I stood beside him for a while, but then an uncomfortable feeling came over me. It was the same eerie feeling I got whenever I was at Indian Point which was up the shore several miles from our farm. Though it used to be a burial ground of the Micmac Indians long ago, it was a peaceful looking place. But it wasn't really peaceful: it just looked that way. It was really a mysterious place, haunted by ghosts of the dead. You could feel the spirits coming up out of the earth beneath your shoes. I used to think if you didn't move around, if you stayed still, they'd get into your body, especially if you had bare feet, and you'd die. It was the same on Oak Island. I could feel death beneath my feet. People had died here once, violently. The quiet peacefulness was just a disguise, to cover up what

was buried in the past. The feeling was worse near the open pit. I squeezed my little brother's hand so hard he hollered and grabbed my uncle's hand. I went back to the water and stood on the safe hard stones edging the shore and looked out over the water. Far out on the waves I saw two birds. I knew from the white necklaces around their throats that they were loons. They floated for a while then dived suddenly, staying under a long time and finally coming up at the end of the point. When they both surfaced, one called to the other, a high haunting sound from deep in its throat and the other answered like its echo.

After a while a man came up the ladder in the pit and I went and stood beside my uncle so I could see better. The man who came up was short and dark.

My uncle said like he'd known him all his life, I didn't think they'd even met but my uncle said the man bought groceries from him;

"How's it going, Bob?"

And the man said, "Slow. The pump keeps kicking out but we'll get her fixed."

"You finding anything?"

"Wouldn't tell you if I did," the man laughed.

My uncle laughed too and shooed me and my brother back to the boat thinking maybe that the man named Bob would open up a little more if we weren't close by. They didn't talk long though and soon my uncle came and got into the boat. On the way back he told us that Bob had been in the circus riding a motorcycle around a globe before coming to Oak Island to look for treasure.

When we got home, my mother set me to work peeling peaches for preserves. She always did this in August when the weather was humid. For once I didn't mind. I was even grateful for the familiarity of sitting on a hard kitchen chair with a cold metal basin between my knees to catch the peelings, and my mother rushing hot and cross-tempered between the stove and the table. My eerie feelings about the island evaporated in the sweet steaminess and warm sugar syrup and my mother's proddings for me to keep up with her or supper would be late.

But they came back that night after I had gone to bed. I couldn't sleep. My head felt heavy, like I was sinking into the soft pillow and would drown if I didn't shift around and keep afloat. All night long I lay there floundering in a sea of feathered blackness. It wasn't until light threaded the underside of the blind that I started to doze and it was then I had the dream.

I was in my uncle's boat, all alone, at least I don't recall being aware of anyone else. I was in the cove moving away from shore into deep

water. On the shore there were men standing around the pit, the one we had stood beside with my uncle. The men were holding a rope. They were pulling on it. They pulled up a body, a man, limp and dead. They put him on the beach and then pulled up another man, limp and dead and laid him beside the first man. They did this two more times until there were four men lying on the beach. I sat in the boat wanting to get to shore, but there were no oars and I couldn't swim. I kept calling out to the men but they didn't hear me.

My mother, who was getting up to do the baking early as she always did on hot summer mornings, came into my room and asked me what the matter was. I told her I was dreaming was all. My mother was not given to telling tales, even true ones, unless there was a moral to them.

That morning I went into town with my father even though I knew I would be bored sitting in the truck while he went around and paid the bills and visited. It was better than staying at home with me feeling worn out from lack of sleep. When we got back late that afternoon, my uncle's truck was in our driveway. He had come over to tell us the news that four men had been killed on Oak Island earlier that day: Bob Restall, his son and two local men, one my uncle knew well. They were gassed in the pit he said and couldn't get up on time. When I told my mother that since there were five dead maybe what Mrs. Nauss said about the curse was true, she told me I shouldn't blaspheme the dead with such thoughts.

I wasn't scared about my dream ending up the truth. I guess I thought it was a coincidence. I didn't tell anyone about it for a long time. But later on in school I wrote it in a composition and the teacher had me stay in after school. She asked me if what I wrote was true or did I make it up. When I told her it was true she gave me the strangest look but she didn't say anything more.

After that incident I forgot about Oak Island. My mind was on other things, boys for instance. Ralph was one of them. When I finished school, Ralph and I got married and the bank transferred us out West. I never went back until last fall when my father had a heart attack. The year before he had sold off his herd and most of his land and I think it was retiring so suddenly that brought on the attack. Anyway with my brother working up North, I went home to help my mother.

One day when she was having a nap before we were to visit my father at the hospital, I went for a walk, not planning to go to Oak Island but ending up there. Since I'd been away, there was a causeway built across and it seemed the natural place to walk to. At first I forgot about how I had once been afraid of the island. After living cooped up in the city for so long, I was glad to see the sun reflecting off the sea and the white

cloud sailing ships scudding over the blue sky. There were a few oak trees left on the island: I could see their russet leaves patched like a quilt with the dark green of the fir and the red of the maples. It was Indian summer and the tourist season was over. Even so, there were three cars in the parking lot on the other side of the causeway: an old blue Chev, a grey, mud-splattered van that looked as if it was being lived in and a black car, square-shaped like a hearse with wire mesh across the back seat to hold an animal of some sort.

To one side of the parking lot was a sign welcoming tourists and suggesting you follow the road and read the signs along the way. It was like walking into a postcard, glossy and slick and I felt like a tourist myself, reading all those signs.

Farther on down the road, closer to the digging, there were other signs. DANGER, DO NOT LEAVE THE ROAD, they said, not friendly like the Tourist Bureau signs. And it was there things started to change. Just beyond the signs a man crossed the road and disappeared into the bushes. He was carrying a rifle and holding onto the leash of a large German Shepherd. I figured he was a patrol of some sort though I didn't know that the island needed a patrol. Maybe it was so people wouldn't fall into the deep pits of water and drown. But a rifle wasn't needed for that, surely. Up ahead I heard a machine whining and I knew the men were drilling for treasure. I didn't know what to do. I wanted to go on but the man with the rifle and the dog bothered me. I stood there trying to make up my mind when the man came back onto the road again, only this time he was closer, about twenty feet away. He still had the dog on the leash but he wasn't carrying a rifle. He was carrying a stick. He waved it at me in a friendly way and then went in the direction of the swamp, using the stick to beat down the bushes as he walked. I felt kind of silly. I mean thinking he had a rifle when really he was carrying a stick all the time and I was too far away to tell the difference.

Farther on down the road I came to more signs: also not friendly or touristy. KEEP OUT, DO NOT GO BEYOND THIS POINT, they said, nailed onto a fence. Inside the fence was a shed and a truck. Mounted on the truck was a drill being operated by two men. They were drilling into a hole. I could not see how deep. The men ignored me and kept on working. I walked past their dusty station wagon and went down to the cove where my uncle had moored his boat the day he had brought me and my little brother over. Near the shore was a sign indicating the location of the shaft where the four men had died, the four men in my dream. Remembering that dream started me shivering even though I was standing in broad daylight. I turned to go back up the hill and away

from that spot when I caught sight of a dark shape at the water's edge. It was not a piece of driftwood or cork, but something soft and limp. I went closer and saw it was a dead loon that had somehow got its long neck caught between two rocks and strangled itself. I couldn't see how that had happened. Loons hardly ever came ashore and anyway how could one get its own neck stuck like that? It wasn't natural. From far out in the cove came the sad drifting call of another loon: the dead loon's mate.

I had the idea that this was the pair of loons I had seen the day I had come over with my uncle. The same feeling of dead spirits coming up out of the ground came back to me so strong that I knew it wasn't just a childhood fear but something unnatural about this place. It made me want to get off the island right away. I didn't want to go back by the road and meet the patrol again. The safest way back was the shore route, and that was the one I started to take, following the hard beach stones around the island shore until I came to the parking lot.

I had gone around the narrow curve of beach, walking as fast as I could past the hole where the men were drilling, when I was stopped by a voice from behind.

"I see! I see!" it said, high and shrilly, "It's deep. Deeper down. I'll tell them!"

I turned around and there, coming out of the bushes skirting the beach was a girl with wild hair, stumbling over the rocks. Behind her was a bearded fellow, trying to hold her back.

"No, Opie. You can't go up there! They're working. Come back!"

He yanked her onto a rock and she sat upright, staring straight ahead. I was right in front of her but she didn't look at me. She looked through me. She was wearing a dirty cotton blouse over jeans and bare feet. At one end of a long skinny arm dangled a plastic bag of purple grapes. She began eating the grapes, stuffing them into her mouth fast like she hadn't eaten in a month and by the thin scrawny look of her that seemed likely.

"You shouldn't eat any more of those," the bearded fellow said. He was young like the girl with wild hair, long and kinked. The girl ignored him and shoved another handful into her mouth. Then she spoke again, but this time it was in a monotone, like she was in a trance.

"I've got to tell them," she said, "They're not in the right place. I see danger. I see death." She sank down, stupid like, her head down, and shoved more grapes into her mouth.

"Let's go back now, Opie. We'll tell them later. When you're feeling better. You should get to bed. Come on." The bearded fellow was worried, I could see that.

I didn't know what to do. It wasn't something you could pretend to ignore, but she seemed so queer I thought she might do something weird if I moved, so I stayed where I was and watched them.

All of a sudden the girl's head went up and she looked straight at me. She lifted her finger and pointed toward me, her eyes bulging like a toad's.

"*She knows!*" she shrilled, "she knows about death. I'll ask her!"

She lurched to her feet and started toward me. "You!" she said, "You know!"

"Know what?" I said, backing away, my feet were nearly in the water. I was afraid of this Opie.

She came toward me, still pointing, her hand stained purple.

"Stop her!" I said to the man. The girl moved so fast she was two or three feet ahead of him. He made a grab for her. It was then she tripped and fell, sort of folding up and falling onto the rocks. She didn't get up but lay in front of me crumpled up on her side.

"Opie! Opie!" the fellow said. He knelt down and turned her over.

"Come on, Opie, get up!"

But the girl didn't move.

I leaned over and picked up her wrist, feeling for the pulse. When I found it, I said,

"She must have knocked herself out on a rock. She'll probably come round in a minute."

"You think so?" he said child-like. Up close he didn't look more than eighteen.

"I'll get some water and see if that won't bring her around," I said. When I stood up to get some I realized there was nothing to carry water in except the plastic bag with the grapes in it. I dumped out the grapes and filled the bag with sea water which I trickled onto her forehead so it ran down either temple. Opie didn't move. You would have thought the water was being poured over a store dummy. I got a couple of Kleenexes and started wiping her forehead. Her face which had been flushed and sweaty before with hair sticking to the sides, was pale now, the eyelids blue-veined, and popping in their bony sockets. She looked about sixteen. The boy seemed unable to do anything except rock back and forth and say, "Opie! Come on, Opie!" so I said,

"I think we should get her to a doctor."

"I guess you're right," he mumbled, still sitting there.

"You take her shoulders and I'll take her legs."

He got up then and lifted her by the shoulders. I took her feet and followed him over the rocks, up the hill and into the clearing. She wasn't

heavy, no more than eighty pounds, but I knew we couldn't carry her all the way back to the parking lot, it was a good half mile anyway. Besides, she might have damaged her brain when she fell and carrying her like we were might be bad for her. We'd have to ask the drillers if they could drive us back. They had their station wagon parked near the drill. We set Opie down on the scrub grass.

The boy saw me looking at the station wagon, but he didn't offer to ask the drillers.

"I'll go ask them," I said and went over to the fence and past the KEEP OUT sign. The two drillers had their backs to me: I got as close to them as I could without stepping on their heels.

"There's a girl over there," I shouted over the drill. "I think she's been hurt. Can you take her to the causeway?"

One man, the older of the two and the one in charge, looked annoyed at the interruption.

"What's wrong with her? he shouted at me.

"She fell and hit her head. She might have a concussion."

He reached over and switched off the drill, shoved his hard hat to the back of his head and strode through the opening in the fence.

When he saw the girl lying on the ground, he said, there was no mistaking the disgust in his voice,

"You two again. I might have known. What happened to your girlfriend?"

"She fell, hit her head on a rock," the boy said.

"Well, we'd better get her to the hospital quick," the man said, "She may need X-rays." He turned to the other driller. "Might as well knock off for the day."

He took a blanket from the front seat and folded it into a pillow for the girl, then the four of us lifted her in. The boy and I crawled in beside her to keep her steady which was a good thing because the road was bumpy and rutted. At the parking lot we stopped to let out the other driller.

"See you tomorrow, Ben," the driller said to our driver, and went over to the blue Chev. Only the Chev and the van were there, the hearse-like black car with the mesh across the back was gone.

"We can take her the rest of the way in my van," the boy said.

"No need for that," Ben said, "The hospital's not that far. Shouldn't move her any more than necessary."

We had to keep a firm hold of the girl as the car rolled in and out of the causeway furrows. She was whiter than before. I was having trouble finding her pulse but I didn't tell the boy.

Ben didn't say a word all the way to the hospital but drove with his lips tight and silent the whole time.

At the Emergency Entrance two men came out of the double doors and slid Opie onto a stretcher and carried her inside, the boy following.

Ben turned to me.

"You staying?" he said gruffly.

"No, I've got to get home." With all the commotion I had forgotten that my mother was waiting for me to get home from my walk so I could take her to the hospital. It was late and she was bound to be upset.

"Where's home?"

"Near the island. That farm close to the causeway is my father's. *Was* my father's," I corrected, "Before he sold it."

"I'll drop you off."

"It's not out of your way?"

He grinned then, showing a chipped front tooth which made him seem friendlier.

"Hell no. I go right past it. I live on Oak Island."

"Then you must be the man who's in charge of the island," I said. I had read in the newspaper years before about this man. He had given up a big business in the States to come to Oak Island and search for treasure.

"Not in charge of the island," he said, "Only the part where we're concentrating the search."

"How is it going? Are you finding anything?"

"Sure," he said confidently, "I'm finding evidence all the time."

"Evidence of what?" I asked him. I mean I was really interested to know if he was close to getting the treasure.

He grinned. "Now I couldn't tell you that, could I? That's classified information."

"No, I suppose not," I said, "When I was younger I used to think the treasure was put there by pirates, you know, the ones who used to hide out in Mahone Bay."

I could tell Ben didn't agree with me. "Listen," he said, his voice slow and serious, like he was dictating a statement to a history book, "When the truth about what is down there is known, it will be more important than anything anyone has guessed at up to now. I know what it is. All it needs is proving."

"Opie said she knew where it was," I told him, "She said, 'It's deeper down. They're in the wrong place.'"

"I know. I know," Ben said in a bored sort of drawl, "That's one of her hallucinations. You can't take anything she says seriously. Opie's

nothing but a runaway kid who keeps herself stoned so she won't have to face up to whatever it was that made her run away. She and her boyfriend used to take mescaline but they ran out of that so now it's grapes. I've had so many Opies tell me, tell *me* of all people, that I'm looking in the wrong place. They're nuts, all of them. You wouldn't believe some of the crazy ideas I've heard. One woman wrote me she had a vision there was a pyramid down there. Then there's those that say if I'll pay for their plane ticket they'll come down and tell me where the treasure is. They usually claim they have an old map passed down from great, great, great, grandfather who just happened to be a sea-captain and was on his deathbed when he gave them this map. Of course they don't have the map because it got lost in a fire. What these people are after is a cut of the take. Some people don't write: they just come. I had one man fly over from Ireland in the middle of winter a few years ago. Two feet of snow on the ground and he started digging with a shovel. Crazy eh?"

I don't think Ben expected me to answer and I couldn't anyway because we had reached the causeway by then and I was busy thinking how I'd explain my lateness to my mother. She wouldn't be pleased to know I had kept her waiting because I had been taking two hippies to the hospital instead of her. After all one of the reasons I had come all this way was so I could drive her to the hospital twice a day: my mother didn't drive.

By rushing, I did get her to the hospital before visiting hours were over. What with supper, and driving her back again afterwards, I didn't think much about what Ben had said about all the crazy people who wrote him letters until I was in bed that night. Thinking about their wild ideas brought back my eerie feelings about Oak Island all over again. It was no wonder that when I finally dropped off to sleep, I dreamed about the place.

The dream started with a procession of men coming up out of the water. At the head of the procession was a man with a large dark hat and leather boots and what looked like a uniform. Behind him were shadowy figures carrying a stretcher uphill. On it was a black box or a chest of some sort. It was long and low and made of wood. They set it on the ground beside an open pit. Two men came up dressed in black skin. They each took a handle of the black box and jumped into the open hole. Their screams came up out of the hole like clouds that floated up and then took the shape of the cross before drifting away.

I woke up heavy headed and depressed from lack of sleep and from having another weird dream dumped on me, one I couldn't figure out.

Naturally I took the dream to be a premonition of death but whose? Were those two men who jumped into the pit the drillers I had met on the island? It didn't take much figuring to add two men to five already dead, making the seven that old Mrs. Nauss had said would die before the treasure could be found. That put me in an awkward spot. I felt I should warn the drillers in case it was them in my dream. I didn't want another Chrissy Morgan on my conscience. But I didn't like the idea of telling Ben because I figured he'd lump me with all the nuts who had written him letters.

As it turned out, I never said a word to anyone about my dream, because later on that day when my mother and I went to the hospital to visit my father, I walked over to the Emergency Ward to see how Opie was getting along. The nurse told me Opie had died during the night. She never regained consciousness. Right then and there I decided it was her death I had dreamed, not the drillers. The black box I saw must have been her coffin, not a chest. So I never told Ben and I never went back to the island.

It would have been left like that with me thinking my dream was a premonition of Opie's death, having nothing at all to do with Ben, except that something else happened to start me wondering again. Coming back on the plane I picked up a magazine and was leafing through it looking for something to read when what should I come across but an article on Oak Island that included an interview with Ben and his wife. I know it sounds strange but the article says that Ben's wife thinks the treasure is the Blessed Virgin or the Holy Grail. She's convinced Ben is going to bring up something like that from the murky depths of Oak Island, which, if you remember my dream, puts a whole new light on things.