

*The darkness of that summer day
Was hidden in sunlight,
When you smiled at me the last time
And we both sang your goodnight.
You didn't want to leave me –
I thought you never would.
A voice said, "Let it be."
I wish I could.*
—Billy's Song

Chapter 4

DICK

*A*s the movie of life is being filmed, events don't always happen as intended by the actors. The direction of the story line can be unintentionally modified by a forgotten word, inflections in the voice or a changed facial expression by a character. But the director can rearrange the plot at will. And once the plot is performed for an audience, it can't be altered. There were a few scenes that deviated from the original script on the sunny day that cast a shadow on our lives forever.

That weekend, we were invited to a friend's cabin "up north," as Minnesotans call the densely wooded area of the northern state. Your Grandma Jen would have watched both Danny and you at her house had we decided to go. Because your mother had worked three days that week and was gone overnight for two of those, she had no interest in leaving

you and Danny for the weekend. At my reluctance, we declined the offer and planned a weekend at home. So the story line changed.

In the first draft, an old college roommate of your mother's was scheduled to visit our home with her family. Your mother's alumni friend called to cancel, so a line was crossed off the script.

The neighbors to our left were on vacation and had placed their daughter in charge of the house. When she was house-sitting, she would spend the entire day basking in the sun on the dock adjacent to ours. That morning, she went out on an impromptu lunch date with a friend, and an actor was deleted.

Early that morning, Danny was scheduled for what parents call a "play date" at a little friend's house, which would have left Denise's undivided attention on you, Billy. The friend canceled and the plot took a new course.

Three young men, our neighbors to the right, were fishing and exercising their dog on their dock that late afternoon, but their lines and attention were cast westward instead of eastward toward our lakeshore. Also, your mother and I would normally wait until evening to leave the house. But on that clear sunny day, I choose to hire the sitter earlier. So the cast was changed.

The lakeside screen door had been replaced a month earlier, because the original had become warped with age and would not easily slide open. And so, a prop was added.

The wind blew gently, cooling the humid air, prompting us to turn the air conditioner off and slide open the glass door facing the shoreline — which left only the screen as your barrier to the outside. Beyond that door, the lake water temperature continued its deadly climb due to the record heat wave of that northern summer.

The stage was set and the dark music commenced.