

FIFTEEN

“Good evening. Thank you for joining us on WSKW Channel 4 evening news. I’m Kate Sikoski.” Kate shifted angles to a different camera. “Our top story tonight, the Maine Warden Service has called off its search for the bodies of Maxwell Carboneau, 76, and his son, Jacob, 43. Both men went missing on Sehgoekaw Lake three days ago, their boat found drifting on the lake. The lake is renowned for trophy bass, but the boat was found over the one deep hole in the lake, more than 200 feet¹ in depth. Both are presumed dead at this point.”

As the newscaster states this, images of Maine wardens pulling a diver out of a lake and into a boat are shown on the screen along with pictures of the lake with the foliage near peak autumn colors.

“Reporter Dan Morgan is live on scene. Dan?”

The screen does a LIVE text flash and a reporter holding a WSKW microphone appears front and center standing on a camp road with a camp to either side of him. Behind him, the viewer can just make out a lake down through the maple trees ablaze in hues of yellows, oranges, and reds.

“Thank you, Kate. As you just reported, the search has been called off to locate the bodies of those two men. A spokesperson for the Maine Warden’s Service reported they’ve searched the best they can with no luck. It is presumed the bodies are somewhere in the deepest portion of the lake. It could be weeks for the bodies to resurface if ever. The two victims had been renting this camp behind me to my right,” the camera pans briefly showing Cathy’s camp with the skunk welcome banner and other skunk décor and then back to the report, “for the week. I have the caretaker of the camp with me, Jenny McKaskey. Ms. McKasky, what can you tell our audience about the renters.”

The camera panned slightly to get the elderly woman into the shot.

“They were very polite and down-to-earth. This was their second week this year at Ms. Nightshade’s camp. They had rented a week back in July with the other son, Steven. I guess they liked the fishing as these two returned for the reduced rate Ms. Nightshade offers in the shoulder season. They had invited me over for dinner the night before they vanished on the lake. Maxwell Carboneau isn’t that bad a cook. We had lamb chops with rosemary. I waved to them as they pulled out of the dock to go fishing as they did every morning. When they didn’t return by lunch time, I called the police, who in turn contacted the warden’s service.”

“Where either of them wearing a PFD²?”

Jenny sighed and wiped a tear from her eye. “Sadly, no, neither one had a lifejacket on though they had them in the boat.”

¹ 61m

² Personal Flotation Device

“Do you have any idea what may have happened?”

“I can speculate, Mr. Morgan. However, we’ll never know for sure unless they find the bodies and said bodies are good enough for an autopsy. The lake temp gets down into the upper 40’s to low 50s³ this time of year. Mr. Carboneau was seventy-six and not in the best of health. All it would have taken is to suffer a heart attack out there, flop out of the boat, and his son diving in to try and save him, only to quickly succumb to hypothermia himself. There have been other incidents just like this in other parts of the state this past spring, though those heart attack victims had a life jacket on. It’s such a shame. I hear his other son, Steven, and his wife are taking this very hard.”

“You’re the caretaker for the owner of the property, a Ms. Catherine Nightshade. We couldn’t find a way to contact her for comment.”

“She’s a very private individual and is taking this really hard. Here it is we thought the curse had been lifted as it has been years since anyone drowned here. But now, the lake has claimed two more souls.”

“Wait? You believe in that old legend?”

“The one about this lake that a white man must drown in it every year in retaliation for the murder of an Abenaki chief’s baby daughter. Yes. It was true I tell you. And someone drowned every year in this lake until twenty years ago. The village historical society has archives of the diaries of various individuals who lived on or near the lake going back nearly two-hundred-and-fifty years. Every year the lake claimed a victim. I’m on the society’s board. I can show you some of the diary entries later if you wish.”

“I might take you up on that, Ms McCloskey, later. Thank you.” The camera pans back to the reporter. “This Dan Morgan, reporting live from Sehgoekaw Lake, Maine. Now back to Kate in the studio...”

As the sun set and the camera crew departed, three skunks came out of the bushes. Jenny knelt down.

“Thank you for the loan of the small dingy, electric motor, and Blitzen’s PDF,” Max stated, nuzzling Jenny’s hand. “It was a little tricky guiding the dingy back to shore in this body, but the trick seemed to work.”

“I just hope the two of you are happy in your new life with Cathy, ‘cause as you know, law enforcement frowns upon the ‘dead’ returning from the dead.”

³ Roughly 10c

Got Skunked (Expanded Version) by Aldin Busheytail, 2025

Jake snuggled up to Cathy before looking up at Jenny. “Cathy is a wonderful companion. Why would we want to go back?”