

## ONE

**T**he man with the ponytail and star-spangled do-rag nestled in the brush along the lake and kept the crosshairs of his scope trained on the jet skier's torso as he zigzagged across the flat water toward him. Each time the jet skier turned, he sent sheets of water spraying skyward and momentarily disappeared from view. When he reemerged, the crosshairs found his torso again. The man's forefinger twitched as he watched the jet skier come closer.

Fifty yards from shore, the jet skier throttled back and the angry whine of his machine softened as he coasted to a stop. The man watching him fought to control his emotions and wiped his eyes to clear his vision. He sighted through his scope again and adjusted the controls to sharpen the focus, centering the crosshairs on the jet skier's torso and holding steady. Then he raised the crosshairs to the man's head for a few moments before dropping them back to his torso. His forefinger began to tighten, slowly, slowly, slowly. Finally, he dropped his head and squeezed his eyes closed.

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When he heard the jet ski rev up, the man raised his head and followed the rider with his eyes as he headed south. He brought his scope up again, this time centering the crosshairs on the skier's back. He kept them there as the skier weaved back and forth across the water until he became a speck in the distance.

The man lowered the scope and breathed deeply several times to relieve the tension that gripped his body. Then he slipped the scope into its padded sheath and put on a pair of wraparound sunglasses and rose to his feet. He glanced around as he walked to his pickup where he stowed the scope in a canvas duffel bag and stuffed the bag under a tarp that hung partially across his tailgate, concealing his license plate. He'd inflated his orange kayak before he left home, and now he pulled it from his pickup's box and carried it to the water.

He took twice as much time as he needed to screw the two sections of his paddle together. When he was finished, he walked down the narrow sand beach and tried to appear preoccupied with other things. He knew someone might see him and would assume he was looking for unusual stones. Being seen wasn't a problem, though. In fact, it was good. That's what he wanted, to be seen.

After a while, he returned to his kayak and launched it and began to paddle. He forced himself to concentrate on his surroundings as he moved noiselessly through the water. On shore, he heard a brace of crows squawking from a dead tree, and just ahead of him he saw a heron flying low over the lake. The peacefulness calmed him and he began to think through his plan again.

An hour later, the man returned to his launch point and glided onto the beach. He fussed with his equipment for a couple of minutes and then carried his kayak to his pickup and hoisted it into the back. He made sure the end of the tarp continued to hang down over his license plate and started out the single-track dirt road to the highway. Apparently hearing his truck, the woman with the straw hat and blue shirt and brightly-decorated gloves who always seemed to be working in her flower garden looked up. He stared straight ahead and gave no sign that

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he'd noticed her. He glanced to his right, but didn't see the other woman. The one who never seemed to be outside, but he suspected observed everything in the area. The invisible woman.

A half-mile north on M-22, he turned left onto a seldom-travelled road that branched off the highway, away from the lake. When he was comfortable he'd gone far enough, he stopped and went to the rear of his pickup where he removed his do-rag and ponytail wig. He stuffed them in the duffel with his scope and put on a worn baseball cap. Then he deflated the kayak, folded it, and stored it under the tarp. He pulled the end of the tarp back so that his license plate showed again. When he was finished, he turned around and got back on M-22.

Pete Thorsen sat on his screened porch with a collection of Chuck Berry's greatest hits playing softly on his Bose music system, his laptop open on a table next to him, and a yellow legal pad resting on one knee. He stared absently at the lake as he thought about the best way to begin his article about Viking longbows for *The Fjord Times*. For inspiration, he'd positioned his replica longbow across the arms of a wicker chair in front of him.

He couldn't help but smile when he thought about the bow's history. Some years earlier, he'd taken a trip to Norway with Harry McTigue, his long-time newspaperman friend. After visiting a museum filled with historical artifacts from the Viking Age, he'd become enamored with the longbows from that period, and the museum's curator introduced him to an elderly craftsman named Ulf who carved bows that meticulously resembled those used by the storied warriors. When he was finally able to persuade Ulf to make a bow for him, he quickly learned that it wasn't as simple as grabbing a piece of yew wood and beginning to carve. First, Ulf emphasized, they had to decide on an appropriate draw weight. Pete knew nothing about draw weights, so Ulf sized up his six-two, two-hundred-five-pound frame and proposed one that Pete later discovered might have been appropriate for a Viking warrior his size, but was a tad optimistic given his twenty years behind a desk as a lawyer.

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It wasn't the bow's draw weight that tickled Harry, though, it was the special fixtures at the ends. Ulf had never been out of Norway, but he was an aficionado of black and white American movies, notably gangster films. Al Capone, in particular, fascinated him, and when he found out that Pete and Harry were from Chicago, he took it upon himself to come up with something Pete could use in close combat in the urban jungle if the need should ever arise. His innovation was the sharpened steel fittings at the ends of the bow, steel being Ulf's sole concession to modernity. Harry never tired of ribbing Pete about strolling through Chicago's streets in a pinstripe suit with the menacing Viking bow slung over his shoulder.

Pete jotted down several possible openings for his article and was finally getting into it when he heard the whine of high-powered engines on the lake. He looked up, and far out on the water, spotted two motor boats running side-by-side, heading east. The smaller one was pulling ahead in what obviously was a race. Pete wondered if his friend, Bud Stephanopoulos, was at the helm of the lead boat. He was meeting Bud later that afternoon for one of their periodic one-on-one basketball games, and was sure he'd hear all about it if it were. If there was one thing Bud liked more than basketball, it was his latest water toy.

He jotted down a fourth possible opening, and then began work on an outline for the entire article. The Chuck Berry CD had run its course and he didn't insert a new one in the player. It was quiet on the lake, too, and his thoughts were flowing better than they had earlier. After an hour, though, his enthusiasm for writing began to wane. He checked the time and saw he still had over an hour to kill before meeting Bud.

Pete got up and stretched and picked up his longbow. He pulled the bowstring back a couple of times, then got his arrows and went out to the small range he'd set up in the wooded area behind his lake house. He'd strategically positioned three army surplus silhouette targets among the trees and bushes at various distances. After repositioning one that had blown over in the wind, he stepped back and eyed the targets.

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He pulled the bowstring back a few more times to regain the feel. Finally, he nocked an arrow, and after running through in his mind the basics of form, drew the bowstring back to his right jaw and let the arrow fly. It grazed a young sapling, altering its course and causing it to completely miss the intermediate-range target. *Rust*, he thought. He nocked another arrow and tried again. This time he barely caught the shoulder of the target. Not good, but better than his first attempt. He pulled the bowstring back a couple of times without an arrow, then nocked a third one and let it fly. It grazed a bush and again missed the target. *You stink*, he muttered.

As Pete stared at the targets, a motivational gimmick he used to employ came back to him. His Chicago law firm was going through an internal power struggle at the time, and as the firm's managing partner, he was the primary target of insurgents led by a mid-thirties-something partner named Marty Kral. When he was at the lake in those days and wanted to let off steam, he began to visualize Kral's sneering face on the targets. Visualizing again, he drew the bowstring back and let an arrow go. *Thunk!* Not dead center, but safely within the target. He nocked another arrow and let it fly. *Thunk!* Center ring this time.

Pete was enjoying himself now. He was in the zone and pounded one arrow after another into the targets as he relived his battles from the old days.