

# CAMP X SHELL SHOCKED

The illustration depicts two young boys inside a vehicle, possibly a train or bus, at night. The boy in the foreground, wearing a brown hoodie, is leaning forward with a look of intense focus or concern, looking out the window. The boy in the background, wearing a dark jacket, is sitting in a red seat and driving the vehicle. The windows show a dark, stormy night with some lights visible in the distance. The overall mood is suspenseful and dramatic.

ERIC WALTERS

# CHAPTER ONE

“WHERE DOES this one go?” I asked.

My mother peeled back one of the flaps on the top of the box and peeked inside. “Put it in the kitchen, George.”

“Kitchen it is.”

“Many more to bring in?” she asked.

“Not many.”

“That’s good,” my brother Jack said as he came into the room carrying yet another box. “Because I don’t think this place can hold much more.”

“He’s right,” I agreed. “This house isn’t very big.”

“It’s a lot smaller than our place in Bowmanville,” Jack said.

“Yeah, it’s about the same size as the house we lived in in Whitby,” I added.

“Well, that’s not surprising, because this house and the one in Whitby were both manufactured by the Wartime Housing Corporation,” my mother told us.

“They do look pretty much the same,” I said.

“All the houses around here look the same,” Jack added. “Everything they build looks the same.”

“There’s no choice,” my mother said. “There are lots and lots of people moving here to Ajax to work at the munitions factory, and they all need someplace to live, so they have to build them fast.”

“And small.”

“Small is relative,” she pointed out.

“It’s even more *relative* when you have to share a bedroom with your brother,” Jack said, and he shot me a dirty look.

“It’s not my idea of a picnic either,” I said. “But at least I don’t snore.”

“At least I don’t keep my room like a pigsty or—”

“Hey, hey, hey!” Bill yelled out as he entered the room carrying yet another box. “A little peace and quiet, please ... don’t make me shoot anybody.”

My mother gave him a dirty look.

“I was just kidding around,” he said, apologetically.

“That isn’t something that should be kidded about,” she scolded him, like he was a child.

“Sorry.”

Of course Bill would never have shot any of us, but he could have if he’d wanted to. Not only did I know he was carrying a revolver—I’d seen its shape under his jacket—

I knew that he always *had* to carry a weapon. As an officer at Camp X, he wasn't allowed to be without one.

What a bizarre thought. The man helping us move into our new house wasn't just a kind neighbour, he was a spy, a secret agent, a man who was able to go out and kill people ... I knew that, because I'd seen him do it.

Bill set his box down on the kitchen counter. "I'm hoping this is going to be your last move for a while," he said.

"*You're* hoping?" I questioned.

"We're *all* hoping," my mother agreed.

"It has been quite the journey," Bill said.

"It makes my head spin." My mother sat down on a kitchen chair, as though she really were dizzy.

"Three moves in less than six months," Jack muttered.

"I still wish we could have stayed at the farm," I said.

"You know that wasn't possible," my mother pointed out. "With your father off fighting in Africa, we couldn't work the farm. Not by ourselves."

My father had enlisted in the army and was with the St. Patrick's Regiment, fighting—and *beating*—the Nazis, chasing them across northern Africa. We had leased our fields to neighbouring farmers to work until we could move back.

"That's why we had to go to Whitby to begin with, so I could work at the munitions factory," my mother said.

“And I imagine that’s where you would have stayed, if a couple of young lads hadn’t let their curiosity get the better of them,” Bill said.

“Sorry,” I said.

“Can you blame us?” Jack asked. “What boys wouldn’t want to discover what was behind the fence of a secret spy facility like Camp X? Of course we were curious.”

“There’s an old saying that curiosity killed the cat,” my mother noted. “And it almost got you two killed, as well.”

“But it *didn’t*, and what we did in the end was for the government and the war effort,” Jack said. “We were like heroes.”

“Almost dead heroes.” She turned to Bill. “Would I have even known what had happened to them ... how they’d died ... if they had died?”

Bill didn’t answer right away. Then he slowly shook his head. “I’m not sure if the Official Secrets Act would have allowed us to inform you. It’s more likely you would have been told a comforting lie rather than an unpleasant truth.”

“I wish I’d known what they were up to,” she said. “If I’d known, I might have been able to put an end to this before it got started. Maybe then we wouldn’t have had to move to Bowmanville. I still wonder, did we really need to make that move?”

“I’m afraid there was no choice,” Bill said. “Those Nazi agents your sons ran up against were neutralized, but

there were others, and they knew about the boys. We had to move you to assure that you were safe.”

My mother laughed. “That assurance didn’t turn out to be worth much.”

“In fairness, your safety was guaranteed . . . until your boys, again, got too nosy.”

“Sorry,” I said for a second time. How many times now had I apologized for our adventures?

“So you got Mom a new job,” Jack said, “and she ended up working with six hundred and fifty German war prisoners. Was that part of the master plan?”

After we’d left Whitby, our mother had been given a job as a secretary at a prisoner-of-war camp in Bowmanville—a place where they held some of the highest-ranking Germans captured in the war.

“Our employment connections are somewhat limited. Besides, we wanted to be able to keep an eye on you, just in case.”

“In case of what?” my mother asked.

“In case the enemy was able to locate you again. Of course, it scarcely crossed our minds that Jack and George would actually go out of their way to find trouble by themselves. We foolishly thought that your boys would go back to being boys . . . going to school, delivering papers, playing with their friends. We had no idea that they’d manage to get themselves inside the prisoner-of-war camp.”

“It just sort of happened,” I said. “But then we were only doing what we were asked to do. We didn’t know we’d get involved in an escape attempt.”

Bill shook his head. “Let’s try something new this time. How about if you *don’t* go looking for trouble from now on? Go to school, get a part-time job, find a girlfriend.”

“Ugh! We don’t want girlfriends!” I said.

Apparently, Jack had other ideas. “Speak for yourself,” he said.

“You can both forget about all that,” my mother interrupted. “School is your number-one priority. It’s hard to come into a new school partway through the year. You’ll have to make an effort.”

“It’s still early in the year,” Bill said. “Besides, there are so many new people coming all the time that it isn’t like a couple of new students is anything unusual.”

“Well, at least I won’t have to be the new kid at work,” my mother said.

Jack and I exchanged a look. Neither of us was that thrilled that she’d be working again at the DIL complex—that stood for Defence Industries Limited—a factory where they made bombs and shells and explosives. It supplied the ammunition that our troops needed to defeat the Nazis.

“And this time we’re living in Ajax instead of Whitby, so I won’t be spending so much time getting to work and back. We’re so close to the factory that I can walk. That

means I can be here to wake you up in the morning, and to make meals and—”

“And to keep an eye on us,” Jack said.

She smiled. “That too.”

“Keeping an eye on these two wouldn’t be the worst idea,” Bill agreed.

“You’ll be keeping an eye on us anyway, won’t you?” I asked Bill.

He smiled slightly but didn’t answer—which, of course, was an answer.

“Camp X isn’t far away,” I said.

“We’re right there if you ever need us,” Bill said.

“Do you think that ... that ... you’ll ever need *us* again?” I asked.

His smile broadened. “There’s no way of telling whether you might be called upon again to—”

“Yes, there is,” my mother said. “Boys, your career as spies is over.” She turned directly to Bill. “Right?”

He bowed slightly from the waist. “As you wish, madam.”

“We came here for a fresh start—we don’t want to have to move again,” my mother said.

“Oh, that reminds me,” Bill said. “There are a few things I need to tell all of you about your fresh start. Perhaps you three should sit down.”

I felt a little chill go up my spine. Being asked to sit down was never a good thing.