

The Dangerous Ferne

Betty Willis

Are you listening to me, George? You can have the children two weeks this summer. No more than two weeks. That's enough time for me to put up with them. After all, they are your children . . . not mine. George sat in absolute silence. Not moving, not expressing a word in reply to Ferne.

When a small child I visualized this scene over and over, whether it was just how it happened I'll never know, but my brother and I spent just two weeks every summer . . . just two weeks in a year and no more . . . visiting our father and stepmother at their cottage on the lake.

My father would go off to work in the morning and my brother and I amused ourselves for the rest of the day. We made a sandwich at noon and then scurried back outside to play. At times we found other "lake children" to romp with. We made sand castles to show to father when he returned in late afternoon.

One afternoon on a sunny warm day I was splashing and jumping around in the water and because I was five years old and could not swim I only dared walking up to my knees. I was jumping up and down watching my brother who could swim at seven years old. He was playing with his new found friend. Where was Ferne? Oh yes, there she was in her lounge chair up near the porch; she was trying to deepen her already golden brown tan. She seldom looked our way.

I continued my splashing and jumping with greater vigor when suddenly I slipped and fell in the water way over my head. I had found a drop-off in the lakes bottom floor. I came up sputtering and noticed Ferne looking at me but not saying a word --- down I went again unable to find my foothold in the dancing swirls of water, I fell again in the murky water going down, completely submerged for a third time. My brother eventually saw me go down, and he swam as fast as a seven year old can. He reached me, pulled me up out of danger, and dragged me to the sandy shore. He laid me down on my back and as he pumped me in the chest. Water came bubbling and

spraying out of my mouth. I looked up to cry for my stepmother, but no need. She was still in her lounge chair watching us. She never moved. I know you are probably thinking "Did our father ever hear of this incident?" My answer would be, no, I don't think so. During dinner and after dinner nothing was said of my almost drowning.

As the years went by I could still see Ferne looking at me but never moving. My wonderful brother came to the rescue, pumping the water out, wiping my tears and saying, "It's ok now, Sis. I'll teach you how to swim tomorrow!!"