

# Secrets of a Summer Spy

JANICE JONES

*Lou-Jan Press*  


Secrets of a Summer Spy  
by Janice Jones

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For my daughter,  
Rachel Anne Jones Smith

In Loving Memory of  
Louise Steintorf

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Standing with reluctant feet,  
Where the brook and river meet,  
Womanhood and childhood fleet!

— *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

# Contents

1. Mia's Return . . . . .	9
2. Prize Catch . . . . .	20
3. Tomcat's Revenge . . . . .	31
4. Spying . . . . .	35
5. Fish Stew . . . . .	43
6. Sinking's Too Good for Them . . . . .	53
7. Grounded . . . . .	66
8. Fern's Surprise Visitor . . . . .	74
9. Piano Lesson . . . . .	78
10. Run, Ronnie, Run . . . . .	85
11. Snake-kissed Hair . . . . .	89
12. Tattletale . . . . .	94
13. Mr. George Peet Returns . . . . .	100
14. Murder . . . . .	107
15. The Sacred Ground . . . . .	115
16. Moonlight Concert . . . . .	123
17. Wedding Present . . . . .	127
18. Clamdiggers to the Rescue . . . . .	133
19. Fern's Escape . . . . .	145
20. A Steinway of My Own . . . . .	151
21. Good-bye, Mia . . . . .	160
About the Author . . . . .	165

HARBOR ISLAND  
OHIO

HADLEY'S MARINA

SACRED  
GROUND

HIDDEN  
COVE

BOG

MURKY COVE

WOODS

MIA

FERN

RONNIE

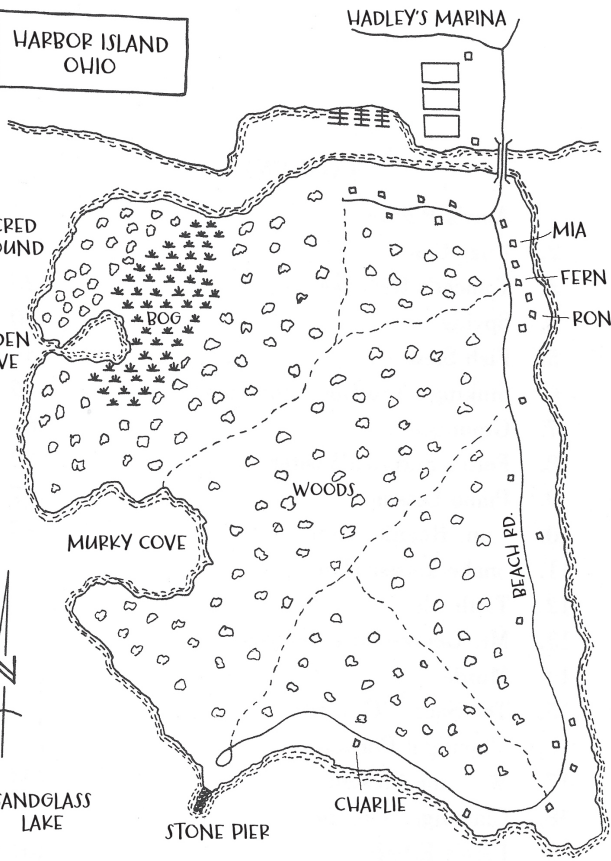
BEACH RD.



SANDGLASS  
LAKE

STONE PIER

CHARLIE





## CHAPTER ONE

# *Mia's Return*

Old catlady Peet leaned over her back porch railing, parted the branches of the shrubbery directly above my head, and stared down at me.

“Stand up now, young lady. You can’t sit out here in the bushes all night.”

The juniper scratched my face as I straightened up, feeling very embarrassed at having been caught in the act of spying. “I’m sorry about running over your cat with my bike the other day,” I stammered. “It was an accident, honest.”

“Well, come inside and tell that to Tomcat,” replied Mrs. Peet.

“I’d better not,” I said, untangling my legs from the shrub. “It’s late and I’ve got to get home.”

“That may be,” the old woman said, her voice stern. “But it would be very impolite not to apologize to Tomcat, now, wouldn’t it?” She opened the screen door and motioned me inside.

My stomach did a tumble, and I stood rooted to the spot, unable to make up my mind. Should I go in or take off running? Then I remembered how Charlie said I was the bravest girl he knew. And how Mia had tricked him into walking her home, leaving me standing alone on the



beach. Mia would never be daring enough to go into the old catlady's house. Here was my chance to impress Charlie, and I was going to take it. I stepped up on the porch and walked past Mrs. Peet into the kitchen.



Mia Williams, Charlie Jackman, and I had spent our summers together on Harbor Island for as long as we could remember. Charlie and I lived on the island year-round, but Mia and her parents only came to Sandglass Lake when school was out. The Williams lived two hours away by car in Columbus, where Mia's parents taught school. Mr. Williams loved to fish, and Mia's mom liked to sketch by the lake, so a summer cottage on Harbor Island kept everyone happy.

All I could think about the last week of eighth grade was Mia's return. Nothing had prepared me for how much she had changed.

The day she arrived, we agreed to meet Charlie at the rock and gravel pier, just like old times. When we were younger, Mia had said that we three were "as close as clams," and we had called ourselves the Clamdiggers ever since. Every summer, we toasted the group with a special ceremony at the pier.

Standing on the tip of the old stone pier, surrounded by miles and miles of choppy water, was like standing on the end of the world. The air tasted like wet sand, and the sharp breeze stung our faces as it whipped in off the lake.

If you looked to the west, you could see where Sandglass Lake ended at the town of Northwood, with the church tower sticking up above the trees. Looking straight across the water to the opposite shoreline, you could see a few blurry white dots that close up became the elaborate, Victorian cottages of Mallard's Landing—a resort for rich summer people. To the east, Sandglass Lake looked endless, just like the ocean. Actually, it ran on for ten miles or so until it ended at the state park campgrounds. Mia and I were already at the tip of the pier when Charlie showed up. He took a long, sideways glance at Mia and climbed the big, flat boulder that jugged out over the water. When he turned to look down on us, his blue eyes glinted in the sun and I sensed trouble.

“Welcome back,” he said, offering Mia his arm.

“Thanks,” she said, taking it and winking at me.

I put my hand out, too, but Charlie didn't notice. He was busy looking at Mia's new hairstyle. She had let her brown-black curls grow to shoulder length, and wore them swept to one side, making her deep brown eyes stand out against the light brown skin of her face. Charlie also stole a fast glance at the front of her rib-knit shirt, then turned away quickly to face the lake. I could see the back of his ears turning red. Mia used to be flat like me, but she had come back from Columbus with definite boobs. Charlie wasn't used to her new look, and neither was I.

“Hey, how about me?” I said, tugging on the canvas strap that dangled from the flap of Charlie's backpack.

“Yeah, Ronnie, come on up.” He never looked at me—I guessed his face was still red.

I scrambled up the rock to stand next to them, and we watched several boats racing back and forth in the distance, in spite of the whitecaps.

“It’s too bad we have to wait till Tuesday to get the *Mia Mae* out on the lake,” Charlie said. Mia’s dad had bought a new boat and named it the *Mia Mae* after Mia and her mother, whose first name was Mae. We wanted to try it out right away, but it was the Friday of Memorial Day weekend, and we weren’t allowed on the lake by ourselves on holidays because of all the tourists.

“Let’s get started with the toast,” Mia said.

“Wait! We can’t forget the clams,” I reminded her. I sat on the boulder and dangled my legs until my feet found the tops of some half-submerged rocks at the water’s edge. A wave washed over the toes of my flops as I bent down, twisted around, and crawled into a small opening under the base of the boulder. It had taken us an entire summer, many years ago, to dig out enough rocks and gravel to make a cave big enough for a secret meeting place. Once inside I found the three special necklaces of clamshells lying near the back wall.

“Whew! These are gross!” Mia said after I climbed back up and handed her one.

“Aw, quit complaining and put it on,” I insisted.

“Don’t you think we’re getting a little old for this

stuff?" she asked. Mia and I were both thirteen, but Charlie was fourteen and a half—almost a sophomore.

"You're right," Charlie agreed. He gave her that crooked smile of his that showed all his teeth down one side. "But it just wouldn't be tradition without it."

Mia made a face as she held the rotting strings in her nail tips and carefully put the necklace over her head. A wave crashed against the rocks and sent up a fine spray that wet our legs.

"Hurry up," I said, wishing I had brought a jacket. "It's cold out here."

Charlie opened the three cans of pop he'd brought in his backpack and handed one can to Mia and one to me. We held them out to the lake and chanted together, "Oh Sandglass Lake, mother of the loons and fishes, we swear by the shells we wear that we are as close as clams, and nothing will ever come between us."

"Clamdiggers forever!" Charlie shouted.

"Here, here," I said. We rattled our shells and took a drink from our cans.

"I feel silly," Mia pouted.

I didn't think it was silly. It was supposed to be a solemn vow—a tradition that we had kept for years.

I handed Mia my grape fizz. She passed her cola to Charlie, and he gave me his root beer. We drank, switched cans, and drank again.

"Now for the best part," Charlie said. We carefully

climbed down onto the slippery, wave-washed rocks at the mouth of the cave and let some of the lake water run into our cans. We clicked them together and drank. Lake water tastes terrible, but it's not so bad mixed with pop. Charlie swallowed his in loud gulps. I took a small sip. Mia raised her can to her mouth, but I think she faked it.

We crawled into our cave, and Charlie built a fire in the pit near the opening. From his backpack, he took out the marshmallows and chocolate chip cookies. We sharpened the ends of some sticks with Charlie's pocketknife, roasted the marshmallows, and smeared them on the cookies.

"It's cold in here too," I said, rubbing my arms.

"Here," Charlie offered, putting his arm around me. It was hard and knotty from a winter of basketball, and it felt warm against my skin. I watched Mia eat a marshmallow, careful not to let any stick to her lips, and snuggle closer to Charlie.

"I'm cold too," she complained, dropping her head and rolling those big brown eyes up at him. He took the last bite of his marsh-cookie and draped his other arm around her. Then we sat, stinking of old clamshells and gazing at the long moss strands that swayed around the rocks at the mouth of the cave.

Suddenly Charlie's hand moved a little. It stopped under my arm, so the ends of his fingers reached the edge of my breast, or where it would have been if I weren't so flat. He coughed and squirmed, like he was settling in

against the hard rock, and his fingers inched forward a bit more. *What was going on here?* I wondered. Charlie and I had been friends forever, and he'd never tried anything like this before. I looked over at Mia. She was wiggling around, smiling stupidly at Charlie.

*Whoomph!* Eighty pounds of wet, yellow dog landed in our laps.

"Boogie, get off," I said, pushing at his rump.

"Ewwww!" Mia said, holding her nose. "That dog has the worst fish breath in the state of Ohio."

"Aw, Boogers doesn't smell any worse than your necklace," Charlie said, taking his arms from around Mia and me. Charlie had always called Boogie "Boogers" when he was a puppy, and the nickname still seemed to fit.

"He must have been out catching lunch," I said. Boogie was always too fat, and Charlie had him on a never-ending diet. Instead of losing weight, though, Boogie had learned to hunt and fish, and he stayed as round as ever.

We were all trying to push Charlie's dog out of the cave when we heard a faint car horn. Harbor Island was small enough that whenever our parents wanted us, they just went out to the car and honked. We usually didn't carry our cell phones when we were just knocking around the island because our parents were tired of replacing them. Charlie had broken two—one fell out of his pocket when he was up a tree and the other one shattered when he dropped it on a rock. Mia had lost one in the woods, and she ran over its replacement with her bike. I had lost my

last one in the lake. Now my new one was in a waterproof pouch, to take along only when I went out in a boat. We each had our own car-horn code.

Charlie hurried out of the cave to listen. “One long and two short. It’s for me,” he said. Then he returned to the cave to put out the fire.

“I’d better get home too,” Mia sighed. “I have all my unpacking to do.”

We took off our necklaces and tossed them to the back of the cave. Then we left the cave and ran along the pier, kicking loose gravel into the lake, until we were back to the shore. We’d left our bikes there, at the turnaround loop where Beach Road dead-ended.

“Good to have you back, Mia.” Charlie hopped on his bike, said, “See ya,” then pedaled off toward his house with Boogie trotting behind him. Charlie lived a short distance from the pier in the last cottage on Beach Road—Harbor Island’s only road. But Mia and I lived near the bridge to the mainland, at the other end of Beach Road, so we took the shortcut through the woods.

I rode behind Mia on the narrow path, and our bike tires made ruts in the soft dirt. The greenish-white flowers of the Solomon’s seal arched over the edges of the trail.

Harbor Island is cut off from the mainland by a channel. A wooden plank bridge is the only way in or out. We all knew the story about how, after the first twenty-some cottages had been built along the eastern shore, some wealthy man bought up the rest of the island.

For the last twenty years the land had sat undeveloped, mostly woods and wetland. My dad said that someday the woods would probably be chopped up into tiny lots and the bog would be drained for a golf course, just like across the lake at Mallard's Landing. I hoped that would never happen.

"You know," Mia said over her shoulder, "I think Charles likes me."

"Of course he likes you," I agreed. "Why are you calling him 'Charles' all of a sudden?"

"Charlie' sounds so childish, don't you think?"

"I never thought about it," I said.

"He's changed. He's taller, he's got a new crew cut, and his eyes—they're sooo blue. He looks at least fifteen, maybe even sixteen—and he likes me."

I thought Charlie's eyes weren't any bluer than before. "What do you mean, he 'likes' you?"

She rode slower and lowered her voice. "Back there, in the cave, when Charles had his arm around me, he ... well, he ... tried to feel around," she confided.

*So I was right*, I thought. But that didn't seem like Charlie. During the school year we rode the bus into Northwood together every day (along with the second-grade Walker twins and Charlie's older sister, Ava). He was like a big brother to me. Still, the girls at school were always whispering in the bathroom about older boys trying stuff like that. And I hadn't seen as much of Charlie over the winter, with him being in high school and on the basketball team.



I was about to tell Mia that he had been feeling around with me, too, when she stopped so fast, I ran my bike into her rear tire. She held her hand up.

“What are you ...”

“Shhh,” she whispered. I squeezed my bike up next to hers. “There’s someone walking on the trail, up ahead.”

“So what? Let’s go,” I said.

“I think it’s the old catlady. I just caught a glimpse of her though the trees. She’s going the same way we are. Maybe we should hang back awhile.”

Old lady Peet lived two houses down the road from me, but she kept to herself so we hardly ever saw her. We knew little about her except that she kept a band of half-wild cats, who roamed the island making nuisances of themselves. And sometimes she played scales on a piano. Once in a while, when we passed her house, we heard a series of slow, deliberate notes. My mom called old lady Peet eccentric. Mr. Jackman, Charlie’s dad, once said, “Mrs. Peet is not playing with a full deck.”

Another series of car-horn blasts echoed through the trees. Three short, pause, three short.

“I can’t just sit here,” I said. “Mom’s honking me in for dinner. I’ll bet we can ride right up behind Mrs. Peet and whiz past her before she sees us coming.”

“Well ... maybe,” Mia said.

“Get moving,” I ordered.

We rode around the bend and saw no one. Pedaling faster, we rounded the next bend, and there she was, a

small woman in a print dress walking slowly away from us, a shiny pail in her hand. Mia and I were really sailing along now, and with the trail so narrow, I didn't see how we could get around Mrs. Peet without running her down. Mia saw the problem too.

"Excuse us," she called out when she was almost on top of the woman, but Mrs. Peet was already stepping aside as though she'd heard us coming all along. Mia shot past her, but as I rode by, I looked down into her pail. It was half-full of tiny strawberries, the kind that grew wild near the cove. If I hadn't been so curious, I might have seen the cat that was next to the old woman's feet. I hardly felt the bump in my tire when I ran over its tail.