

DRAFT

SHADOWBROOK MANOR

As the ferry skimmed past the brick red and white Round Island Lighthouse and agent's quarters and into Haldimand Bay, the island's beauty drew Samantha to her feet and she stood at the railing to admire it. Although she and Jared had visited Mackinac Island several times in their seven-year marriage, she didn't recall the countryside being so lush and green, the historic buildings and homes nestled into the wooded hillsides so charming, or the boat-filled harbor so picturesque.

When the ferry pulled up to the dock, Samantha noticed it was crowded and chaotic and the clamor deafening. Above the roar of voices of the several dozen tourists waiting in line to board the incoming ferry for the trek back to Mackinaw City; bicycle bells, whistles, and shouts from a dozen baggage handlers could be heard as they busily unloaded suitcases, trunks, and bags from various hotel and B&B porters' bicycles and wagons onto their carts and dollies for loading onto the ferry. All the while, half dozen drivers of horse-drawn carriages and wagons from those same hotels and B&Bs and independent taxis were calling out their services.

Collecting her things, Samantha made her way off the ferry and onto the dock where she signaled for a taxi. The taxi was an old buckboard wagon painted a shiny black with the words *Taxi for Hire* in bold yellow letters along the side and pulled by two powerful-looking, glistening black Percheron horses.

The driver slapped the reins over the horses' rumps until they moved, and when he reached her he climbed down from his high seat. He was an older man, she guessed in his early sixties, thin, with big brown eyes, well-groomed grey eyebrows, mustache and a full beard. He was dressed in a crisp, long-sleeved white shirt, baggy tan pants with black suspenders and a straw hat with a wide black band around its crown. Touching the brim of his hat, he said, "Welcome to Mackinac Island, ma'am. My name is Tobias Walker and ole Butch and Sundance there," he said, gesturing to the pair of horses behind him, "will gladly take you anywhere you wish to go on this fine day."

Samantha was startled by his rich baritone voice; it seemed more fitting of a burly man, and she found his old-fashioned dress and demeanor charming and she couldn't help smiling as she told him the address.

With his eyebrows shooting upward, he rocked back on his boot heels. "Why that'd be Shadowbrook Manor."

Samantha wasn't surprised he knew of it, it was a small island after all, but there was something in his reaction that she found a bit unsettling and she cautiously replied. "Yes. You know it?"

"Oh yes, I know of it. I surely do," Tobias said, nodding profusely. "I've been driving this taxi around this island for so many years I know the address of every house and building like the back of this old hand," he said, holding up his wrinkled, sun-darkened hand. "But enough about me," he added with a smile. "Let's get you to where you need to be."

Directing her to go ahead and climb up and make herself comfortable in the wagon seat, Tobias collected her luggage from the baggage handler. He hefted the half

dozen suitcases and various bags into the bed of the wagon with the strength and speed of a man half his age. When he was finished, he climbed up and took his seat next to her and they were off.

As they reached Main Street, Samantha was shocked by the hundreds of people in the narrow canyon of historic buildings of the downtown and by the hundreds of bicycles that lined the street in both directions. The sidewalks were packed and the street was filled with bicyclists, pedestrians, and all types of horse-drawn conveyances full of sightseeing tourists. Nearly every man, woman, and child was dressed in shorts and T-shirts. Many wore hats and sunglasses to protect them from the sun and a good number of people had cameras hanging from straps around their necks. There were dozens of hikers with backpacks and canine companions, a handful of women in early colonial dresses, a trio of soldiers in navy blue uniforms, and a single skateboarder who smoothly wove his way through the busy street.

The murmur of people talking and laughing, combined with the jingle of horse harnesses and the clomp of their hooves on the pavement, punctuated with the occasional barking dog and bicycle bells, was a pleasing clamor to Samantha's ears. The aroma of hot food and the scent of sweet fudge wafting in the breeze made her mouth water and her stomach rumble.

As Tobias negotiated the horse and wagon left into traffic and headed west, he settled in, resting his elbows on his knees and politely asked, "Is this your first time to Mackinac Island, ma'am?"

"Oh no, I've visited before. Several times actually, but I don't remember it being quite so busy," she said watching a painter in paint-splattered white overalls ride past with a six-foot wooden ladder hooked on his shoulder.

Tobias chuckled. "Well, we are quite a popular little island. You see, during a typical season we usually get upwards to fifteen thousand visitors from all around the world *per day*, but this week is our Lilac Festival and we're simply busting at the seams."

Samantha's eyes widened behind her shades. "Fifteen thousand visitors per day?" She echoed, thinking of the promising amount of foot traffic past the house once she planted a for sale sign in its front yard.

He nodded. "Yep, we're quite unique. You see, besides the novelty of being a *car-free* island," he began with a wink, "we're eighty percent state park with an abundance of wild birds and flowers and seventy miles of riding and hiking trails, which attracts all manner of outdoor enthusiasts and nature lovers. The entire island is a National Historic Landmark and with places such as Fort Mackinac with its reenactments, the historic buildings, and some of the finest examples of Victorian architecture, we draw a lot of history buffs. We also have the famous grand dame, the Grand Hotel. Which by itself lures more than 130,000 visitors, mostly hopeless romantics, *like yours truly*, here every year. And then of course our fudge shops, all *seventeen* of them, make the best fudge you'll ever have the pleasure of tasting. So all that combined makes us one of the greatest vacation destinations in the country. Heck, I'd even go as far as to say one of the best in the world," he said with pride.

Samantha chuckled at Tobias' boasting, but as she

looked about her, at all the smiling faces and laughing people in the bustling crowd, she thought he was right. Everyone looked like they were having a great time, even the couple who had to step around a fresh pile of horse manure as they crossed the street in front of them.

"You know," she began with a grin, "I think you just might be right about that."

Chuckling, Tobias leaned toward her and whispered back, "You know, I think I am too."

They continued on in silence for a few moments and as they left downtown and the majority of crowds behind, the atmosphere changed dramatically. The noise died down and only the cries of the gulls swooping overhead and the horses' hooves on the paved road could be heard. The mouth-watering aroma of food and fudge had faded and it was now the heavy perfume of lilacs that filled the air.

Samantha didn't mind the quiet as she enjoyed the scenic view of the lake to her left and the Victorian homes on her right, but Tobias seemed uncomfortable by it and he cleared his throat and began to speak again. "So what is it that brings you to Mackinac, ma'am? Our nature, our history, our romanticism or our fudge?"

As she remembered the true circumstances behind her arrival to the island, Samantha's smile shrank and she turned her face to stare at the road beyond the horses. "Business, actually. I'm the new owner of Shadowbrook Manor and I'm here to sell it. Well, I'm *hoping* to have it sold by the end of summer, that is."

Tobias' eyebrows shot upward. "Oh! Well, for your sake, ma'am, I hope you sell it in record time, but not before you get a chance to enjoy the island and all it has

to offer. By the by, have you ever seen the movie *Somewhere in Time*?"

Samantha remembered Jared talking about the movie on one of their trips, but she could only recall one specific about it. "No, but I heard of it. Wasn't it filmed here?"

"Oh yes, ma'am, primarily at the Grand Hotel," he said, nodding to the building on the right. "It stars Christopher Plummer, Jane Seymour, and the late Christopher Reeve, God rest his soul. Now, the film didn't win any Oscars or anything, but it's a great movie. Wonderful scores of music, a romantic plot with a bittersweet ending. You should try and catch it while you're here. It's shown daily at the theater in town."

"Oh, really," she commented as she turned and stared at the majestic white hotel sitting high on the bluff. "I'll have to stop by and see it sometime," she added politely, although she had no intention of watching any romantic movies any time soon.

"Oh you really should, if you don't mind my saying. That movie is an integral part of this island's pop culture. Why, I'd wager you can't take ten paces in any direction downtown without seeing an image of Elise McKenna and Richard Collier, that's Jane Seymour and Christopher Reeve's characters from the movie," he explained with a throaty chuckle. "But I suppose if ever there were two faces to be plastered about a town, it'd be those two. They sure made a handsome couple."

Boy, Tobias wasn't kidding! Samantha thought with a smile. He really was a hopeless romantic.

"You know, there was another movie filmed up at the Grand back in 1947. It was called, *This Time for Keeps*, and it starred Jimmy Durante and Esther Williams. He was a famous actor and she, a famous swimming actress

way back when, and the pool you see there on the grounds today was built for her use in the film."

While Samantha found his island trivia interesting, she wondered what Tobias knew about her house and figured now was a good time to ask the chatty taxi driver. "Really? That's interesting. Tell me, what do you know about Shadowbrook Manor? Any interesting tidbits that I could share with potential buyers?"

Tobias nodded to a fellow driver of a white canvas-topped, red tour bus as they passed each other. When he looked over at her, he appeared surprised. "You mean to tell me, ma'am, you don't know about Shadowbrook's reputation? Its nefarious past?"

Jared hadn't told her anything about the house, but then again she never asked. With a shake of her head, she said, "Nope, I didn't get the memo, but you would call it *nefarious*, huh," she asked, thinking the prospect of a colorful house history also sounded promising.

"Oh yes, ma'am," Tobias said, nodding his head. "It's quite tragic. And mysterious, which has made Shadowbrook Manor rather notorious. One of the most popular sites on the *Haunts of Mackinac* ghost tour."