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about 15,500 words

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Chapter One

The Wilson family stared out the window of their compact train compartment. The flat snow-covered plains of Montana passed by. In the distance, the Rocky Mountains appeared as a jagged cutout, white on top and purple on the bottom.

“A splendid way to travel,” said Walter Wilson. “Only the best. Only the best will do for the Wilson family.”

Next to Walter sat his wife, Winona, who was sketching the tiny compartment in her sketchbook.

“The bunk beds, the sink, and the bathrooms,” she said. “Everything on this train is

small and cozy. Just the way we like it.”

The twins, Winslow and Whitney, lay on the bunk beds. While boarding the train in Seattle, Whitney called dibs on the upper bunk while Winslow called dibs on the bottom. Now they were both happy.

“American passenger trains in have fantabulous names,” said Winslow. “*The California Zephyr* from San Francisco to Chicago, *The Coast Starlight* from Seattle to Los Angeles, and this train *The Empire Builder*. Seattle to Chicago.”

“It will be fun going to a city that has a twin,” said Whitney. “Minneapolis and St. Paul. The Twin Cities. Twins are the best.”

At that moment, the conductor’s voice came over the loudspeaker. “Next stop, White Fish, Montana. Passengers getting off in White Fish please collect your belongings and proceed to a lower level exit.”

The train came to a slow stop at a small station. Out the window the Wilsons watched people climb off the train and people climb on the train. Many had skis. Passengers getting off hugged people on the platform.

“All aboard!” the train conductor shouted and the Empire Builder pulled away from the station. Soon it was rolling across the snowy plains again.

“Time to go exploring,” Walter said.

The Wilsons left their compartment and strolled down the narrow train car corridor. Walter pressed a button and a glass door slid open. The family entered the observation car. This car had many big windows, soft seats, and a clear roof so passengers

could view the mountains and valleys the train passed through.

As the Winslow walked down the center aisle, a loud voice called, "It's the Elevator Family."

Walter, who led the way, stopped in his tracks. Winona bumped into her husband. Whitney bumped into her mother and Winslow bumped into his sister. They looked down and saw a young woman sitting at a table. She held a pair of binoculars.

"Robin Twitter," said Walter. "Greetings, bird-watching friend."

"Are you watching birds from the train?" asked Winona.

The woman nodded. "This morning I added a new bird to my Life List. A silver eagle was perched on a fence post we passed. Please join me."

The Wilsons squeezed into the booth with Robin Twitter. They had met the woman while they stayed in a fire lookout tower in northern Minnesota. She was doing a Big Year, trying to see how many different birds she could spy in a year.

"How did the Big Year turn out?" Walter said.

"When we met you had spied 399 different birds," said Winona.

"I ended up with 472 birds," the woman said. "A personal best. Now I'm doing another Big Year. I was just in the northwest to see the annual winter migration of shorebirds. I've spotted 165 birds so far since January first."

"And we're heading to the Twin Cities," said Whitney.

"We've been invited to the SMALL Conference in St. Paul," said Winona. "That stands for Society for Minimal and Living Little. Walter is the keynote speaker."

Robin Twitter quickly raised her binoculars to her eyes. "Look! Look!" she cried. "A Montana mockingbird! What a beauty."

"Bird 166," said Winslow.

"You're on track to break your Big Year record, Robin," said Whitney.

The Wilsons resumed their tour of the train. For the rest of the day and evening, they wandered up and down the aisle, meeting people. This is what the Wilsons enjoyed doing most, meeting people from all over the world, young and old, alone or in couples, well-off or on a tight budget, well-traveled or on their first adventure. They never met a person who they didn't find interesting.

In the dining car, the four Wilsons ate dinner with Bob and Betty Blueberry from Butte. They were traveling to Chicago to see their new granddaughter.

"We never fly anymore," said Bob. "We enjoy traveling by train."

"Going slowly and seeing the scenery," said Betty."

The conductor announced over the loudspeaker. "Next stop, Stanley, North Dakota." Anyone departing in Stanley please proceed to a lower level exit."

Without a word, Winslow and Whitney slid from their seats and raced down a stairway. When the train stopped at the small Stanley station, the twins step out onto the platform."

"Are your children getting off here in Stanley without their parents," Betty Blueberry asked.

"Oh, no," said Winona. "They like counting the states they've been to."

“And they collect a stone from every state they’ve been to,” said Walter.

By the time the train started rolling again the twins were back in the dining car.

Whitney held a white pebble. Winslow showed the others a selfie he took on the platform.

“State thirty-eight,” Whitney said.

“Twelve states to go,” said Winslow.

On through the evening, the train passed through North Dakota. Above the glass roof in the observation car, a full moon cast off silver moonbeams.

“Minot, North Dakota,” the conductor announced.

“Fargo, North Dakota.”

“Detroit Lakes, Minnesota!”

Not until midnight did the Wilsons return to their compact train compartment. The soothing *click, click, click* of the train tracks and the gentle swaying of the train car lulled them to sleep.

“St. Cloud, Minnesota,” the conductor called, as the morning sun beamed through their window.

At 7:43, right on schedule, came the announcement, “Minneapolis-St. Paul. Anyone getting off in the Twin Cities please proceed to a lower level exit.”

Pulling their wheeled luggage, the Wilson family left their room.

“Goodbye, cozy compartment,” Winona said.

“So long, Empire Builder,” said Winslow.

“Hello, Twin Cities,” said Whitney. “I like your name.”

“Only the best,” said Walter. “Only the best for the Wilsons will do.”

Chapter Two

The air was crisp and the sky was dark blue. A thermometer outside Union Station read: Temperature 2 °F.

Pulling his wheeled luggage behind him, Walter led the Elevator Family along a shoveled sidewalk. Each Wilson wore a blue puffy down coat, red mittens, and a white stocking cap.

Walter sucked in a lungful of air. “Bracing morning,” he said.

“Wonderful morning for a walk,” said Winona.

Walter checked the Twin Cities map on his cell phone. “Our hotel is a mile away near the Minneapolis Convention Center where the SMALL conference is being held,” he said. “Let’s go there on foot.”

“I hope our room isn’t too big,” said Winona. “They wanted to give us a suite, but I asked for the smallest rooms they had.”

“And the conference doesn’t start until Monday,” said Winslow.

“So we have the whole weekend to see the sights of the Twin Cities,” said Whitney.

A few blocks later, Winslow pointed forward. “There’s the Mississippi River,” he said.

“The Big Muddy, Old Man River, the Father of Waters,” said Walter.

“It’s a lot skinnier here than it was in Missouri where we saw it last,” said Whitney.

“And up ahead is a bridge where we can walk across it,” said Winona.

In single file, the family climbed some steps to the bridge roadway. As they walked across the concrete span, Winslow counted his steps.

“One Mississippi, two Mississippi, three Mississippi, four Mississippi.” On the far side he announced, “The Mississippi River in the Twin Cities is four-hundred and twenty steps wide.”

The Wilsons walked along a busy street. They hadn’t gone far before they passed a snow-covered park. A sign read **Minnehaha Park**.

Walter stepped into a snowy field. He bent down and shouted, “Snowball fight!”

The next thing Winslow knew a snowball smacked him in the side.

As Walter bent over again a snowball hit his shoulder.

“Bulls-eye,” shouted Whitney.

Soon snowballs were flying between the Wilsons. In no time white spots dotted their blue parkas.

“*Bam! Pow! Kaboom!*” Winslow shouted each time he made a strike.

With each hit, Whitney called, “Bulls-eye! Bulls-eye!”

“Missed me! Missed me!” Winona cried.

As for Walter, he laughed so hard he could hardly throw any snowballs at all.

When the family grew tired, they fell in the snow on their backs. They spread their arms and legs and made snow angels.

“Only the best!” said Walter, still chuckling. “Only the best!”

Winslow sat up. Across the park, he spotted an ice-skating rink.

“Let’s go skating,” he said.

Pulling their luggage through the snow, the Wilsons plodded over to the rink. This was a large expanse of ice, half set aside for playing hockey with a goal on each end, and the other half reserved for free-skating. This early, no skaters were present, and the small skate-rent shop and cafe didn’t open for a half-hour.

But the Wilsons quickly lost interest in skating. Their attention turned to a small wooden shed standing on the edge of the rink.

“What an excellent place to stay,” said Walter.

“Small and cozy,” said Winona.

“I hope it’s available for the next few days,” said Winslow,

“And it’s right next to the skating rink,” said Winslow.

The family walked over to the small shack. Walter knocked on the door,

“Hello?” he called out. “Is anyone home?”

Hearing no reply, he opened the door. A blast of warm air swept over him.

“Excellent,” Walter said, “This accommodation is well heated.”

The four Wilsons stepped inside.

“It couldn’t be better,” said Winona. “It has a table, stools, lots of shelves, and hooks to hang things on.” She stomped a foot. “Goodness, it even has a soft rubber floor.”

“And platforms for sleeping,” said Winslow. “Upper and lower.”

“Dibs on the upper platform,” said Whitney.

“All in favor of staying in this excellent room instead of the fancy hotel, say *aye*,”

Walter said.

“Aye,” the Wilsons said as one.

Chapter Three

“First things, first,” Walter said.

He wheeled his luggage into the small warm hut. He pulled out a framed embroidered sampler that read *Home Sweat Home*. He hung it from a nail on the back wall.

“Home Sweat Home, hangs wherever the Wilsons stay,” he said.

Winslow groaned. “And wherever we stay people know what terrible spellers Whitney and I were in second grade when we made that sampler,” he said.

Whitney took off her parka and stocking hat. “This warm house is both sweet and sweaty,” she said.

No sooner had the Wilsons unpacked than they received their first visitor. The wooden door swung open and in walked a young boy wearing a Minnesota Wild hockey jersey. On his shoulder, he carried three hockey sticks with a pair of black ice skates hanging from the curved ends. He looked at Winslow lying on the upper platform, Whitney lying on the bottom platform, Winona hanging her coat upon a hook, and Walter warming his hands over the heater.

“What’s up?” he said.

“Good morning, young man,” Walter said. “Visitors are always welcome wherever the Wilsons stay.”

“We just moved in,” said Winona, “We hope it’s not already reserved.”

“Cool,” said the boy. “You’re staying in the warming hut?”

“The Warming Hut,” said Walter, pulling off his parka “What an excellent name for this place.”

The boy shrugged. “I’m just here to play hockey,” he said. “We play every Saturday morning.”

Winslow and Whitney sat up.

“Can we join?” asked Winslow.

The boy shrugged again. “Sure, cool,” he said. “We’re always short a few players.”

The boy sat on the platform and began putting on his ice skates.

“Play much hockey before?” he asked the twins.

“Never,” said Winslow.

“I watched it once during the Winter Olympics,” said Whitney.

“Cool,” repeated the boy. “You can play goalies. I have two sticks you can borrow. You don’t even need skates. Your rubber boots will do.”

While the boy laced up his skates, more kids arrived in the Warming Hut.

“Greetings,” said Walter. “The more guests we have the merrier.”

Some of the newcomers put on black hockey skates while others put on white figure skates. Before long the skating rink was filled with skinning, twirling, leaping, and zig-zagging skaters.

On the hockey section of the rink, Whitney and Winslow joined the hockey game. Whitney stood in front of one goal and Winslow stood in front of the other. Twenty players, two teams, stood in a circle in the middle of the ice. Someone dropped a puck between the

teams and the game began.

From one end of the rink to the other, the two hockey teams moved the puck. Whitney and Winslow blocked some shots and others went through their legs into the goals. But everyone had fun.

Meanwhile, Walter and Winona rented some skates. Hand in hand, they skated around the rink together. Walter spun Winona around and lifted her. They skated backward and sideways. They parted and flew back together. Their skating was so good the hockey players stopped their game to watch,

“Look at them go,” Whitney said

“Fantabulous!” said Winslow. “Mom and Dad have many talents I never knew about.”

Walter and Winona ended their routine with a breath-taking two-handed twirl.

Every skater on the rink applauded.

“Thank you, thank you,” said Walter bowing deeply.

At noon, the Wilsons went to the snack bar beside the rink. They ordered bowls of chili and sat at a picnic table to eat.

“Good to feel steel under my feet again,” Walter said.

“You still have your moves, Walter,” said Winona.

“But, Dad, how did you and Mom become such good skaters?” Whitney asked.

“Practice, my dear,” Walter said. “Lots of practice.”

Winona smiled. “We skated together every evening during college,” she said.

“When we probably should have been studying,” said Walter.

“The kids here are such good skaters,” said Winslow.

“Even the little ones,” said Whitney.

“Remember many children in Minnesota learned to skate before they could walk,” said Winona. “After lunch, we’ll rent you some skates so you can practice.”

A van with News 3 stenciled on the side drove up to the rink. A woman with a microphone and a man with a TV camera on his shoulder got out.

“And there they are,” the woman said into her mic. “The Elevator Family has arrived in the Twin Cities.”

The cameraman zoomed his camera in on Walter’s face which was covered with chili sauce.

The reporter held out her microphone. “Welcome Walter Wilson to our city,” she said. “We’ve received a report that you’ve just moved into the warming hut at this very rink.”

“Excellent accommodations,” Walter said. “Only the best.”

“People have been calling our station to tell us what a fine figure skater you are, Walter,” said the woman. “That’s quite a compliment coming from Minnesotans. Care to show the camera some of your moves.”

“Come on Dad, give us a show,” said Winslow.

“Show them what a Wilson can do,” said Whitney.

Walter wiped his mouth with a napkin and rose. “Very well,” he said. “If you insist.”

He stepped out onto the ice. With the news camera following him, he started to skate. He spun and did a triple axel. He leaped and did a flying camel.

A crowd gathered around the rink. After each trick Walter did they cheered and clapped their mittened hands.

“Bust a move, Dad,” Winslow shouted.

“Go, Dad, go!” said Whitney.

“And now I’ll end with my special trick, the Wilson Splits,” Walter announced.

He charged forward, leaped, and landed on the ice doing the splits. He glided forward while slowly rising onto his skates.”

The crowd roared.

“Bravo! Bravo,” cried the other Wilsons.

For the rest of the afternoon, the Wilsons skated together. They played crack the whip and freeze tag. They clung to each other’s waists and skated around the rink as a train.

Back in the Warming Hut, the Elevator Family greeted many visitors who entered to put on skates or take them off.

“Everyone is welcome in our home,” said Walter. “The more visitors we get the merrier.”

At ten o’clock that evening, the rink lights went out and the ice emptied. The Wilsons spread out their sleeping bags on the platforms and slid into them.

“What a great day,” said Winslow. “I can’t wait for tomorrow to come so we can

start another.”

“We were lucky to find the Warming Hut to stay in,” said Whitney.

“And aren’t Minnesotans such warm and friendly people,” said Winona. “Don’t you agree, Walter?”

But Walter said nothing. He was sound asleep.

Chapter Four

Walter groaned. He sat up on the platform. He squinted at the morning light coming through the Warming Hut window.

“Great Scott, I ache all over,” he said. “My biceps muscles ache; my triceps muscles ache, and my quadriceps muscles ache. I don’t know where any of those muscles are, but since all my muscles ache I’m sure they’re three of them.”

Winona looked out the window. The rink was covered with a thin layer of powdery snow. “It snowed last night,” she said. “We must get up and put the first footprints in the fresh powder.”

“One of our visitors yesterday told me about a hill across Minnehaha Park for sledding,” said Winslow.

“He said you can rent sleds and toboggans there,” said Whitney.

Walter groaned again.

“Then what are we waiting for,” said Winona. “Let’s get up, Wilsons. There’s so much to do today.”

The Wilsons had doughnuts and hot cocoa at the cafe for breakfast. Already workers were shoveling off the rink with large snow shovels.

Afterward, the family plodded into a large field. The snow here was as flat and sparkly as a marshmallow top. With Walter and Winona walking one way and Whitney and Winslow walking the other they tramped out a giant W in the snow. They all met at the

point in the middle.

“Excellent,” said Walter. “Now everyone will know the Wilsons have been here.”

The family continued across the park to the sledding hill. People were sliding down it on devices of all kinds, inner tubes, plastic mats, saucers, sleds, and sheets of cardboard.

Walter rented a wooden toboggan from a stall at the bottom of the hill.

“Race you to the top,” Winslow said.

Whitney and Winslow sprinted to the top of the slope. Winona and Walter trudged after them. At the top, they sat in a row on the toboggan with their legs wrapped around each other.

Walter, who sat in the lead, shouted, “Onward!”

The four Wilsons pushed the ground with their mittened hands and the toboggan slid forward. It tilted and slid downward.

“Yeoweeeeee!” the family shouted. They raised their arms as if on a roller coaster. Snow powder sprayed onto their faces.

“Yeoweeeeee!”

At the bottom of the hill, Winslow said, “What a ride!”

“Let’s do it again,” shouted Whitney.

Back up the hill, the family plodded. Down the hill they flew.

“Yeoweeeeee!”

Back up the hill, went the family. Down the hill they glided once more.

“Yeoweeeeee!”

On the way up the hill for a fourth ride, the Wilsons spotted a large dog, a German shepherd, sliding downhill on a red saucer. At the bottom, the dog took the saucer rope in his mouth and pulled the disc back up the slope. He passed the Wilsons on the way.

“Ruff! Ruff!” went the dog.

“Excellent,” said Walter. “That pooch is having as much fun as we are.”

By the time the Wilsons reached the summit, the dog was sliding down again on the red saucer.

“Ruff! Ruff!”

The family stood next to an elderly woman in a wheelchair. She called to the dog, “Good boy, Charlie! Good boy!”

“Is that your dog?” Whitney asked the woman.

“That’s Charlie,” the woman said. “I bring him here every Sunday in the winter to go sledding.”

“How did you train Charlie to go down the hill on a saucer and bring it back up?” asked Winslow.

“I didn’t train him,” said the woman. “He just started doing it all by himself when he was a puppy. He’ll bark and bark if I don’t bring him here every week.”

By now the dog had returned to the top of the hill with the saucer pull-rope in his mouth. Without a break, he stepped back onto the red disc, leaned forward, and took off again.

“Ruff! Ruff!”

The Wilsons cheered

“Charlie has talent,” said Winona.

“And a lot of energy,” said Walter. “Only the best.”

“You’re the Elevator Family, aren’t you?” the woman asked. “I saw you on the news last night.”

“Indeed we are, madam,” said Walter. “I’m Walter. This is my wife Winona and our kids, Whitney and Winslow.”

“I’m Martha,” said the woman. “How thrilling to meet you. My grandchildren have read all the books about the Elevator Family and your adventures. Wait until I tell them who I met today.”

“Have you lived in Minnesota a long time, Martha?” Winona asked.

“Born, married, and had three wonderful children right here in the Twin Cities,” the woman said. “My children live in other states now and my husband, Matti, died a few years ago. Now it’s just me and Charlie.”

Again the dog returned to the top of the hill. Again he stood on the red saucer and took off.

“Ruff! Ruff! Ruff!”

“Yes, Charlie will slide down this hill and race back up maybe thirty times today, nonstop,” Martha said. “He’s a funny dog.”

“We’re staying in the Warming Hut by the ice-skating rink, Martha,” said Winona.

“Won’t you stop by for a visit,”

“Charlie might like to try ice skating,” said Walter with a chuckle.

“Oh, I’d love to come,” said Martha. “I know how the Elevator Family enjoys having company.”

For the rest of the afternoon, the Wilsons and Charlie sledded. Up and down the hill they went laughing harder each time.

As the sun started to set, the family said goodbye to Martha and her dog and returned to the Warming Hut. On the way, they passed the Big W in the snow.

“Our Wilson W needs some additions,” said Walter.

Without another word, he packed a snowball and started rolling it in the snow. It grew larger and larger.

The others caught on and did the same. When Walter’s snow boulder was as tall as his waist, he left it at the top of the W and began rolling another one. The others copied him. By nightfall, they were finished. The four Wilsons stood back to admire the four snowpeople standing on top of the Big W. A man, a woman, a boy, and a girl. Each one had eyes of stones, noses of pinecones, and mouths of acorns. Each one had twigs for arms and a white stocking hat on its head.

“The Elevator Snow Family,” said Walter. “Only the best.”

Chapter Five

Early the next morning, a knock came on the Warming Hut door. Winona opened it to find a short, wide man standing there. He wore a black parka and a black stocking cap with the SMALL logo on the front.

“Good morning, Wilsons,” he said. “I’m Tad Twee, director of the SMALL Convention. Today’s the big day. I’m here to drive you over to the Minneapolis Convention Center.”

“Excellent,” said Walter. “My small speech is ready.”

“You’ll have time to tour the booths in the Exhibition Hall before your speech,” said Tad Twee. “Everyone will be delighted to meet the Elevator Family.”

The four Wilsons squeezed into Tad Twee’s compact car. He drove them to a big building in downtown Minneapolis. Above the front entrance was a sign reading:

**Welcome
SMALL
Society for Minimal and Living Little Convention**

For the next two hours, the family strolled around the large hall, checking out the many booths that showed ways to live a smaller and more simple life. Some booths promoted small electric cars and solar energy. Other booths showed ways to declutter your house and recycle things.

The Wilsons stopped at a booth that told about Tiny Houses.

“Hello, Elevator Family,” said the woman in the booth. “What an honor to have you

here.”

“Excellent,” said Walter. “We live in a tiny house ourselves.”

“It’s small and cozy,” said Winona. “Just the way the Wilsons like it.”

“Even when Dad snores at night,” said Whitney.

‘Cat, our dog, has a tiny doghouse in the backyard,” said Winslow.

Another booth told all about Van Life, the joys of living simply in a van. The Wilsons knew the young man who worked in the booth.

“Sam!” Walter and Winona said.

“Nature Boy!” said Whitney and Winslow.

“Mr. and Mrs. Wilson!” said the man. “Whitney and Winslow! How good to see you again.”

The Wilsons met Sam when they stayed in the fire lookout tower in northern Minnesota. At the time he was living off the land.

“But I’m no longer Nature Boy,” Sam said. “Now I’m just Sam Saarinen. I bought a van, fixed it up, and now I’m driving around the country enjoying life in a van.”

Winslow, admired the photos in the booth. “Van Life looks wonderful,” he said. “Seeing new sights and meeting new people every day.”

“it’s sure easier buying food in a store than finding it in the wild,” said Sam. “I wasn’t very good at that.”

“You were giving it a good try, Sam,” said Winona.

“Say, if you have any free time I’ll give you a tour of the Twin Cities in my van,” Sam

said.

“Excellent,” said Walter. “We’re here for the rest of the week.”

“Then I’ll pick you up tomorrow morning,” Sam said. “Where are you staying?”

“In a fine accommodation called The Warming Hut,” said Walter.

“It’s right beside a skating rink in Minnehaha Park,” said Winslow.

Sam smiled. “Sounds just right for the Elevator Family,” he said.

The Wilsons continued their tour of the SMALL exhibition. The largest booth in the hall sold Elevator Family books and merchandise—Elevator Family Pick-Up Sticks, Elevator Family dolls, Elevator Family barbecue aprons, and Elevator Family hats.

“Great Scott,” said Walter. “Bob Brown, our manager, has been busy.”

“People sure can clutter up their houses with stuff like this,” said Winona.

Winslow read some of the book titles, “*The Elevator Family Hits the Road*, *The Elevator Family Takes a Hike*, *The Elevator Family Goes Abroad*, *The Elevator Family Plays Hardball*, and *The Elevator Family Does the Big Apple*.”

“Great memories,” said Whitney.

“Only the best,” said Walter.

A young woman in the booth stood up, “Wow! The Elevator Family has come to visit the Elevator Family booth,” she said. “Hi, I’m Amanda Brown. Bob Brown is my uncle.”

“So, Mr. Brown has his family working for him,” said Walter.

“The whole Brown family has become a lot closer since Uncle Bob met you in the San Francisco Hotel,” Amanda said.

“I’d like to buy one can of Elevator Family Pick-Up-Sticks,” said Winslow.

“And I’ll take one Elevator Family sketch pad,” said Winona.

At two o’clock Tad Twee found the Wilsons. “It’s time to give your talk, Walter,” he said.

The SMALL director led the family into a large auditorium. Every chair in the room was filled with a convention attendee. They faced a large stage with a giant screen on the back wall. Winona, Whitney, and Winslow sat in the front row, while Walter waited in the wings of the stage to be introduced.

Tad Twee stepped onto the stage. He stood behind a podium and said into a microphone, “And now, SMALL ladies and gentlemen, I want to present our keynote speaker. He’s a man who with his small family has charmed us all with his many adventures while staying in small places around the world, from small grass huts in Africa to small igloos in Canada. Let’s give a warm welcome to the father of the Elevator Family, Walter Wilson.”

When Walter appeared on the stage, the audience burst into applause. Winslow and Whitney whistled through their fingers.

“Go, Dad,” they shouted.

Walter took Tad Twee’s hand place behind the podium. He cleared his throat and pressed a button on a remote. A picture of the San Francisco Hotel lobby appeared on the screen behind him.

“Here is where it all began,” Walter said. “In the mobile Otis Room in this hotel, the

very room where we received the nickname the Elevator Family. As our small room traveled up and down we met the best people who remain our friends today.”

He pushed the remote button and pictures of Gavin, Cathy, Bob Brown, and Abigale Golden Gate with her dog Oui-Oui appeared on the screen.”

Walter continued talking about the many small places the Wilsons had stayed in and the many people they had met. When he mentioned, Sam Saarinen, ala Nature Boy, a hoot went up in the back of the hall.

Walter concluded his talk with a picture of the Wilson family and Cat standing in front of their tiny house.

“How much stuff do people need?” he said. “Less is more. The Wilsons have found what makes us the happiest is just being together. We know the best things in life aren’t things.”

Chapter Six

Early the next morning, Sam arrived at the skating rink. His van was a green and white 1968 VW bus. Inside he had built cupboards, a table, and a bed. He added curtains, a small sink, stove, and an ice box. It was clear he had taken great care in the design.

The Wilsons said goodbye to the Warming Hut and climbed into the van with their luggage. They planned to leave the Twin Cities by train that evening. Walter sat up front with Sam, while Winona, Whitney, and Winslow sat on the bed in the back. The morning was sunny and crispy cold.

“A perfect day for sightseeing” said Winona.

“We want to see everything,” Walter said.

“All the lakes and parks,” said Whitney.

“And Minnehaha Falls,” said Winslow. “I like saying the word *Minnehaha*.”

Sam drove the family through downtown Minneapolis and along the Mississippi River. They drove around a string of frozen lakes where people were skating, playing hockey, and cross-country skiing.

“Great Scott,” said Walter. “People in Minnesota enjoy the outdoors as much in the winter as in the summer.”

“That’s right, Mr. Wilson,” said Sam. “Next weekend is the Winter Carnival. I hope you stick around for that. There’s a parade, snow sculptures, and a big ice fishing tournament. It’s great fun.”

“Why not?” said Winona.

“The Wilsons are never in a rush to go anywhere else,” said Walter

“Now I’ll drive you to a bigger lake, Lake Minnetonka,” Sam said. “There’s something on the ice I want to show you.”

Sam drove out of the city a short distance. They followed the shores of a large lake, a vast white expanse with snowmobiles and cross-country skiers crossing it. Far off shore stood a cluster of small huts.

“Splendid!” said Walter.

“How tiny and cozy they look,” said Winona. “Just the size we like.”

“But why are they out on the ice?” asked Whitney.

“They’re ice fishing shacks,” Sam said. “People slide the little houses out onto the ice each winter when the ice gets thick enough. They drill a hole in the ice and sit in their huts to ice fish and keep warm.”

“Fantabulous,” said Winslow.

“I grew up on the shores of this lake,” said Sam. “I know many of the people who fish out there.”

“Excellent,” said Walter. “Let’s walk out and meet the anglers.”

“No need to walk, Mr. Wilson,” Sam said.

To the Wilson’s surprise, Sam turned off the road toward the lake. He drove down a boat ramp and right onto the snow-covered ice. The snow was packed down hard and the van had no trouble driving straight toward the cluster of fishing huts.

Thirty shacks were scattered about the middle of Lake Minnetonka. Some were small, no larger than a clothes closet. Some were RV campers converted for ice fishing while others were as large as small cottages. Most huts had a pick-up truck or snowmobile parked beside it and a ribbon of smoke curling out its stove-pipe chimney.

“It’s like a small village out here,” said Walter.

“So many people to meet,” said Winona.

“I wish we could stay here,” said Whitney.

“These tiny houses are just our style,” said Winslow.

Sam parked his van beside a small shack that appeared vacant.

“I thought the Elevator Family would like these small huts,” he said. “This one’s for you.”

The Wilsons sat in the van speechless.

“The owners, Pat and Pat Peterson drove their RV down to Florida for the rest of the winter,” Sam explained. “When I told them the Elevator Family was coming to Minneapolis, they offered their ice fishing shack for you to stay in as long as you wish. That is as long as the ice remains thick enough to hold it.”

Still speechless, the four Wilsons climbed from the van. They watched Sam take a key from his pocket. He unlocked the hut’s front door and swung it open.

Walter, Winona, Winslow, and Whitney stepped up to the doorway and looked in. A thermometer hanging by the door read 11° outside, but a blast of warm air greeted them from the inside.

“But..but it’s perfect,” said Winona.

“Only the best,” said Walter.

“Fantabulous! It’s about the size of the room we stayed in once that was filled with coats and lunchboxes,” said Winslow.

“That room was even attached to our classroom,” said Whitney.

The fishing shack was no bigger than a large garden shed. Beside the gas heater. It had two bunk beds, four folding chairs, an ice cooler, and a cooking stove. Two windows looked out on Lake Minnetonka and the neighboring huts. Two square fishing holes had been cut out of the wooden floor. Ice fishing rods and reels hung on the wall.

“All in favor of staying in this excellent place for the rest of the week say *aye*,” said Walter.

“Aye,” all four Wilsons shouted.

“Awesome,” said Sam.

“Dibs on the top bunk,” said Whitney.

Chapter Seven

Soon the Wilson's **Home Sweat Home** sign hung on a wall of their ice fishing shack.

"Home Sweat Home hangs wherever the Wilsons stay," said Walter.

"And Sam's found us one of the best," said Winona.

"Let's stop wishing and go fishing," said Winslow.

"We don't even need to leave our snug little house," said Whitney.

Winona studied the cookware on the shelves. "Fresh fish for dinner," she said.

"Couldn't be fresher," said Walter.

Sam grabbed a drill-like device leaning in the corner.

"This is an ice auger," he explained, "The ice holes will be frozen over. I'll show you how to clear them."

He stuck the drill in one of the holes in the floor. He pressed a button and the drill bit whirred and spun. Soon it broke through the ice. The Wilsons looked down into a clear circle of dark water.

Sam repeated the drilling in the second hole. Then he grabbed two short fishing poles off the wall. They each had a reel on one end with thick nylon fishing line in the spools. He handed one pole to Whitney and the other to Winslow.

"Now we need some fishing tackle," said Sam. "The real skill in ice fishing is figuring out what bait the fish are hitting on."

He opened a fishing box on the shelf. It was filled with odd-looking plastic shapes

with hooks attached. Some were round with big eyes painted on them. Some were shaped like pickles and covered with polka dots.

Sam picked out a spoon-shaped lure covered with red rubbery spikes.

“A blowfly jig,” he said. “Great for catching panfish, but today we’ll try for something bigger.”

He picked up a long white lure with two tiny eyes on the end,

“Northern pike love these grub worm jigs,” he said. “But the water here might be too shallow for pike.”

Next, he took out two round bumpy lures. A three-pronged hook dangled from each one.

“Just the jig you need,” he said. “Eel egg jigs. Attached these to the end of your lines.”

The twins clipped on the jigs. They knelt by the ice holes, holding up the tip of their short fishing rods.

“Whoever catches the biggest fish gets to choose the game we play tonight,” said Winslow.

“You’re on,” said Whitney.

“I have the pan ready for frying,” said Winona.

Walter checked the cupboard above the sink. “And I have everything we need to mix the batter.”

“The Wilson Family Famous Secret Fish Batter,” the twins cried.

When the Elevator Family stayed in the tollbooth spanning the Mississippi River,

Walter had created this batter. He gave the recipe to a man named Mom, who sold fried fish from a food truck. It created a sensation.

“Awesome!” Sam said. “Mom’s Cafes selling fish fried with The Wilson Family Famous Secret Fish Batter have sprung up along the Mississippi River from New Orleans to Minnesota. What are the secret ingredients?”

“A secret batter, is a secret batter, Sam,” said Walter. “And if we told you the ingredients it wouldn’t be a secret any longer.”

“But you’ll stay for dinner tonight,” said Winona. “Won’t you?”

“Sure, if you don’t mind it being a little more crowded in here,” said Sam.

“Crowded?” said Walter. “The Wilsons don’t know the meaning of the word. Winslow and Whitney, five fish for dinner, please.”

Sam turned toward the twins, “Dip your eel egg jigs into the ice holes,” he said. “Grip your rods tightly. Some of the walleyes in this lake are whoppers.”

The twins lowered their fishing rods. The bumpy jigs dropped through the wooden floor, through the thick ice, and into the black water.

“Now jiggle the jigs a little,” Sam said. “You want the fish to think your bait is alive. If you feel a nibble, jerk your rods to set the hook in the fish’s mouth and reel it in.”

“Jiggle the jig a little,” Walter sang out. “It sounds like a song.”

The twins raised and lowered the tips of their fishing rods. Almost at once, Winslow felt a pull on his line. He yanked his rod upward and the rod bent downward. The boy turned the reel until the head of golden-brown fish appeared in the ice hole. Sam bent

down and pulled the fish out by its gills. It was over a foot long.

“Nice one, Winslow,” said Sam “Your first walleye. Unhook it and drop it in the fish bucket.”

No sooner was the walleye in the pail than Whitney called, “I got a bite.”

She jerked her rod and turned the reel. Soon Sam held another golden-brown fish, slightly larger than Winslow’s.

“Walleye Two,” said Walter.

“Walleye Three,” said Winslow, pulling up a slightly smaller fish,

“The eel-egg jigs are working well,” said Sam.

“I better start heating up the frying pan,” said Winona.

“And I better make the batter,” said Walter.

In less than an hour, five walleyes lay in the plastic bucket.

“So which fish is the biggest?” said Winslow.

Whitney found a ruler and measured her biggest fish and Winslow’s biggest fish.

“Get this,” she said. “They are the same size. Thirteen and a quarter inches long.”

“I was going choose pick-up sticks to play tonight,” said Winslow.

Whitney smiled. “So was I.”

Sam picked up the fish bucket and a knife off the counter. “And what beauties these walleyes are,” he said. “I’ll go outside and clean them.”

As soon as Sam left, Walter mixed The Wilson Family’s Famous Secret Fish Batter in a bowl—whole-wheat flour, special spices, and when he was sure Sam wasn’t looking, he

poured in a can of root beer.

The Wilsons and Sam ate around a folding camp table they set up over the two fishing holes. The fish were crisp on the outside and tender in the middle. Delicious!

“Yes, the freshest fish possible,” said Walter. “Straight from the water to the pan to the plate.”

“Good work Whitney and Winslow,” said Sam. “And Walter, I still can’t guess the secret ingredients in your batter.”

Out the window, the sun slipped below the western shoreline. Walter lit a kerosene lantern that cast a golden glow throughout the tiny shack. One by one the neighbors drove off in their pickups and snowmobiles. Lights along the shoreline and stars in the sky twinkled.

“Sam, you said you grew up in a house on Lake Minnetonka,” Winona said.

Sam nodded. He pointed to a bright green light shining on the northern shore. “That’s my house there,” he said. “My father passed away five years ago. Now my mother lives there by herself.”

“She must get lonely,” said Winona.

“Yes, I’m worried about her,” Sam said. “My mother rarely leaves her house anymore. She has few friends and never takes a vacation. A month ago, she started turning on that green light at the end of her dock. I have no idea why.”

“Will you be driving there tonight?” Winona said.

Sam took another bite of fish. “Would you mind if I stay in my van by your ice

fishing shack," he said. "In the morning I can introduce you to the neighbors."

"Certainly, young man," said Walter. "You can join us for a game of pick-up sticks."

Sam laughed. "I've read in the Elevator Family books that Winslow is a pick-up sticks expert."

"I hope you can give Winslow some competition," said Whitney. "We've been trying to beat him for years."

Chapter Eight

“Bagels for breakfast!”

The next morning Sam appeared in the ice fishing shack doorway. He held a brown paper bag and a jug of orange juice.

Inside the shack, Winslow and Whitney were already kneeling by the ice holes fishing. This morning they released each walleye, crappie, and pan fish they caught.

Winona sat in a lawn chairs, drawing in her sketchbook, while Walter sat on the fish bucket, reading the newspaper on his cell phone.

“Come in, Come in, young man,” he called to Sam.

“I’ve caught ten fish already, Sam,” said Winslow.

“And I’ve caught nine,” said Whiney. “We’re having a contest to see who can catch the most fish before noon. The winner gets to choose what game we play tonight.”

“I hope it’s pick-up sticks again,” said Sam. “That was great fun. Tonight I think Winslow should play wearing his mittens.”

Sam set the bagels and juice on the table. “Here, I bought some breakfast.”

“So you already have driven to shore this morning,” said Winona. “How kind.”

“I also called my mother,” said Sam. “I told her I was staying on the ice with the Elevator Family, and she got very excited. She invited you all to lunch today, I hope you can come.”

“Excellent,” said Walter. “It would be an honor to meet your mother.”

After everyone ate, Winona said, "Time to meet the neighbors."

The Wilsons put on their down parkas, wool stocking caps, and mittens. They followed Sam out the door. Outside the sky was deep blue. The thermometer by the door read -15°. The air was so cold the family's breath froze on their eyebrows and eyelashes.

"Brrrrracing morning," said Walter. "Only the best."

The pickup trucks and snowmobiles had returned to the neighboring fishing shacks. Smoke flowed from the chimneys. Another day of ice fishing on Lake Minnetonka had begun.

Sam stepped up to the nearest shack, a small hut built from plywood. A white pickup truck was parked outside.

"Ott Olson and his two boys, Lott and Mott, fish in here," he said.

Sam knocked on the plywood door. It opened and a man with a bushy brown beard and wearing a plaid flannel shirt stood there. Lott and Mott, aged seven and nine, appeared by his side

"Well, Samuel," he said. "What brings you out on the ice today?"

"I have some special guests," Sam said. "The Elevator Family is staying in the Peterson's ice fishing shack."

"The Elevator Family," shouted the two boys. "Where?"

Sam stepped aside to allow the Olsons to see the Wilsons.

"By gum, it *is* the Elevator Family," said Ott. "Welcome, Welcome." He pulled off his mittens and shook each of the Wilson's hands.

“How’s the fishing this morning?” Walter asked.

“We’ve caught nothing,” said Mott.

“Not even a bite,” said Lott.

Ott rubbed his knuckles in his boy’s brown hair.

“Doesn’t matter,” he said. “Today we’re out to catch Big Wally,”

“Yeah, Big Wally,” said the two boys together.

Sam laughed. “You’re still going after that big fish?”

“Sure am,” said Ott. “I carved a special large jig and drilled an extra-large ice hole just for him.”

“Big Wally?” said Winslow. “Is that a fish?”

“A whopper walleye,” said Ott. “They say it’s over twenty pounds and a yard long.”

Sam laughed again. “I would say Big Wally was a Minnesota fishing fable if I hadn’t seen him. When I was seven I spotted the huge walleye swimming past our dock,

“So Big Wally is not only big but smart,” said Whitney.

Winona hugged Walter. “Just like our Big Wally,” she said.

“That’s why the fish has never been caught,” said Lott.

“But people keep trying to reel him in,” said Mott.

“And with our new Big Wally jig I think today me and my boys with hook him,” said Ott.

The Wilsons and Sam walked onto the next ice fishing hut. This one was painted red and shaped like a barn. A string of Christmas light blinked along the edge of the slanted

roof. Two red snowmobiles were parked outside. The two women fishing inside, Megan and Marlene Montgomery, were sisters. They also knew Sam.

“Please to meet you,” said Walter after Sam introduced the Wilsons.

“How’s the fishing this morning?” Megan asked.

“Catch any big ones this morning?” asked Marlene.

“Lots of them,” said Winslow.

“We’ll be eating fish for lunch and dinner for days,” said Whitney

The sisters exchanged looks.

“Good for you,” said Megan.

“What bait were you using?” Marlene asked.

Whitney was about to answer when Sam said, “Whitney, these women need no fishing tips from us. They are the best anglers on Lake Minnetonka. This weekend the ice will be covered with thousands of ice anglers for the Winter Carnival Ice Fishing Tournament. For the past three years, Megan and Marlene have won the tournament by catching the largest fish. Each year they use a special bait which they keep top secret. So, let’s not give away any of *our* tricks.”

“Fantabulous,” said Winslow.

“An ice fishing tournament sounds like fun,” said Whitney.

“May the best ice angler win,” said Megan.

“Good luck to the Elevator Family,” said Marlene.

The Wilsons and Sam moved on to the next ice fishing shack. This was the largest on

the ice. It was bigger than the Wilson's entire house back home. Outside was parked a fancy new SUV.

"Now you're in for another surprise," Sam said.

Sam didn't need to introduce the couple who came to the door when he knocked.

"Ann and Andrew Anderson!" the Wilsons said as one

"Walter, Winona, Whitney, and Winslow!" said the woman. "Long time no see."

"Come in, Come in," the man said. "Get out of the cold."

The Wilsons had met the Andersons when they stayed in the fire lookout tower in northern Minnesota. Andrew, Ann, and their ten-year-old daughter Anna were staying in a fancy camper on the far side of the lake. Now twelve, Anna lay on a sofa inside the large ice fishing shack with white earbuds in her ear. A new Anderson, Andrew Jr., age three, sat beside one of the four holes in the hardwood floor ice fishing.

"Well, Wilsons, what do you think of our humble shack?" Andrew Sr. asked.

"As our family grows there's plenty of floor space for new fishing holes," said Ann.

"Nice place you have here, Andrew," said Walter.

"As long as the ice stays thick enough," said Winona.

The shack was spectacular. At one end was a full kitchen with a refrigerator, stove, microwave oven, and double sink. Off to the side was a bathroom with a shower. The living room or *fishing room*, as Andrew Anderson called it, featured a sofa, two easy chairs, and a large flat-screen TV.

"For fishing, I have all the latest equipment," said Andrew Sr. He stepped over to a

control panel filled with buttons, switches, and small screens. Long dark shapes moved across one screen.

“Here we have a fish finder, an underwater fish camera, and an automatic fishing reel. The moment a fish strikes it reels it up right into the room.”

“When we fish want we can sit and watch TV while technology does all the rest,” said Ann.

“Ingenious,” said Walter. “You don’t even need to jiggle the jigs.”

Winona inspected the kitchen. “And you must have some excellent fresh fish dinners here.”

“Oh, none of us likes fish very much,” said Ann. “After the auto fishing reel catches a fish, it releases it back down the ice hole.”

“We prefer frozen dinners cooked in the microwave,” said Andrew.

The Wilsons exchanged looks.

“Well, we must be going,” said Sam. “The Elevator Family wants to meet all the neighbors.”

“But do come back,” said Ann Anderson. “The lookout tower party you held during the thunderstorm was one of the happiest evenings of our lives.”

“Only the best,” said Walter.

Chapter Nine

The Wilsons continued to stroll ice fishing shack to ice fishing shack meeting their neighbors. They rarely had to introduce themselves. Each angler greeted them with a smile and hearty handshake.

“The Elevator Family!”

“Lake Minnetonka had never been so honored.”

“Will you write a book about your stay on the ice?” they asked.

The barking of dogs caught the Wilson’s attention. Apart from the cluster of ice shacks stood a log cottage that looked like it belonged more in a forest than on the ice. In a snowbank beside the cabin lay six husky dogs. A wooden dog sled stood beside them. From the cabin’s peaked roof flew the blue and white flag of Finland.

“That cabin is new,” said Sam. “This is the first time I’ve seen it on Lake Minnetonka.”

“The owner must have ridden out here on the sled pulled by the dogs,” said Winona.

“Let’s go meet this musher,” said Walter.

The Wilsons and Sam tramped over to the log cabin. Walter knocked on the door.

“Greetings, neighbor,” he called out. “My family has come for a visit.”

“Wonderful cabin you have, sir,” said Whitney.

“And your dogs are fantabulous,” said Winslow.

“Who are you?” the voice call.

“I’m Sam Saarinen,” said Sam. “And I’m with the Wilson family. You might have heard of them. They’re known as the Elevator Family.”

The door flew open. In the doorway stood an elderly man with long white hair and white whiskers on his chin. Around his neck hung a pair of binoculars.

Walter held on his hand which the man shook. But his bright blue eyes were fixed on Sam.

“Who did you say you are?” he said.

“This is the Elevator Family,” said Sam.

The man nodded at the four Wilsons. “Yes, I know all about this family. They’re all over the news,” he said. He pointed a leather mitten at Sam. “But what did you say your name was?”

“I’m Sam, Sam Saarinen.”

For the first time, the man brightened. “Saarinen?” he said. He gestured toward the lakeshore. “Do you live in that house on the north shore? The one with the green light shining at night?”

“I used to,” said Sam. “My mother still lives there.”

The man nodded. He rubbed his whiskered chin and asked Sam, “And where do you live now?”

Sam pointed to the van parked outside the Wilson’s ice fishing shack. “That’s my home now. I’m enjoying Van Life.”

“I see,” said the man.

Winslow looked toward the waving flag. "You must be from Finland," he said.

"That's right," said the man. "My name is Shypoke Crisp. I moved to the south shore of Lake Minnetonka a few months back."

"My parents were from Finland," said Sam. "They moved to Minnesota before I was born."

The man nodded again. He showed much interest in Sam's every word.

"Catch many fish this morning, Mr. Crisp?" Whitney asked

"Fish?" said the man. "I'm not out here to fish." He clutched his binoculars. "I come out on the ice to train my sled dogs."

The Wilsons looked toward the six huskies lying in the snow.

"Do they have names?" Whitney asked

"*Yksi, Kaksi, Kolme, Neljä, Viisi, Kuusi,*" the man recited.

"Those are the numbers one through six in Finnish," said Sam. "My mom taught me some of the language when I was little."

"So, you ride out here on the sled?" Winslow asked.

"That's right," Shypoke said. "I raised and trained sled dogs back home. I just started a sled dog business here in Minnesota."

"Awesome," said Sam. "Noisy snowmobiles on the lake drive me crazy."

Shypoke Crisp turned toward the Wilsons. "Stop by during the Winter Carnival," he said. "I'll be giving sled dog rides around the lake."

"Excellent," said Walter. "We've always wanted to go mushing."

The Wilsons and Sam walked back to Sam's van. It was time for lunch at Sam's mother's house.

"That was odd," Sam said as they piled into his van. "Shypoke Crisp seemed to have a big interest in my mother and me."

"A mystery indeed," said Winona.

"And the Wilsons always love a mystery," said Walter.

Chapter Ten

Sam drove his van straight for the shore.

“I asked my mother to keep the lunch simple,” he told the Wilsons. “But she usually goes overboard. I don’t know if she knows what simple means.”

He drove up the boat launch and turned onto a windy road that hugged the shoreline. A few miles later, he stopped in front of a large iron gate. He leaned out the window and said into a voice box, “Winston, it’s me.”

The gate slowly opened. Sam drove down a well-plowed driveway and parked in front of a huge white mansion on the lakeshore. Three stories tall, icicles pointed down from six gabled windows on the top floor.

“Great Scott,” said Walter.

“You lived here, Sam?” said Winona.

“It’s so, so...” said Whitney.

“Humongous,” said Winslow.

Sam nodded. “Yes, this was my home sweet home until I went off to college,” he said.

The Wilsons and Sam stepped out of the van. The mansion’s wide front door opened and a man in a black suit stood there

“Good afternoon, Sam,” he said.

“Hello, Winston,” Sam said. He turned toward the four Wilsons. “This is Mr. and Mrs.

Wilson, Whitney and Winslow.”

The man beamed, “An honor to meet you,” he said. “My daughter has read all the books about The Elevator Family.”

“Winston has been our family butler before I was born,” Sam said. “He’s become one of my best friends.”

The butler led the Wilsons and Sam down a long hallway and into a room with a large fireplace, overstuffed chairs, and a sofa. On the mantelpiece were pictures of Sam in order of his life, from a baby picture to his graduation from Stanford University.

A tall middle-aged woman with high blond hair stood before a large picture window overlooking the frozen lake. She was peering through a brass telescope.

“Hi, Mom,” Sam said.

The woman straightened and turned. “Oh, Sam,” she said. “You’re looking well. How was the SMALL conference? How was last night in your van? Did you keep warm? Did you eat well? Do you have good snow tires on that thing?”

“Everything was fine, Mom,” Sam said. “And the conference was great. Especially Mr. Wilson’s speech about simple living. Let me introduce you.” He turned toward the four Wilsons. “Mom, this is Walter, Winona, Whitney, and Winslow Wilson. Walter. Winona, Whitney, and Winslow, this is my mother, Tove Saarinen.”

“Sam has told me so much about you,” the woman said. “Thank you for looking after him in the northern woods. I was so worried about him. The Nature Boy thing and all that.”

While his mother talked, Sam stepped to the window and peered through the

telescope. A look of surprise crossed his face. "What were you looking at, Mom?" he asked.

Mrs. Saarinen looked startled. "Oh, nothing," she said. "I like to watch the ice anglers. This morning I saw you and the Wilsons visiting the other ice fishing shacks."

"Did you see the huskies?" Whitney asked.

"Huskies?" said Tove.

"A man named Shypoke Crisp rode his dog sled out there," said Winslow. "He's going to give us a ride during Winter Carnival."

"He is?" said Tove. "Oh, that's nice."

"Shypoke Crisp is from Finland," said Sam, "He's on the ice to train his dog team. But I don't know why he doesn't train them closer to his house on the southern shore,"

"Shypoke Crisp is his name, is it?" Sam's mother said. "And he lives on Lake Minnetonka?"

At that moment Winston returned to the room. "Lunch is served," he said.

Mrs. Saarinen turned toward the Wilsons. "Sam told me you enjoy simple meals," she said. "So, I hired a chef from England for this special occasion. His specialty is dishes cooked from simple ingredients he finds near where he serves his meals. He's cooked for presidents and movie stars, but he told me cooking for the Elevator Family was a highlight of his career."

In a large dining room, a long table was set with fine china and sterling silverware. At the end of table, stood a man wearing a white apron and a tall mushroom chef's hat.

"Greetings, Elevator Family," the man said with a British accent. "I am Chef Cook,

and it is a privilege to serve you lunch today. Ever since the book *The Elevator Family Abroad* came out when you stayed in a Harrod's display window and a British phone booth, you have been well-known throughout Great Britain."

"Excellent," said Walter. "That was quite a Christmastime trip."

"We even met the Queen," said Winona.

"And the small huts where her guards with the bushy tall hats stand were fantabulous," said Winslow.

After everyone was seated, Chef Cook clapped his hands and two servers holding silver trays entered the room.

"I have searched the area around this house and found the finest ingredients for your meal today," Chef Cook said. "For starters, I've created a moss and white fungus salad topped with cattail fuzz. Enjoy."

The salads were served and a lively conversation started.

"After the ice fishing shack on Lake Minnetonka what's the next small cozy place the Elevator Family will be staying," Sam's mother asked.

"We admire Sam's Van Life," said Walters.

"Driving around the country in a van sounds just right for us," said Winona.

"The way Sam fixed up his van is fantabulous," said Winslow.

"It has everything Sam needs," said Whitney.

The woman smiled. "Yes, Sam, has many skills. Do you know he has a degree in biology from Stanford? I'm sure after he gets this Van Life out of his system he'll settle

down and put all that education to good use.

Sam said nothing. But the Wilson saw him smile into his salad.

As the Wilsons and Saarinens talked, Chef Cook served dish after dish of his foraged food. Next, came pinecone soup followed by a tree bark and acorn casserole. By the time he served dessert, pine needle sherbet, the light on the lake had grown dim.

“We better be going,” Sam said. “It’s not safe to drive on the lake after dark. All those ice fishing holes.”

“Won’t you join us for a dog sled ride on Saturday, Tove?” Walter said.

“With Shypoke?” the woman said. “Oh, I don’t think so. I can’t imagine myself in a dog sled.”

“At least you can watch through your telescope,” said Winona.

By the time the Wilson’s and Sam reached the cluster of ice fishing shacks it had grown dark. Most of the other anglers had left. The Wilson saw that Shypoke Crisp had driven his dog sled home. Marlene and Megan’s shack had a string of colorful Christmas tree lights blinking along the edge of the roof.

Walter pointed to the northern sky, “There’s the Big W,” he said. “It stands for Wilsons.”

“Oh, Walter,” said Winona, hugging his arm. “You say that whenever we’re out on a starry night.”

“It’s really the constellation Cassiopeia,” said Winona.

“But I always think of our family when I see it,” said Whitney.

The northern sky also shimmered with a colorful translucent curtain of light.

“The Aurora Borealis,” said Sam.

“The Northern Lights,” said Winslow.

“Right, they often shine here in the wintertime,” said Sam.

The family stood in silence, watching the northern lights turned from pink to green to yellow to violet and back to pink. The colorful curtain of light waved as if blown by the wind.

Meanwhile, Sam built a campfire by his van. He brought out a guitar and began to play some classical music. The Wilsons joined him.

As he played, Sam looked toward the shoreline. The green light shone at the end of his mother’s dock.

“I now have a clue what that green light means,” he said.

“The mystery continues,” said Walter.

“Sam, when you looked through your mother’s telescope you seemed surprised about something,” said Winona.

Sam nodded. “I was,” he said. “Her telescope was pointed at Shypoke Crisp’s cabin. I think they know each other.”

Sam continued playing his guitar until Walter said, “Today I wrote a song.”

The other Wilsons gave him blank stares.

“The song is called the *Tonka Ice Fishing Jig*,” Walter said. “Perhaps Sam can figure out the chords and play along. It goes like this.”

Then is his deep baritone voice, Walter sang,

*“If you jiggle the jig a little you can catch a fish
It might be small or it might be big
If you jiggle the jig a little you can catch a fish.
Do the Tonka Ice Fishing Jig.”*

Chapter Eleven

The next morning the Wilson's ice fishing shack rattled and swayed. Outside the window was a white scene of swirling snow. Sam's van was a blur.

"Great Scott," said Walter. "We're in a blustery blizzard."

"Good thing we're in this warm snug hut," said Winona. "I hope Sam is all right out in his van."

"I hope this ice shack is attached firmly to the ice," said Walter. "Or we'll be blown across the lake."

The twins knelt by the ice fishing holes. They gripped their short ice fishing rods. Already the fish bucket was half filled with their catch

"The fish don't seem to care about the weather above the ice," said Winslow. "There biting as good as ever."

"They love Sam's eel-egg jig," said Winona.

Winona looked out the window. "We could be snowbound for days," she said. "But with our food and water supply right below our feet, we have everything we need."

"I have lots of ingredients to make lots of The Wilson Family's Famous Secret Fish Batter," said Walter.

A gust struck the hut. The walls swayed and the wind whistled through the cracks.

A knock came on the door.

"Come in, Come in," said Walter.

Sam entered the shack. His stocking cap, down coat, and wool pants were white with powdery snow.

“Morning, Wilsons,” he said. “Mind if I warm up a bit by the heater.”

“Take all the heat you need, young man,” said Walter.

“And stay for breakfast,” said Winona.

My van radio says this blizzard will last until Thursday,” said Sam.

“Fantabulous,” said Winslow. “Plenty of time to play pick-up sticks.”

“And plenty of time to fish,” said Whitney.

“There will be fish for breakfast, fish for lunch, and fish for dinner,” said Walter.

“Fine with me,” said Sam. “Chef Cook’s lunch yesterday hardly filled me up.”

He looked into the fish bucket “I’ll get my knife and clean these. These walleyes are a good size for eating, but if we want to win the Snow Carnival Fishing Tournament, I must find a bait that will attract bigger fish. I only wish I knew what Megan and Marlene use.”

“If you jiggle the jig a little you can catch a fish. It might be small or it might be big,”

Walter sang as he mixed the fish batter. “That tune is stuck in my head.”

With the wind howling outside and the snow swirling across the window, the Wilsons and Sam ate their fish breakfast on the folding table.

Sam pulled his cell phone from his pocket and placed it by his plate. “This morning I Googled Shypoke Crisp on my phone,” he said. “I know there must be a connection between my mother and him.”

“What did you learn?” asked Winona.

“Lots,” said Sam. “Shypoke Crisp is a billionaire.”

The four Wilsons lowered their forks.

“Great Scott,” said Walter. “The mystery gets more mysterious.”

“That’s right,” said Sam. “Back in Helsinki, Finland, Shypoke Crisp made a ton of money in electronics.”

Another gust of wind rattled the fishing shack.

“So why would a billionaire be training sled dogs on Lake Minnetonka?” asked Winslow.

“He could train his dogs anywhere he wanted,” said Whitney.

“The only explanation I have is because my mother lives here,” said Sam. “I believe they once knew each other.”

“Why don’t you just ask her if she knows Shypoke?” asked Whitney.

“If she wanted me to know she would have said something yesterday,” said Sam. “This morning I e-mailed my uncle who lives in Helsinki. I asked him if Mom knew Shypoke Crisp in Finland. I’m waiting for his reply.”

After breakfast the twins continued fishing, Walter and Winona read e-books on their cell phones, and Sam studied the fishing jigs.

Out the window, the blizzard continued in its full fury. By now Sam’s van was no more than a long mound of snow.

“Got one,” Winslow said, reeling up a small crappie.

“Me, too,” said Whitney, pulling up a small sunfish.

“Whoever catches the small fish today gets to choose the game tonight,” said Winslow.

“You’re on,” said Whitney.

Walter switched on the radio. A woman reporter announced, *“A major blizzard has blanketed the Twin Cities with fourteen inches of snow. Wind gusts up to eighty miles per hour have been reported. But snowplows have been working throughout the night to keep the road clear, and all schools in the area are open.”*

Sam laughed. “Minnesota kids never get a Snow Day,” he said. “The snowplow drivers are just too good at plowing the roads during a storm.

At that moment a cell phone rang. Sam checked his phone on the table.

“Nope, that’s mine,” Walter said.

He pulled his phone from a pocket and raised it to his ear.

“Walter Wilson here,” he said. “He listened a moment and smiled, “Bob Brown, how are you?”

“Bob Brown!” the other Wilsons shouted.

Mr. Brown was the Elevator Family’s manager. He organized the Wilson’s schedule and promoted their products and books.

“We’re in a small ice fishing shack on Lake Minnetonka,” Walter said into his phone. “A big blizzard is blowing outside but we’re as cozy as can be in here. We met your niece Amanda at the SMALL conference.”

He listened some more and his smile widened.

“Splendid,” he said. “It would be an honor.”

After the call was over, Walter told the others the news. “Our family has been chosen to be Grand Marshalls in the Winter Carnival parade.”

“Hurrah!” the other Wilsons shouted.

“That’s a big deal,” said Sam. “The Winter Carnival parade is one of the biggest events in the Twin Cities. Everyone lines the streets to watch. Usually, they choose a Minnesota Viking or Minnesota Twin to be the Grand Marshall.”

“We all must practice our waves,” said Winona.

“We’ll be riding on a float right at the beginning of the parade,” said Walter.

With the wind whistling through the walls of the tiny shack, the fishing and reading continued

Sam kept his eye on his cell phone, Finally, it dinged to indicate he had received an e-mail.

“It’s from my uncle,” he said, reading the message.

“Did Shypoke and your mother know each other?” asked Winona.

Sam read some more. “They sure did,” he said. “In fact, they were engaged for a while.”

“So Shypoke must be here to try and win her back,” said Winslow.

“I wonder if she wants that,” said Whitney.

“I think she does,” said Sam. “I told Uncle Sampsa about the green light and he said that was from my mother’s favorite novel, the Great Gatsby. He thinks it must be a signal to

Shypoke Crisp that she wants him to call her.”

The Wilsons exchanged looks.

“Sounds like they both need a nudge to get together,” said Winona.

Sam laughed. “And I’ve read in the Elevator Family that the Wilsons are good at nudging people together. Gavin and Cathy for starters. And I remember in the lookout tower you helped Arbor, a tree hugger, and Paul, a lumberjack, to hook up.”

“And in London, there was Verity, the singer, and Kevin, the musician,” said Winslow.

“And in New York Natacha, the actress, and Duncan, the songwriter, fell in love,” said Whitney.

“Only the best,” said Walter. “And all those couples are still happily together.”

“They all e-mail us regularly,” said Winona.

The blizzard continued to howl all night long and all day Wednesday. During that time, the Wilsons played many games of pick-up sticks and ate lots of fish. They watched family movies on a cell phone and read lots of books. Although they were snowbound for days, the Elevator Family had rarely been happier.

Finally, on Thursday morning, a day before the Winter Carnival started, the weather broke. The wind stopped and the sky cleared.

Walter pushed open the ice fishing shack door. He squinted into the bright white world. Sam’s van had disappeared under a hill of snow. Only the roof peaks of the neighboring shacks could be seen. The Wilson’s ice fishing hut was buried to the top of the

stove pipe.

Walter grabbed a snow shovel.

“Come on, Wilsons,” he called. “Time for a little exercise. We have some snow shoveling to do.”

Chapter Twelve

After much shoveling and pushing, the Wilsons and Sam managed to clear off Sam's van and start it. Again, the Christmas lights twinkled on Megan and Marlene's ice fishing shack, and the Finnish flag fluttered atop Shypoke Crisp's cabin. Today a longer dog sled with twelve dogs hitched in front stood nearby. People were already lining up for a dog sled ride.

"Winter Carnival time!" Sam said, as he and the Wilsons climbed into his van, "The parade doesn't start until two, so we have time to see the snow sculptures and ice carousel before that."

"Ice carousel?" Winona.

"You won't believe it," said Sam. "It gets better each year."

Sam drove to the shores of Lake Harriet. In the park surrounding the lake were giant sculptures carved from nothing but ice and snow. The Wilsons walked through a snow village. They snapped selfies with a huge ice moose, a giant snow Paul Bunyan, and a tall ice map of Minnesota.

"Fantabulous," said Winslow as they walked around a giant snow Statue of Liberty.

Then they saw the most surprising snow creation of all, a life-sized sculpture of the Elevator Family. Their dog, Cat, sat with them. The family stood by their snow doubles to take more selfies.

"Look, I'm holding a can of pick-up sticks," said Winslow.

"And I'm wearing one of the two-way hats Mr. Brown gave us," said Whitney.

"The artist carved Cat's long eyebrows and mustache just right," said Winona.

Next, Sam led the Wilsons out onto the frozen lake to see the ice carousel. Using chain saws, artists had cut a giant circle in the ice the size of a regular merry-go-round. It slowly revolved with the aid of a

powerboat motor. Around the edge of the carousel, people sat on wild animals—lions, tigers, moose, and wolves— carved from clear ice while a calliope in the center of the circle played merry music.

“Fantabulous,” Winslow repeated. “I’m riding the buffalo.”

“Dibs on the hippo,” said Whitney.

During the Winter Carnival parade, the Elevator Family sat on a large float covered with fake snow. A red tractor pulled it. The entire way the Wilsons waved to the crowd along the streets. They saw many familiar faces. Ott, Mott, and Lott Olson stood on the curb waving a Minnesota Viking flag. The four Andersons were there as were Todd Twee and his family and Amanda Brown. They also waved to Martha and her snow sledding dog, Charlie.

“We’ve met so many wonderful people on this trip,” said Winona.

“Only the best,” said Walter.

“I think my arm’s about to fall off,” said Winslow, continuing to wave.

“Look, there’s Robin Twitter, the bird lady,” said Whitney. “Hello, Robin!”

When the Wilson’s lead float reached the end of the parade route, the family watched the rest of the parade. They saw marching high school bands, dancing snowflakes, vintage cars carrying city mayors, and more floats with local clubs and sports teams on them. The final float carried the Snow Queen and Frost King.

“Yes, a carnival in the wintertime is great fun,” said Walter.

“And we haven’t seen the ice palace or gone snow golfing yet,” said Sam.

By the time Sam drove back to Lake Minnetonka, the sun sat on the western horizon. When they arrived, Shypoke Crisp came riding toward them on his dog sled.

“Whoa!” the Finn cried, and the dozen huskies stopped by Sam’s van.

“Climb on, Wilsons,” Shypoke called out. “There’s enough daylight left for one more trip around the lake.”

“Aren’t your dog tired?” asked Winona

“Look at the them,” said Shypoke. “They’re eager to give the Elevator Family a ride,”

As if to agree, the dogs barked and wagged their tails.

The Wilsons sat in the sleigh one behind the other as they did on the toboggan,

“Mush!” Shypoke called out.

The dog team took off.

“Easy! Easy, now,” Shypoke called and the dogs slowed down.

The dog sled zipped across Lake Minnetonka

“Gee!” Shypoke called and the dog team turned right.

“Haw!” said the driver, and the dogs turned left.

“Excellent,” said Walter. “You have your dogs well-trained, Shypoke.”

“Yes,” said Shypoke. “Next winter I hope to take the team up to Alaska and race in the Iditarod Dogsled Race.”

“Fantabulous,” said Winslow. “1100 miles from Anchorage to Nome.”

By the time the dog sled returned to the cluster of ice fishing shacks the sky was dark. The dog lay in the snow and the Wilsons rolled off the sled

Sam had a campfire blazing near his van.

“Care to join us for a cup of cocoa, Shypoke,” he called out.

“Don’t mind if I do,” the man said. “Hard to resist a good campfire.”

The group drank mugs of hot cocoa sitting on buckets close to the fire.

“It’s been a busy day,” said Walter.

“And tomorrow will be just as busy when thousands of anglers arrived on the lake,” said Sam.

“I see Megan and Marlene are in their shack, no doubt preparing for the contest,” said Winona.

“If only I knew what tackle they use to win year after year,” said Sam.

Meanwhile, Shypoke sat gazing at the green light on the northern lakeshore.

“Shypoke, have you ever read *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald?” Walter asked.

The man nodded. “Long ago in school,” he said.

“That was my mother’s favorite book,” said Sam.

Again, Shypoke nodded,

“I remember in the book, Gatsby kept staring at a green light across the lake,” said Winona, “It belonged to Daisy, the woman he loved.”

“Funny, I still don’t know why my mother turns that green light on every night,” said Sam.

“It’s like she’s trying to signal someone,” said Walter.

Shypoke Crisp took a long drink of cocoa and remained silent.

Chapter Thirteen

Early the next morning, the roar of many engines woke the Wilsons. Outside the ice fishing shack window, they saw hundreds of pickup trucks and snowmobiles zooming past. Here and there people drilled fishing holes in the ice. Soon the entire lake was spotted with holes.

Sam knocked on the door.

“Morning, Wilsons,” he said. “Time to go fishing. The tournament starts at six a.m. and ends at three p.m. Whoever has caught the biggest fish by then is the winner.”

Winslow and Whitney grabbed their short ice fishing rods. Last night Sam put new jigs on the lines. They looked like large jelly beans with one eye. *Maggot jigs*, he called them.

“Before you begin,” Sam said. “I want to clear the holes.”

While Sam worked with the ice drill, the Wilsons stepped outside. The thermometer read -15°.

Walter pounded his chest with his mittens. “Yes, another bracing morning,” he said.

“There must be more anglers on the lake than fish in the lake,” said Winona.

“The cold never stops Minnesotans,” Winona said.

“If I were a fish I’d be hiding out in deep water today,” said Whitney.

Outside Megan and Marlene’s ice fishing shack four news vans were parked. The two sisters stood in the doorway being interviewed.

“May the sister’s fishing rein end today,” said Whitney.

“Right,” said Winslow. “Today I feel lucky.”

Andrew Anderson called from the window of his grand fishing shack, “Good luck today, Wilsons. I just bought a new electronic fish caller. It calls to the biggest fish in the lake and brings them right to my hole.”

No dogs lay outside Shypoke Crisp’s cabin. No Finnish flag flew from the roof.

“I wonder what Shypoke is doing today,” said Winona.

Walter rubbed his chin. “Maybe he’s rereading *The Great Gatsby*,” he quipped.

Back inside the Wilson’s ice fishing hut, the family and Sam sat around the two ice holes. The twins held their rods at the ready.

Walter checked the time on his cell phone. “Eight seconds to six,” he said.

Everyone counted down, “Seven, six, five, four, three, two, one.”

A canon boomed on shore, signaling the start of the tournament.

The twins lowered their maggot jigs into the water.

“Go, Whitney!” cried Winona. “Go, Winslow!”

“Mom, this isn’t a race,” said Winslow.

“We’re going to be sitting here for seven hours,” said Whitney.

“Jiggle your jigs a little,” Walter said.

Winslow raised and lowered his rod. “Could today be the day someone catches Big Wally?” he asked.

“Big Wally is a smart walleye,” said Sam. “He’s survived this fishing tournament for

many years. No one's even hooked him."

For the next two hours, the twins sat by their ice holes, waiting for a bite. They moved their short poles up and down and waited some more. They received not a single nibble. Another hour passed and still nothing.

"Maggot jigs aren't working today," said Sam. He searched through the box of lures. "Maybe we should try these striped wiggle worm jigs."

Fishing with the new tackle produced four small sunfish.

"They'll be good for lunch," said Winona.

"Time to whip up a batch of The Wilson Family's Famous Secret Fish Batter," said Walter.

The *putt. putt. putt* of a four-wheeled all-terrain vehicle came from the doorway. A large man with a bushy brown beard knocked on the door. He wore a blue parka and a large fur hat with ear flaps. A badge on his coat read Winter Carnival Fishing Tournament Official.

"Any luck today, Elevator Family?" he asked.

"Just a few panfish for the pan," said Walter.

"The big fish seem to be going after natural baits today," said the man. "You might try a minnow or a lollapalooza."

"Lolla what?" asked Winslow.

"Dried goldenrod blooms," said Sam. "I think the Olsons have some."

"Remember to call in any big fish you catch, and I'll come to measure it to make it

official,” said the man. “You can catch the latest contest results on radio KFish FM.”

The official drove off. While Sam went next door to get some lollapaloozas, Walter turned on the radio.

An announcer said, *“Good day, Minnesotans. I’m Ice Angler Al, and I’m on the ice of Lake Minnetonka for the annual Winter Carnival Ice Fishing Tournament. Lots of bigguns caught so far this morning. Here’s the top fish on the scoreboard. In third place...a ten-pound walleye caught by Frank Knutson in Tonka Bay using a horsefly. In second place...a twelve-pound northern pike brought in by Tammy Smart near Frog Island with a minnow, and at number one... a thirteen-pound four-ounce walleye caught by Megan and Marlene Montgomery off Mound Point. Again this year the women are using their top-secret tackle. So, keep fishing folks. Three hours remain in the contest.”*

Sam reappeared in the doorway. He held a mittenful of dried flowers.

“Put these lollapaloozas on your hooks,” he told Whitney and Winslow. “Ott, Lott, and Mott are having some luck with them.”

“I’m surprised Chef Cook didn’t serve lollapaloozas for lunch yesterday,” said Walter.

In the next hour, the twins caught three small walleyes. Time was running out.

“Attention, fish tournament anglers,” Ice Angler Al announced on the radio. *“Megan and Marlene Montgomery have just topped their top fish of the day. The new leading fish is an eighteen-pound sturgeon. How they do it, I don’t know. But that biggun will be hard to beat.”*

The twins groaned.

Sam shrugged. "A sturgeon?" he said. "Many anglers call sturgeon bottom-feeding garbage fish and don't eat them. But in this tournament sturgeon count."

With the lollapalooza on their hooks, the twins continued to fish. Another hour passed without any luck.

"This is frustrating," said Winslow. "Megan and Marlene are fishing only a few yards away. But they're catching fish ten times bigger than ours."

"It's all about the bait you use," said Sam.

"A Wilson never gives up," said Walter.

"Miracles do happen," said Winona.

Then at two-thirty a miracle happened. When Walter waved the spoon he used to stir his fish batter, a few drops of batter flew off. They fell in Winslow's ice hole. At once, the head of a giant walleye appeared. It gobbled up the splattered batter and disappeared.

"Great Scott!" said Walter. "What a biggun!"

"It went after your batter, Walter," said Winona. "Try it again."

This time Walter dropped some batter in Whitney's hole. Again, the giant walleye appeared and devoured it.

"That's Big Wally," said Sam. "Big Wally is right below this ice fishing shack."

"And he loves The Wilson Family's Famous Secret Fish Batter," said Walter.

"I have an idea," said Sam. "Winslow and Whitney, raise your lollapaloozas. I'll dip them into some batter. Let's see what happens."

With only twenty minutes left in the fishing tournament, the twins lowered their

bait again through the ice holes. This time the lollapaloozas were smothered with Walter's batter.

Things happened fast. Both rods bent almost in two.

"I'm on," said Winslow.

"Me, too," said Whitney,

Winslow leaned back trying to reel in the fish. "What a whopper! I can't even raise my rod,"

"Me, neither," said Whitney. She was being pulled downward.

"Big Wally must have grabbed both your lines," said Winona,

"The fish has good taste," said Walter.

Sam went to work. He pulled up the floorboards between the two ice holes. Then he grabbed the ice drill and connected the two holes.

"Keep at it," said Sam. "With two lines on him, Big Wally is bound to tire soon. Then his fight will be gone."

Whitney and Winslow continued to battle the fish. They leaned back and reeled in some line, leaned back and reeled in some more line.

"Go Whitney!" shouted Winona, "Go Winslow!"

"Big Wally, you met your match," said Walter.

By now it was ten minutes to three. Ten minutes until the ice fishing tournament was over.

The shouting attracted a crowd of spectators outside the Wilson's ice fishing shack.

The news reporters left Megan and Marlene's hut and race to the Wilson's. They pointed their cameras through the doorway at Winslow and Whitney.

"Go! Go! Go!" the crowd chanted.

The tournament official arrived on his four-wheeler ATV. He checked his watch.

"Two anglers on one fish is allowed," he said. "But you must bring the fish up by three or it's disallowed."

Back and forth the twins rocked in unison.

"One, two, three pull," they called. "One, two three pull."

Finally, the giant fish appeared in the water beneath the long ice hole. It swam slowly back and forth. Yes, the walloping walleye was tiring.

At three minutes to three, the twins reached into the water. They managed to grab the fish by the gills. Walter knelt by the hole to help but the referee said, "Tournament rules say the anglers must land the fish without aid from others."

"Go! Go!" shouted the crowd.

Winslow and Whitney heaved upward. The fish wouldn't come.

"One, two, three," they said together.

They heaved and the giant fish rose through the hole. The twins fell backward and the fish fell on top of them.

From the shore, a cannon went off. The Winter Carnival Fishing Tournament was over.

Chapter Fourteen

“Hello, Big Wally,” Walter said to the fish on the floor. “Welcome to our home.”

The fishing tournament official held up a large fish scale. Sam and Walter raised the big walleye and hooked it on.

“Twenty pounds, eight ounces,” the man announced. “A new Minnesota walleye record. And this year’s Winter Carnival Ice Fishing double champions are Whitney and Winslow Wilson.”

“Hurrah!” went the crowd outside the Wilson’s ice fishing shack. They tossed their mittens in the air. They stomped their snow boots on the snow.

“Only the best,” said Walter. “Only the best for the Wilsons will do.”

The news people held out their microphones. The news cameras pointed at the Wilson twins.

“Whitney and Winslow, what bait did you use to finally catch Big Wally?” one reporter asked.

“Sorry, it’s a Wilson family secret,” said Whitney. “And if we told you, it wouldn’t be a secret any longer.”

“What are you going to do with that big fish?” another reporter asked. “Will you mount him and hang him on a wall?”

“Of course not,” said Winslow. “We’ll release him back to Lake Minnetonka where he belongs.”

“Big Wally has been a lake legend for a long time,” said Walter. “And a lake wouldn’t be great without a legend.”

After the reporters took pictures of the Wilsons with the yard-long walleye, the family lifted him and gently placed him back in the long ice hole. After a pause, Big Wally waved his tail fin and swam off into the dark water.

“This calls for a celebration,” said Walter. “It’s the Wilson’s last night in the Twin Cities, and we’re having a party here on the ice. Everyone’s invited.”

The party began shortly after dark. As soon as the fishing contest ended, artists with chain saws cut a large disc in the ice near the Wilson’s ice fishing shack. By party time, the ice carousel was slowly revolving with the aid of a motorboat engine. Marlene and Megan strung Christmas tree lights around the rim of the ice circle, and Sam built a large bonfire in the center.

Andrew Anderson supplied the sound system for dancing, a first-rate stereo system from his ice fishing shack.

“We didn’t catch any fish today,” he told the Wilsons. “But we got to watch the Vikings game on our giant TV.”

“We need more refreshments for our party,” said Winona. “We don’t have enough fish and batter for everyone.”

As she spoke, a food truck appeared on the ice. It drove up to the Wilson’s shack and parked beside the ice carousel. On the side of the truck were the words:

**MOM'S JUST FISH WAGON
GOOD LUNCHES AND DINNERS
MADE WITH THE WILSON FAMILY'S FAMOUS SECRET FISH BATTER**

The side of the truck folded open. In the van stood a big-bellied man with a long gray ponytail.

"Mom!" the Wilsons shouted.

Yes, inside the food truck was none other than Milton Oliver Montgomery, aka Mom, the very man Walter had created the Wilson Family's Famous Secret Fish Batter for.

"But what are you doing here, Mom?" Winona asked. "You're a long way from Missouri."

"I drive up every year during Winter Carnival to bring my daughters some batter," Mom said.

"Hi, Dad," Megan and Marlene said.

"Mom's your Dad?" Walter asked.

The Wilsons exchanged looks. This explained a lot. Now they knew the mysterious bait the angler sisters used each year during the ice fishing tournament. Lollapaloozas dipped in Walter's secret fish batter.

"But don't worry Mr. Wilson," said Mom. "The ingredient for your batter is still safe with me.

"Well, then, let the party begin," said Walter.

"Free fish, fries, and hot cocoa for everyone," said Mom.

Andrew Anderson turned on his sound system, The Beer Barrel Polka began to play.

Everyone stepped on the ice carousel and danced the polka.

“I wish Shypoke Crisp was here,” Winslow said.

“And too bad Sam’s mother didn’t come out,” said Whitney. “But Sam says she rarely leaves her big mansion.”

Walter pointed toward the northern lakeshore. “Notice the green light isn’t shining,” he said.

Winona smiled. “You know something, don’t you, Walter?”

“I saw dad make a phone call earlier,” said Winslow.

“Dad’s always full of surprises,” said Whitney.

At that moment, the sound of barking dogs came across the ice. Shypoke Crisp appeared driving his team of sled dogs. And who should be sitting in the dog sled but Tove Saarinen herself?

“Whoa!” Shypoke called, and the huskies stopped before the ice carousel.

“We heard the Elevator Family was having a party out here,” said Shypoke.

“And we couldn’t miss an Elevator Family party,” said Sam’s mother.

Winona squeezed Walter’s arm. “You convinced Shypoke to bring Tova here,” she whispered. “Didn’t you?”

Walter grinned. “Shypoke figured out what the green light meant by himself,” he said. “I simply nudged him to make his move.”

Sam brought out his guitar from his van. “Here’s a song composed by Walter Wilson,” he said. “It’s called *The Tonka Ice Fishing Jig*, and it’s only the best.”

The twins raised their mittened hands.

“And we’ll teach you a dance that goes with it,” said Winslow.

“We made it up during the blizzard,” said Whitney.

After everyone knew the dance and the words to the song, Sam began to play.

All the partiers danced and sang along,

*“If you jiggle the jig a little you can catch a fish
It might be small or it might be big
If you jiggle the jig a little you can catch a fish.
Do the Tonka Ice Fishing Jig.”*