

ICE STORM

Part I

By Chuck Baker

From Story Ideas
By Paul Pruitt

**Copyright 2003 by
Chuck Baker and Paul Pruitt**

For Monica
Christmas 2003

The Kidnap

She was almost afraid to look--

But when she did, there was nothing new.

The same fluffy objects that had been filling their town for weeks on end were still coming down.

Snowflakes. Grey snowflakes.

She made her way downstairs to the kitchen table where Mom was fixing breakfast.

"Just cereal and coffee today, girls," Mom said, smiling apologetically.

"Again?" she and her sister Jill answered together, just a little too loudly.

The Kidnap

"Again. You know I can't risk a trip outside right now--not when the streets are filled with raiders. Thank God for your father, bless his soul, who fortified this house before he--before he--"

"Before the accident," Anna offered.

"Before the accident. . . But it just doesn't make sense," she continued, "Women over 50 dropping like flies, and ALL the boys and men--dead! It just doesn't make any sense."

"My teacher said the snow has affected the drinking water--that something is not being filtered out. It's the grey snow, Mama. Eventually, it'll get us all!"

"Don't talk nonsense, Jill!" Mom replied.

"Right now, I'm a lot more worried about those

The Kidnap

raiders than about some mystery illness--and I'M the scientist, remember?"

"Then what's causing it?" Anna asked.

"I think I know. But I need to do some more tests, and to do that, I need supplies for the lab. And you know what that means--I've got to get past those raiders. Any ideas girls?"

Jill scratched her head, wracking her brain for something, anything that might work. She looked up, and saw her sister smiling from ear to ear. Anna had a plan. This would be fun. . .

The Kidnap

Jill and Anna searched out every balloon they could find in the house--leftovers from past birthday parties and anniversaries. One by one they were filled with water, and then popped into the fridge.

The ice cube trays were next. They unloaded the cubes--a whole tray of them into plastic bags, tying each one before popping them into the freezer again.

Time to prepare the buckets, pails, and containers. They punched two holes into each one, loaded them up with the ice packs from the fridge, and took all of it up through the attic to the roof.

They connected one piece of surgical tubing to the chimney, and the other to the big bucket.

The Kidnap

Anna volunteered to hold the other end, as she carefully stood near the edge of the roof. Jill pulled the first bucket back, and yelled,

"Now!"

Ice packs flew through the air, and their mother took off, out of the house, ducking into doorways, trying not to be seen.

The girls launched bucket after bucket of ice bombs on the raiders below. Their giant slingshot was working well.

One raider was hit directly in the head, knocking him off his motorcycle.

They hit the wheel of another, sending him into a slide, directly into a lamppost.

The Kidnap

The street below was soon littered with ice bombs everywhere, scattering riders, sending them to other streets. The diversion had worked.

The girls made their way back into the house, secured the latch on the roof, and checked every door and boarded up window in the house.

Then they settled down to wait for the signal. It would take Mom a while to get what she needed. There was nothing else they could do at the moment, and that was the worst.

The waiting was always the worst.

It was midnight when they heard the knock.

..

The Kidnap

“Don’t answer it!” Anna whispered to her sister. “That’s not the signal. Pretend there’s no one here, and they’ll go away.”

The knock got louder. More persistent.

A voice:

“Come on, and open up the door, girls! I know you’re in there. Your mom sent me.”

“It’s a trick,” said Anna. “Don’t open it.”

“Eclipse,” said the voice.

“WHAT did you say?” Anna screamed back.

“*ECLIPSE*. I said *ECLIPSE*.”

The Kidnap

Anna and Jill froze. Something was definitely wrong. Mom had told the secret family password to someone, and that meant one thing and one thing only. She was in trouble.

Jennifer Kennedy was a resourceful woman. She had a lot to show for herself—brains, beauty, and two intelligent, independent girls who could think for themselves. If Ken were still alive, it'd be perfect. She'd earned everything the hard way, but it was all worth it. Except for this. Except for now. Being held against her will—and it very well could

The Kidnap

be because of her beauty or her brains. . . She hoped it was brains. . .

“Ready?” Jill asked, one hand on the doorknob, one on the latch.

“Just a sec.” Anna reached over, and grabbed a heavy table lamp with both hands. She held it over her head, then moved to one side of the door. “Ready.”

Jill flipped the latch, turned the knob, and pulled the door open wide.

A skinny blonde in jeans and a t-shirt stood there, shivering.

The Kidnap

Jill was no longer worried. She was taller than this woman, and outweighed her by a good twenty pounds. “Come on in! You look like you’re freezing!”

“Th-Thanks.”

“Now—What’s going on? What’s your name, and how do you know our mom?”

“I’m Ingrid. But I’ll tell you about me later. Right now, your mom needs your help. I’ll explain later—we’ve got to hurry! Before they get too far away. What’s the fastest way out of town?”

“Well, right about now, that’d be a snowmobile,” Jill replied.

“Do you have one?”

The Kidnap

“As a matter of fact,” Anna answered, “we have two. Jill’s and mine.”

“Well, grab as many supplies as you can, bundle up, and let’s go. We’ve got to find where they’ve taken her.”

“Ok, we’re all worried, but there’s no need to rush. We can track her with this—” Anna pulled open an end table drawer and took out a small gizmo.

“A locator? But they’ve been illegal for— how did you get it?”

“Our mom’s a scientist, remember? She’s got friends in high places. Anyway, she taught us how to use the transponder locator GPS system for

The Kidnap

this very reason. Now, we can just hook into her microchip, and follow her wherever she goes—”

“That is,” cut in Jill, “until the batteries start to go. We’ll have to pick up these X-475 Lithium batteries wherever we can. They last awhile, but they’re hard to find. And we’ll be using it a lot. It’s either that, or find a generator to charge the ones we’ve got.”

“Ok, so we’ve got a bit of time to prepare. But let’s not let them get too far away.”

“Don’t worry. We’ve always been prepared for this day. Our supplies are ready in the shelter downstairs. Since we packed for three, you can use Mom’s stuff.”

The Kidnap

Mrs. Kennedy was getting cold. She knew she was in the back of a semi that was full of supplies, and a couple of snowmobiles, but she was handcuffed to something heavy and couldn't do much about it. No, that's not quite true. She knew what she had to do. She just hoped she wouldn't black out in the process. . .

The tracks of the semi were easy to follow in the fresh snow. The roads had been cleared that morning, but already a thick grey blanket covered the highway. No one else had been crazy enough to

The Kidnap

drive in these conditions, so it was easy pickings, Anna thought. Too easy. And what would they do when they caught up to them?

The driver glanced at her companion in the passenger seat for a split second, but quickly looked back to the slippery road. “This was so easy,” she said. “She never even saw us coming.”

“Yeah. Spotting her duck into that store was a real bonus,” the passenger said. “We just picked her up like you pick up groceries!”

Welcome to Washington, the sign read, as they crossed the Oregon border. “It won’t be long now,” the driver said. “We just dump our “cargo” at

The Kidnap

the Seattle docks, collect our checks, and take a well-earned vacation.”

“Hawaii sounds like a nice change,” the passenger said.

“Yeah, you’re right about that. At least for the moment. But those glaciers are moving south fast. If one of the ones near the coast hits the ocean, the forces could send a tsunami our way!”

“Always the optimist, aren’t y—”

A deer jumped directly in front of the semi. The driver swerved. The trailer jack-knifed. The entire semi started sliding sideways towards the ditch. There was nothing to stop it. . .

The Kidnap

Mrs. Kennedy was in the trailer. She had just managed to calm her heartbeat. She concentrated on relaxing one hand, one wrist. She had tightened her fists when they slapped the handcuffs on her. Now, if she could just relax enough and then pull sharply, she might get her hand out. She might lose some skin in the process, but it was worth a try.

She was just starting to pull when the semi slid and slammed onto its side. The impact jarred Mrs. Kennedy's hand free, but she was smacked into the side of the trailer. Something heavy had her pinned, and one of the snowmobile's front skis had just narrowly missed her head. It sat wedged into the wall of the semi. She could feel the cold air rush

The Kidnap

in. She struggled to remain calm. She struggled to stay conscious. She felt a trickle of blood from her forehead slide down her brow, and she gently drifted off to sleep . . .

The girls were making good time. The tracks were harder to follow now, because the biting wind was blowing snow across them. But the signal was coming in strong. Anna could tell they were getting closer, and gaining fast. The others must have stopped. Maybe the road was blocked up ahead. She could always hope . She had the throttle fully open now, and she blasted across the snow, kicking up a whirlwind.

The Kidnap

Jill followed the cloud from a bit farther behind. It was dangerous driving behind Anna. If Jill fell back too much, she might lose sight of Anna and Ingrid—she was thankful for the cumulus cloud of snow Anna was kicking up behind her. . .

Inside the cab of the semi, both driver and passenger struggled to escape. The seatbelts had saved their lives, but now the clasps had bent and jammed, and the two women were fighting against the straps. The passenger reached into her pocket and pulled out a switchblade. In seconds, she cut

The Kidnap

herself free, then slid down to the driver and did the same.

“You ok?”

“Yeah, I’m alright. Stupid deer! I should’ve just mowed him down!”

They crawled out through the passenger window, and made their way to the back of the truck.

“Looks like our easy job just got tougher.”

“No kidding. Just hope our passenger is alive!”

They cracked open the back doors and saw Mrs. Kennedy lying underneath the rubble, her face covered in blood.

The Kidnap

“She’s dead! Can you believe it? Now we’ll never get paid!”

“Never say never.” She crouched down and made her way inside the semi. Seeing Mrs. Kennedy’s hand laid out towards her, the kidnapper lifted her foot, placed the heel of her boot on the palm, and stomped down hard.

“AAAAAHHH!” Mrs. Kennedy screamed at the top of her lungs.

“See?” The woman looked back. “She’s ok. . . Now help me get these snowmobiles out. We’ve got to take our prisoner for a little ride.”

Still Alive

We're getting close. Very close, Anna
thought, as she raced her way down the I-95. *I don't*
have much gas left, but they can't be very far from
here—should I risk it?

And just then, she spotted it. A semi rolled
on the side of the road, with the back doors snapped
open. She eased up on the gas, and approached
carefully. Jill soon caught up to her. The two of

Still Alive

them stopped, about a hundred feet away from the wreck.

“Is it safe? What do we do if there’s a gang of them around somewhere?” Jill asked her older sister.

“You know me,” said Anna. “I always have a plan. For now, let’s just circle around the wreck and see what we can see.”

They saw nothing.

It was a bad sign. The kidnappers had gotten away.

It was a good sign. No bodies meant that everyone was still alive.

Still Alive

“You still got a piece of that surgical tubing in your pocket, Jill? The stuff we used for the slingshot?”

“Yeah. I brought a coil of it in case we had to do our slingshot trick again.”

“Get it out for me. We need to siphon some gas soon, or we’re not going to make it too much farther. And get me our water jug and a plastic bag.”

The jug had been tucked inside Jill’s snowsuit to keep it from freezing. She took it out, grabbed a plastic bag, and gave both to Anna.

Anna used her foot to dig out a hole in the snow. She placed the bag in the hole, and then told Jill to pour the water into the bag.

Still Alive

“But it’ll freeze!” Jill protested.

“Exactly!” Anna replied. If we freeze the water now, we can strap it onto something else, and use the water jug as an extra gas can. We can always melt some when we need drinking water.”

Ingrid just stood there, amazed, gaping and gawking as the two girls went into action. Jill siphoned gas into the jug, and Anna ran back and forth to the snowmobiles, filling the two tanks. She filled their jug to the brim and capped it, and then the girls strapped everything back on the snowmobiles and set off.

They were behind again.

Still Alive

The air turned colder and the winds were more bracing as they headed north. The massive glaciers had moved as far down as Horseshoe Bay, just north of the U.S. / Canada border, and they were still making their way farther south. Most Canadians had already fled across the border to escape the cold. Only the most stubborn or the most hopeless and helpless remained.

And here they were, racing closer, when most people were fleeing. Just where were these kidnappers taking their mother anyway? Anna kept thinking of the crash, and the state that the semi had been in. She hoped that her mother would be able to get medical attention if she needed it. Realistically, she knew it wouldn't happen.

Still Alive

The signal was faint for several miles, but again, the girls were gaining ground quickly. They must be searching for gas! We can catch them!

They raced forward, but soon found what slowed down the group ahead of them—evidently, they'd cut through a dense forest, weaving this way and that, making their way through the tall Douglas fir trees. It was getting late, and dark, and cold. Anna knew they would have to stop soon and make a fire, or they risked frostbite. She brought her snowmobile to a halt at the edge of the forest, and waited for Jill to do the same.

“What are you doing?” Jill asked. “Why are you stopping? We’re going to lose them!”

Still Alive

“Calm down, Jill,” Anna said. We’ve been in the cold air for a long, long time. THEY were in a warm truck—remember? We need to stop and get warm, or we won’t be of any use to anyone.”

“But they’ll get away—”

“Not as long as we have this—” Anna pulled out the tracking device. She stared at the LCD light on it. Either her eyesight was getting poor, or the light was becoming very faint. She tucked the finder back into her pocket. Batteries. Tomorrow, they must find batteries. . . but right now, they had to get warm.

They parked the snowmobiles about six feet away from each other, and draped and tied a tarp over top. Then they piled gear near the ends to

Still Alive

block out any cold wind that might sneak its way through the trees.

Fire was next. Finding dry material was difficult. But they gathered some twigs and small branches to dry near a fire that they started with whatever they could find in their backpacks that would burn. When they were all warm, one by one, they drifted off to sleep. When the fire died, other noises began . . .

Something was rustling in the bushes nearby. A bear! They'd used their backpacks, with food inside to block the ends of their homemade tent—and the scent had attracted an unwelcome visitor!

Still Alive

“Don’t move! Don’t anybody move!” Jill whispered to the others. The bear ambled up to the backpacks, and pawed at one lightly. He turned, as if to go away, but then moved back and slashed at the pack with a claw. The pack rolled a few feet away, and then Anna turned to the others, wide-eyed.

“We need to move—now!”

They snuck out of their shelter as quietly as they could, and backed into the woods in the other direction. The bear gave them a passing glance, but it had other things on its mind. Bit by bit, it picked through their belongings, sniffing everything, taking bites out of what it thought was edible. It was a long time before it was safe for the girls to return.

Still Alive

When they did, the scene wasn't pretty: anything edible was picked through, half-eaten or completely gone. There was barely anything left for them to eat, so they'd have to scrounge for food—and the winter woods were no place to find it. They needed to get to a city. So much for sleep.

They were a few hours from Olympia. They should be able to scrounge some food and batteries there. But it meant that they'd have to take time away from the chase to do it.

The kidnappers had already passed through Olympia. They had gas and food—and their prisoner. They were well on their way, and their prisoner seemed to be cooperating.

Still Alive

They were making good time, so they decided to stop and take a rest. Mrs. Kennedy pretended to fall asleep from exhaustion. Soon, both guards were asleep, but Mrs. Kennedy was cuffed to the treads of the snowmobile. If she could just reach the gas tank . . .

She dug down deep under her blanket, until the snow she was scraping turned brown. Then bit by bit, she started putting dirt in the gas tank. She covered the hole with snow again, and went to sleep. May as well get some rest . . .

By the time they got to Olympia, the three women were exhausted. Tired, hungry, and desperate, they searched for stores that had not

Still Alive

already been totally ransacked. They found a convenience store, snacked on what they could find, and filled their patched up backpacks. The locator's batteries were completely dead. They'd have to search out an electronics place, and hope for the best.

Anna grabbed the yellow pages, and looked up "Electronics". She found the address of a Radio Shack not far from where they were, at least according to the map on the inside cover. They'd be able to find batteries there, and then they'd gas up and be on their way.

Still Alive

“Ok, get up!” The voice of the kidnapper woke Mrs. Kennedy.

“I said, get up! The sooner we get you to Seattle, the better.

“I’m ready,” Mrs. Kennedy answered. “Stop pushing. And can you please uncuff me?”

“We can uncuff you from the snowmobile, but don’t try anything, or we’ll hurt you. They want you alive, but they didn’t say we couldn’t hurt you, you know.”

“And just who is THEY?” Mrs. Kennedy asked.

“ You don’t need to know that right now. But you never know—you might be surprised.”

“And just where are we headed?”

Still Alive

“For us, Seattle. For you, much much farther.”

“You’re just going to dump me off?”

“Something like that.”

“And what should I call the two of you? I haven’t heard you use each other’s names once yet.”

“Of course. Still digging, hmm? You want something to use on us? Well, let’s just say we’re both women, so it’s safe if you call me Frank and her George. Is that ok with you?”

“Beautiful. So tell me Frank, when do we get to eat again?”

“Be quiet and climb on. It’s time to get moving.” Frank started up her snowmobile without

Still Alive

a hitch, but when George tried the same, it wouldn't turn over at all. "What's wrong? Why won't this start? I don't know a thing about snowmobiles."

She looked at Mrs. Kennedy. "You're the scientist! Why won't this go?"

"I'm a scientist, not a mechanic," Mrs. Kennedy replied.

"Is it out of gas? I thought we just filled up."
George opened her gas cap, and looked inside.
"Mud! There's mud in my tank! You sneaky little—"
"

Whack! The butt of a pistol slammed into the side of Mrs. Kennedy's face, and she was knocked unconscious.

Still Alive

“Come on over here, Francesca, and help me get the dirt out of this tank!”

“I’m Frank, remember? No real names, ok? Just in case she isn’t really sleeping... I already feel bad choosing names that are so close to our real ones as it is.”

Anna, Jill, and Ingrid were fed and rested and ready to go. The locator was working again, and they were amazed to see how close they were. With renewed energy, they set off to begin the chase again. They were gaining ground quickly—if the gauge was correct, they were only about a half-hour

Still Alive

behind, and their target wasn't moving. If they hurried, they could catch them within the hour!

Frank and George had spent a lot of time trying to get the dirt out of the tank, but even after they'd gotten as much as they could out by scooping and sponging it up, they still couldn't start it. They piled as much gear as they could on one snowmobile, pressed the unconscious prisoner between the two of them, and set off. They had to move more slowly now, both to hold the body, and to make sure the gear didn't go flying off. Still, they didn't have any time to waste . . .

Still Alive

The girls could see that they were gaining ground fast. Though the target was nearing Seattle, they weren't far behind. And they were steadily catching up.

Fifteen minutes away, then ten, then only five—they were almost there. The target was somewhere along the coast. What would they do next? How could they get their mother back from the attackers? Anna searched her mind for a solution. Maybe another distraction was in order . . .

Still Alive

The kidnappers slid the snowmobile up to the water's edge.

“I can't believe it! We missed it! The boat's already left. We didn't even have time to get her into the container. What do we do now?” George asked.

“You know the backup plan just like I do. We can't just sit here and wait for the next ship—wait for someone to find us. The next ship might be a month or more in coming. We can't just sit still with a captive for that long. It's safer if we move.”

“But, but the other trip is so long, and dangerous.”

“It's all we can do. We have to keep moving so the daughters can't find us. Remember, the girls

Still Alive

are almost as intelligent as their mother. Maybe we should have tried to take all of them, waited until we had a chance to get them all. But one thing is sure—it's not safe for us to stay in one place with those girls looking for us. It's much harder to hit a moving target. So even though it means a much longer trip, we have to do it. There is no other way.”

They got back on their snowmobiles, just as the girls crested the top of the hill and spotted them below. The chase was on!

Anna and Jill split into a V, one trying to head off the other snowmobile, the other trying to come up behind it.

“Look! Up on the hill! Someone's coming!”

Still Alive

George's shouting snapped Mrs. Kennedy awake. She looked up through blurry eyes, searching the hillside. She spotted two snowmobiles—her daughters?—coming down the hill fast towards them. Mrs. Kennedy brought her leg up and stomped on the foot behind her. George gave a yelp, then smacked her in the head again. She tried to stay awake, tried to stay alert, but the pain in her head was just too great. All she could do was hold on. She couldn't think. She couldn't fight back. All she could do was hold on and hope for the best.

Anna raced to cut them off. She came down the hill too quickly, almost losing control, and a sharp dip sent Ingrid flying off the back. A quick

Still Alive

glance back showed Anna that she was ok, and she had no time now to stop. Ingrid would have to find her way into the city. There was no going back for her. She increased speed a little more now, almost floating over the snow. She was gaining on them!

Jill was catching up as well. A single rider can move a lot faster than three bodies on a single machine. Frank and George saw them both coming too. Frank moved to pull into a straight line with the machines. At the last moment, she cranked the steering to the right, and Jill caught her front ski on Anna's machine. Both riders went flying into the air, skidding across the hard-packed snow. Their machines flipped end over end, scattering supplies over the shoreline. Frank's machine turned up on

Still Alive

one side, and then slammed back down again. Their extra weight had kept them from flipping over.

She coasted to the hill, and made her way up more carefully. When she got to the top, she glanced back, seeing the two bodies still lying in the snow. Frank laughed, and headed inland. She'd have to see if she could find faster transportation. Until then, the snowmobile would allow her to go places where cars could not. She'd stick to the main roads now, since the chase was on. She didn't want anything to slow them down —now that she knew the daughters were tracking them.

Still Alive

Bruised but not Defeated

Anna, Jill, and Ingrid were bruised, tired, exhausted, but otherwise unhurt. The padded parkas they were wearing had saved them from much harm, physically. But the emotions were harder to deal with. They had been so close to getting their mother back. So close. They'd even seen her! But now they were far behind again, and in fairly rough shape. They'd need some time to heal their wounds before they got back to the chase. Time was precious, but if they were in no shape to do

Bruised But Not Defeated

anything when and if they caught up with the kidnappers, they might all be captured . . . or killed.

This was life. This was real.

“Ingrid?” Jill said, looking up. “Ingrid, you know, we appreciate all you’ve done, but—”

“But you don’t want me along as extra baggage,” she said. “I know. You two are better off without me. And two can move faster than three. I get it. I’m a big girl, I can take it. I’m sick of this chase anyway. I just hope you get your mom back.”

“Ok,” interrupted Anna,” and speaking of that, tell us everything you know about this, and how you found us in the first place.”

“Well, I don’t know much. All I can tell you is that I didn’t like this operation from the start.

Bruised But Not Defeated

Some Swedish scientist convinced two assistants to help her capture your mom, and use her research to help solve the world's problems. With so much wiped out from the glaciers and from disease, she says that whoever controls health, whoever has solutions to the world's problems, will gain ultimate power. She sounds a little psychotic, bent on taking over the world or something.”

“And you? How did you come to be wrapped up in all this?”

“The other two—Francesca and Georgina? They're my sisters.”

Bruised But Not Defeated

Frank and George were wasting no time.

They took advantage of the lead they had, stocked up on supplies, and then quickly headed out into the cold again. The icy wind lapped at them, but they were well-stocked, well-padded, and prepared for almost anything. Almost.

They'd stopped for only a short time to find shelter from the cold. They couldn't stay in the city and feel safe, so they opted for the nearby woods. They could camp out in the middle of the woods without fear of being found. Or so they thought.

Just an hour or so of rest, and then they'd head out cross country again, zigzagging their way across the country. They settled down, supplies piled around them to block out the wind.

Bruised But Not Defeated

“Don’t you think you should—” began Mrs. Kennedy—but she never got to finish her statement.

“Nighty-night,” said George, who had snuck behind and clamped a chloroformed cloth over Mrs. Kennedy’s nose and mouth. With her knocked out, they were free to snooze themselves.

It was the snarling, not the snoring, that woke them up a few short hours later. A pack of wild dogs, scavengers really, had found their way to them. Somehow, they’d caught their scent, or the scent of the food in their packs. And they looked hungry. Very hungry. Their eyes glistened with hate for the lives they led, lives filled with endless searching for food.

Bruised But Not Defeated

“What do we do, Frank?” George whispered. “There are so many of them. There must be fifteen or twenty dogs out there, ready to attack.”

“Eighteen, actually.” Mrs. Kennedy’s head hurt, and her vision was a bit blurred, but she could still make out the shapes of the ravenous creatures as they came closer and closer. She leaned over to Frank. “Now listen. I can tell you how we make it out of here, but you have to do exactly as I say. . .”

Anna and Jill were on their own. Jill was upset.

Bruised But Not Defeated

“That was stupid of me to let Ingrid go now. She could’ve helped us.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Anna replied. “I’m afraid she’s not much help—just like these two snowmobiles.”

“Neither will start?” Jill asked.

“Nope. Bent, broken, and in no shape to carry anyone anywhere, I’m afraid. But we can use these at least.” Anna held up the front skis that had been snapped off her snowmobile. Before long, both girls had the skis of the snowmobile securely fastened to their feet.

“A bit clumsy and heavy,” Jill complained.

“Yes, but watch.” Anna picked up two of the branches they had gathered, stuck them into the

Bruised But Not Defeated

ground, and pushed. It was a struggle to get going at first, and to maintain control, but once they got the hang of it, the two girls made good progress, cross-country skiing toward the city, where they could find new gear. With so many shops deserted and people heading farther south, there should be plenty of supplies to find there.

By the time they left Seattle, the signal was weak—even though they had new batteries. Frank and George were at least four or five hours ahead of them, even if they weren't moving at the moment. .

“What do you think, George, do I trust her?”

Bruised But Not Defeated

“Do you have a better plan?”

“No.”

“Then you trust her. She doesn’t want to become dog food either, you know.”

“I know. But it’s risky. And it will cost us half our supplies, and maybe our transport.”

“We don’t really have much of a choice now, do we?”

“I guess not.” Frank reached over slowly to the ignition on the snowmobile, and slid the key in. The dogs snarled, and came even closer. In one quick movement, Frank jumped on the snowmobile and started it up. Two dogs rushed straight for her. Mrs. Kennedy and George made use of the distraction to run the other way.

Bruised But Not Defeated

Frank headed straight for the two dogs, then jumped sideways off the snowmobile. It continued in a straight line, right through the pack of dogs. Then she heard it smack into a tree. Some dogs were scared, and ran off. Others were more curious, and went for the food that was strapped to the snowmobile.

Amazingly, none of the others followed the girls. They had what they wanted, and while they were feasting, the girls searched for cover. They'd have to camp out somewhere, until they figured out alternate transport.

“Ever seen an igloo before? Or an ice cave?” Mrs. Kennedy asked. “We need to keep the cold out

Bruised But Not Defeated

and insulate ourselves to keep warm. Now we'll find a spot and do it quickly—”

And just like that, Mrs. Kennedy took over the leadership of the group. She took the leadership right from her kidnappers. They were following her orders like scared school kids, who felt they better do as they were told, or they might just freeze to death.

Crashing the snowmobile was my best plan yet, Mrs. Kennedy thought to herself. It'll give the girls a chance to catch up again. And it should take us awhile to build this snow fort. I hope they're not far away.

Bruised But Not Defeated

The girls were tired and physically exhausted by the time they made it into the city. Their feet and legs were sore from their makeshift skis, and all they wanted was to soak in a hot bath, and then sleep the night away. They knew they didn't have that luxury.

The most important thing would be to find transportation. And they'd pick up some skis too—real ones, just in case. They needed to be a lot better prepared for Mother Nature if they were going to get their mom away from the kidnappers. Their strength wouldn't hold out on snowmobiles or skis or anything like that—they needed to find a

Bruised But Not Defeated

vehicle—one that still hadn't been drained of all its gas.

They found it—at the local fire department.

They siphoned all the gas they could and loaded up the truck. They packed it full of food and supplies, and at last were ready to set off. They'd find their mom soon—they had to. It was a long, long way to Sweden, after all. They had time.

The blizzard came out of nowhere. Just after they'd smoothed the last block of snow into place, the winds picked up, and snow blasted around the ice cave of the three women.

Bruised But Not Defeated

“We have to huddle together,” Mrs. Kennedy said. “We need to share body heat, and wait this out. Walking out there is suicide.”

“I’m so tired,” Frank said. She yawned, and rested her head on George’s shoulder.

“You can’t,” Mrs. Kennedy said sternly.

“Can’t what?” Frank snapped back. “I can do anything I want to. You just remember who’s the prisoner here, ok?”

“You can’t go to sleep. If we all fall asleep, we might sleep for a long, long time, if you know what I mean. And we have to make sure the cave isn’t snowed under either. We have to be able to get out of here once the storm clears.”

“Who died and made you boss?”

Bruised But Not Defeated

“It’s just that you and I both know—I’m a scientist, and I’ve studied survival among other things. You know that I’m valuable to you. Chloroform me again, and you’ll die out here—one bad decision, and it’s game over. And you know that it’s true!”

“Just shut your mouth and keep quiet. This storm won’t last long.”

Two hours later, the winds were still howling, and the women were starting to get stir crazy. Two hours later, Anna and Jill were making their way down the logging roads, snow chains on the tires of the fire truck. The light on the locator was growing brighter and brighter. . .

Bruised But Not Defeated

“We need to get supplies,” Jill said. “We don’t know how long we’ll be here.”

“You mean you want to go back to the snowmobile? The dogs will have eaten everything up.”

“Yeah, but there might be some supplies left, and you never know—the snowmobile may work. Eventually, we have to get out of here. How long do you think it’ll be before the girls track us here?”

“In this blizzard? No one’s going to risk driving in the mountains in a blizzard.”

They couldn’t have been more wrong. Less than an hour away, the girls were slowly negotiating curves and pullouts on the side of the mountain.

Bruised But Not Defeated

“This is crazy, Anna! We have to stop. We can’t see anything—you’re going to drive us right over the cliff!”

“Be quiet and keep your eyes open! THEY are not moving in this blizzard; that’s why WE have to—it’s our only chance to catch up!”

“I guess you’re right . . . but go slow, ok? It won’t help mom if we go tumbling over the edge.”

Bruised But Not Defeated

“We’ve been here too long, Frank They’re going to find us. We need to go get some supplies. We need to check out the snowmobile.”

“We? I’m just starting to warm up—I’m not going out there now. If you do it, you do it alone.”

“It’s suicide,” Mrs. Kennedy piped in. “If you go out into that sheet of white, you won’t come back.”

“It’s no good just sitting here. I have to try,” George said. With that, she bundled up, slid out of the shelter, and headed for the trees. They weren’t that far away. Mrs. Kennedy was just trying to scare her.

She was right about that, Mrs. Kennedy thought. And with one kidnapper gone, it was now

Bruised But Not Defeated

one on one. Maybe she'd have a chance to escape.

But to where? And how?

Surprisingly, it didn't take George long to find the snowmobile. It was completely trashed, but she gathered up what she could, then tore the seat off the snowmobile, and tied a rope around it. She used it as a sled to pull the supplies back to their cave. There were still some packs of food the dogs hadn't gotten into. At least with full bellies, they'd be able to think more clearly, make a better plan for getting out of here. The last item George packed in the torn up sack was a pair of binoculars. When the snow cleared, they'd be able to pick out the best path.

Bruised But Not Defeated

The girls were almost directly above the ice cave now, a few hundred feet up the mountain. They looked down, searching the slope with binoculars. The winds had slowed, and it wasn't snowing anymore. All they saw was a sheet of white, but far below, near the lake, what was that? Float planes? Wherever the kidnapers were now, they would be sure to make for those float planes as the sky cleared more and more. They had to be here. The signal said they were. But where? In the forest? It didn't seem to be coming from that direction. Where were they?

Bruised But Not Defeated

Just as the snow cleared, George stepped out of the snow cave, binoculars in hand. “Frank, come see this! You’re not going to believe this!” She was looking downhill, towards the lake.

“Float planes—lined up along the shore of that mountain lake! We’ve got it made. All we need to do is get down there!”

“That’s a long walk, George,” Frank said.

“But it’s a short ride,” George replied, nodding at the snowmobile seat.

“You’re not serious, are you?”

“Very.”

“Ok, but we all better be strapped in well.

This promises to be a wild ride.”

Bruised But Not Defeated

It was the break they'd been looking for. Jill and Anna spotted the two women far down the mountainside, looking at the float planes. But where was their mother? Probably knocked out somewhere. They couldn't afford to kill her, the girls knew. They needed to know how close she'd come to solving the aging problem.

Jill and Anna strapped on their skis, and grabbed a few tree branches. Maybe they could take them by surprise.

Bruised But Not Defeated

For some reason, George turned around and started to scan the mountain itself. The fire truck was easy to spot.

“They’re here! We’ve got to get going.”

Both Frank and George grabbed Mrs. Kennedy, threw her onto the flattened snowmobile seat, and pushed off. They started coursing down the hill, the extra weight helping them pick up speed, as gravity helped them go faster and faster.

Jill and Anna set off at almost the same time. They zigged and zagged, controlling their speed. A fall would be the worst thing right now. They didn’t need a fall.

Bruised But Not Defeated

The skis cut through the snow, and the girls gained speed quickly. They were catching up to the sled, and they were nearing the lake.

Frank and George tossed the packs off the back of the sled at the same time. The girls tried to avoid them, but both went tumbling over them, their skis snapping off, their bodies flying through the air. They landed close together and skidded farther down the hill. When Jill gathered the strength to lift her head to look for Anna, she saw her about fifty feet away, lying motionless in the snow. Face down. She had to hurry.

The kidnappers made quick work of checking for a gasped up plane, starting it up and soaring off. This was close, too close. But they'd

Bruised But Not Defeated

make good time now. Even with stops for gas, it wouldn't be long before they reached the east coast. Much faster than going by land, anyway.

Jill knelt in the snow, afraid to move the body. Afraid not to. She held Anna's shoulders firmly, and then flipped her to her back. Anna's mouth was jammed full of snow. Jill dug it out, then took a deep breath and started filling Anna's lungs with air.

It worked. Before long, Anna sputtered, coughed, and threw up all over the snow. Beaten, breathless, but alive. Jill checked for broken bones—nothing. She pulled Anna to the float plane

Bruised But Not Defeated

and hoisted her up into it. Anna had always bailed Jill out before. It was Jill's chance to return the favor. She took out the locator, set it in front of her, and grabbed the flight manual. It took her a short time to figure out the controls, but soon, they were hot on the trail again. Now if only this weather would hold out. . .

A Plain but Very Real Solution

The trip to the coast was mostly uneventful, but the girls were far behind. Jill had trouble maintaining control, and figuring out how to land the plane—and where—when they needed gas.

But Anna was feeling better now, and she had her flight ticket. She'd only just done her first solo flight, but she was much more confident than Jill, and with her at the controls, they'd made up some time.

A Plain But Very Real Solution

The locator was dead now. They didn't know whether it was the impact of the fall, or if it just needed batteries again, but they would find out when they got to New York. For now, they just had to plan their stops carefully, and make sure they didn't run out of gas.

They could see the enormity of the advancing glaciers. Whatever had caused them to grow so large so fast was unknown, but where they had dipped down into the U.S, their effects could be easily seen.

“George! Look over there—those homes have been snapped up and carried off by the glacier. It's just shaving off the land—anything unlucky

A Plain But Very Real Solution

enough to be in its path is just popped off the land like a pimple!”

“Much safer to be up here, is that what you’re saying?”

“Well, they’re fairly slow, but the size of them—and the strength! I wonder how long this will last? Are we in another ice age? Will this be THE BIG ONE that finishes us all off?”

“Hey, don’t go there, Frank. We’re up for a vacation when we get this chick to Sweden.”

“Yeah, I know, I know. Don’t worry, I’m not flipping out or anything. But it makes you think, you know?”

“I know. But for now, let’s just get this woman to Sweden. Dr. Spiley awaits.”

A Plain But Very Real Solution

“Speaking of which,” Anna added, “how do we get her to Sweden? Neither you or I can fly anything larger than this float plane, and it certainly doesn’t hold enough gas to make the trip. Any suggestions?”

“I think we have to deal with that when we land at the coast. But keep thinking of options. I’m sure you’ll come up with something.”

The pain Mrs. Kennedy was feeling was strange. She’d been through a lot lately, and she had bumps and bruises to show for it, but this pain was different—it was almost like arthritis. Her joints

A Plain But Very Real Solution

were stiffened up and some had quite a bit of pressure bearing down on them. Fatigue had also set in, and she wondered why all this was happening all at once.

Was it the virus? But so far, only women over the age of 50 had been hit by it. Was the virus mutating? Was there a stronger strain of it? This was not what she needed. On top of all of her other problems right now, she did not need this worry.

“Hurry up,” Frank told her. “It’s time to take off across the Atlantic. We have no time to waste, and this is going to be a long, long trip.”

A Plain But Very Real Solution

The girls had no idea how they would make it to Sweden. The glaciers had come far southward, true, and there was probably an ice shelf between here and there that they could traverse, but how?

Snowmobiles would constantly need gas—more gas than they could carry. There was no fresh water out on the ocean, so THAT was what they'd have to take huge supplies of—that and batteries. They'd found Battery World in the phone book, and had loaded up. If they lost the signal, it would be almost impossible to locate them in time.

“I know what to do!” Jill said.

Her comment surprised Anna, who was usually the ideas woman. “What are we going to do?”

A Plain But Very Real Solution

“We’ll build a catamaran—well, we don’t have to build one, just borrow one, and make a few modifications. With skate blades on the bottom, and a strong sail, we can use wind power. We won’t have to carry gas, and we can easily push it when there is no wind—but out in the open there usually is. What do you think?”

“I think we’d better load up on skate blades. Great idea, Sis. Even if it takes us a day to do a good job, we’ll be back on their tail in no time. It’s a LONG way to Sweden, so there should be plenty of chances for us to catch up!”

A Plain But Very Real Solution

Mrs. Kennedy was really feeling it set in now. She was weak, very weak, but her mind was still strong. She was searching for something, anything that might save her. . . Plantain!

“We need to land!”

“What are you talking about?”

“We need to land. Look, we’ve been hugging the North American coastline for days now. I know what the problem is. I know what can make me feel better.”

“So why should we care?”

“You need me alive, remember? Dead, I’m no use to you. And if this is the virus and it’s attacking younger women now, I could infect you if I can’t stop it.”

A Plain But Very Real Solution

“Okay, okay, we get it,” Frank said. “But why do we need to land?”

“To get some plantain. I don’t really care if we have to chip six feet through solid ice to get to it, we need some plantain.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s a wonder herb. In the past, it’s been used for inflammation of the skin, malignant ulcers, fever—many, many illnesses. If you make a poultice out of it and wrap it over your wounds, it heals them. I only thought of it because it’s very common and found worldwide. We should be able to dig some up and give it a try. It could hold the key to one of our biggest problems right now—

A Plain But Very Real Solution

premature aging! I'm so stupid! I should have thought of it before. . .”

Mrs. Kennedy kept talking, more to herself than anyone else in particular. The others thought she had gone crazy, but they decided to stop along shore anyway. They were sick of the open waterway that had become an open iceway , and their craft likely needed a break too. They could check it for damage while Mrs. Kennedy dug for her wonder drug.

It was just the break the two girls needed. They were gaining on the signal. Something had

A Plain But Very Real Solution

stopped the craft ahead of them. They hoped their mom was okay. But for whatever reason, they were gaining quickly on the signal. If they had a few hours more and a good strong wind behind them, they might just catch up! Their catamaran had already been flying across the ice, faster than the other craft, but now, they were really gaining. If all went well, they should have their mom back by the end of the day.

Frank and George had completed repairs just as Mrs. Kennedy struck frozen ground. She was right to search near what was once a marshy shore. There would have been plenty of water here, and

A Plain But Very Real Solution

the plantain would grow long stalks, unchecked by man. The glacier had bent the stalks over, and the ground was frozen, but Mrs. Kennedy quickly filled her knapsack and raced to the others.

“Ok, take me to Sweden. I’m ready to go! I need to get to a lab!”

The two kidnappers exchanged confused looks, but then packed up and pushed off, just as Jill and Anna spotted them.

Jill and Anna had the wind behind them, and they skimmed across the frozen surface like butter on a hot fry pan.

“Ok, Sis,” Jill screamed above the roar of the wind, “we’re going to catch them. But what do we do?”

A Plain But Very Real Solution

“Aim for the center of their craft. Let’s split it in two! Even if we destroy both, they won’t get away from us this time!”

Jill steered straight for them

“We’re going to be hit,” yelled Frank.

“What now?”

“Remember the snowmobiles?” George said.

“Yeah, why?”

“One pack each. Same side.”

The girls craft raced closer and closer. They could see the other three bodies clearly now. This was it! They braced themselves for a hit!

Just at that moment, Frank and George each hurled a package in front of the left pontoon of the

A Plain But Very Real Solution

girls' racer. The pontoon smacked into the packages, sending the left side of their craft vertical—straight up into the air.

It narrowly missed Frank, George, and Mrs. Kennedy, then instead of settling back down, it flipped on its back, sending both girls and all their supplies skipping across the frozen surface. Frank and George aimed their craft for the narrowest passage between where they were and where they wanted to be.

“Go back!” screamed Mrs. Kennedy. “You have to go back to see if they’re okay. I’ll go with you to Sweden, but for the love of everything that’s decent, go back!”

A Plain But Very Real Solution

Frank and George ignored her pleading and begging, and continued coasting across the Atlantic. They were already more than halfway there. There was no going back.

Jill and Anna were exhausted—physically, mentally, and emotionally. They knew now that by the time they got going again, they couldn't possibly catch the others. They'd have to prepare for an ultimate showdown in Sweden.

Time passed. Depression set in.

A Plain But Very Real Solution

“I can barely remember what mom looks like, you know?”

“Calm down, Jill. We’re nearly there. Now you know the plans, right? Plan A if we get to her undetected, plan B if we get caught?”

“I know, I know,” Jill said. “We’ve only gone over it a million times.”

As the girls coasted their way across the North Sea, and landed on the southwest corner of Sweden, it was obvious they’d need plan B. No fewer than twenty armed female soldiers were there to greet them.

Jill wrapped a white sweater around a ski pole and waved it back and forth.

“We surrender,” the two girls said together.

Same Old Mom

“You’ll find your mother is a very cooperative prisoner, girls,” the guard said, escorting them down to the lab. “She too is interested in solving the problems. Especially since she is aging herself.”

“You lie! Mom’s nowhere near 50—”

But it was true. As the girls entered the lab, the face that turned to greet them was not their mother’s, but that of a much older woman.

Same Old Mom

Their mother only had a moment to whisper to them. “Girls,” she said, “pretend you know everything.”

“Stop that!” the guard said. “No whispering. If you talk, you talk so all can hear. If not, we shoot one of the young ones.”

“We get it, meathead,” Mrs. Kennedy said.

The girls smiled at each other. Same old mom. Some things had changed about her, but not her strong will.

“You know the formulas we were working on before?” Mrs. Kennedy asked.

“Yes,” the two girls quickly answered.

“What about them?”

Same Old Mom

“Well, they needed some plantain, but there’s something else they need as well. And it’s a volatile liquid, so it has to be handled carefully. Can you get it for me, measure out the quantities I need, and bring it here? I’ve listed the chemical properties and formulae for you.”

“We’ll get it.” Anna snatched the paper from her mother and looked it over. It was a bunch of gobbledygook. Of course, the guards didn’t know that. It did mention a chemical their mother needed, but it was an ordinary drug used to treat psychotic patients—nothing volatile about it. As for the other formulas on the paper, it must be some kind of code. The letters e, c, I, l, p, and s were repeated in several places, all over the paper, along with other

Same Old Mom

numbers and letters—ECLIPSE! Their family password! Now if she could just eliminate those letters and figure out the message . . .

“Come on then,” the guard said. “We have a huge pharmaceutical storehouse here. You should be able to find what you need quickly.” Anna walked away with the guard, leaving the other two in the lab.

“And as for you, Jill, I need your help,” Mrs. Kennedy said, showing the guards the importance of keeping both girls there and healthy.

Same Old Mom

Anna quickly decoded the message. She read it again and again just to make sure it said what it said. Mom and whoever captured her were dying. She needed the drugs for the other woman.

“I’ve done it!” Mrs. Kennedy shouted, soon after Anna had brought her the medicine. “Take me to your boss. I have the cure.”

“Don’t trick us,” the guard said. “You take some first.”

Mrs. Kennedy had a few nicks and cuts on her hands still, so she put some of the crushed plantain mixture on a piece of gauze and wrapped it around her hand. The guards waited and watched.

Same Old Mom

Not long after, she removed the bandage, and the cuts were visibly better.

“But Mom, that’s just plant—” Jill began, but her mother’s icy glare cut her off in mid-sentence. “You’re brilliant, mom! I never would have thought of that!”

“Watch these two girls while I bring their mother to Big Mama.”

Mrs. Kennedy carried the bottle of medicine with her. She had not altered it at all. The show she put on for the guards was simply the work of the plantain healing a cut. She had no clue about what

Same Old Mom

was necessary to solve the problem. But somewhere deep inside her troubled mind, Big Mama did. The same Big Mama Mrs. Kennedy used to work with. The Big Mama who had now gone insane.

Mrs. Kennedy administered the drugs to Big Mama over the next three days, and her thinking was much clearer now. “Jennifer?” she asked. “Jennifer Kennedy?”

“Well, that’s a good sign,” she said. At least you recognize your old pal now.

“But, whatever are you doing here?”

Same Old Mom

“No time for explanations, Karen. I need your brain. Just how clearly are you thinking?”

The two women were inside the room for most of the day. Mrs. Kennedy said that she was monitoring the health of Big Mama, but the two of them were whispering away, trying to solve the aging problem together. Big Mama/ Karen was feeling the effects far worse than Mrs. Kennedy. The time was urgent, but at last they thought they had it. They'd found the cure for the aging. They'd needed the plantain after all, but something else they hadn't thought of before. It, combined with the plantain, should heal both women, once and for all.

Same Old Mom

“Get me to the laboratory,” Mrs. Kennedy said. “I need time to whip up a batch of our miracle cure. We need more, much more!”

Mrs. Kennedy truly needed the girls help now, to get this medicine ready soon. The three women worked hard together, and even used the extra hands of some of the guards when needed. Everyone pitched in, until finally, Mrs. Kennedy collapsed in a heap.

“She’s had a stroke. We need to give her some—NOW!” Anna screamed. Jill pried open Mrs. Kennedy’s lips, and Anna poured. At first,

Same Old Mom

they didn't notice any change. But then, her fingers fluttered, her eyes blinked, and she stared straight at them. The grey seemed to slide right out of her hair, and her gnarled hands and fingers returned to their usual smoothness.

The aging problem had been solved, but not in time for Big Mama. Mrs. Kennedy's one-time friend, stricken by both a psychosis and by the virus, had too much organ damage from the disease. She had died while the three women were preparing the miracle cure.

Two problems remained—reproduction, the future of the race without men, and finding a way to kill the virus, not just stop the aging. Her cure may work for awhile, Mrs. Kennedy knew. But there

Same Old Mom

would eventually be more resistant strains of the virus if she didn't clean the world of it now.

And what was worse—she didn't know what these guards would do to her, now that Karen had died.

“DID YOU KILL BIG MAMA?”

Those were the final words Mrs. Kennedy heard, before the butt of the rifle met with her temple, knocking her unconscious. . .

End of Part I

Look for Part II

Arriving Under

the Christmas Tree,

December 2004

