

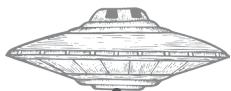
A Collection of Short Stories About
Ghosts, UFOs, Shipwrecks, and More



The Mysterious North Shore of Lake Superior

William Mayo & Kathryn Mayo

The
Mysterious
North Shore
of Lake
Superior



In some instances, names and locations have been changed at the request of sources.

Content Warning: This book contains several references to suicide and may not be appropriate for all audiences.

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The Mysterious North Shore of Lake Superior: A Collection of Short Stories About Ghosts, UFO's, Shipwrecks, and More

First Edition 2007

Second Edition 2022

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Published by Adventure Publications

310 Garfield Street South

Cambridge, Minnesota 55008

(800) 678-7006

www.adventurepublications.net

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Printed in the U.S.A.

ISBN 978-1-64755-321-0 (pbk.); eISBN 978-1-64755-322-7



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PUBLICATIONS
Adventure

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank everyone who contributed their personal stories to be included here and all the many friends and acquaintances from the past and present who strongly encouraged the writing of this book. But mostly I thank my children: Melanie, Jessica, Kelsey, Kate, Brenna, and Bill, who sustain my heart, give me courage, and never let me forget what's important.

—Bill

Reading together. We passed time this way on the couch, in the car, tent, and just about anywhere you can imagine. We thought about bigger ideas and talked about grander possibilities. Dad, my three brothers, my sister, and I traveled through time and space, led by Mom's fluid voice echoing the page. Then you and I filled all our spare minutes doing the same, and now you are bringing the circle round again. Thank you, Johnny, my boy, for showing me the book that helped set the wheels in motion for this one.

—Kathryn



Ghosts and Spirits

Ghostly Shipmates

*O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done;
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.*

—Walt Whitman, “O Captain! My Captain!”

Ore boats have long histories. They plow up and down Lake Superior, many of them painted in the same rusty hue as the cargo they carry. They seem unremarkable, especially in the port cities where they come and go with regularity. Many of them, though, could tell stories of storms and struggles worthy of books—if only they could speak.

The *American Victory* is one such boat. It's a fitting name for the old ore freighter, though she's been called by many others. In 1943, she entered military service as the *Neshanic*. Serving as an oiler, she participated in nearly every major battle in the South Pacific as Allied

forces fought their way toward Tokyo. She served her country with honor, was decommissioned in 1945, and received nine battle stars.

In 1947, she was purchased by the Gulf Oil company and renamed the *S.S. Gulfoil*. She worked hard without mishap for more than 10 years, but then disaster struck in August of 1958.

Sailing empty and outbound from Providence, Rhode Island, on her way to Port Arthur in Texas, the *Gulfoil* found herself near the mouth of Narragansett Bay, enveloped by a thick fog. Running blind, yet cruising nearly at full speed, the freighter was taken off guard by the sudden appearance of the *M.V.S.E. Graham*, fully loaded and carrying 600,000 gallons of fuel.

The crew aboard the *Gulfoil* spotted the *Graham* too late.

Unable to steer clear of the *Graham*, the *Gulfoil* rammed her bow into the tanker, gashing a huge hole in her side. Gasoline poured from the *Graham*'s wound, while sparks from the collision ignited the explosive cargo. Within seconds, both vessels were wrapped in fire.

Harbor tugs, naval firefighting units, and Coast Guard vessels worked all day, through the night, and into the following day to bring the fire under control. By the time the blaze was extinguished and the smoke cleared, the *Gulfoil* had lost 17 souls out of a compliment of 38. The *Graham* didn't lose a man, her crew having jumped ship moments after the impact.

The remains of the *Gulfoil*'s captain, Eden Montrivell, were discovered on the ship's bridge—indicating that he never left his post. Eight more bodies were recovered in the crew's quarters; another eight

were found floating in the sea. The bodies were all removed, though some of the *Gulfoil's* crew are said to still inhabit her today.

After Marine Board investigators found both ships at fault—the *Graham* for not posting a proper lookout and the *Gulfoil* for faulty navigation and excessive speed—the *Gulfoil* was moved to the Maryland Shipbuilding and Dry Dock company in Baltimore, Maryland, where she remained until 1960. It was then that the nearly gutted hull was picked up by the Pioneer Steamship Company, rebuilt as a Great Lakes bulk carrier, and renamed the *Pioneer Challenger*.

A run-in with a submerged rock in Lake Erie cut her tenure with Pioneer Steamship Company short, but her next boss was Oglebay Norton Company, who named her the *Middletown*. It was during her 44 years of hauling taconite pellets, from the iron ports of the north to the steel mills on the lower lakes, that stories of the paranormal began to surface.

I had the chance to interview a former *Middletown* crewman named Steve, who experienced several ghostly encounters firsthand. Any seaman will tell you that ship doors are tightly closed. Latches are checked and double-checked, especially in the potentially deadly waters of Lake Superior. So when doors began to mysteriously swing open, Steve knew that something was amiss. Unseen hands seemed to be at work. Perhaps the old crew and the new crew were crossing paths.

Over his remaining days and months aboard the *Middletown*, Steve's encounters with the supernatural seemed to escalate. Strange, unnatural occurrences grew in frequency until one night he was awakened from a deep sleep. He was used to awakening in the middle of

the night to a pitch-black cabin, but on this night he was able to make out the figure of a man looming over his bunk. The frightful sight snapped him to alertness, which was when he realized the figure was oddly luminescent. Unable to comprehend what he was seeing, Steve stared for a long moment at the glowing phantom and slowly began to grasp that this was no living man. In that moment, the ghost melted away.

To this day, word around the ports of Lake Superior is that this boat carries more crew than is accounted for on the payroll. Yet despite these reports, the boat was sold in 2006 for nearly \$120 million. She remains one of the fastest ore boats on the Great Lakes, and as she nears the end of a long career, she finally has a name reflecting her dignity: *American Victory*. Should you happen to see her on a trip across Lake Superior, look for the proud symbol of her earliest career—the yellow World War II ribbons on her bridge wings. Wish her safe passage and remember those who lost their lives aboard her, those who visit her still in the night's shadows, loathe to relinquish their orders for a ship “grim and daring.”

Space Between: Rita's Story

*Somewhere over the rainbow bluebirds fly.
Birds fly over the rainbow; why then, oh why can't I?*

—E.Y. Harburg, “Over The Rainbow”

Whatever you believe about the nature of miracles, we ask that you consider this story: a story that is true, a story of home and of wishes granted—a story of sleep and dreams, of love and longing. Rita's story.

We stopped by Roy's farm one morning. Roy was a longtime neighbor of Bill. We had heard the news of his wife's death and wanted to check in on him. The first thing Roy said to me was, “Sorry things are in such a state. I've had a hard time since my wife passed away.” Consumed with his grief, he put it out there in the open. Though we tend to painfully avoid the topic, it is a paradox that won't ever go away for any of us. It

is so incomprehensible, how do you talk about it—yet so vast, how do you not talk about it?

We chatted about the wildlife he had seen lately from the kitchen window, his horses, and his bad knee. Through it all, he reminded us that his wife was missing and remembered things she'd said or done—especially her fondness of animals. Sad and struggling to make conversation, he stared at the stacks of paper on the table. Then he looked at us sharply and said, "I have something to show you," and abruptly left the room.

He returned with framed pictures. One look at the astonishing photographs left us no doubt that something amazing had happened, and the mystery of it took us utterly off guard. The pictures told a story about the space between worlds—where anything is possible.

We were eager to hear more about these strange photos, and Roy wanted to talk about Rita, filling the void of her absence with memories. Somehow by telling them, he created a measure of comfort for himself. More than that, in his struggle to understand the enormous puzzle of what happens to us after life, he clearly yearned to give this remarkable woman just homage. How they had lived and cared for each other was an integral part of what he had to convey; he almost felt obligated to share with us.

Roy and Rita met when they were growing up in Deerwood, Minnesota. They eventually settled in Two Harbors with a farm of their own. It was 1962; despite the local opinion that they paid way too much for the place, they knew that they had found somewhere to make home. Priceless. They worked hard to make the life they wanted.

In the space between day and night, when the sun had set and the day sounds were yielding to silence, they found time on summer evenings to reconnect with each other and enjoy what simple pleasures they were both so fond of in nature.

Before darkness fell or the night sounds arrived, they would set aside their many tasks of barn and house and sit on the porch to listen to the quiet. Knowing that this was the best part of the day, they would hold hands and be still together.

By all accounts, Rita was one of the warmest, most spiritual people you could ever hope to meet. This made the news of her cancer even more difficult for her loved ones. By the summer of 2005, it was apparent to everyone that Rita was dying. She and Roy had been through difficult times, but the last few years had found them growing even closer. In Roy's own words, "We never wanted to be away from each other, like teenagers." True to form, Rita was more concerned about her husband being on his own than with her own illness.

Rita became weaker and eventually spent all of her time on the living room couch. Family and friends passed through to visit. With each new day her slumber grew deeper and lasted longer. Finally, by August 27, Rita did not awaken, and she spent the rest of her time on this earth wrapped in sleep.

At the same time, in her childhood home of Deerwood, strange events were unfolding. Back at the farm where Rita had grown up, the current owner, Laurie, left to pick up her grandson. When she arrived at her daughter's house a quarter mile away, she noticed a female marsh hawk perched on the roof. From inside

the house, she watched as it came near a large window and appeared to be keenly observing her grandson playing on the other side of the glass. Curious, Laurie approached the bird, expecting it to fly away as the door opened, but it did not.

Strangely overcome with a desire to connect with the hawk, Laurie drew nearer. As if in a dream and feeling a little enchanted, she found herself offering her arm to it, using only her thin sweatshirt as protection from its sharp claws. She could scarcely believe what was happening when the hawk accepted the perch. It gently rested there, its hooked beak just inches from her face. The hawk gazed at her, looking intently into her eyes with an air of calm regard.

Interested, but not sure what to make of this wild creature's lack of fear, she collected her grandson and left for home.

Laurie couldn't imagine her day getting any more bizarre, but when she pulled into the driveway of her farm, a marsh hawk was waiting for her.

Perched on the peak of her barn, it was the identical size and bore the same markings as the one just seen at her daughter's. It had to be the same one. Intrigued, Laurie spoke to the bird and it flew to a branch near her, then to the ground at her feet. She could see that it was not injured and appeared to be quite healthy, evidenced by the bright gleam in its eyes. Laurie felt an odd sense that the bird not only lacked apprehension about being near her, but that there was some familiarity in the way it looked at her.

For the next hour and a half, Laurie and the bird continued their interactions. Wherever she went, the bird followed.

Incredibly, at one point it even walked onto her grandson's lap as he sat on the ground. Laurie grabbed her camera and snapped several photographs of the hawk.

Feeling overwhelmed and mystified, Laurie went into the house to call her sister. She sensed strongly that there was some task at hand that she was being called to do; the hawk was trying to tell her something.

As coincidence would have it (or perhaps it wasn't coincidence at all), Laurie's sister Amy lived in Two Harbors, just down the road from Roy and Rita. As Laurie blurted out her story, Amy listened in stunned silence.

"What does it mean?" asked Laurie. Amy responded, "It's Rita."

In a state of awe and clarity, Laurie went back out to the hawk. As they gazed directly at each other, Laurie asked, "Are you Rita?" As the words fell from her lips, the hawk snapped out of its calm demeanor. Its wildness returned. It crouched down and then took flight, retreating to the peak of the house, lighting for a moment directly above the window of Rita's childhood bedroom. Then it wheeled into the evening. One last photograph caught the bird moving past Rita's bedroom in the fading light, its wings a blur of motion.

The next day, Rita's long and courageous battle with cancer ended. Yet in her passing—as in her life—she found a way to touch people's lives. This strange and mystical visitation by the female marsh hawk to Rita's childhood home, a place she surely held in a treasured part of her heart, came on a day she lay nearing death. Quite possibly, she was slipping back into old memories from her life, drifting back and forth between worlds.

Those who've heard the story have found it profoundly moving, and somehow very fitting for a woman who loved God's creatures as Rita did. She loved little children and little birds so much, she would make Roy leave patches of their much-needed hayfield undisturbed for mother birds with chicks. It is fitting that she may have found a way to fly back to her old home for a time, her spirit lifted by the wings of a powerful hawk, made gentle by Rita's kindly presence. Perhaps in recognition for her kindnesses, she was granted a wish, a moment to fly home once more. Wouldn't most of us do the same, given the chance? Maybe such things are sometimes allowed, in acknowledgment of a tender heart and sweet spirit. We like to think so.

The Duty of Ghosts

*If you could read my mind, love,
What a tale my thoughts could tell.
Just like an old time movie,
About a ghost from a wishing well.
In a castle dark or a fortress strong,
With chains upon my feet,
You know that ghost is me.*

—Gordon Lightfoot, “If You Could Read My Mind”

Split Rock Lighthouse State Park is perhaps the most frequently visited and most beloved historical site on the North Shore of Lake Superior. Yet its lighthouse operators (commonly known as keepers) and their assistants remain the unsung heroes of the sea. These men needed an unceasing dedication to duty and the grit to keep the light burning—always, no matter the conditions or situation. Like a ship’s captain who bears ultimate responsibility for the safety of his vessel and crew, the keeper also shares this burden, as all captains look to him for light and guidance.

The lighthouse and its accompanying fog signal building began operating in 1910. They were built in response to a brutal November gale in 1905 that is reported to have damaged 29 vessels—7 of which were wrecked within 12 miles of the Split Rock River.

For the next 59 years, Split Rock's keepers warned nearby ships of the treacherous shoreline and impending doom. First powered by an incandescent kerosene lamp, and later by a 1,000-watt electric bulb, the light was said to have a range of 22 miles. The eerie fog signal could penetrate 5 miles of gloom.

Sadly, calamity struck within the lighthouse's first year of operation. Two of the head keeper's young assistants, whose duties included rowing to Beaver Bay to pick up mail and supplies, tragically drowned when their boat capsized. Apparently, despite the keeper's warnings, the duo had attached a makeshift sail to their boat. Because the small craft lacked a keel and was not designed for sailing, this risky rigging made it dangerously unstable.

When the young men failed to reach Beaver Bay, several locals ventured onto the big lake and found the forlorn little supply boat floating upside down—a sail secured to one of its seats.

The assistants' bodies were never recovered, and their story seemed to be over almost before it began. But in a place such as the North Shore, where the paranormal seems a common thread in the very fabric of life, this was not the case.

Though Split Rock was decommissioned in 1969, it lives on today. Each year, tens of thousands of people visit the historic site and adjoining state park. Included in this throng are groups of wide-eyed schoolchildren,

who arrive by the busloads for special tours. Their visits commonly consist of walking the grounds, exploring the adjacent state park, taking an interpretive tour leading down to the lakeshore, and watching the much-anticipated lighting of the lamp—a striking sight to behold. It was an airtight routine for a tour guide whom we’ll call “Jon.” At least, it was until the summer of 1990.

Through the gathering darkness of evening, Jon was leading a gaggle of excited children down to the water’s edge. As he glanced behind him, he noticed in the distance a small light bobbing its way up the path, back toward the area from which Jon and his group had come. He had not met anyone on his way down, and he was not expecting any other staff members. Needless to say, Jon was puzzled.

Moments later, Jon heard something that chilled him to the core. Several children who had joined his group from an earlier tour were discussing a strange encounter they had experienced. The youngsters reported to Jon that they had seen a light coming across the lake, directly toward the beach. As curious children might, they had gone to investigate.

It wasn’t long before they found what they were looking for. The light was coming from a small boat that had docked. Two strangely clad men disembarked—one holding an antiquated lantern, the other a bag. It appeared that some sort of re-enactment was taking place, since both men were wearing old-fashioned work clothes. The children watched silently as the men quietly disappeared up the path, toward the top of the hill.

Jon was at a loss. He knew of no special, staged events that night. And after checking with other

employees, he could find no explanation for what the children had seen.

It has been said that children can often see the mystical when adults cannot, for they are not yet blinded by dogma and cynicism. Did the young light tenders finally make it back to their post that night? It has been written that every lighthouse the world over has at least one ghost. Perhaps by its solitary nature, the work can only be understood by those who have done it. And these few must return from time to time, to revisit the world where they dreamed their dreams, communed with eternity, and learned to become—over their long years of service—navigators of time.

Split Rock Keepers

*. . . Many a man has served me,
Tending the Light with care,
Many a vanished footstep
Passed by my winding stair.
Years pass and men pass with them,
Never my light grows dim,
One hands the torch to another,
Others will follow him.
So are the centuries moving,
Still serving men am I,
Constant through gales of winter
Calm beneath summer's sky.
Lights are the hope of seamen,
Warning of rock and shoal,
We are the danger-stations,
We are the sea-patrol!*

—Hattie Vose Hall, “The Light”

Are ghosts real? If so, why do they exist? Is a ghost the shadow of a person who has passed from this earth? Is he somehow drawn back to the place that held him in life?

Perhaps a ghost is a dream-walking spirit, returning once more to a world he could never forget. No living

person can say for certain, which in part is why ghosts fascinate us so.

In August of 1997, Matt Miller and a younger co-worker, Zack, were wrapping up a typical day at Split Rock Lighthouse outside Two Harbors. They closed and locked up the place, then they started toward their vehicles. As they walked away from the grounds, a movement at the top of the lighthouse suddenly caught Zack's eye. He turned to Matt and asked, "Did you see that?"

Matt glanced back, and he, too, saw a dark figure moving beyond the lighthouse's glass windows. Almost certain that the lighthouse had been empty when they left it, the two men assumed they had mistakenly left its door unlocked.

They returned to the lighthouse, but the door was securely locked. Obviously, Matt and Zack had inadvertently locked someone inside. They gave the place a thorough inspection, but there was no one to be found.

In his 14 years at the Split Rock Lighthouse Historical Site, Matt heard several stories about guests encountering ghosts. In most cases, the guests mistook the spirits for employees dressed in time-period costumes. One of Matt's favorite tales involved a careless visitor who had lost his wallet.

It was the end of a hot, July day when the man returned to the lighthouse. He was disappointed to find its door closed and locked. Hoping that an employee or two might still be inside, the man knocked loudly on the door. When there was no answer, the desperate man persisted—this time knocking and shouting for someone to open up.

“Hello, is anyone in there?” yelled the man. “I think I left my wallet inside!”

He was about to give up when suddenly the door was flung open. A man mature in years, dressed in an antique keeper’s uniform, unceremoniously pitched the wallet at the tourist and slammed the door shut. Of course, there are no such employees at the lighthouse.

Matt has never been inclined to believe in the paranormal. After all, lighthouses naturally inspire thoughts of the romantic past, and people can be prone to flights of fancy. Still, he never did figure out what he and Zack saw on that August night. If it were a ghost, it’s the first and only time he ever saw one—which is why it’s an experience he will never forget.



The Tall Man

There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

—William Shakespeare, Hamlet

A legend has arisen out of Oneota Cemetery in Duluth about a tall, shadowy figure and a specter dog that have been said to wander on occasion through the graveyard. The authors of this book learned of the legend thanks to a local man who told us his personal experience with the ghost, which has come to be called the Tall Man.

According to his best recollection, the local was 16 years old when he sighted the Tall Man during the fall of 1992. He and some daring friends had ventured into the old cemetery, which features gravestones dating as far back as the middle of the nineteenth century. The group of adolescents wanted to test their nerves and try to scare one another. In accordance with the storyteller's wishes, only his first name is mentioned.

As Jason remembers, once inside Oneota Cemetery, the teenagers found themselves widely dispersed. Jason walked from gravestone to gravestone, reading the names and dates by the bright moonlight. It was no doubt a strange and lonely place to be.

No one in his group was familiar with the legend of the Tall Man. So when Jason heard one of his friends softly call, "Here comes someone," he assumed it was the cemetery caretaker out to run them off.

Jason hid, crouched behind a particularly large marker, and watched. The 16-year-old saw a lean, angular figure approach, led by a dog of medium height with a heavy build. The man and his dog strolled along an interior roadway designed to allow easy access into the cemetery.

As the duo drew closer to his hiding place, Jason heard what sounded like dog tags jingling. He and the others hunkered down, so they wouldn't be seen by what they believed was some responsible party. They were quite surprised when the lanky, dark figure and his dog strolled briskly past them and onward down the cemetery road. The man looked neither left nor right but marched smartly by at a steady pace, the dog mirroring its master precisely.

Jason imagined nothing supernatural until the two reached the point in the road where it made a sharp, 90-degree turn. Straight ahead was a wall of heavy brush and trees, followed by a sheer drop-off of nearly 100 feet. The turn, on the other hand, led back into the graveyard. To Jason's horror, the man and his dog walked straight into the brush. Crunching noises and footfalls were briefly heard, then there was only silence.

The encounter sent the teenagers running. Later, when the band of young friends reassembled and discussed what they had seen, they all agreed it was no living man or dog—and if they possibly might have been, they no longer were. Jason’s earlier assessment had been that the caretaker was coming to send them away. It seems that they were right on both counts; maybe it was a former caretaker. Perhaps the man and dog were spectral beings, who once had walked the grounds as part of a job, and now were obliged to go on doing so beyond the grave.

The spirit of the Tall Man may wander the cemetery acting as a guardian with his trusty dog over the resting place of the deceased, watching for those who would intrude with a less-than-respectful attitude.

Further evidence of this comes from another local named Ethan. His story, also from 1992, tells of a rowdy group of young people from Denfeld High School who were “hanging out” next to the cemetery with their car radio turned up loud. On the road that runs next to the cemetery, they saw the tall figure of a man approaching with a dog. Suddenly the dog broke away toward them at a run, snarling and showing its fangs. Without uttering a word, the man halted and raised his arm in a sweeping arc. Immediately, the summoned dog retreated, and both of them turned and walked off the cliff’s edge—just as Jason’s group had witnessed. The boisterous crowd quickly turned somber at the eerie sight.

In Ethan’s own words: “They walked directly down the impossibly steep embankment that was nothing but a cliff falling straight down 100 feet into a creek bed.”

Needless to say, the high schoolers took their party elsewhere in a hurry.

Though history does not provide us with a record of who this lonely man and his dog may have been, it seems likely that the ghost of the Tall Man and his loyal companion were bound together in life long ago, and they continue on together as caretakers even after death. As they carry out their grim mission, they offer a lesson in humility and respect for the strange and somber nature of cemeteries—and those who would guard them—ensuring that all entombed there do indeed rest in peace.

Strange Creatures



About the Authors



Bill Mayo is a former Duluth resident and has resided in Two Harbors, Minnesota, for more than 25 years. Long a part of the poetry scene of the North Shore and a former Artist-in-Residence for Isle Royale National Park, he has published work in *National Geographic Traveler*,

Poets Who Haven't Moved to St. Paul, and *Zenith City Arts*. He also holds an AAS Degree in Human Services and is an enrolled member of the Leech Lake Pillager Band. Whether in a canoe, diving, or walking the beach, the eternal mystery of the lake is always awe-inspiring for him.



Minnesota native and longtime visitor to the North Shore, Kathryn Mayo now resides within view of Lake Superior. Frequent trips “Up North” finally gave over to permanent residence, and Kathryn has drawn on her previous perspective as a visitor in

the compilation of these narratives. With an MA in counseling psychology, she has spent her career as a licensed therapist and addictions counselor.

Embrace Your Fears with Tales of Ghosts, Monsters, and Shipwrecks!

A haunting figure roams a Duluth cemetery. A giant serpent lurks beneath the surface of Lake Superior. A fighter jet vanishes while investigating an unidentified flying object. Northeastern Minnesota seems to be a magnet for paranormal activity, and this collection of stories presents the creepiest, most surprising of them all.

Horror fans and history buffs will delight in 21 chilling tales about haunted happenings, as well as harrowing reports of shipwrecks and animal attacks. They're based on reportedly true accounts, proving that Lake Superior is the setting for some of the most compelling ghostly tales ever told. The short stories are ideal for quick reading, and they're sure to captivate anyone who enjoys a good scare. Share them with friends around a campfire, or try them alone—if you dare!



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PUBLICATIONS
Adventure
an imprint of AdventureKEEN

REGIONAL / HORROR / MINNESOTA
ISBN 978-1-64755-321-0



9 781647 553210