



Kyle McKinley's cabin and studio were a mile farther up river from Spruce Lodge and sat on a low bluff above a gentle bend and on the opposite shore. He built the cabin himself shortly after leaving the force. It was slog going at first but therapeutic the whole way through.

The cabin was snug, tight, with a full-length front-screened sun porch, two bedrooms, and an open kitchen and living area. The exterior was vertical stained cedar board, and the interior walls and

doors were varnished knotty pine. The appliances and kitchen cupboards were white, and there was an island with two bar stools where McKinley ate and read the paper. The sun porch had a full dining table that could seat six. That was used when he entertained guests, which was relatively infrequent.

Since he left the place unattended for the winter months, the windows were coated with shatter-proof glazing, and when he closed it up, he installed custom-built bars. When he got back in the spring, the first thing he did was remove the bars. They reminded him of jails and bad times now long gone but not fully buried. Steel plates were embedded in the door jambs. It wasn't Fort Knox, but the former cop had taken due diligence to protect his property and himself. A trusted neighbour checked the place regularly whenever Kyle was away for any length of time. Perched up on the bluff, McKinley had an unobstructed view of the river in both directions.

The studio was smaller than the cabin and was built a few years later. His work was in demand and he needed the dedicated space. It sat behind the cabin, a

few steps from the short laneway into the property. It offered that good north light that McKinley enhanced with artificial lighting as required. He used a stand-up easel and floor area wong. That was a different kind of river all together. A river with problems far greater.

McKinley loved the longer summer days, and he loved looking up at his little cabin from the river. It always made him feel good. He climbed the plank steps from the beach to the front lawn. Probably should mow this tomorrow, he thought.

In the kitchen he took a rib-eye from the fridge, washed off a baking potato, went out to the back deck, and fired up the grill. He opened a bottle of Decoy Merlot and let it breathe while he washed up. Kyle McKinley, former cop and internationally renowned artist, was at peace with the world, but that was all about to change. His smartphone buzzed. It was Inspector John Ramsay in Fredericton. Marcel Latour had escaped from prison.

*Below: One of Graham MacDermott's early paintings, depicting the woods around Plaster Rock that he grew to know so well.*

