Chapter 2
The Booby Trap

In the summer of 1803, a small sailing vessel left the town of Onslow, on the Bay of Fundy. Loaded with digging equipment, it was meant to be embarking on a voyage of discovery. Moving gracefully before the wind, it made the roundabout voyage down the shores of Fundy, past Yarmouth and the southernmost tip of Nova Scotia where it juts into the Atlantic. Turning northeast it followed the coast until it reached the island-strewn waters of Mahone Bay, a 350-kilometre voyage in all.

The boat was met at Oak Island by the three discoverers of the Money Pit and their families. For years they had been waiting anxiously for this moment, spending the last winter in agonizing anticipation of the wealth that would be theirs.

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No more would the women need to scrub their own floors or mend old dresses by candlelight. No more would the men have to patch their leaky old boats. They could fill their wardrobes with all the best clothes from England and the United States, and hold their heads high amongst the city folk when they sailed into Halifax in their fine new sloops.

It had been a hard seven years since the summer of 1795. With the three men living on or near the island, they were able to keep an eye on their treasure while they searched for a financial backer for another attempt on the Pit. The community of Chester was not wealthy enough to provide the means to hire the men and buy the equipment that would be required to dig further. It is also possible the three wanted to limit local involvement, in order to better protect their treasure.

In 1802, they found the man they were looking for. According to one version of the story, John Smith's wife became pregnant. Believing Oak Island to be cursed, she refused to have her baby on the family farm. They travelled to Truro, where the child was delivered by Dr. Simeon Lynd. John revealed the secret of the Pit to the doctor, telling him about the strange structure of the shaft and the history of the island. Intrigued, Lynd returned to Chester with the Smiths to inspect the island. He went away convinced that there was great wealth to be found in the soil of Oak Island. He formed the Onslow Company and appointed Colonel Robert Archibald, a surveyor and justice of the peace, as director of operations.

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When the men of the Onslow Company arrived at the Pit, they discovered that it had collapsed in on itself. However, when they cleared the debris and brush from the area, they found the stakes McGinnis and his friends had driven into the ground years before, which indicated that no one else had dug into the hole.

As the Onslow Company workers probed ever deeper into the Pit, the mystery only deepened. As McGinnis, Vaughan, and Smith had done years ago, the men set to work with shovels. Hearts leapt with excitement at the sound of metal hitting wood. They shovelled at a frantic pace, only to uncover another platform of oak logs. This obstacle cleared, digging commenced again. Three metres farther down, a layer of charcoal was encountered and removed. Another three metres into the shaft was a layer of putty.

There was still no sign of treasure, but the consistency of the layers gave hope to the partners. Whoever had made the Money Pit had gone to great lengths to hide their treasure, indicating that it was valuable indeed. The Pit was already 27 metres deep.

Finally, the shovel of one of the men hit a stone. More dirt was cleared away in order to remove this newest obstacle, but it soon became apparent that this was no ordinary stone. The gray rock, not a type found around Mahone Bay, was 35 centimetres by 60 centimetres, and marked on one side with unusual characters. The inscription on the stone was not in any language or using any alphabet that the men on the

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island could decipher. Was it a code? Some sort of ancient artifact? A key of some sort to the mystery?

The stone became the first proof that the Money Pit held something more mysterious than Kidd's doubloons. Some among the partners may already have been realizing that no pirate would have had the means or the discipline to dig so deep to hide a treasure for which they planned to return.

The men didn't concern themselves too much with the rock at first. They set about digging again — they were close now, they knew it. But as they dug, something strange started to happen. Water began seeping into the Pit. Soon it was entering the Pit at a rate that forced them to remove two buckets of water for every one of soil. Nonetheless, they continued, and as night fell they began to pack up. They probed the bottom of the Pit with rods, poking into the mucky earth. Through the dirt, the rods hit a hard surface of some sort that covered the entire diameter of the shaft at a depth of about 30 metres. They retired for the night, certain that the next day they would be millionaires. What a shock it must have been the next day when they returned to the Money Pit to claim their reward. The shaft was filled with seawater from a depth of 11 metres, roughly the level of Mahone Bay.

Somehow, whoever had constructed the Money Pit had set a trap — dig to a certain depth, and flood tunnels connected to the bay would fill the tunnel with water. Perhaps in removing the stone the men of the Onslow Company had

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somehow triggered the mechanism that would protect the secret of the Pit.

At this point, unaware of the flood tunnels, the men believed the flooding to be a result of natural seepage, and set about removing the water. The workers attacked the Pit with buckets, bailing out the seawater as quickly as they could. It was to no avail. The level of the water remained the same, fluctuating only with the tides around the island.

This was a problem beyond the immediate resources of the Onslow Company. They were forced to halt operations for the next few months, and go back to work on their farms for the summer.

In the fall, the company contracted the services of a Mr. Mosher from Hants County, who they paid £80 to set up a pump to remove the water. That autumn the pump was sent to the bottom of the shaft, but burst without lowering the water level at all.

Colonel Archibald decided to give up for the winter, and spent the cold months of early 1804 plotting his next attempt on the Pit. Perhaps his military background gave him the idea of a flanking assault. Rather than continue wasting money and time trying to drain the water, Archibald decided to go around it.

Picking a spot several metres away from the Money Pit, Archibald directed his workers to start digging anew. They sunk a new shaft, almost 35 metres deep, parallel to the original. They then began to dig a connecting tunnel. With luck, they would be able to enter the Money Pit below the level of

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