

The Day We Stole the Stanley Cup

by Valerie J. Wood



It started as a bit of a lark, really. The six of us were sitting in Lisa's living room, watching the huge surround-sound television and drinking Molson Ice draft (we actively support our sport's sponsors), while nibbling on potato chips, party mix, thin pretzels and some sort of Cajun-spiced health food trail mix that Barbara had brought, watching Game Seven of the Stanley Cup finals. Helen, Heather and I were for Vancouver, and Lisa, Julie and Barbara were pulling for the Rangers.

What a tremendous game that was! I guess we carried on as much, if not more, as a group of male hockey fans would; whooping and hollering when Linden scored and begging for that last goal to tie the game to send it into overtime. But, alas, it didn't happen.

The Rangers won, and Messier hoisted the heavy gleaming silver Stanley Cup over his head and skated around the ice in the ensuing bedlam. Helen and I were fighting back tears at losing, while Lisa was gloating. She grabbed a huge silver Revere bowl from the center of the large marble-topped coffee table in front of the sofa and, grinning widely, mimicked Messier, cavorting around the room, then handing the "Cup" over to Barbara.

Maybe I should explain our great abiding interest. We play ice hockey for a team in a womens league here in New York, about an hour or so's drive from the city. Lisa's our team captain and center, Barbara's our goalie (which might possibly explain the unusual health food mix, since goalies are certainly noted for being odd and quirky creatures), and Julie and I play defense. Helen and Heather are the forwards. Our own playoffs had just gotten underway a few weeks before, in best-of-three series, and our team, the Delaney Diamonds, had made it to the final round. Our first game of the finals was scheduled for tomorrow night.

Anyway, the sight of Messier passing the Cup over to Tikkanen, and it making the rounds amongst the Rangers' players in the background on that 60-inch television, while Lisa waved the Revere bowl in the air, was truly inspiring. Then one of the broadcasters mentioned that the Cup would actually be in the possession of the players and they would have a schedule wherein they could literally take it home for a day or two. At the same moment, I locked eyes with Helen. Intuitively, I knew we had the same idea.

"What if we borrowed the Cup to present to the winners in our final game?" I asked, almost casually.

Silence descended on the room. Only Gary Thorne's voice could be heard in the background, sonorously extolling the Rangers' victory.

"I know where a few of the players live," Helen ventured. "Maybe we could figure out who had it and sort of borrow it."

"Sort of? Sort of? What do you mean, 'sort of'?" Barbara shrilled excitedly.

"Well, just for our finals," I said, defensively, warming to the idea. "It's not as though we're going to keep it or anything."

"We could never pull it off," Lisa mused.

I knew then we had definitely piqued her interest. In her mind, she was seeing our victory over the Gold Nuggets and the wild bedlam which would ensue when she raised the Cup -- *the Cup* -- over her head in celebratory jubilation.

"It weighs thirty-two pounds!" practical Heather noted.

“I can lift that much!” Lisa shot back, and added darkly in her Brooklynese accent, “Just don’t drop it when I give it to youse, or we’ll be in big trouble!”

I didn’t want to be the one to say, if we pull this off, we might still wind up in big trouble. But, it seemed like such a wildly wonderful idea.

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In the end, it was easier than we had anticipated. Patience was the main requirement. First, though, we had to play game one of our finals.

A pretty good crowd showed up for the game. All of us have brothers that played hockey and our families, family friends and boyfriends showed up for support. Helen’s brother, Eric, a forward in the Islanders minor league system even made it out to the rink to add support. She had milked him for some additional addresses.

The Nuggets were a pretty good skating group of players. They had gotten to the finals by way of finesse and scoring more so than by great goal-tending, since their goalie tended to be streaky. We had our hands full the entire game with their offensive attack, but Lisa was really ready to play and even scored a hat trick. We finally beat them, five to four.

After the game, we talked quietly in the locker room, as we dressed to go home.

“We’re going to have to try and get it tomorrow since, if we win, the series will be over on Friday,” Helen whispered to me. I nodded, and motioned for them to gather around quickly.

“Okay, here’s what we’ll do,” I said, “We need to synchronize our cell phones. Helen is going to give each of us an address for the players that live in the nearby areas. We each stakeout one player’s house. If you see the Cup, or hear anything about it, call and we’ll meet right away.”

Since four of us were still in college, it would simply be a matter of cutting the next days’ classes. For Barbara, who worked as an accountant at a printing corporation and Lisa, who worked at a jewelry repair shop down on Main Street, it was a different situation. But they both felt sure they would have no problem swapping work days with their co-workers.

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The stakeouts began in earnest early the next morning. Surely at least one of the six players would have the Cup in their possession in the next day or two!

The long morning dragged on. It was a hot and humid June day, and I sat in my blue Camaro, parked out along the sidewalk, with the windows down. I kept watch on my appointed charge, wondering how the others were making out. We had figured that the only chance to snatch it would be if we saw it in a car in the driveway or something. After all, we didn’t plan on committing a crime like breaking and entering in order to borrow it.

I watched as the player left for awhile, returned, stayed in the house a few hours and then departed again. No sign of the Cup.

I took advantage of his absence to drive down the street to a small restaurant, where I had a quick late lunch. I called Lisa to check in. No sign of anything on her charge either.

Methodically I checked in with each of my cohorts. It was now after two p.m., and no one had seen a sign of the fabled and highly coveted trophy.

We agreed to stick it out until dinner time, after which we would meet back at Lisa’s apartment to compare notes.

I returned to my stakeout, settling in the car in front of his house with a copy of *USA Today* that I had bought at the restaurant.

The worst case scenario, aside from not being able to borrow the Cup, would appear to be that we would have to try again tomorrow. With the second game set for tomorrow night, we'd have to set a limit as to how long we could each manage to keep watch before reporting to the rink for the game.

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None of us had any luck that day. Gathered together at Lisa's, we discussed whether to continue or not. Her heart was set on it, though, I could see, and none of us wanted to disappoint her. We agreed to try again the next day.

Not meeting with any more success on the second day, we finally called off the surveillance and met at the skating rink two hours before game time, to prepare.

Maybe because of the distraction we didn't play as well as we should have. The Nuggets got a two to nothing lead early, and we couldn't score off of their goalie, Emmaline, to save our souls.

The Nuggets center, Karen O'Keefe, got cocky after beating me on a one-on-one, and I lost my temper, checking her into the boards. She came up scratching and shrieking and the referees got in between us before we could get a good fracas going. They stunned us, beating us finally by four to nothing.

On the way back to the ladies' locker room, I muttered to no one in particular, "Don't count your Cup before it's snatched."

Our coach, Terry, looked at me quizzically.

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On Saturday afternoon, I sat, bored, watching the defenseman's house once again. I was just about to call off the whole escapade when a cherry red SUV pulled into the driveway, halting behind the Escalade already parked there. The driver walked up to the front door and knocked. The door opened and my defenseman greeted him with a huge smile on his face. Sounds of chatter and laughter carried to me as they approached the van. The driver slid open the side door. He pulled forward a large square case and opened it for the player's inspection.

There it was.

Lovingly protected in a black velvet-lined case, it gleamed in the afternoon sun. The two men looked at the Cup in reverent silence. Finally, the driver snapped the case closed as the defenseman opened the back door to the Escalade.

The driver gently placed the case on the seat of the vehicle and closed the door. After a moment's hushed conversation, the two men unexpectedly disappeared into the house.

Now was my chance! As soon as the door to the house shut, I quickly opened my passenger door and slid out and onto the sidewalk. My heart pounded wildly as I dashed to the Escalade and hoped against hope that it was not locked. The door opened!. I tugged the bulky case out onto the driveway. As quietly as possible, I closed the door and, grabbing the thick handles on the case, hauled it over to my car and hoisted it up and onto the passenger seat. I raced to the driver's side, jumped in and fired the engine.

I was down the street and away in a matter of moments; the heist had only taken a few minutes.

I drove nonstop all the way back to Lisa's apartment, trying to calm my pounding heart and watching to make sure no one was following me. Once I heard a siren and my heart almost stopped, but it just proved to be an

ambulance on the way to an accident.

I pulled into the garage under Lisa's apartment building and parked in her vacant spot. Trying to be casual, I opened the car trunk and transferred the heavy black case back there.

With a sigh of relief, I headed to Lisa's apartment.

She had given me a key awhile back, in case of emergency, so I let myself in then called her on the cell. She picked up right away.

"Lisa?"

"Yeah, it's me. What's up?"

"I got it."

"You got it? *You got it?!!*"

I pulled the phone away from my ear before her shrieks shattered my ear drum.

"Lisa? Lisa, calm down! I'm going to call the other girls and we'll meet back here, okay?"

"I'll be right there!"

She slammed the phone down and I started dialing the others.

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Within an hour, all had returned.

I had gone back to the garage, looking surreptitiously about to make sure no one was watching, and opened the trunk of the car. I hefted the case out and with great care and a feeling of something almost reverential took it up to Lisa's apartment. My heart began pounding once again as the realization of what I had actually done set in.

I placed the trophy's case on the sofa and, fingers trembling, opened it.

The sterling silver glimmered richly against the velvet backdrop with the luster of a well-polished and treasured antique relic. Finally breaking my gaze away from it, I turned and removed the Revere bowl from the coffee table, looking for somewhere else to put it. I carried it into the dining room and set it on the sideboard. Returning to the living room, I carefully removed the Cup from its case and proudly placed it at the center of the marble-topped table. For several minutes, I stared at it in awe.

Afterward, I went into the kitchen and located the dish towels in a drawer by the sink. Returning with the softest cotton one I could find, I worshipfully rubbed the huge silver chalice, buffing it gently.

One by one, the girls arrived and in turn, each stood dumbfounded, gazing at the world's most famed and valuable trophy.

Lisa wanted to lift it up, but I thought that didn't seem right unless it was actually won, even for practicing. Besides, that might jinx us; I mean, it took the Rangers 54 years to win one, and we sure didn't want to wait that long.

We watched the early evening news, sent out for pizza, and watched the late news, worried that the story of the theft of the Stanley Cup would send law enforcement officials descending upon us. Curiously, there was no word of its being missing. Perhaps the player had been too embarrassed to report it.

"How are we going to return it?" Heather asked, before biting into a cold leftover slice of pepperoni pizza.

“Do we have to give it back?” Lisa ventured.

Julie chimed in, “It’s really nice. And, it looks great on Lisa’s coffee table.”

“We are not keeping it,” I insisted firmly. “We’d spend the rest of our lives worrying about it and trying to take care of it. As soon as the game’s over, and the pictures are taken, maybe we can just return it.”

“Just return it? Just like that?” Barbara scoffed. “Don’t you realize that this is super grand felony larceny theft and if they catch us they’ll put us all away for fifty years? And, we’ll probably be blacklisted, too?”

“What if we call the Commissioner’s office after the game and say it showed up at the rink and we don’t know how it got there? Maybe we can get him not to press charges.”

The dilemma was unresolved, but we figured we had a day to think about that. After all, first we had to win the trophy, then we could worry about disposing of it.

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I stayed over at Lisa’s, borrowing a night-gown and sleeping out on the sofa, guarding the Cup. Before going to bed, I called my boyfriend, Bill, to let him know where I was. He promised to be at the game tomorrow night, and I told him if we won, I had a big surprise for him.

We slept late, exhausted from the two days of surveillance work. By the time we both had showered, dressed and eaten breakfast, it was past one o’clock. Barbara called once, checking on us and Helen stopped by to make sure everything was okay.

Carefully, we re-packed the trophy in its protective case, after Lisa had taken several photographs of it. We carried it to the elevator and down to the garage, stashing it in the trunk of Lisa’s car.

Lisa ran back upstairs to make sure everything was shut off and locked up, then the three of us piled into her Cavalier to head over to the rink.

By the time we got there it was almost three o’clock. Lisa pulled up in front of the arena and Helen and I took the trophy case from the trunk while she drove off to find a parking spot.

We had listened avidly to the radio and were relieved that there were still no reports on the news about the Cup. I picked up the case and with Lisa’s help we toted it into the rink, taking it over to the players’ bench that our team would occupy.

“What’cha got there?” Our coach, Terry Donnell, stopped us as we reached the bench.

“A surprise,” I managed to sound casual. “It’s for if we win.”

She gave me a probing look, but said nothing.

As the others arrived, we took turns standing guard over the case. When it was time to finally suit up and go into the locker room, we did it in shifts.

The afternoon passed quickly. We had a light practice and did some warm-ups, then came off the ice while the Zamboni resurfaced it.

Our game drew a crowd of around eight-hundred, and by the time the game was ready to start, we were really psyched.

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The Nuggets never knew what hit them. Maybe they weren’t playing for Lord Stanley’s Cup, but we were. That knowledge lifted our game and soaring spirits and Lisa scored two goals in the first 5 minutes of the period.

We had never played better. Helen got one goal in the second and I added one as the buzzer sounded ending the period. In the third, Lisa scored the third for the trick, then another one, then another. Emmaline was rattled by now, and it showed. On the next play, Julie was awarded a penalty shot, and we scored on that, too, so we had them down eight to zero in the final minutes of the last period.

I skated over to the bench when their coach called a time-out, and pulled the black box forward, within easy reach.

For some unknown reason, I looked over into the stands next to the bench. Stunned, I did a double take. There, sitting casually, watching the game, was the Commissioner of the National Hockey League. He was seated next to Helen's brother, Eric, and the two were chatting amiably, apparently simply enjoying the game.

The ref whistled, ending the time-out, and I skated over to my position outside the face-off circle, all the while watching the Commissioner's face. I could tell he didn't know we had the Cup. I wondered if he knew it was missing.

Play resumed with one minute left to play. Barbara fended off two solid slapshots on goal and I grabbed the rebound from the second one and sent it down the boards as the clock finally ran out. Our players jumped onto the ice, cheering and celebrating, and Helen and Heather started to pull the Cup from the case.

I watched the Commissioner, rising slowly as he saw the huge silver trophy emerge from the bench area. For the briefest moment, he paled in stunned surprise, but recovered quickly. I skated swiftly over to the rail nearest him and called out.

"Commissioner, would you do us the great honor of presenting the Cup?"

"Okay," he nodded, a bit unsteadily, rather looking like he might pass out in the stands.

He walked down the aisle and climbed over the wooden rail to the bench, then came out the gate and onto the ice. Taking the Cup from Helen and Heather, he looked it over swiftly as he went to center ice. A hush fell over the crowd as they murmured and pointed with disbelief, most of them recognizing the trophy. He beckoned to Lisa, and she skated over to him. He held the Cup out to present it to her.

"Congratulations, Captain, on your win tonight and the great game you played!"

She grinned widely, her long pale blonde hair spilling from her helmet as she removed it. Tossing the protective gear over to the bench, she reached out and accepted the coveted trophy from the Commissioner of the NHL.

"Thank you, sir!" Jubilant, Lisa hefted the trophy over her head and skated around the ice with it, much as when she had waved the Revere bowl in the air a week ago.

I entered into the celebration, managing to loft the trophy high over my head. I held it for a moment, displaying it to the crowd, then with both hands carefully gave it back to Lisa. Lisa then headed towards Terry, watching from over on the bench. She moved quickly, her skates pumping hard under the unaccustomed heavy load. She handed the Cup to Terry, whose mouth opened and closed repeatedly, with no words coming out.

There was cheering, applause and celebration and the local news photographer snapped some photos of us, surrounding the Cup in what has become traditional team photo-style.

"I will get that back right after we're done here, won't I?" The Commissioner had recovered his usual calm and approached me speaking quietly in a tone that brooked no argument.

"Yes, of course, sir. I guess you've been worried about it."

"You might say so," he noted drily. "Where, ah, has it been?"

"I don't know for sure," I responded blandly, with as much innocence as I could muster. "When we got here for the game, it was just sitting on the floor by the bench."

"I see." His eyes twinkled as he assessed my answer.

"There won't be any charges, will there, sir?" I asked. "It was all done in great respect."

"As long as it's not damaged, I see no reason to make an issue out of this...event. If this whole story ever gets out, we'll have to keep it under lock and key round the clock, and I don't really want that to happen."

"None of us would. Thank you, Commissioner. Thanks a lot."

"Go join the celebration, you've certainly earned it!" He smiled, shaking his head, as I skated off to rejoin my teammates.

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Finally, the arena cleared out and only our team, a few family members and the Commissioner were left.

I picked up the Cup, and skated over to the Commissioner. He was seated on the bench, next to the velvet-lined trophy case. He looked at me and I nodded, so he opened the case. Carefully, we placed the trophy back where it belonged, lovingly restoring it to its rightful place and keeper.

"It looks like it's none the worse for wear," the Commissioner noted. "What would you have done if I hadn't happened to be here tonight?"

"We were going to call your office to tell them the Cup had shown up at the rink. But, your being here to present it made this night a truly special and memorable one."

"For me, too," he murmured, drolly. "Most assuredly, for me too."

Smiling graciously, he shook hands with the women on our team. First Lisa, then Barbara, Helen, Heather, Julie and me.

Closing the case, he picked it up and we followed him, forming a protective cadre around him. We walked him to the exit of the rink, where a driver was waiting for him at the curb, with a Cadillac stretch limousine. The driver took the case, put it in the limo and the Commissioner stepped inside. Silently, we watched them drive away.

"You know, one thing is too bad, though," Helen commented thoughtfully. "All the winners of the Cup have their names on it."

"What makes you think ours aren't?" Lisa asked, with a sly gleam in her sparkling blue eyes.

"Lisa, what have you done?" I asked, dreading her answer.

"Nothing much. Just, last night, I took an engraving pen and put our names on the Cup." (Actually, that came out rather like, "Nuttin' moich. Joist last night, I took an engravin' pen an' put our names on da Cup.")

"You did what?" I barely managed to squeak out, aghast.

"Just on da bottom! I didn't hoit the thing! I toint it over and wrote out our names on da bottom. No one'll see 'em, but we'll know that they're there."

"Lisa, my dear, you are a piece of work. Do you know that?" I asked her, shaking my head slowly in amazement.

She grinned widely in response, inclining her head in a bow of humble acknowledgment, and toint to head back to the dressing room.