

DANCE-WATER BLUE

by

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DEAN

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

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ABSTRACT

Dinosaurs are extinct, right? Wrong -- not in the tiny, half-deserted mining town of Stuart's Landing on Okanagan Lake. Naitaka -- an ancient and deteriorating plesiosaur, known popularly as "Ogopogo" -- has visited this dwindling community several times over the years.

Brady Stuart was fifteen the first time he saw Naitaka, and the experience touched him so deeply that the creature's subsequent fifty-year absence has left Brady a dislocated man. Despite evidence that Naitaka is less than benevolent, Brady has done what he can to protect the creature from fortune hunters; he has even closed the mine above the Landing because he believes that the inexplicable shaft of water at the end of one of the tunnels might be Naitaka's secret home. Because of the mine-closure and the consequent economic strife, however, the people of Stuart's Landing want Naitaka for their own. Benton Williams, hardware king and ex-MLA, has lured the mysterious Bar Cranston and his company, Voyageur Expeditions, to the Landing to look for the creature. If they find Naitaka, they plan to put him in an aquarium-like tank on the south side of the Landing, thereby providing themselves with a remarkable tourist-draw -- a phenomenal attraction that

will bring Stuart's Landing back to life. Both in spite of and because of his wife's intense fear of Naitaka, Brady commits himself to fighting Voyageur Expeditions.

On their side, Bar Cranston and the town have a fleet of high-tech search-boats and a sonar-equipped mini-submarine. On Brady's side is Roy Silverheels, a spirited young Indian who cannot seem to keep himself out of trouble but will not, for his own reasons, abandon Brady and his fight. Through Roy's allegiance to Brady and his own determination to discover some form of truth about his Indian culture, Roy teaches his father, a disgruntled alcoholic with a fierce belief in the irrelevance of his own people, something about the dignity of their shared past.

If home is the emotional/psychological state where we feel comfortable with our circumstances and our histories, then these characters -- Naitaka included -- are homeless; but each of them is searching for a way out of isolation.

When Brady finds Naitaka, sick and apparently half-starved, at the desolate north end of the lake, he decides on a plan. Using a fibreglass decoy they have built in Brady's workshop, Brady and Roy stage an attack -- a bloody and presumably fatal mauling -- at one of the busiest beaches in the valley's biggest city. But part of the plan back-fires, and Brady finds himself naked, alone, amnesiac and trapped in a cave by Naitaka. Later, after

being driven into another cave, Brady discovers both his father's bones and an entirely new perspective on Naitaka. Finally, at the end of his life-long search for this strange, pre-historic creature, Brady is forced to admit that his view of Naitaka has been naive and narrow, and he decides to turn him over to Bar Cranston.

Dance-water Blue explores the relationships between these individuals and the relationships between these individuals and Naitaka, the extraordinary aspect of their private and collective realities. There may not be answers, the novel tells us, but there are ways of approaching home, or, at least, there are ways of coming to, or making, a new home.

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DEDICATION

This novel is for my mother and father

little wonder
it seldom surfaces now
as shrunken as its pride
it spends these last years
humiliated
bottom-feeding
beneath the contrails of water skiers
beneath starry-eyed anglers
who muse on the monstrous trout
that once cowered in its shadow
while it dreams itself
a great white leviathan
with a name
worthy of some mad Ahab's barbed attentions

- Greg Simison,
The Possibilities of Chinese Trout

PROLOGUE

When Brady locked horns with Bar Cranston and Benton Williams and each and every one of his neighbours, some folks probably figured that he'd always lived in Stuart's Landing.

Brady Stuart, Stuart's Landing -- it made sense.

The dates fit: at the time of the big fight, Brady was in his mid-sixties, which would have put his birth some time in the late teens or early twenties of the century. Since there couldn't have been much to Stuart's Landing at that point in history, maybe Brady Stuart started it all. Maybe he popped his head out of the soil and laid claim to the land right then and there. Or maybe he crawled out of the water and, like Johnny Appleseed, set to work on his orchard.

If Brady'd been there since Day One, then you could understand his attachment to the place.

The truth was a little different: Brady Stuart fought hard against Bar Cranston and Benton Williams and the rest because he was used to fighting. If his methods seemed wild and his motives cloudy, it may have been because Brady had never understood the relationship between himself and the things he was fighting for. Or against. At any rate,

he did not complete the journey from his small, cold hometown on the edge of the Province's Northeastern prairie until shortly after his fifteenth birthday.

*

He stood ankle-deep in the lake, the cool water seeping into the pores to loosen the dust and ease the heat from the miles of walking. Because he could not swim, he chilled his fingers in the lake; then he pressed them into the knotted muscles at the base of his back. After all the dust and gravel he'd seen in the past month, the lake fascinated him. He did not take his eyes from the water; he did not tire of the slow diamond-shaping, the sparkle-cap on each wave, the sudden melting. But his wonder did not stop at the surface. From the pale brown road that wound along the mountain ridge above the Landing, Brady had understood the Lake's mass, the blue-deep distance you could travel north or south or east or west, or down. It stretched as far as Brady could see into the distance -- fifty, seventy-five, a hundred miles? And always at least a mile wide. The ocean, of course, would be bigger. But he had no desire to see the ocean because the ocean was too big to be explored. Over a lifetime, this lake could be known. And as Brady stood in the

shallows of the lake, the miles of dust and muscle-ache and fear loosened themselves from his body, and every pore in his skin, every blood-blown cell, opened to the water.

What could he say, then or later, about what he'd been through? Nothing. That was part of the problem. He could not find words. How would you feel, he had often wanted to ask the people who considered him crazy...How would you feel if you'd lived long enough to believe you understood the way the world looked -- not because you'd seen everything, but because you'd read and you'd listened and you'd watched, and you believed you could trust your eyes -- and then found yourself face-to-face with something that did not exist? Or wasn't supposed to. A dinosaur.

And what if the dinosaur did magic to you? What if it violated you, made you feel each atom in every cell of your body -- brain, heart, feet, legs, arms, eyes, genitals? What if you felt certain you were going to blow apart, your cells showering into the water like mist-fine rain?

Brady stood on the edge of Stuart's Landing that day with five hundred miles of dust and rain and tears streaked over his body like an old man's wrinkles. He had come five hundred miles from his mother's grave on the edge of the northern prairie. Five hundred miles of train tracks and

gravel roads that wore his boot-soles to a film. Dozens of nights spent with his back pushed against the warm boards of someone's porch wall, or hunched in the corner of a rail car, or in the back seat of an unlocked automobile. And now Brady Stuart stood on the edge of the town his father had built on the edge of this great lake and pulled a crease-stained piece of paper from his back pocket.

Not much land here, son -- five hundred acres or so and all of it as flat as the prairie. One great triangle of land that sits on the water like a sheet of balsa wood, almost like the rocks and soil and weeds got too hot sitting in the sun up there on the mountain and slid down for a bath. It's as warm as a circle of fire here from May through to October. Some months ago we started planting fruit trees and tobacco. We're told it will be some years before the trees bear solid fruit but in the meantime there's silver in the mountain rocks above the place. No telling how long that will last. Right now it gets us the lumber we need for building. We feed on the vegetables we grow and the deer along the Hudson's Bay trail....

He had not seen his father today, but he knew from the words that he had found Stuart's Landing.

Brady refolded the page and let his eyes drift back to the lake. The water was cool on his feet and around his ankles. The August sun beat down out of a glass-blue sky and brought sweat out of his chest and armpits and back. Brady tossed his father's letter ten feet up the rocky shore toward the small apple trees. And just as he began to sink, fully-clothed, into the shallow beach-water to rub away the sweat and dust, something rose out of the water

before him: a great oblong boulder of water as dark as the forest of pine trees on the mountain across the lake. A great, water-streaming boulder rose out of the lake and stared at him -- lifted, finally, its long neck and small, snake-like head, and cocked a shining brown eye at Brady. A long, tapered tail slid out from behind and pushed a few hundred gallons of lake-water toward the shore.

Brady did not shake or tremble. His knees did not buckle and his heart did not race. Brady laughed. He opened his arms toward the vision and he laughed. Because it was a vision: Brady had travelled five hundred miles; his bones ached and his muscles ached and he had been twenty hours without sleep. In that condition, a dinosaur was as likely a dream as any.

He tore off his clothes and rushed toward this great, imagined beast, splashing awkwardly through the lake. Still laughing, he dove toward the dream, his tired brain's vision, and stretched his arms above his head to shield his face when he sank through the image and into the cleansing water.

But the borders of the dream were solid.

The slap of his palms against the hard, slick skin stung through his hands and bent his fingers back at the knuckles. His face smashed into the creature's huge, rock-hard body; a stream of blood flushed over his lips and

against the green skin and into the water. Brady collapsed into the lake with his blood.

Before he could sink through the algae-clouded water to the stones, the creature slipped beneath him. Brady found himself straddling a thick slant of back. His arms circled the creature's neck; his face clung to the slick-leather skin.

As the creature tore him through the lake, Brady watched drops of water tear apart like cloth over the bridge of his nose. Out in the middle of the lake, as the creature ripped him so deep his chest sank and blood dripped onto the back of his tongue, Brady saw grains of mud and sand on the bottom; he saw the ice-sparkle sides of rainbow and kokanee trout. He saw a ling-cod edge between two stones. His heart beat wildly. It was too much: On the flight upward, the salt-taste of his own blood rubbed his throat raw and he hungered for the water, sucking it in through the sides of his mouth to cool the blood. When they broke the surface -- Brady no longer holding tight, since the cold skin of his legs and arms and chest had fused with the creature's skin -- Brady felt a thin sheet of glass shatter over his skull. A thread of mist or cloud or steam scratched his cornea; the pain dissolved when he blinked lake-water over his eyes. Beneath the water again, Brady's heart pounded against the walls of his lungs; the

bones in his temples and around his ears knifed his brain; his lips split against his bottom teeth. One breath, he thought...One breath.

When they broke the surface, Brady cleared the shards of water aside with his arms, sucked one long, continuous breath, then screamed his terror into the perfect sky.

He woke up naked and alone on the beach. His back ached from the stones digging into his muscles; his head pounded; his blood felt heavy in his veins. Gently, Brady pushed himself up. He stared at the surface of the lake but saw nothing. His clothes floated only a few feet from where he had discarded them in the shallow water. He waded after them, wrung the water from the fabric, then slipped into the cotton shirt. He left the moisture-heavy denim pants to dry in the branches of a small tree.

There were voices in the distance.

Beyond the rows of small fruit trees, Brady found a old pine. His fingers felt sore. He climbed up thirty feet, scratching red welts into his calves and forearms with every step. He would not stop. He would not stop until he was high enough to get a good angle on the lake. But when he'd climbed as far as the thickness of the branches allowed, he strained his vision north and south and east, combing every inch of shore and water, but he saw

only rocks and trees and long grass and the impenetrable surface of the lake. Nothing else.

He did not know how or when he fell. The branch he was standing on may have broken. He may have been climbing down when his heel pushed the bark off one of the limbs and he slipped. He may have leaned back, thinking his spine would come to rest against the tree, only to sommersault through the branches and needles to the ground. Whatever it was, the next thing Brady knew he was flat on his back beside the tree and four men were leaning over him.

"Look at that leg."

"He'll never walk again."

"Who is he?"

"Must've been pretty high up to bend 'em like that."

"You ever see him around here before?"

"I'm Brady Stuart," Brady whispered. "My father is here."

The men looked at one another.

"We better tend to that leg." A tall man with a yellow beard and small red skin-pockets beneath his eyes slid his arms beneath Brady's shoulders. Two men joined hands to make straps beneath his buttocks. The final two men took to his legs, lifting them gingerly when the bearded man gave the command.

"My father's here," Brady repeated a few minutes

later. "Halverson Stuart is my father."

They were nearing a tall white house. To their left, a T-shaped dock made of new pine boards jutted off the rocky shore. The bearded man looked at the others and shook his head almost imperceptibly.

"My father's name is Halverson Stuart," Brady said again. When the strangers refused for the second time to answer his declaration, Brady panicked, twisting his arms and his hips; pain rolled up his thighs, closing like fine-toothed pliers on his testicles. The man holding his right leg was short and thick; he wore black sideburns and there was a pink scar across his tanned forehead. He said, "Your father's dead, son."

One of the others nodded toward the lake. "Naitaka got him," he said.

*

Forty-six years later, Brady stood deep in the silver mine's east shaft and stared down a flashlight beam at a pool of ink-black water. A month before, an Indian miner named Dave Charlie had chipped out the last silver ore, then disappeared. The three shifts of miners who lived on the flat pitch of land below, and constituted the Stuart's Landing Mining Co-operative, kept working -- swinging picks

and shovelling rock into small, square trolly cars as if the century had never turned -- but their journey further into the mountain failed to turn up any more silver. Instead, they hit water.

Brady had borrowed the long, wooden measuring pole from Walter Striper's PetroCan station. Now he rested his flashlight on a thin ledge of rock in the wall of the shaft, then slid the pole into the water. Even on his knees, one arm elbow-deep in the chill water, he could not jab the pole against anything solid. He pushed deeper, the water now soaking into the light cotton fabric of his T-shirt, and swung the pole from side to side. Nothing.

Brady knew very little about geology -- he didn't own the mine, he simply leased the land to the Mining Co-operative -- but he knew enough about water tables and irrigation to understand that this pool of water -- this cavern both deep and wide -- did not make sense. Nonetheless, here it was, and who could say how far down it might go, or what it might connect with, or what might live there?

ONE

Sitting at his kitchen table as the grey five a.m. light cracked over the mountains and spread across the water like chromium chains, Brady finally admitted the truth: He could no longer manage the orchard alone. But in light of his decision -- now a five-year-old reality -- to cancel his lease with the Stuart's Landing Mining Co-operative, finding help would not be easy. No one in Stuart's Landing would apply for the job.

Therese hadn't come down yet. Brady could hear kitchen windows and screens sliding open and closed across town. Stuart's Landing, population (as of the most recent count) seventy-five. The town his father built. A dying town. A town that hated him.

Brady drank off the last of his coffee, taking in even the bitter grounds and pressing them between his teeth till they were as thin and dry as the fish scales baked onto his dock. Then he pushed himself away from the table and stepped out the back door. For several minutes, he stood on the porch with his hands pushed deep into his pockets and stared at the rows and rows of fruit trees beyond his ragged back lawn.

For reasons he seldom considered these days, and only

remembered when some unwelcome deja vu slammed his own history to the front of his brain, Brady had spent forty-five years struggling to keep his orchard alive, his kingdom secure. Every year posed problems: the water table rising beneath the orchard floor, bogging the soil; over-proof pesticides; water-core; apple scab. Acts of God. Brady Stuart always fought back. He didn't win so much as he survived, managing to get the crop off in time, pay the bills, secret some money in to the bank for the year it all came crashing down.

Last year, it had all come crashing down.

Brady crossed the thirty yards of weeds and stones between the house and the water. This was his reason for staying and for fighting. He believed in the lake and he believed in its secrets. And yet now, even as he stepped forward and felt the water soak through his tennis shoes and weight his feet to the rocks, he could not believe with urgency. This is important to me, he told himself, and the words rattled around his head without catching interest.

At sixty-five, Brady Stuart still held the shape of a young man. Flat-bellied, his skin brown and resilient despite decades of outdoor work, he stood just under six feet tall. The muscles in his arms and back danced, supple and strong, when he pruned the trees. But his legs kept him down. The crooked fusion of his thigh bones turned to

fire and ice at their own whim, sending crippling needles of pain up to envelope his groin and lodge in his hip-sockets, then down to hammer-beat his heels.

In the cupboards above the back-porch washer and dryer, Brady found a black felt pen and the hammer and nails Therese used around the house. Out the back door, beside the unpainted steps, he knocked apart a dilapidated apple bin and wrote in large letters on its smoothest side:

HELP WANTED
SEE BRADY STUART
#10 LAKESIDE ROAD

Then he drove across town, past the houses of his neighbours and past their favourite haunt, Ransom Steen's Dairy Bar And Fruit Stand, and up the steep set of switch-backs to the shabby old strip of highway. With the nails clamped between his teeth and the hammer elbow-pinned against his ribs, he lifted the sign out of the truck-bed and carried it to a road-side tree. It would not be unlike one of his grudging neighbours to rip the sign down. By making it large and awkward, and by driving a dozen tempered spikes through it and into the old pine tree, Brady hoped to hold them off.

He climbed back into the truck, his right leg burning ice from mid-thigh to the top of his buttocks until he reached down with both hands and took the pressure off --

just let it hang there in his grip until the pain throbbed away.

Heartbreak from a down-valley Country & Western station came up through the dash-board speaker. Brady looked from the sign to the town, then back to the sign and back again to the town. Help Wanted See Brady Stuart, and Stuart's Landing there below, seventy-five souls and not one of them with guts enough to step forward to help a neighbour do an honest day's work for an honest day's wage.

An hour later, Brady drove the five-hundred yards from his house on the lake to where Steen's was tucked in against the base of the mountain. At eleven he was due at the Glenmore Clinic in Kelowna for another look at his legs.

A few years earlier, when things were still good and most of the Landing's three-hundred residents drew their wages from the silver mine high up in the mountain, Brady had been a regular here. Now things were different. As far as the people of Stuart's Landing were concerned, Brady had been the one to throw a spanner into their work: Brady Stuart had closed the mine and shut down their lives.

Brady refused to stop drinking Steen's coffee altogether; he'd be damned before he'd let that piss-bitter crowd drive him away from the habits of a lifetime, but he

was no longer the regular he had once been.

Brady nodded hello to Ransom.

Short and squat, Steen matched his building; he stood no more than five-foot-eight, and his wide, stuck-out belly hung over his belt like a wrecking ball. Like Brady, Ransom Steen wore his hair crew cut, but instead of grey, Ransom had bright white hair, and without fail he sported an old-fashioned short-order cook's clothes, complete with wide apron and a navy-style paper cap.

Brady nodded toward the tarnished silver urn behind Ransom.

Ransom poured coffee into a large styrofoam cup, then snapped a plastic lid over the top. But he did not speak or wait for Brady to slide fifty cents across the counter. He stared past Brady to the far side of his patio.

Brady peeled the lid off his coffee and flicked it onto the counter. Drops of condensation scattered across the arborite. At first, he did not notice anything unusual. Several men sat hunched over coffee and burgers at one of the white-metal sun tables. Earle Hyatt, the motel owner, and Walter Striper, the one-armed manager of the two-pump PetroCan hut at the centre of town, broke off their conversation to stare at him. Brady avoided their eyes. At one time, he had been close to Hyatt and Striper -- close enough, at any rate, to sip beers over the

lobby-desk of Earle's cramped motel office, or to grab a couple of Special Brews from Ransom, then head over and push one across the counter of the gas hatch to Striper. But after the mine shut down, Walter Striper and Earle Hyatt gave themselves over to philanthropy: When marriages strained to the breaking point under the pressure of unemployment, Earle took in one or another of the warring partners and put them up in unit two. The room was stripped of all but a single bed. The word "ALONE" was penned onto the bathroom mirror in red block letters, and, beneath it, the instruction "Repeat Until Cured."

For his part, Walter Striper now and again let price wars flare up between the two pumps at the PetroCan. And he'd neglected to report even one of the thirty-seven times his hatch had been robbed during the past three years. "I never seem to have more than thirty or forty bucks in the till at night," Striper confided to Brady before the split. "If you got a hand that shakes like mine does, you can spill that much on a busy Saturday."

As far as the town could see, Brady never gave a thing. He'd shut down the mine, and after that folks had to guard their money like crazy old millionaires. Before long, Styles' Grocery, Martin Reynold's Burger Hut, Billy Ostipin's Come-On-Inn, and Mary Dalton's Boat and Sailboard Rental Hut closed shop. Even the Amway salesman moved

away.

And Brady Stuart hadn't done a thing to help.

Nearer Brady, Patricia Lang, the silent half-breed who held the whole town's sadness in her eyes, looked toward the lake. Both hands were raised on her chest, fingering a wooden ornament that hung from a chain of beads.

Following Patricia's gaze, Brady saw two men in business suits standing together on the beach, near the narrow forty-foot dock. "What's with the suits?" he asked Ransom.

Ransom shrugged. "Been around all morning."

On a closer look, Brady recognized one of the men. "That's Benton," he said over his shoulder.

Ransom looked up. "So it is." Sweat glistened like oil on Ransom's upper lip.

Brady excused himself with a half-cough, half-grunt, weaved through the scattered maze of tables and chairs -- all the time stroking his crew-cut grey hair from front to back with the palm of his left hand -- then cut down to the beach, to Benton Williams and the stranger.

"You look like hell, Benton," Brady said, and stopped. He looked Benton up and down, then eyed the other man. "Doesn't he look like hell?"

Despite the expensive grey suits he favoured, Williams reminded Brady of a used car salesman. He always looked

like he needed a shave. No matter how clean and crisp his suits, and no matter how straight Benton stood or how eloquently he spoke, Brady could never shake the feeling that Benton's life was falling apart.

"That reminds me," said Brady, tapping his foot against the rocky beach until Benton and the other man looked down. "We need more sand." Brady stepped close to the stranger -- a tall man with dark handle-bar mustaches and an ill-fitting beige suit -- and knocked his elbow against the man's forearm. "Benton had an idea to sell this place as Canada's Hawaii -- brought in truckloads of black sand for the beach here. Too fine-grained, I guess -- it all sank into the holes. Gotta get some coarse-grain stuff. Maybe when they build the highway, eh, Benton?" Brady paused. "You here about the highway?"

As a politician, Benton had grown accustomed to greeting adversity with humour, but when he looked up at Brady his lips were hard-set and as pale as stone. "You're wasting your breath, Brady. This is personal."

Benton Williams had been the MLA for this part of the Valley for fifteen years, but he had never made any headway on his pet project -- a plan he had for a highway that would run along the west side of Okanagan Lake, past Stuart's Landing. Now, three years after his retirement from provincial politics, Williams had been elected Regional

District Representative for the westside. "You're not here for the scenery," Brady said.

"Believe it or not..."

"Not," said Brady.

Benton shrugged, and smiled. His suit-jacket and the thighs of his pants were badly creased. His skin was grey-pale and clammy from the number of cigarettes he smoked each day.

Brady said, "So how's the hardware business?"

Twenty-five years ago, hoping that the west side of the lake would turn out to be a perfect place for summer homes and dream homes, Benton had opened a branch of his hardware chain at the head of Westside Road. The store lost money every year and became Benton's own personal cross, the one bad link in the Williams chain of stores. He covered the losses with profits from his stores in Penticton, Kelowna and Vernon; but it drove him nuts. And when Benton Williams found himself elected to the Legislature, he began to fight for what he called The Westside Project.

"Or is the Westside Project still alive?" If it was, it meant only one thing to Brady: They'd try to get his land again.

He could still remember the line Benton had fed him shortly after the mine shut down. (Early on, Williams and

the townspeople tried the civil approach -- the threatening letters and broken windows and the logs laid across Brady's driveway came later.) "Just imagine," Brady had been instructed, "imagine a world-class resort on this lakeshore. People from all over the world coming here to admire this beauty, and the people who live here now working at the resort, giving their time and their creativity to rebuild Stuart's Landing."

"Can't see it," Brady had said.

Glancing side-long at the stranger with Williams, Brady felt a wave of nausea ride through his stomach. It came from the man's dug-in stance and from the patient but determined half-smile on his lips as he took stock of the Landing. A tall, thickly-built man of about thirty, he looked uncomfortable in his clothes. His trousers wrinkled at the ground behind his heels, his jacket was too tight across the shoulders, and he yanked his belt up at his left hip every few minutes. Now, obviously bored with Brady's attack, the stranger stared out over the lake. His manner troubled Brady. Whereas Benton Williams could stand and chat all day if given the chance, this stranger looked ready to burst the seams of his clothes.

"Brady Stuart," Brady ventured, and pushed his hand toward the stranger.

The man did not respond.

Benton smiled. "See you around, Stuart."

Brady shook the last drops of his coffee onto the beach-stones and walked away. He did not look at the stranger again, but his presence on Ransom's beach bothered Brady as he drove to his appointment in Kelowna. The ache came up in his legs so bad that by the time he crossed the floating bridge between Kelowna and the west side he had pushed three pain-killers hungrily into his mouth.

TWO

Down valley in the city of Kelowna, Roy Silverheels had been searching diligently for work all morning. Flat broke, he couldn't even afford bus fare; he had to walk three miles along the narrow asphalt shoulder of highway 97 from the industrial park to the government offices on Water Street.

His feet ached throughout the forty-five minute wait in line. Despite the air-conditioning, sweat ran down his neck under his long black hair.

When Roy's turn came, the short, tight-collared clerk held his cheque out to him -- all the while staring at Roy's unwashed hair, at the flab hanging over his belt and the holes in his jeans -- only to snatch it away as Roy's fingers closed on the envelope. The clerk suddenly bent his head, exposing the bald spot set on his crown like a beanie, and muttered, "Silverheels, Silverheels, let's see," as his finger ran down an official-looking computer printout. "Roy Silverheels?" The little man's finger had stopped; he looked up, smirking. "Where's the Lone Ranger?"

"Funny," Roy said.

The clerk pursed his lips.

Tired, hungry and thirsty, Roy stopped battling his patience. He was supposed to meet Ivan at the Willow Inn, and if they hoped to catch the first round of peelers, Roy needed to make tracks. "Just gimme the fucken thing," he said wearily.

"But there's an asterisk beside your name," the little man snapped, penning an asterisk in beside Roy's name. "I'm required to check on that."

So Roy spent the next ninety minutes waiting for the line to dwindle and the clerk to find time to phone the businesses Roy had listed. By that time, Roy needed something to take his mind off failure. He needed a drink.

Ivan was nowhere in sight when Roy finally reached the Willow Inn, two hours late. It was just as well. Ivan had the irksome habit of trying to make his friend live the way he knew he himself should have. "You better watch the hooch," he'd chide Roy seriously, gesturing toward a fresh glass of beer. "You'll wind up drunk like an Indian."

Fortunately, Roy had no trouble cashing his cheque at the bar.

"Spend it on what counts, eh?" taunted the pork-bellied man behind the counter.

"Right," said Roy. He ordered a jug, certain that Ivan would show up to claim benefits from the Ministry of Human Resources.

The bar was only a quarter full, and Roy easily found a seat on the raised platform between the scuffed dance floor and the stage. Four machinists hunched over the table to Roy's left. Their dark overalls were stained with oil and speckled with shavings of steel and aluminum. They spoke slowly, laughed slowly, and stared curiously at the empty jugs before them, as if they knew they'd been tricked but couldn't quite figure out how. Watching them, Roy knew they'd come for lunch and just couldn't make it back. He could see the guilt lining their brows. By this point they'd be drunk enough to believe they could crawl back to work and pretend nothing had happened; or they'd be belligerent enough to go whole hog, make it an all-nighter.

The tall, red-headed stripper had just finished her act. Robed now, with her mat under one arm and her cassette clasped in her hand, she bowed, smiled whimsically at the men in the first row, and walked off.

At twenty-past three, Ivan still had not shown. Roy sat alone at the table, staring at another empty jug, watching beads of foam slide slowly down the plastic. Beside him, the machinists grew louder and louder.

"Boss ain't gonna like this," said one of the machinists.

"Hell with him," said another.

"I hope the old bastard comes lookin' for us," said

the one closest to Roy. He had bags under his eyes and every few minutes he pushed his beer glass against his left ear. "I'd fight him."

Halfway through her second act, the tall, slender stripper spread her black-shag floor-mat on the stage. After a few minutes of leg-swivels, somersaults and tucks, a roar went up from the crowd. Roy had been watching the panelled doors for Ivan, but now he turned his attention quickly back to the stage. The woman had produced a nerf toy -- a large replica penis and testicles. She set it on the black stage tiles in front of the mat and flipped her long blonde hair back purposefully, as if what she was about to do would require great concentration.

At that moment one of the machinists, a tall heavy-bellied man, his skin flushed pink and his flowered welding cap tipped back on the crown of his skull, shot out of his chair. He towered beside Roy, arcing back at the waist, a jug of dark beer thrust into the air above his head. "Do it to me, baby!" he wailed. And gave out with a booming "Yeeeeeeeeee-hawwwwwwww!"

Then things turned sour for Roy.

The machinist laughed, glancing toward his cronies for approval, and stumbled two steps toward Roy, sloshing a pint of beer onto Roy's lap.

"Hey!" Roy said, and sprang out of his own chair,

slapping at the front of his jeans. "Watch it, man!"

The machinist leaned his face into Roy's, tapping the jug into his own chest. His eyes were pink and half-closed, the capillaries in the corners blazing red. "What?" he said coarsely, "you never pissed your pants before?" He looked back to his friends.

"Hey, Ian," one of them snorted. "You got yourself the first Indian who never pissed his pants."

Ian slapped a hand down on Roy's shoulder, leaned close, and nodded toward the stage. "Y'see the tits on that one?" he breathed heavily.

Roy did not move -- didn't nod or look toward the stage or mutter a word; he stared at Ian's face and waited. Soon, he hoped, the game would lose its novelty.

"Ian, Ian!" A short man with bleached-blond hair and a pink complexion leaned forward to clip Ian on the shoulder. The big man turned and caught sight of the stripper. He squared himself to the stage; his arm slid round to weigh on both Roy's shoulders, then tightened.

On stage, the stripper stared innocently at her prop. She reached out to test it the way a child might poke at an insect's back.

"Feels so goooooood!" Ian crooned, arching his back. The stripper glanced up; the stage lights caught the moisture in her wide blue eyes. She gently bit the tip of

her left index finger. The crowd roared.

"Betcha wish that was you up there, eh red man?" Ian said, leaning his face into Roy's again. The arm tightened and shook Roy, who moved his head neither up nor down but let it wobble so that Ian could take the gesture any way he pleased.

The stripper had grown more adventurous now. She cupped her hands around the nerf toy and drew it closer; her fingers played gently over the surface.

"No! no! no!" Ian shouted. His head fell back and he closed his eyes, mouth twisted open in delight.

But when, in the stripper's grasp, the toy started acting up, jerking this way and that, trying to make its way between her legs, she pushed it away. It inched toward her over the stage. People in the crowd hooted approval, shook their heads, stared back to the performance and yelled for more. And the girl batted it, first left, then right, and finally pounded on it with both fists and threw it over her shoulder toward the stage exit. Then her shoulders slumped and she collapsed backward on the tiles, her nipples erect, her chest rising and falling after the exhausting battle, her legs spread wide apart. Most of the men scrambled to their feet to applaud. Standing at the edge of the bar, a middle-aged hooker turned away from the stage.

Ian gave out with an agonized "Awww!" He squeezed Roy's cheek into his own. "Go get 'er, eh." He looked to the stage, to the stripper just rising to her feet after a successful act, and boomed, "Hey, sweetheart, loverboy here's got something for you." The hand came off Roy's shoulder and gathered a handful of the shirt on his back. The girl collected her things -- mat, nerf toy, cassette tape.

"Go fuck 'er," Ian breathed, his breath hot and thick on Roy's face. "Hey!" Ian shouted, "red man wants you!"

The stripper turned toward Roy and his captor, lifting a delicate hand to shade her eyes against the stage lights, then looked to the bartender and the bouncer. Both seemed to be enjoying Roy's predicament; they didn't move. The stripper left the stage.

"You wanna fuck 'er, dontcha red man?" Ian scowled. He swung his head heavily toward his friends again, and they cheered him on.

Roy was beginning to panic; he looked frantically toward the door in search of Ivan. The hand on his back scratched at the surface of his skin, searching for a tighter grip, and Roy wobbled involuntarily back and forth with Ian's sway.

"Tell me how much you wanna fuck 'er, little red man," Ian slurred, drawing Roy back and pushing his own face so

close they could have kissed.

Roy looked up into the big man's bleary eyes, at the thick blonde stubble pushing out of Ian's skin, and he retched. An ounce of vomit rose in his throat and dribbled out the sides of his mouth. That was when he felt the first punch land.

An hour later, both eyes bruised and his lips cut and swollen, Roy drove along Westside Road in his rattling, farting Volkswagen Beetle. He did not like the idea of returning to the Reserve. Before Ian the machinist had taken the liberty of mashing his face, Roy had hoped to find a cheap motel room for the night and hit the pavement again in the morning. He'd felt certain a job awaited him somewhere, and he wanted time to find it. But it was going to take a week or more for his face to heal, and he could not afford seven nights on a rented bed or stomach a week of feeding on the pepperoni-and-mushroom "Torpedos" he stole daily from one or another of the 7-Eleven stores downtown.

Roy needed a place where he could live and eat free, and right about now he was not stupid enough to let his pride interfere. As much as he disliked the Reserve, in general, and as much as he disliked his father, in particular, he could think of no other option.

But with only fifteen miles of the narrow, twisting

Westside road separating Roy from the Reserve and hooting kidney shots from his father -- a leathery, helpless old man who fired off one crack after another about the white car salesman his ex-wife had married, and with equal fervour smashed his bony elbows into the nearest bystander -- Roy saw Brady's sign nailed to one of the big pine trees above Stuart's Landing.

THREE

The sound of a country & western band belting out

If you ain't got a woman
A truck is a lonely ol' ride...

pumped in through the open bedroom window, bounced against Brady's ear drums, and jarred him awake so awkwardly that the bedroom he'd slept in for all his married life seemed unfamiliar.

If you ain't got a sweetheart,
Then heartbreak rides by your side...

When he'd risen far enough into consciousness to recognize the landmarks of his own home, he reached over Therese and slammed a hand down on top of her clock radio. Therese didn't budge, and the radio kept blasting. Brady yanked the cord from the socket. The digital face went dead, but the music kept on. And behind the music, Brady heard laughter and cheering -- the sounds of yee-haw drinkers blowing the lid off the town. This town. Because the music wasn't coming from anywhere inside the house; every few seconds the notes dulled, broke away, then steadied again, as if the songs were rolling down a telephone wire but were now and again gusted off course by the wind.

Brady doubled his pillow and shoved it against the headboard, then poked Therese in the shoulder. "Therese?" He poked her again, then rolled her head so the bed-side light caught her eyes. "Therese!"

Therese cracked an eyelid but didn't speak.

"You hear that?"

She worked her mouth. He could see her straining to keep her eyes open and understand him, but within seconds her eyes fell shut and she turned her head back into the darkness of the pillow.

Gently, Brady placed his hand on Therese's head. Working his fingers softly across her scalp, he was afraid. They'd never had children. Therese had wanted them, but he wasn't able -- some mumbo-jumbo the doctors muttered about his sperm count. So they had one another. And under normal circumstances one another did just fine. When the mine shut down and so many people in town stood with their fingers levelled at Brady like busted pistols, Therese had been the one to step up to him beside the window, wrap her arms around his chest from behind, and lay her head in between his shoulder blades. "When it's all said and done," she'd whispered into his shirt, "all you've got is family." She reached for his hands. "They haven't turned against you, Brady," and she tightened her arms to bring him closer. "They've just turned back to their families."

But Therese no longer seemed capable of such strength. Sometimes he found her asleep in the parlour in the middle of the day. He'd sit and watch her then.

Outside, the music blared. Brady dressed in the bathroom and descended the stairs into the cool midnight air.

As soon as he stepped onto his front porch, he knew where the party was. The dew-wet grass soaked his sneakers. Car lights flickered, a strawberry-pink strobe, and the glittering flashes from a hanging mirror ball shot toward him from the south-west corner of the Landing. From Ransom Steen's Dairy Bar and Fruit Stand.

Brady headed for the beach. Centered between two black-edged clouds, the moon silvered the water and the beach-rocks, and Brady picked his way along, bending here and there to scoop up and hurl a flat chip of stone.

Sometimes, on nights when his body felt good and his mind felt as clear and capable as the starlight, he thought he could see Naitaka. A small head lifted above the surface, watching him. Sometimes he thought he saw the torso lift then melt back into the lake. Now he saw only the breeze-chopped water shifting like silver coins, and the dark hills rising up to close the valley on the other side.

The violent KRAABOOM-SSSSS, KRAABOOM-SSSSS of

fireworks ripped into the black sky above the Landing. A wave of hoots and cheers and whistles followed the explosions. Under the rain of pink light, Brady headed quickly along the last stretch of rocks to Steen's.

The whole town was there. Ransom had cleared the white-metal chairs and the umbrellaed sun tables to the edge of the lot. On the far side, in front of the stand, Dave Gallagher had parked his Chevy crew-cab. Extension cords ran along the pavement from the Fruit Stand's open hatch to the stereo set up on a card table in the bed of the truck. Inside the stand, Ransom and his sister, Ruth Chalmers, passed beer across the counter to the line-up.

The women were dressed to the nines; the men were clean-shaven. Even Billy Ostipin wore a blue suit and a rope-tie.

In the center of the asphalt pad, Ransom's large outdoor patio had been converted to a dance-floor. Twenty or thirty couples danced feverishly, swinging one another round and round, close-dancing and ass-pinching. Laughter, clinking bottles and cat-calls peppered the air. Cigarette smoke drifted through the overhead lights.

Even when the mine was going strong and the population broke two-hundred, there had never been a wing-ding like this. He could not think of a single local who was not there. Except for himself. Except for Therese.

Brady stood in the black shadow of an old apple tree. He tried to catch the thread of a conversation that might fill him in, but people weren't talking. They laughed, they shouted, they danced and drank, but the prime-mover behind all this gut-busting fun was either so simple or so terrible that it never crossed their lips.

*

Half an hour later, Billy Ostipin half-swaggered, half-stumbled up onto the tailgate of Dave Gallagher's truck and turned down the volume on the amplifier. Conversations broke off and people turned to face him. Walter Striper reached into the truck's box with his good arm and shut down the tape deck. Earle Hyatt took off his cap.

Most of the dancers had left the patio for the rows of orange plastic chairs in front of Ransom's food hatch. Patricia Lang's interest in a quick skinny dip had drawn a dozen men and fourteen protective women down to Ransom's dock.

"Awright now," Billy Ostipin said, and let his eyes drift over the crowd. Billy was short and stout. His eyes were round and glazed and as white as porcelain. He had been publicly alcoholic since the day he arrived in Stuart's Landing, but no matter how often Billy drank

himself into a stupor, the whites of his eyes stayed clear.

"Lissin up here."

Still concealed behind a large apple tree, Brady shifted uncomfortably. If anyone could get this crowd riled, Billy could. Before the mine shut down, Billy Ostipin's Come-On-Inn had been the Landing's main watering-hole. After twenty years of busting his ass as a beachcomber on the sunshine coast, Billy took to serving drinks and working the restaurant floor with vigour and enthusiasm. Despite his drunkenness, the people of Stuart's Landing fell in love with Billy. He was the least threatening of all human beings.

"Lot of us," Billy said from the truckbed. His voice was both deep and raspy and it rode the cool air with ease. "Lot of us been pointing over there." He raised a thick arm and pointed toward Brady's house. "Lot of us been pointing over there and saying, His fault. 'S'all Brady's fault."

People in the crowd nodded to one another. Murmurs rose and died. All eyes refocused on Billy Ostipin.

A wide grin broke over Billy's face. He threw up his arms and his belly pushed forward. "Hell, that's okay -- it is his fault, ain't it?" A deep chuckle rocked him.

The crowd applauded. Billy waved a hand to quiet them.

"But we been looking in the wrong place. We don't like Brady and he don't like us -- that's why he wouldn't help. So what's new? We shoulda known it was going be a friend who finally helped. Eh? I give you Ransom Steen!" And Billy thrust an arm toward Ransom's food hatch.

People cheered and clapped. Someone whistled. Seven or eight of the men who'd been standing close to the truck charged toward the hatch. Ransom, his forehead filmed with sweat and his face flushed, saw them coming and tried to bolt the side entrance. But the men stormed in, took hold of him, and half-pushed, half-dragged him to the makeshift stage. Billy Ostipin, by this time, had made his way to the bar. He had a full beer shoved into each front pocket of his pants and was draining off a third.

From the moment Ransom climbed into the truckbed, it was clear that he did not know what to say. He stared at the ground beyond the tailgate, he shifted, he shuffled, he mumbled and looked into the sky. The crowd waited silently. Mosquitoes buzzed near the microphone.

Frozen in place, clutching a fencepost so hard the clusters of warts on his fingers and palms filled with pain as dark and salty as blood, Brady waited on Ransom's words.

Finally, Ransom took off his apron and his paper cap and scrunched them into a ball in his hand. "I guess we expected too much asking Brady to share his land," he

shrugged, looking at no one in particular. "I mean, we didn't really want to share it -- we wanted it for ours. So maybe we can't blame him for hanging on."

Again, people nodded.

"But as far as I know, that creature out there's never been owned by anyone." He stopped for a moment and enjoyed the smiles on the faces before him. They were ready to burst again and Ransom knew it, so he gave them a line that let them celebrate their fortune and get back at Brady. "If Brady thinks it's his, he really will have to learn to share."

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! blasted the speakers. The party exploded. People grabbed partners and raced toward the dancefloor; others headed straight for the bar. Several women lit Hallowe'en sparklers and stood on the end of the dock, their sulfer-fingers firing gold and bronze against the black sky.

Brady backed into the black shadows of the fruit trees.

After the blinding lights, he could barely see a yard ahead. The branches of leaves and blossoms had grown thick. Twice he scratched his face. He tore the sleeve of his shirt at the right shoulder.

Goddamnit!

He'd lived here since he was fifteen years old; he'd been the one to pull it all together after his father died. What life Stuart's Landing had had, it owed to him. But his trip through the orchard was difficult. He knew every tree on this side of the house -- 305 apple, 160 pear, and 85 cherry -- and he knew when each one had been planted and how much it could produce.

When he'd come about halfway through the trees, he stumbled over a piece of discarded fence-wire; his head thudded into the grassed earth and his right hand, stretched above his head to fend against jutting branches, came to rest against a trunk. He lay there for at least five minutes, his face buried in the moist grass, his long, flat fingers working over the surface of the bark. But he did not know what kind of tree it was; he could not remember the significance of the rough, vertical cuts in the bark. Not until he raised himself up on his hands and knees, his hands pushed out and grasping at the tree for support, and crushed a sap-wet blossom in his hands, did he know it was an apple tree. He let out a breath he was sure he'd been holding since he left the house. Something in the world was familiar.

After that, he made directly for the water -- for the soft pouring of the lake over the first row of beach stones -- and then along to the dock. Tied to a pylon midway

along the left side, Brady's flashy Boston Whaler rocked against the tire bumpers.

Brady stared out at the lake, but the moon had died behind a black cloud, and he saw only the iron-grey water, indifferent in the darkness. Behind him, across town at Steen's, the energetic foot-stomping songs had been replaced by ballads, and Brady could imagine all those people backed onto Ransom's wooden patio, hugging their secret.

Brady walked along the beach to the T-shaped dock, then along the slatted grey boards to the end. Behind him stood the house. It had been white and fortress-like once, but now the siding shed paint like an old skin; dozens of weathered grey boards had begun to loosen, popping away from the nail-heads. The eaves-troughs sagged like strands of old rope.

If he thinks he owns it, he'll have to share. What in hell was Ransom talking about?

FOUR

Brady hadn't slept. While pale light seeped into the valley, he lay on his back in bed and brooded over what he'd witnessed at Steen's. By the time he heard the stumbling and muttering and crashing behind the house, the saliva in his mouth tasted like vinegar.

By the time Brady pulled on his boots and crossed the back yard, the noise had stopped. He stormed up to the door of the picker shack and threw it open so hard that it crashed against the inside wall and popped one of the hinge screws. Roy was settled beneath a thick, red, white and black Indian quilt.

"Oh," Brady said as he stepped in, "just getting up?"

Roy smiled weakly, then raised the corner of the blanket to cover his mouth. He whispered in a grieving, throaty voice, "I'm not feeling well this morning," then lowered his head to the rolled-up pair of jeans and shielded his eyes with a hand.

"You'll be fine once you get your blood moving." Brady jerked a thumb over his right shoulder. "There's a whole batch of herbicides already opened. They've gotta be sprayed today."

Roy dropped his feet to the slatted floor and hunched

his chest over his knees. He stood up. And then he wobbled a bit on his ankles, swayed at the hips, and collapsed. He didn't fall, didn't stumble; it was more like the floor shot up to collect him like a raw egg.

"You're pissed," Brady said flatly.

Roy slid a hand between his head and the floor-boards.

Brady was so boiling mad he wanted to squeeze at the Roy's throat until the kid spilled his guts on the floor. Two days in town and already Roy had joined in with the others.

Brady pulled Roy to his feet, then guided him into a sitting position on the couch. "Do you need this job?" he asked flat out, and jerked Roy's shoulder's in his hands. "Or are you so smart you can work anywhere?"

"I need it."

"Okay. Then I'd be interested in knowing why you'd want to be pissed out of your gourd on" -- he lifted his wrist to check the date -- "Yup, Monday -- the day you were supposed to start. It strikes me as a funny way to launch into things."

"It won't happen again."

"Oh." Brady nodded slowly. "You want a bonus?"

"Fuck off."

Brady counted to ten under his breath. Therese had told him about this trick when they still believed there

might one day be a child. If they ever get to you so much you think you might slap their brains out, you're supposed to count to ten.

"Right about now," Brady warned, "I could whack you so hard across that drunken bean of yours that you'd never know what hit you. Right about here," and he rapped his fist against Roy's skull. When his knuckles struck the bone, something electric -- something charged with the resentment and bitterness that had pounded through his veins when he'd seen the locals dancing at Steen's -- shot up his arm then burst through his chest, his stomach, his thighs. His legs felt weak; he wanted to sit; he did not move. His heart beat so hard he could almost feel its shape against his ribs. There was sweat clenched in the pores of his closed fists. And he was so close to driving Roy -- there was a voice in his brain shouting, "Now, now, for God's sake now!" But the kid in front of him was on this land by his own will, and he was someone other than Brady himself or Therese. So Brady stopped. He stood back and let the sweat dry against his hand. The frenzy in his chest slowed. Brady walked to the door. But before he closed the door and headed back to his own bed, he told Roy, "Tomorrow morning."

He was reasonably certain that he heard Roy mutter "Aye-aye, skipper," as he closed the door.

Brady plunked himself down at the old picnic table a few yards in front of the shack. The breeze had pushed the cloud-cover up against the low mountains on the other side of the valley. The water just off the shore danced silver. For some reason this lifted Brady's spirits. He didn't put much stock in signs, but he needed a reason to do something against his better judgement, and the blue sky over his head and the rocks bleaching white on the shore seemed as good as anything else. So against his better judgement, Brady stormed back into the shack.

This time he did not jolt the door against the inner wall. He snatched the broom out of the corner and poked the handle into Roy's ribs.

Roy propped himself up with his elbows and stared, slit-eyed, at Brady.

"What I'd really like to know," Brady said, "is I'd like to know what was going on at that party."

"It was a party," Roy shrugged. His throat sounded raw. "You were there."

"If I was there I wouldn't be asking. Of course I wasn't there." Brady shook his head. "You really are new around here."

"Forgive me, Father."

"Well, why in hell would I be there?"

"They said it was in your honour."

"Who said?"

"I don't know -- everybody. They kept hoisting beers and saying, "Here's to Brady Stuart, the man who made it all possible!" He let out a long breath, then rolled toward Brady on his side. "No -- that wasn't all of it." He paused and rubbed his eyes. "Ransom -- is that right?"

"Ransom Steen."

"Yeah, him. He was the one that made it all possible, you were the one who made it all worthwhile."

Brady stared out the window for a moment. "Didn't anybody say anything about why it was in our honour?"

"I don't know. I figured you guys donated a new flag-pole or something."

"Didn't you care? Didn't Ransom's speech puzzle you? Or Billy's?"

Roy looked bewildered. "What speech?"

"Their little midnight speeches. About me."

"Didn't see them. I must've been gone by then."

"Where in hell did you go till this time in the morning?" Brady trembled with frustration. "You didn't even stay for the drama!"

Roy shook his head. "I thought you said you weren't there," he half-shouted back.

"Never mind," said Brady. "Where were you?"

"I met this chick," Roy said quietly.

Brady rubbed his face in his hands. He didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "Who?" he asked wearily.

"Patricia."

"Patricia who?"

"Lang. Patricia Lang."

Brady's head shot up. He was wide-eyed and wide awake. "You went home with Patricia Lang?" There was an edge of sarcasm in his voice.

"Yeah, after her swim."

"You were all night diddling Patricia Lang?"

"No," Roy said. "Talking. We drank wine and talked."

"Talking," Brady repeated. But it was a question.

"Yeah." Roy brought a hand out from under the quilt and worked it, open-palmed, in the air as he explained to Brady. "Did you know she tries never to speak unless she absolutely has to?" Roy did not wait for an answer. "It's because she's saving it up. She says she waits for someone who can listen with their ears and their eyes and their breathing. Then she talks about all the things she's been thinking about while not talking."

"And you're one of these lucky breathers?"

"Lucky me," Roy shrugged. "Anyway," he said peacefully, "I thought you were at the party. Why weren't you there?"

"I wasn't invited, for one thing, and I wouldn't have gone if I was."

"Silly me."

"More than you know." Brady paced the room. "So that's it?" he said finally. "You don't remember hearing anything else?"

"That's it. If you want to know why your friends threw a party, why don't you ask them?"

"Yeah," Brady said. He stepped to the window. Outside, the wind had stopped and the clouds had drifted back from the east side of the valley. "I'm just about ready to fire you," he said quietly, "so get some sleep and be set to prove yourself tomorrow."

"Yeah," Roy said, settling under his quilt.

Later that day, when Brady drove by and saw a small, make-shift "CLOSED" sign on the edge of Ransom Steen's pitch-black parking lot, he didn't give it much thought. After last night most everyone in town would need at least a few hours to recover.

But later, when Brady returned from his errand and saw Ransom up on a step ladder, driving nails through the edges of the hatch, he swung the truck off Centre Street and motored across the lot so fast that Ransom stepped down from his perch and braced the wooden ladder before him like

a shield. Three long nails hung out of the side of Ransom's mouth like flat-steel cigarettes. His eyes were narrow and red.

Brady stopped the truck ten yards from the stand, rolled down his window, crossed both arms over the rubber glass-guide, and smiled his best kiss-ass smile. He raised a hand to scratch at the crown of his head. "What's up?"

Ransom climbed back up the step-ladder. He took up his hammer, plucked a nail from the corner of his wide mouth, and started back to work.

Brady got out of the truck. At the other end of the stand, Ransom's sister, Ruth, lifted the corner of the hatch back to check her centering, then drove a nail through the plywood. Staring across the asphalt toward the water, Brady said, "So even Ransom couldn't keep her in the black when the crunch came."

Ruth turned away from her work. "You weren't much welcomed here when we were open. What makes you think we want you now that we're closed?"

As well as a sculpted face and figure that, at fifty, fit into jeans and T-shirts so well it made younger women envious, Ruth had been known for her tough and accurate tongue. When it came to running the stand, Ransom had the recipes and Ruth had the good sense. Left to her brother, coffee would have sold for a nickel, burgers for

seventy-five cents, and the local apples and cherries would have tipped the scales at less per pound than it cost to keep the bugs off them.

For several seconds Ransom stood three rungs up the ladder, balancing himself with his left hand, tapping the air with the hammer in his right hand, and staring at Brady. Then he backed down off the ladder and bent his head into his apron to wipe the sweat from his forehead. His tongue made sucking noises against his front teeth. He squinted at Brady and worked the hammer in his hand, quietly and continually shifting it in his fingers, as if finding the right grip would give him the words he was looking for. "I sold the place," he said triumphantly.

A natural belly-laugh rumbled up from Brady's stomach and into the mid-day air. Then, abruptly, it stopped. Brady shifted his eyes toward Ruth, as if she might smile or laugh and so betray Ransom's joke. But Ruth didn't even turn; she simply hitched her butt up to one side, and drove in another nail. Turning back to Ransom, Brady wondered if it was possible. He wondered, After forty years in one place, is it possible to imagine another life -- can the mind do that?

"Who?" Brady said.

Ransom shrugged. "Does it matter?"

"No, Ransom," Brady fired, sarcasm thick on his words.

"It doesn't matter at all. Who cares?" Brady was growing panicky, shifting from foot to foot, glancing first left, then right, then turning to look at the rows of apple trees beyond Ransom's lot; at least they were still here, no matter the shiftings of everything else in this goddamned place.

"You're real community-minded, aren't you?" Ransom started fidgeting with the hammer again. "You know what your problem is?"

"You tell me what my problem is." Brady was trying to link Benton Williams to the sale. Ransom's property was not big enough for a hotel, but if Williams had bought some of the vacant houses across the road...

"You don't give a shit about anybody but yourself, is your problem."

"Is that the scientific word for it?" Brady said. "Shit?"

"You think it all belongs to you. Just because it's got your father's name on it" -- he came down hard on 'father' to show that ownership belonged to Halverson Stuart, not Brady -- "you think you're the only one who knows what's right and what's wrong."

Ruth watched them from her perch on the paint-speckled ladder.

"Maybe I don't want to see the place ruined," said

Brady. "It could be that I'd like to see one place on this lake that isn't over-run with tourists -- goddamned Ogopogo cafes and Ogopogo Motels." Brady stopped abruptly and took a breath. "I have never understood why people want to promote tourism." He looked straight at Ransom. "Do you realize that this valley has only been settled for a hundred-and-some years?"

"Who said anything about tourists?"

"Benton was here, wasn't he? Unless he's changed his tune, a world-class resort would allow the people of Stuart's Landing to use their creativity and spirit to rebuild the place. Jesus."

Ransom shrugged.

"It's always seemed weird to me that a person can build some gimmicky souvenir shop or something, and then sell rocks out of the lake as if they belonged to him personally." Brady was getting worked up again. He thrust a hand toward the water. "But people come up with these stupid souvenirs. It's like saying, I own this valley, and if you pay some money I'll let you have a piece of it to take home. Look around you. This valley used to be so beautiful it made people's hearts stop. Now it's just holding up souvenir shops and Ogopogo cafes and motels."

"People just want to remember where they've been," Ransom said softly.

"People want to own where they've been. That's why they pay money. The ultimate tourist is the guy who likes a place so much he moves back and buys a summer cottage. A summer cottage is the ultimate souvenir." Brady shook his head. "You know, I once flew over the Grand Canyon. Half the people in the plane were trying to take pictures through the windows. They wanted to take it back to their living rooms. If you made it legal to chip pieces off the Grand Canyon, it'd be gone in a week."

For several moments, both men stood staring silently at the ground between them. Finally, Brady said, in a voice so quiet it barely reached Ransom, "Why did you sell?"

Ransom walked across the pad to the edge of the raised wooden patio. He sat down. His belly was so big it almost drooped between his thighs; his pinkish, uncalloused hands hung over his knees. "I'm not interested in flopping dead to the world into a mushroom burger." He folded his hands and looked up at Brady. "And because something around here had to give, or pretty soon you'd be the only one left." He scratched at a dried splotch of blue paint on the knee of his pants. "You're the one who thinks you own this valley. Otherwise you wouldn't get so worked up about sharing it. You hate to see others trying to take it away." Ransom's voice was quiet and steady. He was simply

giving Brady the facts. "You figure you own that creature out there, too. You don't care about anybody else who's seen it or believes something about it -- you've got this idea about what it is and what it's all about, and that's it. That's why you've been chasing people away from it for fifty years. You should've been Pope." Ransom sat quietly for a minute. He picked a green shoot of weed that had grown up through the asphalt and poked at the paint stain with it. Then he looked up at Brady and nodded his head toward town -- toward the run-down, empty houses across Centre Street and to the run-down, occupied houses beyond. "I sold because those people have as much right to a life here as you do." He was quiet again, then: "You never invented fruit trees, but you say you own them and you take money for tending them. No one ever owned the silver in the mine, either. But no one thought twice about it until you found your reasons for shutting it down. That's no different from what's going to happen here."

Brady turned away from Ransom's eyes to stare across the Landing at his own house. "Who did you sell to?"

But Ransom pushed himself up and walked back to the food hut. Ruth had gone. Ransom checked the job by trying to lift the hatch away from the frame. Satisfied, he turned to Brady. He clasped his hands beneath his stomach and lifted, taking the belly-pressure from his lungs. "I

don't much feel like working any more. What's the point?"

"It's what you do."

"You're not born to do one thing," Ransom said as he walked away.

For a long time after Ransom had gone, Brady stared at the asphalt in front of the closed hatch: it had cracked open and sunk under the weight of thousands of customers ordering their food and drinks on hot summer days.

FIVE

After watching Brady pout for two full days -- he would call it brooding, if she gave him the chance to pick his own word -- Therese confronted him across the dinner table.

Brady had been drinking. (No matter what he wanted to believe about himself, the truth was he couldn't handle pressure. After the mine shutdown, Brady'd spent his evenings flicking through channels and watching the old western flicks he'd rented up in Vernon. He'd watched True Grit and Rooster Cogburn so many times Therese thought she'd end up talking like John Wayne before Brady came to his senses. This had gone on in the middle of winter -- Brady all day moping about the house, complaining about his neighbours as though the laughter they'd shared over the years was so much dust in his eyes, then whining to Therese about the pounding headache he'd served himself the night before.)

Now Brady sipped at his third Captain Morgan's Spiced Rum, and chewed listlessly on a pork chop. Therese knew to expect a fight from this kind of silence. Anything could set it off: a creaking couch-spring, stale, shrunken ice in the trays, a supper-odour that refused to drift off after the meal. She decided to get it over with early.

"I'll need some help with these dishes," she said.

Brady shrugged and polished off his drink.

"I've a good deal to do around here," Therese pressed, "and I'll need your help."

Brady was silent.

Therese stacked plates and bowls in one hand and squeezed the cutlery into a metal knot in the other. "The last time you made the bottle your hobby -- did you accomplish anything then?"

"You don't know anything about it," Brady told her. After only three drinks his posture was slack, his voice thick and husky.

"What don't I know?"

Brady waved a hand to dismiss her. She was now supposed to go back to her woman's work.

A sharp pain flared just below Therese's throat; she covered it with her left hand, and her breathing quickened. She placed the dishes on the counter. For several seconds she stood over the sink, eyeing her reflection in the warped window-glass while she tried to feel the shape of the pain. Why did Brady have to disappear inside himself just when she'd begun to get sick again?

"Why is it," Therese wanted to know, "that men love to pretend they've got the weight of the world on their shoulders?"

"Leave it alone, Therese."

"I won't leave it alone. You go talk to the other wives in this town. Most will tell you that when things went sour around here, their husbands took to drinking or went out and chased up another woman or spent money like crazy people."

Brady stood at the fridge, clinking ice into his empty glass. "This isn't the same, Therese." He'd had enough to drink now that he didn't need mix; he poured out half a glass of rum and leaned against the counter. "Do you know what it's like to wake up and not know where you are? I don't mean they've changed things physically," he said, pushing a hand toward town. "It might even be easier to take if they'd shuffled the houses and moved the trees. At least that'd be something you could get a hold of with your eyes." He cracked an eroded ice-cube between his molars. "But they've changed their ideas. It used to be that we all liked the pace around here -- that's why most of us chose here over somewhere else. That's why people stayed, and that's why people wanted to stay undiscovered. It was the beauty here and the pace we moved at and the way we believed we had it as good as we could get it." He went back to the kitchen table.

Therese sat down beside him.

Brady squinted hard at the floor tiles, as if he hoped

to find a coherent pattern amid the frenzy of gold and red speckles.

"You don't know for sure that anything's going to happen."

"Ransom's sold his place," Brady said. "He's kept the house, I think, but he's sold the rest. Eight or nine acres."

"Who to?"

Brady shrugged. "Dunno. It's some big secret. But you can bet it's got something to do with that hotel Benton tried to sell me on." Brady laughed bitterly. "They're probably going to promote the rustic setting -- advertise that it's the authentic Okanagan Valley experience, on the water and right beside an orchard. If you're lucky," he mimicked, "you might catch a glimpse of the old fart farmer spraying his trees." Brady took a drink. "Bastard'll get his highway yet."

After dinner, Therese went upstairs to the bedroom. She lay motionless on the waterbed mattress. And when the pains started again, she tried to diagnose them. The one that throbbed below her shoulder-blade, she had almost convinced herself, was a muscle-ache, the one between her sixth and and seventh ribs a bone-bruise -- she must have

knocked her chest against the corner of the fridge or the counter. But she could not dismiss the other two: the one that flared directly below her wind-pipe when she breathed deeply, and the one deep in her stomach, on the left, that ached and cut her when she moved her bowel.

Twenty years earlier, only months after Therese had stopped menstruating (an event that had permanently ended Brady's continued attempts -- despite the three examinations that had shown him to be sterile -- to get Therese pregnant), her left breast had been removed. Her next two years had been filled with terror; bruises, cuts, the sight of her own blood, and any pain whatsoever had been enough to keep her awake through the night. And she had refused to go near Brady. With the left side of her breast gutted -- the growth had been extensive, and spreading, and all cosmetic considerations had been pushed aside like a child's first screams -- she could not lift her hand away from her naked chest, and she could not lie beside him in the bed and believe him when he said "This does not matter," and stroked her hair and her forehead and tried himself to lift the hand away. It changed everything. She could not bear the prosthetic they'd given her; instead, she stuffed her cups with tissues. (Their coolness, the faint scratching and the dry, dusty smell, reminded her that no good would come of pretending.) She

did not want the warm gel of the prosthetic to give her "confidence." Being altered, she wanted to feel altered. If she "adjusted," gained confidence, she would be off-guard.

But eventually she did learn to pretend. Months passed, then years. X-rays and check-ups confirmed her health. Occasionally, she'd be troubled by a sudden pain, but the pains passed, then disappeared altogether. She let Brady touch her, she touched him. The scars became less a calling card for the disease and more a part of her own body.

And then, a few months ago, the pain returned.

The pain.

The ingeniousness of the pain amazed her: Taking deep breaths, she could feel the lump in her throat expanding. It did not ache, it simply asserted its presence, and now and again it would disappear just long enough to let her believe it had been a temporary ailment -- a virus or bacteria that hadn't quite taken hold in her system. But it always came back -- a big cotton ball at the base of her throat, pushing against the passage, scratching at the air she breathed. She could also feel the shape of the other serious pain, the knife-cut centered between her hips, just in from her tailbone. When she excreted, the pain flared, enveloping the intestine, and she could feel the inflamed

cylinder struggling to release the pressure of her waste. Sometimes, the pain was so forbidding she refused to eat, preferring vitamins and milk and teaspoons of brown sugar to the pain. And then the pain would ease off and almost disappear until Therese could believe that although there was something wrong, it was not cancer, it was not the cell-by-cell invasion of her body.

Today she had felt both pains. If she rested here on the bed, would her body gather the strength it needed to fight, or would her resting body be overtaken by the ingenious cells that courted them like black widows? If she worked around the house or in the garden, would her working body fight for wholeness, or would it become fatigued and give passage to a fury of bad cells?

Therese slipped out of bed and dressed. Then she moved through the room, straightening the sheets, hanging discarded clothes. She heard Brady's voice threading through the house; he had left his movie to talk to Roy Silverheels at the back door. Therese listened. She could not hear the words, only the rising and falling sound. She knew the tones and cadences of her husband's voice so well -- the way it quickened and grew rich when he was talking about something right before his eyes. It was a voice that came in deep, arhythmic bursts when Brady walked or when he came against an idea that he couldn't quite get hold of.

And it was a voice that became, at night, a full and reverent whisper, a quiet, gentle voice that did not want to rise above a sound Brady was waiting for. Now, as Brady's voice faded, it drew Therese downstairs.

She could not accept Brady's withdrawal. If he was right and Ransom had sold his land to hotel interests, Therese was willing to let Brady dull his senses until his brain was ready to accept things as they were. But she had no interest in speculation. Life was made of time. You started at point A and you went to point B without stopping; if you were lucky, you could throw most anything you wanted in between. But you had to be stupid to sacrifice your time to something that might never happen. Therese intended to get to the bottom of this business before her own time ran out.

Brady was back in front of the TV. Therese called good-bye, but she did not go into the parlour: If Brady saw her clothes, he'd be suspicious. (Men. Why did they need to fix themselves so steadfastly at the centre of the universe -- one minute worrying themselves into a rage about other men, the next minute prying into conversations you'd had with your girlfriends. All because they thought women too stupid to control the persuasions of their bodies or their tongues. Too stupid to effectively guard the personas of their men.)

"I haven't been out in days," Therese called when Brady didn't answer. The sound of Henry Fonda giving his Word drifted down the hallway. "I'm going for a walk."

Brady muttered good-bye.

Outside, the air was thick and warm; within minutes, a damp film had settled on Therese's arms and shoulders. She wore her peach-coloured summer dress and sandals made of white canvas. Her white-blond hair -- grey, really, although her natural shade had been so light no one had seen it turn -- was pulled back and fastened into a pony tail.

She went into the orchard and walked down the aisle between the third and fourth rows of apple trees. This way, if Brady suddenly missed her and stepped out onto the porch or to one of the windows, he would not be able to see her walking away. He would not be able to call her back to share the solitude he'd drunk himself into.

Ten minutes later, Therese had reached the other side of town. She stood on the narrow grey street in front of Paricia Lang's shack, a small, square house of rough-hewn cedar painted the shade of dark green you used to see on rural school-houses.

She stood straight-shouldered on the worn asphalt, her feet together, her hands folded over her abdomen, and took several deep breaths. Would her plan work? (Plan. It was

no plan at all, really -- she simply wanted to find out what was going on, and because of the things they shared -- in passing, their eyes had met more than once, and, Oh yes! they shared -- she believed that the striking young woman inside this green hut might tell her.) Not long ago, Therese had shared things with other women in Stuart's Landing -- with Ruth Steen, with Mary Jane Carson, with Dee Hyatt. But when Brady closed the mine, each family defined itself by blood. Therese glimpsed her old friends around the the Landing, and she understood from their eyes that their bitterness was not directed at her. But the borders were clear and unalterable.

But Therese shared more with Patricia Lang: forty years ago, Therese had been the woman mooned over in this town. She'd been the one men couldn't tear their eyes from. She'd been the scarred one, the silent one. Mind you, the two of them were different in that aspect: Patricia's silence harboured a kind of wisdom; her jade-green eyes sparkled with a discerning half-smile when she was approached. Therese's silence had been terror-filled. Behind her own blue eyes -- the same blue as the lake under the sun, she'd been told, ironically -- there was the shame of Halverson Stuart's death and an absolute fear of the water. And there was the violence and the mystery of her scars -- the way they surfaced like

rose-coloured patches of excema on the flawless skin of her back when she remembered Naitaka. That was the other secret: The secret of their scars, for it was said that Naitaka had attacked Patricia -- that one night Patricia had been found on Brady's beach, just north of Steen's, bleeding and weak but without inclination to pick herself up and seek help.

Therese walked across the dried-yellow lawn to Patricia's front door. She knocked.

Patricia Lang opened the door -- swung it quickly toward her on the hinges, as if the infrequency of callers here forced her to treat every knock with the seriousness reserved for midnight phone calls.

The two women looked at one another. Patricia's silence was famous in the Landing, but Therese did not know whether this was the silence of habit or the silence of etiquette. Who was supposed to speak first?

"Hello," Therese ventured. She was sorry she'd come. Her reasons for seeking answers from this stunning young woman now seemed absurd.

"This is awkward," Therese said.

Patricia Lang raised her eyebrows.

"And you're not making it any easier." Therese paused. "May I come in?"

For a moment Patricia did not seem to know whether she

would let Therese in or not. She glanced back into the house once, twice, then looked back to Therese and gave a small nod. Therese walked past her into the living room.

The faded wooden floor was covered with a tightly-woven beige carpet that did not reach to the baseboards. Rain had soaked the ceiling tiles, leaving yellow puddle-stains around the central light fixture. Behind the couch, several small plants rested on the white window sill. Therese sat forward in a large recliner, her knees pressed together, her elbows resting on her knees, her chin resting on the knuckles of her clasped hands. Patricia Lang sat in the old rocker across the room.

"I don't quite know how to say this," Therese began, and let out a long breath.

Something metal clattered to the floor on the other side of the house. "Shit!" A man's voice.

Therese glanced through the kitchen entrance-way in time to see Roy Silverheels storm out of a low side-door, whip a powder blue towel off his bare shoulders, mutter "Damnit, Patricia!" and freeze in mid-step when he saw Therese. The towel hung from his right hand; in his left hand, he held a pair of red-handled scissors. And his hair was gone. Or most of it. The long mane that had hung down the middle of his back had now been cropped unevenly at the back of his head, one side hanging just above his shoulder,

the other side brushing his collar.

Therese stifled a laugh.

Roy was obviously startled by the unexpected visit here, but at the moment he was more concerned with the damage he'd done to his thick, black hair. "Jesus!" he cursed, snapping the towel at a curled edge of carpet.

Quietly, Patricia said, "All you have to do is even it up."

"Well, Jesus!" Roy spat again. "I look like I'm off to buy designer jeans and a Volvo, for chrissakes." He dropped the towel, then stared down at the scissors in his hand as if he'd just used them for murder. His other hand moved incessantly between the uneven strands of hair at the back of his head. Now that he'd vented his anger, he no longer seemed to know what to do about his hair or how to deal with the sudden appearance of Therese.

Therese was angry. She suddenly felt betrayed. Was this what Brady had meant when he railed against the changes? Did he feel, as Therese felt now, that people were sneaking around behind his back? (She could not tell herself that she had a right to know. What Patricia and Roy did was their own business. But in a town of seventy-five souls, it seemed natural to know who was keeping time with whom -- particularly when the whom worked for your husband. And when people held their tongues for

no apparent reason, the simplest facts about their lives seemed sordid.) Therese had come here to try to get things straight, but Roy's presence confused her. "What is going on here?" she demanded.

Roy looked up. He glanced intently from Patricia to Therese, as if waiting for some kind of explanation himself. Then he walked past both women to the window. For several minutes he stood staring out at the dark streets. When he finally turned back, he was shaking his head. "You tell me what's goin' on around here, man. 'Cause all I know is that this is one weird goddamn town."

"I beg your pardon?" said Therese.

"Roy," Patricia Lang whispered. A warning.

"No, I mean it, man." Roy came out from behind the couch and stood between Therese and Patricia. "It's weird. That party, for example." He was looking at Patricia. "I've been meaning to ask you about that. What was that all about? Everybody praising up Mr. Stuart -- then I talk to him and he's flippin' out because I'm stupid enough to think he'd be invited. He's workin' me over for information like nobody else around here has a mouth." He turned to Therese. "And now you're here," he said, and flushed, and lowered his voice. "And you're acting like I'm part of this weird chain of secrets."

When Therese did not respond -- just sat frozen in her

chair, for all the world as if she'd lost her place in her own life -- Patricia explained.

Thirty minutes later, Therese left the house. Instead of crossing the small, open field between Patricia's place on Townsite Road and the strip of asphalt that ran alongside the orchard, she headed south, toward Ransom's.

Sitting on the couch while Patricia's quiet, steady voice recounted the significant history of the past fifty years, Therese had not been able to concentrate. She had heard the words, but she had not been able to listen. Too many memories had plunged into her head all at once, without regard for their own chronology, and they'd spun around so furiously and tangled themselves so uncontrollably that Therese could no longer recall what had happened, or when, or why, or what any of it meant. Then, when Patricia told of the town's plans for Ransom's property, Therese excused herself. If her decision to come here had seemed absurd the minute she'd walked through the door, her future seemed absurd once she'd heard what she'd come looking for.

Now, as she stepped over the frayed end of a rusted steel cable that curled over the lip of the roadside ditch and up onto the shoulder, Therese let the conversation come

back to her.

Patricia had told Roy how Halverson Stuart had wandered into the valley sixty years ago to find silver in the hills and rich alluvial soil beside the water. (Didn't wander! Therese thought: Abandoned his family to do it.) She told how Brady had followed some years later and how he had pieced things together after his father's sudden death. (Didn't follow: Abandoned his mother to do it. And didn't piece things together out of pride, but wanted a father so badly he made one out of the land and scattered enterprises his blood father had claimed.)

"During the teens and twenties of this century, the Landing saw its first generation of children -- mostly the people who've stayed." (Stayed, Brady would say, because they were born to parents who'd come looking for somewhere good: these children, now men and women approaching old age, still believed in the judgement of their elders and refused to pack off and look for something that could only pale in comparison.)

Patricia told how the mine had turned out enough silver to keep everyone happy. "Between the miners and the drivers and the salesmen and the secretaries and so on, the mine kept two-thirds of the town fed and clothed and housed." She stared out the window, as if she expected to see the mine up behind her house reflected off the mountain

on the other side of the lake. "It was all done the old way -- the mining. It made the work harder, but no one wanted to be replaced by machinery." (There was an old joke: People seldom moved to the Landing because few people knew it existed; when the shifts changed in the late afternoon, half the town was underground and the other half was asleep -- passers-by didn't even know it existed.) Those who didn't work in the mine, Patricia told Roy, opened shops on the north side of town. You could still see the buildings -- open rooms with plate glass windows in front -- alongside Earle Hyatt's run-down motel.

"But four years ago, Brady shut down the mine. He had no real part in the mine -- it was a co-operative -- but he owned the land. And he wanted it back. No one really knows why. All they know is they don't believe it had to happen -- they think it's got something to do with Brady wanting the Landing for himself."

(I know.)

Patricia motioned Roy to sit in front of her on the carpet. She used the scissors to even out the mess Roy had made of his hair, and she dropped the long, thick strands into a scuffed, stainless-steel bowl. When she spoke again, her manner had changed. Her voice broke -- not the breaking of tears or laughter, but the fading and regathering of uncertainty; her eyes, fixed on the window,

were wide and hungry, as if she wanted her stare to burn a path through the abandoned houses, the vacant lots and the rows of trees so she could see the lake. "For as long as anyone can remember, Brady's been obsessed with Ogopogo. No one really knows the why of that, either."

(I know. And you know.)

"Some people think Ransom knows, but he's not telling."

(I know.)

"And now Ransom's sold his place to a search company that wants to find Ogopogo."

Roy traced his fingers along the collar-length border of his hair. He shook his head. "Naitaka," he said, using the anglicized version of the original Indian word, "is a myth. Indians invented it three hundred years ago. No one believes in it anymore."

Patricia laughed softly. "You might be able to sell that in the cities, but you'll never sell it here."

(Myth? Did Brady touch a myth? Was it a myth's head, as hard as old leather, as slick and cold as ice, against my naked skin? Were you scarred, Patricia, by a story? Did a myth try to take me beneath the water? Was it a myth that drowned Halverson Stuart when he tried to save me?)

SIX

The next morning, Brady didn't have to rouse Roy Silverheels; he woke up to the sound of Roy knocking on the back door.

When Brady came down, Roy said, "I waited in your chair," and nodded across the porch to an old kitchen chair with rusted chrome legs. He clasped the edge of the open door by way of apology. "Then I figured maybe you were waiting for me."

Brady nodded absently and dropped two thick slices of bread into the toaster. The automatic coffee maker gurgled the last drops into the pot. "I was down to make coffee a while ago," said Brady. "Guess you didn't hear me."

Roy stood just inside the door now. "Is there anything I should get ready outside?"

"You eat yet?" Brady spread a thick pat of butter across his toast. "You want some coffee?"

"I have a drunken uncle who told me never to eat breakfast. He used to say, 'You eat breakfast, you'll puke up the fun you had the night before.'"

Brady handed him a mug of coffee.

"Okay if I drink outside?" Roy asked.

Brady waved a hand toward the porch. "Be my guest,"

he said, and parked himself at the table to enjoy his toast.

"Have to start with some garbage work," Brady said a few minutes later. He closed the door and walked past Roy, who was sitting on the chair, staring out toward the lake. "It takes a lot of skills to be good in an orchard," Brady added. "It's not all dummy labour. So don't worry -- smart guy like you can find it very challenging."

Brady led Roy past the picker shack, then along the shore to the north-west tip of the orchard. Brady's property took up most of the shoreline; a three-strand barbed-wire fence ran from one side of the landing to the other, sectioning Brady's trees off from everything else. Halfway along, the fence broke for Brady's driveway and the narrow cedar-chip path that led to the public beach.

When Brady's father began planting the orchard, he started on the north-west side of his land and made his way south. Now the trees were old. Brady had been forced to uproot the ancient apple stock at the northwest edge and replant. The small trees needed grooming.

"Close your eyes," said Brady.

"Excuse me?" Roy leaned against a fence post, watching Brady run his fingers over the lower branches of one of the trees.

"Close your eyes," said Brady. "These things," and he lifted a hand to point at his own eyes.

Reluctantly, Roy did as he was told.

"Now," said Brady, "What's an apple tree look like?"

"I look stupid -- is that it?"

"Just answer the question," Brady ordered.

"Well, it's got branches and leaves, it's made out of cotton candy, and if you see a snake near one, don't believe a word it says." A huge grin broke across Roy's face.

"You're a funny man," said Brady. "What shape is it?"

"Tree shaped."

"If you drew a string around the perimeter of the branches, what shape would it suggest?" Brady was getting impatient; an edge crept into his voice.

"An oval," Roy said flatly.

"Wrong!"

Roy's eyes flew open. "Whadaya mean, 'wrong'?"

"Look over there," said Brady, pointing beyond the newly-planted rows to the ash-grey bark of the old trees. "Show me an oval."

"Okay, so those are round. But I've seen plenty of oval fruit trees."

"Sure you have," said Brady. "But they weren't good trees. The best fruit comes off round trees." Brady

stepped to the first young tree in the row. "Over here."

"This one's oval," blurted Roy, his face full of delight.

"You learn fast." Brady stepped behind the tree and walked along the fence. He peeled a sheet of black polythene off a bundle of lumber-yard cut-offs, then carried the wood to Roy. Yanking three two by fours from the center to loosen the rest, he said, "You've got to spread the branches of the young trees to make them round. Otherwise they'll grow up to be nothing more than lousy oval trees."

While Brady watched, Roy worked a small piece of wood in between the tree's small trunk and the next branch. Jamming the narrow edge down had little effect, so Roy turned the block 90 degrees, bore his weight down on the end of the branch, and tried to stay the block against a small knot. It wouldn't go.

"Not too hard," Brady warned from behind.

Roy nodded and pushed harder against the branch, but just as he slid the block into place, the branch peeled away from the trunk. Roy thudded into the long grass on the orchard floor.

"For pete's sake!" Brady marched toward the tree; but instead of reaching down to help Roy up, he knelt to examine the white, tear-shaped scar at the base of the

small tree. Roy lay on his back in the grass, rubbing his left shoulder.

"That's a stupid way to do it," Roy said from the ground.

"What's that?"

"That's a stupid way to do it," Roy repeated. "The branches are bound to break if you try to jam them out like that."

"I been doing it fifty years and I haven't broken one yet."

"Lucky you," muttered Roy. He rolled onto his stomach and pushed himself up from the ground, his jeans and pale blue shirt speckled with drops of water from the grass. "What about this?" Roy said, stepping to the next tree. His fingers closed around the branch between two full buds, and he pushed down.

Brady folded his arms across his chest, waiting.

"What if you tied a cord around here?" Roy asked, pointing to where his hand held the branch, "and weighted it with a brick or something."

"Sure," said Brady, "I'll go over to the house and take down the fireplace."

"Stones," Roy said, shaking his head at Brady's stubbornness. "You could go over and take down the beach."

"I been doing it this way for fifty years," Brady

said. He swept Roy's block of discarded wood up from the grass and used it to spread another branch. Then he turned on Roy. "See, it's not so hard."

Roy said nothing.

"Why do you shake your head?" Brady said. He could hear the edge in his own voice. Roy was being belligerent, shaking his head as if Brady was the stupidest man on earth. Why did young people always want to trade common sense for originality?

Roy did not stop shaking his head. "I just don't see why...older people think there's only one way to do things."

Brady let out a long breath. "And peach-fuzz like you figure that older people couldn't possibly have come up with anything useful."

"That's not what I said."

Brady felt himself growing angry. He did not intend to argue this point. Who did Roy think he was to argue grooming techniques with the man who'd run this place since 1934?

"Just do it!" Brady ordered, his voice rising.

Again, the shaking head.

Brady exploded: "You got a fucken loose bone in your neck?"

Roy glared at Brady for a second, then let his gaze

fall to the damp mat of grass between the rows of trees. But Brady knew he did not look away out of embarrassment or from fear of the shouted words; Roy looked away to keep from saying something that would again sting Brady's anger.

"Just do it," Brady said, softly this time. And when Roy turned toward the bundle of cut-offs, Brady headed for the house.

At five-thirty, Roy snuck along the west-edge orchard fence to Brady's rutted driveway and the Volkswagen Beetle. He was hot and dirty from his work, but he did not stop to dip in the lake to scrub the sweat from his skin and clothes. He wanted to get off the property before Brady came out to call him for supper or check his work. Twice he glanced over his shoulder to see the branches end-weighted by heavy beach-stones hanging from the twine he'd found in Brady's storage shed. He knew he would pay for any defiance, so he did not defy Brady completely. He had spread most of the branches the way Brady requested -- three had broken accidentally, two he'd helped along to make his point -- but he'd spread a dozen trees his own way. And he was sure he could talk his way past Brady's fury.

Twenty minutes later, Roy rounded a sharp curve and saw, through the tunnel of shadows between the roadside pine and fir trees, the Reserve townsite -- the beaten-down

community hall (flapping plastic where there should have been glass); three green steel mailboxes overgrown by a chokecherry tree; a huge, orange Disposal garbage bin, and the sagging powder-blue spectators' stands bordering the rutted softball diamond. On the other side of the road, long grass and the clumps of bush that clung to the stands of pine and fir trees shielded several dilapidated houses. Just beyond, in a wide, brown-grass clearing, stood the small Anglican church, its warped walls and oiled boards dark against the sunlight on the other side of the lake.

It was all here. A little older and a bit more run-down than it had been twenty years ago. A little greyer and dustier than it had been when Roy visited six months ago. But nothing had really changed. Roy gripped the Bug's steering wheel tighter and tried not to think. This was where he came from, and yet how could anyone be proud of or glean a sense of identity from this scarred landscape and the scarred faces inside these buildings?

Once he'd pulled the car onto the shoulder of the road outside his father's house, Roy sat for a long time. Why had he come here?

Staring toward the house, Roy could not help but look into his own past. Scattered across the yard and along the lakeside strips of land to either side of the house and the book-shed -- strewn like time-posts across the acres and

acres of decent bottomland -- were the smoke-blackened objects of Roy's childhood and adolescence: the battered green '54 Chevy half-ton, the '69 Buick Electra, the red '74 Montego, and the old orange Willy's Jeep. The pile of rough cedar that Roy's father had at one time intended to side the house with was now grey with age and warped by rain and heat; and the tarpaulin that still clung to the house above and below the stucco had bled to an ash-grey colour. The truck-loads of coal-black soil the old man had once meant to spread into a garden behind the house were now thick with bright green weeds and dandelion stalks. Boards and tin and tufts of faded insulation lay around the perimeter of the book-shed. At one time, thirty-odd dairy cattle had grazed the fields, but now those same fields were the dark, rusted shades of burned vegetation and singed earth. Roy's father, in a fit of rage, had one day set them aflame.

"What am I doing here?" he muttered softly.

It was a question he could not answer. Sometimes he felt that Brady was driving him back to the Reserve -- Brady and his fierce allegiance to his own place and to the rules of conduct for that place. There had been something like that in Eugene Silverheels at one time, and perhaps Roy had come back to see if a spark of it still remained. Wasn't it true that people used to burn their fields to

regenerate them?

When his third heavy knock went unanswered, Roy pushed the door open on its hinges and stepped inside. The smoke-yellowed curtains were drawn, the light pushing through them as tarnished as an old brass fire-screen. Dozens of beer cans, mason jars and bottles of One Crown rye were scattered across the coffee tables and on the carpet in front of each piece of furniture. The thin adaptor-wire of an old cassette player ran like a twisted artery from a wall-socket to the couch. The cushions on the chairs and on the old purple chesterfield sagged with age and with the weight of the old man's bones and rage.

"Eugene," Roy called softly.

In the kitchen, Roy found books on Indian myths, pamphlets about land claims and magazines about native art scattered across the table and fallen onto the vinyl chair-seats. But there was no sign of Eugene Silverheels -- not in the kitchen, not back in the living room, not up the bare-wood staircase where the dust stirred by passing cars rained through the only open window in the house. So Roy pushed out the dented screen door behind the kitchen table and stood in the long grass and weeds behind the house. The land sloped gently across fifty yards to the lake, then broke into mud and reeds and the thick tangles of eurasian milfoil. Halfway between Roy and the water, a

dirty mason jar lay on its side on a faded red-cedar picnic table.

"Eugene," Roy called, louder this time. Although he was only twenty-two years old, Roy had not called Eugene "father" or "Dad" for nine years. In his early teens, Roy had been forced to decide between his father's guilt and anger and the visions and dreams forming in his own brain. As a child, Roy had been able to pretend that the old man's anger was his anger also, but the bitterness and the rage had been a child's play with waving fists and unfamiliar words: they had been independent of sacrifice.

"Eugene?"

"Ohhh-ohhhh-oohhhh!" echoed through the book-shed behind Roy and escaped through the cracks between the weathered boards. Then a crash -- not the sound of glass shattering or crunching metal, but the slow crumbling of something built piece by piece.

Roy sprinted to the shed and threw open the metal door. Inside, clouds of dust rolled through the dirty light from the overhead bulb. To the left, along the wall nearest the house, Roy saw the old man's craggy face and narrow chest sticking out from under a pile of books, magazines and boards. "Eugene!" Roy barked.

Eugene Silverheels did not respond. He lay still, staring wide-eyed and unblinking at the ceiling.

"You okay?"

"Fuhgoff."

A few years ago, this long, squat building had been a barn: stalls along either side, cow dung and hay packed tight as tile on the floor, the silver milking machines scrubbed and stacked in the corner after two hours' steady pumping, the faint rubsound of Eugene Silverheels' hands on the teats of the temperamental cows. Back then, Eugene had been building something. And because he wanted to give something of his success back, he had begun a search for the perfect symbol -- not tins of paint for the hall or salt sheds for the winter road-ice, but something Indian out of an Indian past and somehow important to the future. ("Something," he once told Roy, "that could stand proud enough to make people like that pale-blooded mother of yours realize it's no shame being Indian. That you don't have to run off to a city to mean something.") He started reading. He had always been a heavy drinker but now he had something he could focus on through the haze. Late into each evening, he drank beer at the kitchen table and pored over books -- borrowed books, loaned books, books he purchased at local stores or ordered from the coast. He drank beer and made notes in Key Tab scribblers. He refused to return the borrowed books for fear he might lose a piece of the puzzle, but his friends and neighbours

forgave him because they liked what he had become: an Indian's Indian. He gave parties focus and he told stories that made the past and the traditions more vivid and alive than the wisdom of the old people. But his need for a future broke him.

One morning, Roy came down the stairs to find his father still sitting at the table, books open all around him and beer cans stacked like totem poles on the far side of the table.

"Nothing," Eugene said.

"What's nothing?" asked Roy.

"There's nothing to build."

Roy hesitated. From the beginning, he had been excited by his father's dream. In secret -- not because of shame or fear, but because he wanted the knowledge for himself -- he had thumbed through every book, pressed every photograph to his skull until he was sure he would not forget it. "What about a giant pit-house?" Roy said. "Or a hunt camp?"

Eugene Silverheels shook his head.

"Why?"

"Those things are the past. They are the past and they can only take us back to the past. I wanted the past to lead us into the future."

His father looked weak this morning. Weak and thin,

as if the dream of building something physical had been the only thing feeding his muscles. "There's the stories," said Roy.

Eugene Silverheels, eyes glazed and red and expressionless, faced his son. "Stories are like booze," he said. "They dull things into sense for a while, but you breathe them out before long -- until the next time, at least. You're always left with gaps in between."

Eugene did not stop reading. He read more than ever. But whatever he'd found that night changed him. Now he read to the exclusion of his son and his home and his work. One by one, he sold the cows, cleared their stalls, and shelved his books along the walls. He read more voraciously than ever, but he no longer read to find the structure of his dream: he read to prove it did not exist.

Now, more than a dozen years later, Roy looked into the same expressionless eyes that had turned to him across the table that morning. Red, glazed eyes above swollen cheeks. A face marked by broken blood vessels that purpled the copper skin and twisted across Eugene's nose and cheeks like the roots of a pushed-down tree.

"Come on," Roy said. "Get up."

"Fuhgoff."

Roy knelt and pushed some books aside, freeing his

father's left hand. "Come on. Get up. How did you manage this, anyway?"

"Looking for sumpthin."

Roy cleared a pile of Canada West magazines away from his father's stomach and hips, then tugged on the free arm. "I thought you quit looking for things."

Eugene's drunken eyes looked hurt. He tilted his head back and gazed around the room. "Just lookin' for sumpthin different."

"Can you move your legs?"

"Lookin' for a curse." Eugene Silverheels spat the final word.

"Good," Roy said impatiently. "A curse'll fix the bastards. Now come on, get up."

When the old man did not budge, Roy slipped his hands under his father's armpits and pulled him away from the debris of books like a fireman dragging a victim away from flames. At the door, he guided Eugene to his feet, steadied him, and pointed to the house.

"What're you here for?" Eugene said as he half-walked, half-stumbled toward the front door.

"I just came to see how you were doing. I got work just down the road. Stuart's Landing. It's just picker work, but the pay's better than usual."

Inside, Eugene collapsed on the couch. "Beer?"

Roy shook his head. "Why don't you wait a while," Roy said quietly.

"Fuhgit." The old man rolled off the couch and stumbled into the kitchen. Seconds later, he returned with two opened bottles of generic beer pinned to his chest by his forearms. His hands fumbled to light a cigarette. "Halverson Stuart," he muttered, sinking into the cushions.

"What's that?" Roy sat in the old rocker across the room.

"Silver in the mountain above the landing used to belong to Indians. That's how you gotch'er name. There was a Silverheels Silverheels three hundred years ago. He found it. Wooed the ladies with bracelets and rings. Pissed off just about every man around, but the sonofabitch could run like nobody's business. So Silverheels."

Roy did not know whether to believe his father or not. Over the years, Eugene had ingested so many myths and stories -- had learned their basic patterns so well -- that he was inclined to invent his own. "And?"

"And it was a secret until Halverson Stuart came along. People traded silver along with furs to the Hudson's Bay, but no one ever slipped out with where the silver was. Even when they pushed us back here, no one knew about it." Eugene leaned back and swallowed half a bottle of beer, then wiped the dribble from his chin.

"Seventy, eighty years ago, Halverson Stuart wandered off a road crew and found it. Somehow raised the money to buy the landing and most of this side of the mountain." He finished the first bottle of beer, dropped his cigarette into it, and picked up the other bottle.

"I guess that's the way it goes," Roy said absently. Was Halverson Stuart Brady's grandfather? His father or uncle? Although the idea intrigued Roy, his anger chased the fascination away. The smell of beer and urine and molding food and dishes bit at his nostrils. His chest and stomach tightened at the sight of his father swilling back beer on the couch. Once, this hearty man had burned with the desire to build something; now he was committed to no more and no less than his own destruction. "When are you going to get off that stuff?" Roy asked, nodding toward the bottle in his father's hand.

"When I find it."

"Find what?"

"The curse."

"You're going to find a curse to set it all right, are you?"

"Fuhgen rights."

"I thought the elders used to need to be pure before they could work magic."

"Nothin's been pure for a hundred years. 'Least a

hundred."

Roy shook his head. "You've got no right," he said softly.

"What do I got no right to?"

Roy was standing now. "You've got no right to believe you represent anything other than your own self-pity." Roy swung toward the door. "Jesus, this is stupid."

"Stupid for you," Eugene spat.

"It's stupid for anyone to look for a string of senseless words instead of getting off their ass and being something."

"What are you bee-in'?"

"At least I'm trying to make something out of myself."

Eugene laboured out of the deep cushions and staggered toward Roy, swinging the second beer wildly in his right hand. "You can't make nothin' of yourself 'cause you can't make sumpthin out of nothin'. You got nothin' to make with. You're no Indian and you're no white man. You're nothin'. You got Indian blood but blood don't make a man. Spirit makes a man. And you got no spirit." The old man snatched the portable tape player off the coffee table and hit the play button. The sound of his own recorded voice, made harsh and metallic by the machine, blared through the room, chanting nonsense while Eugene tried to harmonize.

It was this last bit, this sputtering, stumbling

drunken wisp of a man that turned Roy to rage. Maybe the old man was right -- maybe Roy was without anything he could call Indian spirit -- but if Eugene Silverheels did have spirit, Roy could live with the absence. What he could not live with was the image before him. No father -- just a foolish, humiliating man who made Roy ashamed.

"I'll see you sometime," Roy said. He wanted out. In this family, there was nothing Indian to be proud of. He left the house, the sound of Eugene Silverheels' recorded chants trailing behind him in the summer air.

When Brady tore open the doctor's letter and read the slip inside, he was too furious to think of treading lightly where his wife's feelings were concerned.

Weeks ago -- the morning he'd posted the Help Wanted sign, in fact -- he'd once again gone to the doctor about the pain in his legs. But instead of giving Brady the pain relievers he'd asked for, Doctor Roberts had insisted on "another approach." He did not give Brady the details of this new approach; he simply said he wanted Brady to see another doctor. Now, before him on a pink slip of paper was the doctor's name and an appointment date. Doctor Wilfred Grass. A psychiatrist.

Brady stormed into the kitchen and pushed the letter under Therese's nose. But before she could read it, he

snatched the paper away and re-examined it himself.

Back in the parlour, he glared out through the picture window toward the lake. It was the one stable thing in his life -- the one thing that didn't alter or lend itself to change at the hands of others. People were chameleons. The land couldn't be trusted. When people said, "The land -- the good earth -- that's the only thing you can count on in this world," Brady scoffed. Potato blight, drought -- or was that the sun's fault, or the rain's? -- floods, failed crops, goddamned apple beetles, frost. The good earth.

But the lake was different. This lake, at least, was too big to destroy: eighty miles long and more than a mile wide in most places. People bowed to the water. The water kept to itself; it harboured its secrets -- Brady had touched those once, had felt his body and heart shaken violently -- and it could colour itself iron against you, but it created its own rules and did not pretend to friendship. Even people, in their wisdom, pouring shit and piss into it, could not halt its regeneration.

Now, watching the water as he shook the paper at his side, Brady concentrated on the uncapped waves and tried to pour his anger and his self-pity into the water. Sometimes, if he worked hard enough, he could feel the garbage inside him starting to loosen. Today it wouldn't

come. The lamps inside the house gave off more light than the overcast sky outside. From the yard, you could see into the house, while inside, the lamps across the room reflected things back into the parlour -- this was supposed to contain the winter warmth -- and Brady was faced by a thin and tired-looking half-reflection of his own body.

Therese came slowly up behind him. Without speaking she asked her question, resting a hand gently on his shoulder.

"My legs hurt," Brady said.

Therese stepped closer. She slid her hands down his thighs. There were times when she could relieve the pain that way.

"Friday morning -- when I was out? -- I drove down to Kelowna to see the doctor. Roberts." Brady pushed his hands into his pockets. Through the material, he could feel the delicate bones in Therese's hands. "He took me off the pills and said he wanted to try another approach -- he was going to recommend me to some specialist." Yanking the crumpled piece of paper from his trousers, he said, "I'm supposed to see a shrink."

Therese lifted her hands, clasping them round Brady's stomach. A small laugh, like a smirk, caught in her throat.

"What's funny?" Brady demanded, and felt Therese shake

her head silently against his back. "What's funny?" he said again. "For fifty years my god-damned legs have felt like poles sewn together with saw-blades. They healed crooked and they hurt, so when the pain gets worse and worse and I tell the doctor, he thinks I need my head examined."

"You've been acting funny lately," she murmured seriously. "I thought I was supposed to laugh."

He could feel the soft movement of her chin between his shoulder blades.

Therese said, "You're tense. Maybe you just need something to clear your mind." And she gently reached down and cupped her hands between his legs.

Brady was so aware of her frailty that he forgot about the hammering in his legs. It was as if it vanished.

Sixty-four years young, Therese's body had aged but it had not changed. Again he lowered his lips to the white skin surrounding her navel; it was drier, more likely to show a fine series of wrinkles when she twisted right or left -- like the breeze skimming the surface of the lake into delicate parallel lines -- but when she lay on her back it still fell into a concave between her ribs and her pelvis. And he loved the smell of her skin.

Over the years, Therese had taught Brady how to make

love. Early on in their marriage he had been rushed and selfish, mostly because he was frightened. One afternoon, however, Therese stopped his sudden roll toward her. They had been married less than six months, and without exception Brady had been the one to initiate their love-making. (What he lacked in finesse and skill, he tried to make up for with initiative and stamina.) But that day, Therese had stopped him. Then she had slipped out of bed and thrown open the curtains, which Brady always closed to blacken the room. Pushing the covers to the floor, she'd said, "Lie still."

Therese arranged his naked body: legs slightly apart, arms straightened a few inches from his sides, head comfortable on the pillow. "Close your eyes."

He could feel her above him. "Sometimes, when you're out working and I'm here alone, I start thinking about us at night." Her voice was soft and low, the wind in the trees of a cove. "I shut my eyes and I try to think of things that would make you feel good." She straddled him. Brady's hands shot up to hold her, but Therese peeled them away, guiding them back to the mattress. He could feel the warmth of her thigh against his side. Her hands danced on his shoulders and chest, and her lips came down again and again on his neck, his arms, his stomach. She kissed his legs, taking special care over his thighs, since the injury

had a tendency to worsen when Brady got worked up, and she slid her hands under his buttocks. His body clenched with fear and pleasure. He tried to regulate his breathing. And when Therese said, "I've never touched you," and took him softly in her hands, he clamped his eyes tighter. And then, as she lifted her night-dress away and slid up beside him, her lips finding his in the dark, pressing down, Brady's muscles loosened and his skin ached for the touch of her fingers and the moistness of her lips. And the longing, the skin-memory, told him how to give back.

Now forty-seven years later, Brady hesitated before each kiss. Once more, he was afraid.

SEVEN

If that sonofabitch Roberts didn't like the workings of Brady's head under normal circumstances, he should have been there when Brady drained off the final drops of Captain Morgan's Spiced Rum after Therese went out on Tuesday night, or when he woke up Wednesday morning with his eye-sockets aching like chiselled bone.

Brady made his way from the beach to the barbed wire fence between Ransom's lot and his own property. In the last week -- since the day Ransom told him about the sale -- the lot had changed. Pick-up trucks and sports cars were scattered across the lot from one end to the other, without regard for symmetry. Lengths of pine 2" X 4" and sheets of 4' X 8' plywood had been dropped next to the patio. The Stand, small and gleaming white, stood firmly in place. But Brady knew it had been gutted: the things that brought Ransom Steen's Dairy Bar and Fruit Stand to life -- the coffee and the milk, the burnt-crisp beef patties and the fresh-baked buns, unstocked fruit bins (empty because Ransom refused to buy from Brady) and the cardboard advertisement for "Dream Weenies" -- had all been distributed among the locals or packed into the bed of Ransom's blue 3/4 ton and carted to the auctioneer's in

Kelowna. As a last display of good manners, Ransom had hosed down the asphalt pad, spraying the pine and fir needles into the street-side ditch.

Brady saw the commotion even before he had emerged fully from the trees. At least fifty people had gathered at the edge of Ransom's lot. Spectators stood on the edge of the ditch between Centre Street and the asphalt pad. Some slid onto the hoods of parked cars. But because the boundaries on property had grown more stringent since the mine shut down, no one stepped onto what had been, until a few days ago, the main site for their congregation.

"Look, they drug something up already!" Earle Hyatt said when he saw Brady coming. He shifted his shoulders back, slackening his belly, standing cocky as a teenager. A small chuckle rose from the others.

Billy Ostipin said, "They're serious," and looked, wide-eyed, at Brady. Tipping back and forth in his hand was a half-empty glass of whiskey.

On the other side of the lot, down near the old dock where Ransom had welcomed summer tourists, a tractor-trailer rumbled back and forth. Back wheels sunk inches into the rocks, small clouds of black smoke belching from the stacks behind the cab, the truck lurched forward and straightened. A moment later, the driver backed

alongside the dock, submerging the truck's rear tires.

Brady saw Benton Williams, hardware king cum MLA cum private man cum Regional District Rep., standing on the shore. "Well, well, well," he said quietly, and stormed toward the dock without looking at the others, "lookit this." But he warned himself: Don't rile them.

"What's going on, Benton?"

Benton Williams turned, stone-lipped, to Brady.

"You need a shave," Brady said, pointing to Benton's dark cheeks. Williams wore a wool suit despite the heat, and his forehead and neck were glazed with sweat. "Bar Cranston," he said, flicking a thumb toward the other man, "will be leading the expedition." There's more than just me now, he was letting Brady know. This was as legitimate as the earth beneath their feet.

With his eyes closed, Brady nodded and waved a hand impatiently. "Yeah, yeah -- whatever." He hitched up his belt. "Now, Benton, you of all people should know this. But just in case you've gotten yourself so tied up with trying to get that store down the road out of the pink, I'll remind you of something." Brady paused to make sure he had Benton's full attention. "My property starts at the fence over there." He pointed along the beach to the barbed-wire strands and the first rows of trees. "I'm mostly just concerned about the safety of my crops,

understand. There aren't going to be any problems with exhaust or anything, are there?"

Out the corner of one eye, Brady watched Bar Cranston stroll to the end of the dock. He stood looking over the water, arms crossed over his chest.

Brady abandoned Benton and stomped down the slatted dock. His face was only inches from Cranston's left ear when he half-shouted, "No kids? No crowds traipsing all over the place?"

Cranston's eyes, when he turned, were flat-grey, like raw steel. He said nothing, and after a moment looked back to the lake. "I'm not here to get in your way, Mr. Stuart." And said it like a busy man dispensing directions to an irritating tourist.

Brady suddenly felt old and foolish. For a moment he saw himself as he must have looked to Bar Cranston: a wiry old man with thick, bristly, white hair and an injured walk -- a jawing old farmer you could turn away from without embarrassment or fear of recrimination. Brady flushed. Just you wait, he wanted to say, but wondered if there was anything he could show Bar Cranston.

Cranston was different.

Cranston wasn't like Jeremy Boyd, the long-haired californian who'd stationed a thousand camera-clutching volunteers around the lake to wait Naitaka out. Jeremy had

been easy to foil. In the early-morning hours before the troops arrived, Brady had raced north to south over the lake, dropping green-painted styrofoam decoys every mile or so. At dawn, he'd sat on the end of his dock, sipping coffee and watching instamatic flash-bulbs explode like fragile stars along the shore for as far as he could see. And Cranston wasn't like Fritz Bruner, the German sport-fisherman who'd planned to troll for Naitaka, lines baited with Easter hams. He'd been easy to fend off, too. Brady had purchased four three-hundred-pound market pigs, starved them for two days, and chained them to Fritz's boat. Day of the derby, the pigs got the press, and Fritz went on to fish clearer streams.

Cranston was a different breed. He wasn't smiling, he was thinking. And the people around him -- the three men prepping the uncrated boat, the half-dozen men framing a hut on top of what had been Ransom's dance floor -- were working. The searchers who'd come before him might have come for adventure or publicity, but Bar Cranston and his crew had come for only one reason: they'd come to find Naitaka.

Brady said, "So you're going after the old Ogie-pogie?" But the words came out half-hearted.

Cranston said, "Something like that." He was impenetrable; he wouldn't crack his poker face. And Brady

needed in. If he hoped to fight, he needed to understand his opposition. If he had the goods on Voyageur Expeditions -- and if he was lucky -- he wouldn't need to step out of the house to hamper their efforts. A few phone calls to open line shows, a few letters to the editor -- "Are these people toying with us, or what?" -- a few well-placed cardboard signs along Westside Road. If he didn't fight, they couldn't stop him. But they couldn't stop him if they didn't see him fighting, either.

"Gotta warn you," Brady said, "she's been tried before."

"Not by me." Bar Cranston did not turn or change the tone of his voice.

Benton Williams signalled Brady toward the beach. Behind Benton, the crowd of local spectators had come halfway across the asphalt pad. Some now stood near the raised patio and watched the workmen drive nails.

Brady left Bar Cranston and stepped down onto the beach. Benton opened his mouth to speak, then thought better and reached into the flapped pocket of his suit. He brought out a stack of xeroxed newspaper articles and peeled one off for Brady. The headline read, "Ogopogo Brings Economic Boost."

"Brady," Benton Williams said, slotting the articles back into his pocket, "this is the most important

development to hit this area in years. There will be jobs and growth because of what this man is doing." He nodded toward Bar Cranston. "Natural growth." From the look in Benton's eyes, and from the way he spread his fingers wide and stiff in front of his chest, Brady could tell just how serious he was. This meant more than the traffic that would roll past the failing hardware store; this was a man's belief -- belief groomed by the years he'd spent in positions of power, both corporate and political -- in his ability to triumph over odds and opposition. This was Benton's baby.

"Natural growth," Brady repeated.

Benton's eyes, a light, depthless shade of blue -- chambered, as if you could step in and wander endlessly around the surface without ever being admitted to the back rooms -- bore in on Brady. "Yes," he said.

"I'm just an ignorant old farmer, Benton. You'll have to explain these things."

"Do you want the official line?" Benton sighed. "Okay. Here its is: Natural Growth in economics imitates life. You start with one healthy cell, place it in an environment where it can grow, and it spawns other cells. Life abounds." His eyes slid over to watch Bar Cranston, who stood in the dock, his thumbs hooked into the front pockets of his jeans, watching the truck driver work at the

two large crates on the trailer-bed.

"Right now there's nothing but death in this area, Brady. The base for Voyageur Expeditions is that vital first cell." Suddenly his eyes brightened, and he looked directly at Brady. "Your orchard, for example -- you haven't turned a profit in five years."

Brady shuddered. "What's the unofficial line?"

Benton stepped closer. He bowed his head toward Bar Cranston. Brady could feel breath on his ear. "Unofficially, I suggest you keep the peace. The people of this town want this to happen. That's called democracy."

Brady pushed his face an inch closer to Benton's. "As a politician, Benton, you should be aware that the people don't always know what's best."

Behind Brady, the spectators talked quietly. "Hey, Brady, introduce us to your friend?" Brady didn't turn. He heard the group moving closer to the beach for a first-hand look at Cranston and Benton and the crates. He stepped onto the dock, fingering the news clipping.

"I want it," Benton seethed.

"Of course," Brady nodded. "We mustn't let the hardware business wane."

Benton stepped back. A thin smile turned up the corners of his mouth. "You know, Brady, there are a lot of picky little laws in this world. Laws about how you run

your boat, and where. Laws about tree-spray and pollution. Some people can hardly walk down the street without breaking a picky little law." Benton stared at his hands for a moment. "And there's taxes. You received money from the mine, and given the lean years you've had farming, the orchard could be considered a hobby farm." He paused for effect. "You could owe a lot of back-taxes. The government might have to seize the place."

Brady kept his eyes level with Benton's but said nothing.

"Keep the peace, Brady. Bar Cranston won't be going anywhere." Benton walked down the dock to join Bar Cranston.

Crouched on the deck of the truck, the driver reached up and wrapped his fingers tightly around the crow-bar that was wedged in between the top of the crate and the side. He lifted himself, letting his weight hang, and the nails screeched out of the pine casing. He did the same thing for the opposite side and the front, then pushed the top up like a soup can lid until the pressure popped out the back nails and the top fell into the shallow water on the other side.

A few minutes later, the HIAB crane behind the truck's cab lifted out a twenty-one-foot Reinell and lowered it into the water at the end of the trailer. Brady felt

relieved. A good boat meant nothing. Even the most inept searchers had good boats, and they had all failed. Brady had a good boat, but he'd never seen Naitaka from it.

Brady was left a bit more ill-at-ease by the small, iron-grey mini-sub they lifted out from the other crate.

Lined up on the beach now, the locals murmured fiercely.

Someone whistled.

"These guys ain't bullshittin'," said Earle Hyatt.

Brady turned and glared at Earle, regretting it immediately. He walked along the weather-greyled boards to where Bar Cranston knelt at the end. Cranston leaned over the edge of the dock, reaching his hands down to work at the small top-hatch. He loosened off the packing-bolts and lifted the hatch open. Brady leaned over for a look. Inside the sub, there was no room for a man, there was only a tangle of wires and electronic gadgetry. "What's this do?" Brady wanted to know. The question came out like an accusation, sudden and hard-edged, and Bar Cranston did not answer. A moment later, Cranston stood, walked down the dock, across the asphalt parking lot, and into the stand. Benton followed.

Brady stared into the guts of the mini-sub. He felt helpless. This compact piece of science changed the rules: it could roam the lake beneath the water's surface, filming

caves and fish and weeds where Brady could never see. The sub was at home in the water. Brady couldn't even swim.

Was that the difference between Ransom and himself? Was that what Ransom meant when he called him a dinosaur? Did Ransom know that Brady would be in for a different kind of fight this time? Did he know that Brady wouldn't be able to take this because he couldn't fight it? Couldn't fight what he couldn't see?

Brady stared into the mass of wires -- green and red and black and yellow and white and orange -- braided wires, wires clipped together with white plastic fasteners, loose-running wires that hooked up somewhere to make this thing work. In the bottom, there was a metal camera casing; just under the cannister lid and to the right, there was an oscilloscope, its screen dark and empty. There were buttons and lights and toggle switches. And all of it sunk into this sombre-grey machine. Steel-grey -- grey the way the lake was grey under storm clouds. You wouldn't even be able to see the goddamned thing.

Brady stomped back to shore. The locals stood on the beach now, forming a semi-circle around the base of the dock. Front and centre, Earle Hyatt, Billy Ostipin and Walter Striper used their hands to motion the group of forty or fifty into a tighter stance -- shoulder-to-shoulder, hands clasped over stomachs, legs set

wide. The first row was almost entirely made up of men who had worked in the mine. Ransom Steen stood at the back of the group, watching.

When Brady stepped off the last grey plank at the end of the dock, Earle Hyatt said, "You can leave this one alone, Brady."

Brady stopped. He looked from side to side at the faces of the men. His gaze settled on Martin Richards, the small, bald-headed man who'd worked as the mine's night-watchman. Brady had heard stories of Martin's fear, of his thin voice wavering in the stillness of the night up above the landing. To Brady's left, behind Martin Richards, the barbed-wire fence and the first row of apple trees marked the edge of safety. Richards was the line's weak link. If Brady could thread doubt into Martin Richards, he'd be allowed to pass. And if he passed through, he'd be safe. These men might try to stop him, but they would not chase him.

"Is this guy such a pansy he needs all of your help?" Brady said, and jabbed a thumb over his shoulder at the sub. Martin Richards fidgeted, and Brady stepped toward him. But when Martin stepped aside, Ruth Steen filled the gap. She locked her hands behind her back and thrust out her chest. She knew there was no way a man like Brady could move a woman who stood like that.

Brady backed off.

"This isn't any of your business," Walter Stripper told Brady. This isn't like when things were good and it was some kind of crazy joke -- you chasing people away."

"I didn't chase them away because things were good," Brady said. "My reasons don't change just because things aren't so good now."

"Ours do." Ransom pushed his way through from the back of the crowd. "Our reasons for standing by or not standing by have changed now that things aren't so good."

Brady stared straight at Ransom. "It's not your business anymore," he said. "No matter what your intentions, you opted out of this place when you sold it." Brady tapped his left shoe on the beach-stones. "What happens isn't your concern."

Earle Hyatt stepped forward. "What about the people whose work shut down when you shut down the mine? And the people whose businesses shut down after you shut down this town?"

"You got everything you need, Brady," Walter Stripper said, nodding toward the orchard.

Brady shook his head. Without looking at any of them, he said, "I didn't shut down the mine."

"What's your word for it?" someone called from the back. A wave of yeahs broke through the crowd.

"It was mined out," Brady said. "There was nothing left."

"Where we were, maybe." This came from Albert Bullock, a tall, heavy man with a jet black beard and dark brown eyes. Bullock had been lead-hand in the mine for ten years. "We never drilled to find out if there was more somewhere else."

"We went twenty feet looking for more."

"This isn't 1910," Bullock said. "Just because we mine like it was the turn of the century doesn't mean we can't use the methods they got now for finding where the veins pick up again. We could've tried something."

"It was the way you did it, Brady." People in Stuart's Landing were so unaccustomed to hearing Martin Richards speak, they fell silent at the sound of his words. "More than anything, it was the way you did it." Hands shoved deep in his pockets, his part in this barricade of bodies betrayed by his bent-forward shoulders, Martin Richards nodded toward the mountain behind them -- nodded to the scars made by the twisting, rutted road and the boarded-up mouth of the mine. "You don't put years of your life into something hard just to go to work one day and find a sign that says your job is gone. You don't sit in your house, waiting for an answer, just to find out that the man who shut it down can't be bothered to explain

himself." He paused for a long moment. "You don't treat people like that."

"I'm not gonna argue this," Brady said. "It's shut down. There was nothing left. There's no way to change that." What was he supposed to do with what Martin said?

Ransom said, "So we're all supposed to lay down and die? Or be like the others and go somewhere else? Find another home instead of turning this place back into one?"

"You wanted it shut down," said Ruth Steen.

"We coulda tried to find where it picked up again," repeated Bullock.

"You wanted it shut down so that you could have this place to yourself."

"Listen to yourselves," said Brady.

"Why's not important now," Ransom cautioned the others. "What's important here is that we have another chance." Out of his white T-shirt, white pants, apron and chef's hat, Ransom looked strange and new. An iron-crease ran down the front of each pant leg, and the stiffness in his denim shirt made the fabric stand away from his shoulders. He turned to Brady, opening his palms at his sides. "I guess what you've done is your right. But we've got rights, too."

Did they honestly believe that his decision to close the mine had been easy? He had been forced to make a

decision. And the decision he'd made -- the conclusion he'd reached -- was that sometimes you had to sacrifice convenience to vision. Naitaka held secrets. Secrets bigger than either Brady or the locals. Brady wanted the secrets for his own.

Brady drop-stepped back, skirting the crowd by running through the water, splashing along in the lake till he passed his own barbed-wire fence. He followed the curve of the beach out of their sight-line.

He stopped in the deep shade of an old apple tree. The grass was long, uncut and speckled with the short, grey cuttings; the leaves on the trees were thick and emerald-coloured; and the shadows rose and descended and fluttered as the breeze stirred the trees. Brady's breathing had been laboured, his chest tight with fear, but now it slowed and he took in the familiar shapes and shades. One drop of water glittered like metal on a blade of grass. These things, he told himself, these things.... But he couldn't finish the thought. He could no longer say what this land, this fucking diseased but beautiful garden of his, meant to him. He didn't trust the land, he didn't love it, and he didn't respect it. It made a good enemy. He loved the fruit that split with juice from the trees, but the trees weren't the land; the trees rose above the land, fought with the land the same way Brady did -- so

that they could say, at the end of a season, I did this in spite of you.

In the fashion of the mined hills above the landing, this piece of dirt and rock could at any time say, Enough! and spit up its last ornament -- one last healthy apple. So far, Brady had been able to win the fight often enough to stay on top of the land, to own it, but one more bad crop and the land would own him. A failure this year would force a large mortgage.

If he stopped now, if he gave in and sold to a hotel chain or some Chamber of Commerce pact, he'd come out ahead. Between his pensions and Therese's, there would be enough to live comfortably. Somewhere else. Somewhere away from the bitterness of his neighbours, away from Naitaka and Brady's weird defense, somewhere away from the pain in his legs.

With a new determination, Brady headed for the house. Today, perhaps, the first cherries would be ready. By all indications, they had survived; the skins were tight, the meat unwormed, but there were some things you couldn't tell until you tasted the ripe ones. They were bitter before maturity, and you couldn't tell if the meat had been poisoned. You needed them fat and ripe on your tongue to tell that.

If the cherries are healthy, we stay. And yet, he

couldn't help hoping they'd gone bad.

He walked to the east side, to the row that faced town and received the afternoon sunlight. In the lower branches the fruit was still orange-yellow, sometimes with patches of deep red, like bruises, on one side. Brady wrapped his fingers around one of the thick, sturdy branches and used his weight for leverage, pushing his feet against the trunk, trying to walk up the bark until he could hook a leg around the branch and swing himself up. He jammed his left foot in above the branch, and lifted. He could feel the ridges of uneven bone pounding in his thighs. The pain was cold. He hung under the branch, both hands whitening under the pressure, a knot in the branch cutting into his ankle. From here he could reach up to a cluster of ripe cherries, then swing down, safe. He counted aloud, "One, two, three-ee," and freed his right hand to lurch at the fruit. His fingers folded around them as gently and surely as a young husband's hand on his wife's breast. And then the falling: descending, he couldn't hold his own weight. The rough bark tore his palm, and the resistance turned him so that he fell face-first to the ground. The two lower buttons on his shirt popped open, and when he landed the prunings gouged his belly. Blades of grass stabbed his face. The pain in his thighs splintered, shredding the silver ache up to snap closed on his groin; it slid like a

knife under the muscles in his buttocks, and it flashed downward, slicing the nerves around his patella so the bone was left pounding like a free but useless heart.

Still he clenched the cherries in his hand, squeezing them against the pain, the juice leaking between his fingers. His lips twisted into a smile, and he drew the sticky hand to his mouth, his teeth -- they were cold for some reason, and ached -- anticipating the bitter warmth of the meat.

But it wasn't bitter. The wet fingers touched his tongue, the juice and cherries spilled in, and when his molars closed, the red skins showered the full-ripe sweetness against his throat.

Brady dropped his head into the grass. He lay there for a long time, the grass and branches digging in, the leg-pain turning ice-blue, a dull throb knotting his lower lumbar. His body was in such constant yet varied pain that he grew comfortable. He could have fallen asleep.

The centre of the world refocused. He saw the trees and his work in the orchard with a new clarity; beyond the borders of his property -- Therese, the house, his love for the water -- everything blurred: the party at Steen's, the sale of the Fruit Stand, the doctor and his apparent belief that Brady had split his gourd, Benton Williams and Bar Cranston, his sense that the locals knew something

about the mine-water. It all seemed like nonsense. He didn't get it; he did not understand the logic of the riddle. The juice at the corners of his mouth, the taste in his throat: these things were simple enough. And if I can contain that much, things will work out. There is the world out there, beyond the fence, and there is the world in here. It's the world in here I have to keep straight. I can do that; I've always done that. That world has never made sense, only I never worried about it enough to let it disturb me. It's this world, this is the only thing I need to keep straight.

But he did not know if it was possible to keep them straight. Maybe he did want them to leave -- secretly, at least. Brady had shut down the mine because he believed the mine-water might lead him to Naitaka, and now they were also trying to connect themselves to the creature. He wanted to grasp and make sense of a past, but they were determined to burst into some high-tech future. Perhaps he was a fool to believe he could keep things straight.

He found Therese in the main bathroom, off the front hall. She lay stretched out in the old, cast-iron tub. Her head rested against the plastic beige tub-pillow he'd given her last Christmas. Her mouth was submerged, her nose only a fraction of an inch above the surface of the

water. Some tiny white bubbles clung to her left cheek like a scar.

At first, Brady was startled. A person could drown like that. But just as he took in breath to yell -- scare the living hell out of her and she wouldn't be careless enough to let it happen again -- he looked at her face. Her cheeks were full of colour from the hot water; the worry lines and creases that had been deepening over the last months now seemed to be soaking away in the steam and sleep.

Brady sat down on the toilet. For now, he would watch her; when she woke up, he would tell her he wanted to leave. He'd tell her they had to leave. He'd tell her they were leaving.

"Jesus!" Brady spat. "Everybody's at it!"

The anger and volume of his voice woke Therese; she sputtered water from her submerged lips, coughed, and sat up quickly in the tub. The water had cooled. Therese folded her arms over her breasts and shivered. "What are you doing?" she said, her eyes wide and confused. Therese raised her left foot out of the water and used her big toe to open the hot water faucet.

Brady sat on the toilet. "Look at this." He held a small bottle of Charlie Nail Gleamer.

The fresh hot water slid along Therese's legs, along her buttocks and beneath her back. She closed the faucet and sank back into the water. She was smiling. "It's not your colour."

"Not that," Brady said. "This." With his index finger, he pointed at the bottom right hand corner of the bottle. "Twelve millilitres."

"They haven't come out with the litre jugs yet," Therese laughed.

"They will," said Brady. "They will." He clenched the bottle tightly in his right hand; with his left hand he felt along the cedar shelf for more cannisters and bottles of makeup.

"What are you talking about?"

"When was the metric system brought in?"

"Ten years ago?" Therese shrugged.

"And metric is a system based on tens, right?"

Therese nodded.

"So why's this thing got twelve goddamn millilitres in it?" Brady tossed the nail polish into the tub. The bottle landed on Therese's stomach, cold against her skin. "What are you doing?" She set the polish in the soap dish.

"No -- listen." Brady leaned toward her. "Do you know why it's only got twelve millilitres in it?"

"Why, Brady?" Therese examined the shrivelled pads of

her fingers.

"Because the makeup people couldn't refit their whole bottle plant just because the government said they had to put things in metric -- so instead of writing 'half-an-ounce' on the bottle, now they write 'twelve' millilitres."

"Make sense," Therese told him impatiently. She lay back in the tub, only half listening.

"Okay. How much is in that bottle?"

"I don't know," Therese said, glancing at the bottle. "A quarter ounce or so."

Brady pounced. "Why didn't you say twelve millilitres?"

"I don't know." Therese picked up the bottle.

"I'll tell you then. It's because you can't change the way a person thinks. It's a quarter ounce to you because it's always been a quarter ounce."

"I'd like to get out of this water," Therese said. "I'm shrivelled like a prune."

"It's a quarter ounce because that's the way you think." Brady's voice was suddenly quiet. "But sooner or later you'll think twelve millilitres because they'll wear you down -- they won't let you function by thinking the way you've always thought."

Therese furrowed her brow. "Who are they?"

"Everything's changing, Therese. People are changing everything." He was quiet for a few moments. "Everybody's getting practical. These people don't see their way of life as valid anymore -- else how could they go from mining and minding their own business to hoping to cash in on Naitaka? They're all like Benton now. They want everything and every idea to be useful." He stopped again. "No, that's not quite it. They want everything to be physically practical and efficient. They want to pull Naitaka out of the water and put him to use."

"So let them," Therese said tightly.

"They won't be happy until they've changed everybody."

"That's a little extreme," Therese said. She pushed out of the tub and grabbed a towel from the closet. Then she reached into the collection of bottles Brady held in his hands. "Look -- here's one with a hundred millilitres. In a system of tens, that fits."

"Exactly," Brady said quietly.

EIGHT

"Something you need?" Brady said. Dusk had bled into darkness.

Only minutes before, he had pushed up from the split-log bench on the beach, determined to confront Therese about his decision to leave the Landing. Brady rounded the corner, then ducked along the path that led through the cherry trees from the beach.

Someone stood on the other side of the tiny public beach. From this distance -- fifty yards or so -- Brady couldn't be sure if the stranger was on the far side of the three-strand fence, in which case he was trespassing, or whether he'd planted himself on the edge of the beach, in which case he was simply irritating. Brady stepped up to the cedar hedge-fence in his front yard and squinted into the darkness.

"Just looking," the figure told him. Shaped around the mouth like a deep scar, the mustache came into focus at the sound of the voice. Bar Cranston. "Beautiful house, Mr. Stuart."

Brady glanced around defensively. The lawn needed cutting; in the faint light from the parlour he saw two pushed-flat circles of yellow grass where he'd left the

summer tires to sit through the winter. And he didn't have to look at the house to know it needed painting; paint chips lay like shed scales around the base, the eaves-troughs were plugged with pine and fir needles from the front-yard trees, and they leaked, bleeding orange stains down the sides of the house after each rainfall. "That's not an access road," said Brady, pointing along the beach.

Cranston slipped through the fence. His wiry body jerked when it moved, but there was a confidence to him that bothered Brady. "I'd appreciate some of your time," said Cranston. He wore jeans, and most of the time he kept his hands shoved in his front pockets. He seemed relaxed. His leather jacket was worn brown-beige; the lapels were flat and the arms and mid-riff loose. An old bomber jacket, Brady guessed. Perhaps it had belonged to Bar Cranston's father during the Second War. Now his son donned it for a different kind of fight.

"Why's that?" Brady felt better, though no less hospitable, now that Cranston had stepped onto the beach.

"I understand you're familiar with..." He paused and looked out over the water; his eyes narrowed and his tongue came out to poke at one side of the mustache. "...the searches for the plesiosaur."

It was Brady's turn to smile. He had been

anticipating the word "Ogopogo"; he'd been ready to deny any knowledge. He wouldn't waste his time chasing after a cartoon. But sensible theorists had narrowed it down: Sturgeon-in-a-line, oarfish, manatee, plesiosaur. To an innocent, each was possible. Swinging an arm slowly in front of his chest, taking in the water and the trees and the grass he was standing on, Brady said, "I've been here fifty years -- just working."

"That's a hell of a long time in one place." The two men stood twenty yards apart. A cool breeze blew off the surface of the lake, muffling their words.

"For some, maybe," Brady started to explain, "but I...." He edged himself between two of the small cedar trees in the hedge. Some rust-coloured branches broke off and fell on the grass. Brady hung back. It was not in his rediscovered creed to explain or justify his inside world to the outside. When you explained things to strangers, you seldom made sense.

"You what?" Bar Cranston asked calmly.

You what? Calmly. Patiently. He asked the question with the patronizing tone of a TV psychiatrist. It's all right, go ahead, I understand you.

Brady shook his head, lips pursed. "Forgot." He shrugged. "I'm just an old country boy. Isn't that what they say in the movies?"

"Mr. Stuart, it's difficult to plan a search for this thing and not run across your name. Personally, I don't need to fuck around with people like you." He stared straight at Brady's face. Raw-steel eyes. "Obviously you hold anyone who wants to get a look at this thing in contempt." He took a half-step, angled his shoulders toward town, then halted.

"Why do you need to see it?" Brady asked. "If I want to stop you, at least I have the excuse that I've been here for fifty years. Where are you from that you can waltz in and claim it for yours?"

Cranston snorted -- a gust of air that scraped his throat and said, Where the hell have you been? He told Brady, "I'm not claiming it for me. It's been a fascination to thousands of people, and..."

"Oh, I see," Brady burst in with an exaggerated nod. "You're claiming it for them."

"For anyone who's interested. Joe Blow in Flin Flon has as much right to see it and be swept away as you do."

"You didn't answer my question." Brady stepped between the cedars again. "Why do you need to see it? Why does Joe Blow from Flin Flon need to see it?"

Bar Cranston faced the lake. The breeze quickened. He took his hands from his pants pockets and slid them into his jacket. The wind stirred the water to a chop; small

white crests skidded from the caps of the waves into the troughs, then regathered and slipped down again. "We could probably find somewhere more pleasant -- if you want to talk about this." He glanced toward Brady.

"A bar, Bar?" Brady said it facetiously, bouncing the words off one another.

Cranston ignored the slur. "If you'd like."

Brady said, "Not particularly. Would you like to answer my question?"

Bar Cranston took a deep breath and squared his body to Brady. "If you're like the others -- no matter where you go or what you look for, there's always someone who screams about it -- then you're worried about defrocking the mystery."

Not the mystery, thought Brady, but the thing that happened to me. "What's wrong with that?" he asked.

"No one's taking the mystery away," said Cranston. He took his hands from his pockets and held them, palms opened upward, in the air. "Whatever's out there," and he flicked a thumb toward the water, "has been there -- has survived, for chrissakes -- for thousands of years. Now explain to me, how can letting the people see and marvel at this incredible creature diminish the majesty?"

Brady stepped back again. He could feel a lump slide into his throat, as if he were some goddamned kid watching

his father move out of the house. There was no one to turn to or talk to. Not Therese. Not Ransom or anyone else in the Landing. He had never felt this close to it before. Perhaps it had been nothing more than a game all along, his weird defense of Naitaka. But now the game had ended. This sullen-faced man with the high-tech wizardry could snap up something that had been real all along. "Because that wouldn't be the end of it," said Brady. "It wouldn't end there -- people standing around having a good look and mumbling about how fascinating it all was." He turned toward the house, into the yellow light. Raising his eyes, he saw that both the parlour lamps and the bare bulb in the attic room were burning. Therese was watching; standing in the doorway between the kitchen and the parlour, she was trying to stay out of his line. But she was watching.

Brady swung back toward Bar Cranston. "It's a big deal when an animal is born into captivity -- when it's the first one. When they put it out on the news and in the papers, they always tell you about how many there were that died before this one."

Bar Cranston didn't respond. He tilted his head a fraction to the side, his shoulders rose a bit, and his eyes flashed So?

"Now let me ask you something," Brady said. "Let's say you've got all your scientific gizmos and hot-shot

scientists. If they can't keep beluga whales alive in the biggest zoos, how do you figure you're going to keep a million-year-old dinosaur alive in a show tank? How'd you get so much smarter than the rest of the world?"

"We'll simulate the conditions in the lake."

"Oh -- and they don't try that in the zoos, right? You're the first one to think of it. You're gonna shit in the tank and piss over the edge and feed it milfoil weeds and rainbow trout, and that's what's going to keep its spirit intact?" He paced along the hedge, finally throwing his arms up in defeat. "Please -- correct me where I'm off track."

Bar Cranston shrugged. "It won't be trapped, Mr. Stuart. The tank we've planned for it will be cut into the shore" -- Cranston pointed through the trees in the direction of Expedition base -- "but it will extend out into the lake -- the plesiosaur's natural habitat. The lake itself will maintain the natural environment."

"Jesus Christ!" Brady spat. "How can you trust anything but God himself when you're talking about one -- one! -- one thing in this world that's the only one of its kind?" Brady could not shake from his mind the image of a great white-concrete-and-glass case surrounded by gawking tourists; he pictured Naitaka inside, slamming himself against immovable walls.

"The bottom line," said Bar Cranston. "And I mean beyond all this arguing -- whose it is and what its chances are for survival -- is one thing." He drew a folded piece of paper from his pocket and angled it toward the light from the windows in Brady's place. Satisfied, he put the paper away and looked up. His eyes were flat and serious, his lips pulled up, half-smiling, on one side. "That plesiosaur could be your house-pet for all I care, but I'm going after it. And I'll get it." He paused. "I came over here to ask if you'd like to be part of the search team; some things are better understood by people who know them by instinct. Because they've lived with them their whole lives. What I don't need is your permission. You must understand this, Mr. Stuart: I. Will. Find it."

Bar Cranston turned but Brady called him back.

"It's not just me," Brady warned. "There'll be others. People don't stand for this kind of violation these days. You'll get Greenpeace and all kinds of bleeding-heart liberals trying to chase you off. They've got more power than me."

"How many people challenged the other searches? The good ones? Besides you?"

Brady was silent.

"If you want to know the truth, Mr. Stuart, I'll tell you something." Cranston looked across the lake and

laughed. "I could advertise a search for the bones of Christ if I wanted to -- I could swear I knew where they were and how to get them and how to prove they were Christ's bones." He faced Brady and spoke quietly. "No one would get fired up. Most people would cheer me on. Like it or not, few people believe in anything these days. They say they believe, and they want to believe, but it's just not in us anymore. So now people believe in proof, positive or negative." Bar Cranston paused for a moment. "Besides, protesters are only effective when they can get a majority behind them, and the Ogopogo just isn't important enough for that."

Brady didn't wait for Bar Cranston to turn away. He turned, walked up his front steps, through the parlour and past Therese, who stood near the right side of the parlour window, staring after Bar Cranston. He climbed the stairs to the bedroom, stripped off his clothes, and climbed into bed. He lay there with his eyes jammed open, turning left, turning right, until Therese came up. He did not speak to her or let on that he was still awake. He stayed still, waiting for her breathing to level off. And then he slid the fingers of his left hand between the small of her back and the mattress. He tried to count the ridges of stippling on the ceiling. He tried to think of some place where the two of them could go.

NINE

When he was fifteen, Brady watched his mother die. One afternoon he found her leaning against the refrigerator, her pale fingers deep in a porcelain bowl filled with bread dough. Of course she couldn't have told Brady about her sickness. But when Brady found her, he knew immediately what had happened. He leaned forward and looked up at her. His mother's eyes were closed, her chest motionless beneath a long blue dress. Her head leaned against the bright white fridge.

He realized then, standing on the kitchen tiles in his stocking feet, that he had watched her die. He had not seen the final moment, but he had seen the degeneration. He knew the necessary facts: death came, but you did not clean house for it. You did not lie down and die. His mother had carried on about her business; now Therese was doing the same. Talking about it amounted to surrender. And what good would that do?

Over the past few days, Brady had noticed more deteriorations in Therese. She moved more slowly, took long rests between the duties she assigned herself each day. Earlier that morning he'd found her leaning over the kitchen table, asleep, her head cradled in her folded arms,

her blonde-grey hair mussed and falling in a natural part down the centre of her scalp, revealing thick, dull grey roots. She slept for two hours. She must have known Brady would see her, but she never mentioned the incident. Neither did Brady. He'd pass her in the hall; he'd want to say, "Therese, things aren't right here -- we've got to talk about this." But the truth frightened him.

One night Therese followed him into the parlour.

He stared away from her, out the window to the lake, to the illusion of dusk created by the reflective film.

We are leaving town, he thought. Chasing up and down the lake every night, combing a hundred-odd square miles of water in search of the Naitaka, now seemed hopeless. What did he think he was going to do -- warn him? The more he thought about it, the more solid and unavoidable his conclusions: the creature was dead, or Bar Cranston would find him. If Brady had touched Naitaka once -- if Naitaka had let that happen -- then the disappearance didn't make sense. Why hadn't Brady seen him since? Because, most likely, he was dead. And if Naitaka wasn't dead, he was ungrateful: Brady had been searching after him, defending him from predators, for a half-century. Without success. If Naitaka was alive and wouldn't come to Brady, why should Brady defend him? If it was inevitable that Voyageur Expeditions would find the creature -- and Brady had little

doubt that it was inevitable -- then what was the point in staying? The game, or whatever that part of his life had been, was over.

With the crop in good shape, he could get out now.

"What's so funny?" Therese wanted to know.

"What?"

"You're laughing. What's so funny."

"Nothing," Brady said. "I was just thinking."

"Oh."

The portable air conditioner hummed in the next room.

Standing at the centre of the parlour, Therese folded her arms across her chest; her hands rubbed over her biceps, staving off the chill.

"Do you want it off?" Brady asked.

She shook her head, then walked to the window and stood gazing out, hands motionless now. "It's so pretty here, Brady."

He didn't respond. It won't be pretty for long, he thought. On top of everything else, their relationship with the town would only deteriorate from here on in. What's the use? he wanted to ask Therese, and heard her reply inside his mind: I'm not leaving my home to go live with strangers.

But there is no point in staying.

"For a long time," Therese was saying, "I think I

forgot how I love it so." She turned back to him. "You know how they say part of wisdom is missing friends before they're gone?"

Brady raised his brows but refused to look at her.

"Well, that's how I feel about the Landing."

"Other places are pretty," said Brady. He glanced at her briefly. The parlour was dim, but the kitchen lamp shone through the open door, lighting her profile: the long, fine nose, the dip and hollow below her high cheek bones, the vague smile on her full lips: the light caught this beauty and sparkled on the wet corner of her left eye. For a moment she looked healthy, and he felt the worry free itself and coax on the need for sleep.

Therese faced the window again. "It's not the same. I'm not going to spend my last days in some Sun City." She turned her head, staring toward town, her face completely hidden now.

"Who said anything about last days?"

"Who ever moved to a geritol camp and came back?"

Brady shrugged, opening his arms toward Therese. "I don't understand why you want to stay here," he said. "You won't go near the water and you won't hear mention of Naitaka -- and yet you refuse to leave this shore. You refuse to leave the water you're so terrified of and you refuse to abandon the possibility of seeing the creature

again." He got to his feet, then pushed the tails of his plaid shirt into his jeans. "It's like you're babying your own goddamn fear."

"Maybe I don't want to go because I still don't understand what happened." For a long time Therese was silent. She stood by the window, her hands working over the skin above her elbows. Finally, she turned to Brady. "Do you know what it's like to live with a fear, to go over it in your head again and again and again, but still not understand anything about it? Do you know what that feels like?"

"Yes!" Brady whispered fiercely. "Something happened to me, too, Therese. Not with the violence that you went through, but something no less wierd just because it wasn't violent. I've never felt..." He stared into his hands. "I don't know. Alive. Like I was a part of something. It sounds so stupid." He looked up at her. "Not like a part of some great global scheme. It was smaller. Like I was part of the water while I was in the water. It happened fifty years ago, but I haven't felt it since. Don't you think that's frightened me?"

"I'm not leaving."

"As long as you sit on your ass in this house, you're not going to figure out a goddamned thing -- no matter how many times you go over it."

"I'm not leaving."

"We might be getting old, Therese, but we're too young to live in the past." Brady reached for her hands, but Therese stepped back. A chainsaw wail rose and fell in the distance.

Brady walked to the window. "This is glass," he said, and rapped his knuckles against the big window. "You can't hide behind it and expect to understand anything about what happened."

"I'm not leaving," Therese said again. She had stopped listening; she simply waited for the gaps in his speech, then fired off her song: I'm not leaving.

Brady wanted to say something more -- something shocking enough or true enough to bring Therese back. But she was gone: she had closed the door between Brady and the parts in her own history that she did not understand.

Quietly, Brady passed through the kitchen and out the screen door at the back of the house. In the distance, the chainsaw gutted out, then refired.

Because he did not want to run into Roy or anyone else, he turned south, walking to the front of the house, then crossed the public foot-path and went into the trees south of the house. He smelled the blossoms, their scent as light as shadows in his nostrils.

After more harsh words with Therese, Brady again

questioned his choices. He knew what she meant: the mown grass between each row, the stacks of pruned branches -- these had been a part of fifty summers for Brady Stuart. Shortly after his mother's death, Brady came to the Landing; he'd been here ever since: The farm drove pain into his young muscles and stung his eyes with sweat till he couldn't tell the difference between a pruned branch and a seedling. And when his mind burned with wonder and confusion over the creature and his father's death, he lay in the shallow water on the smoothest stones he could find and let the lake take his feelings. In the old picker's shack where the young Indian kid now slept, Brady and Therese had slept together for the first time.

The chainsaw's wail had died; the evening breeze wound through the pink-white blossoms, carrying only a thin trail of water-sound.

Brady knew it had been the same for Therese. Most of her close friends had moved to the valley's cities when it became clear the mine would not reopen. Therese's other friends grew resentful, along with the rest of the town, as their fortunes declined while hers stayed the same. That one family should sit pretty on the edge of the lake, pulling money down like rain while their fortunes rotted, their cars rusted, and the cuffs on their children's pants frayed, was a hard weight on the townspeople's shoulders.

And Brady couldn't help wondering if Therese wouldn't be happier in a retirement village, after all; at least there would be people to talk to; here, there was only the silence growing louder.

So why not just leave? His nocturnal wanderings up and down the lake had proved fruitless; he hadn't found a trace of Naitaka. Even if he did find the animal, he'd have to drag it along home, since Therese was terrified of the water and closed up like an iron gate at the mention of Naitaka.

If there was no saving Therese, why not just leave and spend the remaining days in peace?

As Brady neared the barbed wire fence which marked the orchard's southern boundary, the fence between inside and outside, between the base of Voyageur Expeditions and his farm, he found his answer. He stood, shaking now, his eyes wide and staring. The fence had been ripped down, had fallen under the weight of the hacked-down trees. Branches had snapped like human arms broken at the shoulder; they were twisted now beneath the trunks.

Brady stared. His brain registered the image, and he laughed. He remembered what he'd said the first time he'd tracked across Ransom's asphalt lot to face Benton Williams and Bar Cranston: There won't be people traipsing all over my land? At the time, he had intended only to rile them,

to make them think that perhaps they hadn't chosen the best site after all. And yet, it had not been long before he realized that Benton had probably come up with a pretty sound theory. Natural growth. It would spawn other ventures -- a renewed spirit, more business, an appreciation for the marvels of science. The death of dinosaurs.

It is over. We are leaving.

TEN

After Brady stormed out the back door, Therese sank into his recliner and waited for the roar of the truck's engine. That it did not come meant Brady had probably marched to the dock to watch for his precious monster. One way or another, he wouldn't be back for several hours. He was too stubborn a man to face a cold war; he'd wait until Therese fell asleep before coming back, and in the morning he'd pretend there hadn't been an argument.

I'm not leaving.

Therese meant what she'd said. Fifty years ago, she could have left. Would have left, gladly, if Brady'd only said the word. But leaving had been the farthest thing from Brady's mind, back then, and so Therese had stood by him. Even though he'd built his home and work on the edge of her fear, she stuck by him. And she gave herself her own reason to stay: If the first step to fighting fear is facing it, I'll face it. I'll stand here and stare it down. I'll wait for fear to blink. After that -- after fifty years of living on the shore of her own biggest terror, when each step toward the water made her bursitis flare -- she refused to watch her husband flee the storm.

Therese had not felt any serious pain for a week.

Since the day of the hard, fist-sized chest pain -- the day she'd faced Patricia Lang -- she'd felt all right. Not healthy, not strong, but all right. Nor had there been any other signs of disease. She checked her feces daily but found no blood. She did not find red spots in her phlegm. She noted the quality of every cough and she timed the intervals, but discovered nothing unusual. She examined her body for new moles; there were none.

But Therese was exhausted -- at least she craved sleep. When she slept, she slipped beneath Brady and the town and her own body; she slid under a sheet of transparent blue glass. She could see, vaguely, the soles of their shoes pacing silently across the surface, but she was sound-proofed and pain-proofed and sealed off from their troubles. Awake, Therese wept over the friends who had left the Landing for work in the cities; she worried about the way Brady talked about the men and women who had been his friends for fifty years; she worried about their resentment; she worried about his drinking and his movie binges; she wondered if the things the townspeople said were true -- she wondered if Brady really had closed the mine to drive them off. Most of all, she worried about Brady and the creature, because she believed that if Brady found Naitaka, if he got close enough, he would be taken. Killed.

Therese climbed the stairs to the bedroom. She wanted to sleep. She wanted away from Brady and the troubles in the Landing; she wanted away from pain and the fear of pain. Trouble was, the more she slept, the more she dreamed.

In the bedroom, Therese cupped her hands against the window-glass and searched the beach for Brady. The dusk lightened the weathered boards of the dock to the colour of ash. Brady was nowhere in sight.

Therese changed into a robe, then lay on her back on top of the bed-spread. Sometimes, if she lay down to nap and not to sleep, she could dream-think; she could think even as she slept, and if she felt her thoughts sliding toward a dream she didn't want, she could roll onto her side, rising far enough out of sleep to erase the dream.

Lying still on the mattress, Therese tried to rest; but she could not think free of pain and the recent absence of pain. She could not think free of Brady's wild obsession with Naitaka. (Brady: He had no sense of history. As far as he was concerned, Time began the day he walked down the mountain-bank to the Landing. The world was created, Brady wanted people to believe, the moment he met Naitaka in the water beyond the seedling orchard. But Halverson Stuart had been here before that. Therese had been born here. Both Therese and Halverson had had their

day with Naitaka before Brady even saw the valley. But Brady felt too small when he considered a scope broader than the borders of his own life.)

Therese could not sleep. After her conversation with Brady, she was wide awake. The memory had entered her again, and there was nothing she could do but stand back and watch it.

Therese had swum to the east side of the lake and back, as she had done a dozen times before. She was thirteen years old, lithe and long-legged and strong. But even though the surface of the lake was smooth, the swimming fluid and effortless, her arms and legs felt heavy; the material of her white swimsuit felt as thick and water-logged as old wood.

As Therese neared the shore of the Landing, she took long strokes and let her body glide through the cold water. Close to Halverson Stuart's T-shaped pine dock, she glanced up at the shore. A small crowd had gathered on the beach. They were shouting, waving their arms. Three boys -- Ransom Steen, John Wilder and Walter Striper -- pulled off their shoes and stockings and charged into the water. Then stopped. Then retreated, their faces as pale as butter.

When Therese turned toward the centre of the lake to see if there was more than her athletic swim to draw a

crowd, she found out why the boys had slipped back to the beach so suddenly.

A great green-slick rock was moving toward her, displacing water like a steel blade. Therese screamed. A long neck and small, vicious-looking head curled away from the body and moved toward her. Therese threw her hands toward the creature's face. Her fingers slapped against the side of its mouth. The mouth came open, revealing jaws lined with long, yellow-brown teeth, but the creature continued its advance. Therese doubled her open hands and pushed at the beast's neck, but her hands slipped on the slick skin and she stumbled forward, her chest and face pressed against the thick, green coat, her arms now wrapped around the neck.

Suddenly, she no longer felt the need to move. Behind her and to the left, she heard someone charge down Halverson Stuart's new pine dock. She knew someone was coming to save her, but she was not certain she wanted to be saved. The water -- the underwater -- seemed a natural place to go.

And Therese was going -- slipping into the lake with this suddenly beautiful, suddenly irrefusable beast -- when she saw Halverson Stuart catapult off the dock and fly through the air toward her. His unbuttoned shirt buffeted at his sides like small, cotton wings; the twisted

silver-charm hung from a clean rawhide strap around his neck and gleamed like an exploded star; his face was calm, his eyes fixed on the fusion between Therese's chest and arms and the creature's neck.

And as quickly as it began, it ended. Halverson Stuart's white shirt swirled beneath the water. The silver charm cut the surface of the lake once, then disappeared. The creature spun into deeper water. The water resettled. No blood, no struggle. No one screamed. No one rushed Therese. No one launched a boat into the water in search of Halverson. One man walked to the end of the T-shaped dock, glanced over the water for a minute or so, then turned back toward town.

Therese stood neck-deep in the lake. The water felt cold, but the skin on her back and her breasts and her fingers and forearms was numb-cold where the creature had touched her. She was shaking. She was standing in the lake, shaking and wondering why she felt so empty.

There was nowhere else to go. Times past, feeling disconcerted or angry or just downright confused, Brady might have stepped off the back porch to wander through the rows of fruit trees behind the house. He might have strolled down his driveway to where the trees opened to the town. From there he might have made his way from one street to the next, waiting to run into a friend or neighbour who might ask him in for a beer -- Earle or Ransom or Walter Striper or Billy. Or he might have stayed in the house, following Therese from room to room, bouncing his troubles off her level head, finding sense in her soothing answers or seeing the nonsense in his stream of babble.

But he could no longer find refuge in any of these places. All he got from the townspeople now were suspicious frowns and warnings. Therese wouldn't listen to him. The branches of the full-blooming trees stuck into his path like the bars of a cage. There was nowhere left to go.

Brady thudded over the dock to the Whaler. He pushed off the grey pylon and fired up the motor, cranking the wheel hard to the right, automatically heading north.

Handling the wheel carefully so he wouldn't irritate the warts that had plagued his hands for years, he drove flat out, his eyes fixed directly ahead as he stood at the wheel, his short, greying hair blown straight up against the wind. Never once giving conscious thought to exactly where he was headed, he zoomed along under the star-spotted black sky, the motor churning out a long trail of white foam behind.

For a brief moment he felt strong.

The boat was his prize possession -- a sixteen-foot Boston Whaler with a ninety-five-horse Merc outboard hanging off the back. Over the bone-white fiberglass, Brady had painted a bright red stripe, wide at the bow but narrowing progressively as it neared the stern, where it changed again, flaring into a series of wild flames. High on the bow, set in each curve of the double hull, two angry black-paint eyes stared coldly ahead above a turned-down, snarling mouth. Rod holders big enough for rifles were mounted on each gunwale. Brady loved the boat so much that he occasionally gave himself over to fantasies, equating it with the sleek but powerful horses of days of yore, and thinking of himself as a hard-riding, lonesome lawman. In this vein, he'd take all-out, fire-breathing runs at the kids who drank beer out on the lake in their Daddies' boats and threw garbage -- bottles and caps and empty beer cases

-- into the water.

When he neared the lake's northern tip twenty-five minutes later, Brady jerked the gear back into neutral; the boat drifted quickly forward, slowed, then bobbed softly as its own wake splashed against the stern. Finally, Brady began to relax. He lowered himself into the captain's chair and looked around. This was the barren land. Through the darkness, he saw the bare brown hills to the west above the Indian Reserve, a treeless stretch of foothill where the Natives loosed their cattle for grazing because the land proved useless for anything else. One long expanse of bottomland lay fallow between the hills and the lake. Brady had to strain his eyes to see where the black water broke against the black land. Opposite, spread like wet mulch over the mountain rising up on the east side of the lake, a deep-green moss ran over the desolate rock, lending, from a distance, the illusion of richness. But they were Irish hills. Along the north shore, the lake turned almost to a swamp.

The boat had drifted sideways. Straight ahead, fifty yards up the shore, Brady saw lights come on in one of the houses -- a square two-storey building with tarpaulin sides and garbage littered through the yard. A small, bent-over figure rattled out the screen door at the back and walked to a nearby barn.

Brady checked his watch. It was four-fifty a.m. A minute later, the figure re-emerged with a small bundle and returned to the house.

Brady wanted to start the motor and pull to shore in front of the house. Through a low window, he could see the figure sitting at a small table, hunched over a plate of food or a magazine. Why was this man up before five in the morning? As far as Brady could see, there were no animals in the dark fields around the house, and no crops, and the man had not started any one of the three cars in the yard, as he might have done if he needed to get to a seven o'clock shift in Kelowna or Vernon. So why? If there was nothing to get up for, then the man must not have been able to sleep. Brady felt connected, somehow, to this man, and yet he knew they would never meet.

Bobbing on the lake, surrounded by this empty landscape, almost invisible in the dawn, Brady cried. He cried for the trembling in Therese's voice when she refused to leave the Landing, because he knew just how thick the fear was on her limbs and on her mind: she could not leave, but neither could she take one step toward the water. Brady wept for the fear he saw in his neighbours -- people who were so frightened of being changed by a new place and new work that they sought to change their old place. And Brady cried for the fifty years he'd spent

living for the day he would see and touch Naitaka again; even more, he wept for a feeling he had carried with him ever since Naitaka slipped back into the water a half-century ago and left Brady on his back, deep-breathing under the hot-salt sun. The feeling that told him it would never happen again. The fear-feeling.

There was nowhere to go.

So Brady sat in his boat, drinking brandy-spiked coffee from his stainless steel thermos and chewing listlessly on a stale tuna sandwich. And as he glanced over at the ratty, car-littered yards of the Indian Reserve, he realized why he'd come here: this was the most useless part of the valley. The Indians were sent here because "here" was bullshit -- one thin strip of fertile earth, the rest impractical and uninteresting.

The brandied coffee had begun to work through him; it warmed his chest and he could feel the tension working free of his neck. He tossed off the last drops and screwed the plastic cup back onto the thermos, which he set beside the creased brown lunchbag on the dashboard. He stepped to the bow, unzipped his fly, and urinated into the dark water, watching his stream kick up a loose foam of white bubbles.

Piss on the lake.

A water-sound rippled into the air behind the boat. Brady spun toward it.

Naitaka floated motionless in the dark water seventy-five feet off the stern -- his massive snake's head cocked to the left, a dark, glazed eye fixed on Brady. Water streamed from the hump of his exposed torso, and his long neck disappeared into the water. Every few seconds the head fell an inch or two, as if from fatigue, or weakness.

Brady stared. His legs shook and his hands ached from their tight grip on the seatback. His warts ached. The glassy black eye remained fixed on Brady but seemed to wash in and out, a grey mist rising to the surface, then retreating. Hatred? Disgust? Wonder?

Brady opened his mouth to speak; the dry, early-morning air took the moisture from his tongue and dried his throat. He swallowed hard.

The creature came nearer, his thick, blade-shaped fins cutting water in a slow, regular rhythm. When Naitaka stopped, his head hung over the whaler's stern, mouth slightly open. Ridges of bone stood out beneath the head-skin. Two long, tapered nostrils, like wind-blown tears, were set forward in the huge head; the eyes were small and beady and set in hollowed sockets back near the corners of the jaws. The teeth were long and yellow-brown and pointed, and the rose-coloured gum-skin was flecked with black spots. Between the eyes, like a violent

brush-stroke, a blue-black scar ran from the top of the skull to the tapered ends of the nostrils.

From this too-close vantage point Brady noticed a thick coat of gel, like puss, on Naitaka's heavy skin. And when, next, the creature opened its mouth wider, Brady saw what looked like a dense coating of dried saliva around the thin lips and on the tongue.

"What?" Brady said, jerking his eyes from side to side. To his right, near his foot, he saw the crumpled paper bag.

The black, misted eye stayed fixed on Brady. And Brady had no idea what to do because he had never once imagined this kind of reunion. Fifty years ago, he had seen the creature and rushed upon it. Now both of them waited.

"What?" Brady repeated. And the memory of each instant of their one prior meeting rode through his brain: without thought or fear, Brady had torn through the water to get to Naitaka; they had fused -- Naitaka sliding low onto the stones beneath the water, Brady rising up through the lake and into the air and onto the creature's back, his slim arms wrapped around the thick, leather-green neck.

Each arc and fall of their ecstatic romp through the water flooded Brady's mind and pushed a single question into his throat: What do you want me to do? Because what

had been both simple and natural fifty years ago now confused Brady. He was in the boat; the creature was in the water: neither of them could move safely into the other's element. And yet they both wanted something.

I never felt more alive than I felt that day.

Half a century ago, Naitaka had been full and monstrous in front of him, and their brief journey had made Brady alive. But was Naitaka now dying? He looked thinner; the eyes were misted like the eyes of a blind dog; the skin was thick with puss, the mouth dry and the tongue cracked and bloody. What would happen to Brady's dream, his hope, if Naitaka died?

Slowly, keeping his eyes on the Naitaka, Brady knelt, fumbling for the crumpled paper bag and the tuna sandwich inside. He shook away the wrapping and carefully held the food at arm's length. He nodded his head eagerly. Naitaka didn't move, so Brady stepped closer, pushing the food gently against the dry lips. Naitaka pushed Brady's trembling hand aside with the tip of his jaw. The eye bore in on Brady, as though Naitaka wanted to ask a question, wanted to establish Brady's standing.

"What?" said Brady.

The mouth opened a fraction, accepting the offer. Brady reached back to the bag, then realized he'd eaten the other half of the sandwich himself. The only other bit of

food was a day-old apple core turned soft and brown; he held it toward the creature. Naitaka took it, tilting its head back, allowing the morsel to slide down.

Brady kept his eyes glued on Naitaka and shuffled backwards to the storage space beneath the steering assembly. From there he took the half-empty case of Libby's pork and beans. After opening a can, he moved cautiously to the stern and offered it to the creature. Naitaka pushed at the tin with his jaw, then darted his tongue onto the surface of beans. Then, once more, he eyed Brady, as if to say, If you tell me this is all right, I'll go along with it. Brady nodded and tilted the open can toward Naitaka's mouth.

Brady spent the next twenty minutes feeding the animal, pouring one can after another onto the dry, black-spotted tongue. At one point he even went so far as to pat Naitaka's head with both hands, as if to say, There we go, good boy.

When only three containers of Libby's remained, the creature slipped back into the water as quietly as it had come.

Brady watched the water for a full half-hour, but saw nothing other than hints of dawn. He was beginning to tire, the adrenalin only now beginning to fade from his bloodstream. He stood erect in the boat and rubbed his

smooth palms over his face, suddenly realizing something. Smooth palms. He looked down. "Jesus Christ," he swore softly. He could still feel the cool, slightly clammy, hide -- the leather-like coat as heavy as tree bark and yet as pliant as a skin of moss. Only the feel of Naitaka's hide, and the thin white residue of gel, remained on Brady's hands. The warts were gone.

After one final search over the water -- now blue-grey as the first light bled into the valley -- Brady fired up the outboard and headed home.

He docked the boat at five-thirty a.m. and immediately walked up behind the house to rummage through the junk-filled apple crates stacked at the rear of storage shed. Finally, he dug out his old telescope.

He hurried to the end of the worn wooden dock. Growing drowsier by the minute, Brady sat with his feet dangling in the warm summer water, and stared into a sky wiped clean of stars by the ascending sun.

TWELVE

It would have been both premature and senseless to face Therese with his news about Naitaka, so Brady headed north along the beach, past the split-log bench, then cut through the trees to Roy's cabin. It was six-thirty in the morning.

Brady poked a finger into Roy's side, then pulled the quilt away from his face. "Come on," he said. "Get up."

Roy cracked one eyelid. "Why?" he asked.

Brady was too excited to dance around the issue. "I need you to help me with something."

"I don't start work till seven," said Roy. "Therefore," and he glanced at the small travel-alarm on the counter across the room, "I don't have to get out of this bed until six-fifty-five." He looked back to Brady. "Seven, now that you've stolen five of my minutes."

"No work today," said Brady, proclaiming his decision like an MP taking credit for a new social programme. "And no work tomorrow either!" Again he prodded Roy. "You can have the rest of the week off. With pay!"

"In that case," Roy said groggily, "I'd like to sleep in this morning."

"No, no, no!" Brady cut in.

Roy rolled onto his back. His eyes came open, and he folded his hands behind his head, pressuring his skull up so he could raise his eyebrows.

Brady said, "What kind of Indian are you?"

"Red-skin."

"I'm serious," Brady said.

"Okanagan. A kind of Salish. Why?"

"So you know all the Indian stories about the lake and so on?"

"Don't you know anything?" Roy said, sitting up. His skin was a deep bronze, and there was a long, white scar on his left shoulder. "We've been stripped of our identity. That's why we drink."

"Look," Brady said, then stopped. He glanced around the room. Beside the wash basin was a rickety chair. Brady retrieved it and set it beside the bed. He leaned forward, his fingers resting on the edge of the mattress. He mustered all the earnestness he could. "I need you to be very serious, and I need you to listen carefully."

Roy nodded, then gulped. "Sorry," he said. "Serious now."

Brady ignored him and pressed on. "Do you know anything about Naitaka?"

Roy squinted "Ogopogo?"

"Jesus!" Brady cursed.

Roy shrugged. "Same as most people, probably. My family's been right out of canoeing and trapping for years. We don't make sacrifices as often as we probably should."

That snapped it. Brady lurched forward; his hands fell hard on Roy's shoulders, and he squeezed. "I...am... dead...serious." And he let go his grip and fell back into his chair. He sat shaking his head.

Roy did not move or speak for a full minute. "Okay," he said finally. "My fault."

"Maybe I should explain some things," Brady said. He did not look up. "But I'll have to do that as we go -- if you're willing. For right now, I'll tell you what." Raising his eyes to Roy, he saw the red marks his hands had made around the collar-bone. "I'll give you a room in the house, and you can eat all your meals with us -- Therese and me." He waved a hand around the shack. "And you can have this place if there's time to get away anywhere. And I'll keep paying you."

"To do what?" Roy asked.

"To keep your mouth shut, to stay on this land when I say, and to help me with some things I need to do. Nothing illegal. Nothing violent. But you won't get anything like popular."

Roy closed his eyes. His jaw shifted while he thought, and then his eyes brightened and he trained them

on Brady's. He said, "Will it be fun?"

Brady thought about this for a moment. "Could be." And he smiled, a real smile that for a moment or so sent him back to some of his past adventures. "Nothing even the least bit embarrassing. But you've got to keep your mouth shut just the same."

"Call me Harpo," said Roy.

THIRTEEN

Later the same day, after Brady had explained his plan to foil the Voyageur Expeditions and hide Naitaka, Roy found Brady sitting on an old metal chair at the end of the dock. A small white telescope rested on the weathered boards beside the chair. An orange-and-white thermos and an open can of Libby's beans -- spoon standing straight up out of the middle -- sat between Brady's feet.

"Just give me a day to get a few things done," Roy said, and leaned against the tilted, algae-slick pylon on the right side of the dock. "I've got some things to clear up in town -- then I'm all yours."

"We've gotta get busy," Brady said. He hunched forward in his chair, his elbows on his wide-set knees, his chin resting on the bridge of his laced fingers.

"Just today," Roy said. "We can start first thing tomorrow." His voice was quiet and unsure. "Hey -- are you sure this plan of yours is going to work?"

Brady set down the thermos cup. "You having second thoughts?"

"Call it inexperience," Roy shrugged. "The last monster hunt I went on involved a moth and a flickering porch lamp."

Brady stood up. "I told you," he said, "I've seen it. I saw it." He pointed to the telescope, as if to say, This isn't just me, this is scientific. "It'll come back to me. I know it."

"Then what?"

"I told you," Brady said. "We create a diversion, then hide Naitaka in the caves at Squally Point. Those caves have been searched a hundred times -- these guys won't even bother."

"What if they do bother?" Roy did not want to cause a fight, nor did he intend to back out of his pact with Brady: he simply wanted to know how much of Brady's plan was based on wide-eyed excitement and how much on common sense.

"They won't." Brady's face reddened; the sun was hot and there was a thin sweat-film along his hairline. "You're going to have to trust me." Brady dug into the front pocket of his jeans. "Here." He pushed a set of keys at Roy. "Take the Ford. That beater of yours is liable to get you in an accident."

Twenty minutes later, Roy knocked on the door of Patricia Lang's green shack. What he'd told Brady was only a half-lie. He had no intention of going to town, but he did need to clear some things up.

"Have you got a few minutes?" Roy asked when Patricia came to the door.

Patricia raised her eyebrows.

"I'd just like to talk," Roy said.

Patricia swung the door open and gestured into the house with her free arm.

"Could we go somewhere?" Roy asked.

"Why?"

"I want to see the silver mine. Something's been bugging me."

With Roy struggling against the pot-holes and skittering left and right over the washboard ruts, hauling on the armstrong steering to pull the heavy flatbed truck through the series of mountain-side switch-backs, and with Patricia navigating beside him, they reached the mine without incident. Roy parked the truck beside a long, slab of rubble concrete.

"This used to be the office," Patricia said after they'd climbed out of the truck. She slid her foot through the blanket of dust on top of the cement. "1947" was lettered into one corner.

Patricia looked perfect up here. She wore dark brown corduroys and a worn buckskin jacket with fringes and a beaded collar. The sun brought out the blue in her black hair, and her eyes were as dark as the blue water off the

shore of the Landing. Roy stared until he knew he wouldn't forget the look of her standing against the backdrop of pine trees and the patch of wild sunflowers on the mountainside behind her, then he walked across the gravel clearing to join her. In one hand he held a full bottle of Crown Royal. Two up-side-down styrofoam cups wobbled over the bottle-neck.

"It's ten o'clock in the morning," Patricia said, pointing at the whiskey.

"That's not why I brought it," said Roy. He uncapped the bottle and half-filled each cup, then handed one to Patricia.

Looking down the mountain, he could see all of Stuart's Landing -- the rows of houses lined up close to the mountain; the flat, box-shape of Earle Hyatt's motel; Ransom Steen's lot, now filled with cars and pick-ups and scattered equipment crates; the great fan of trees that made up Brady's orchard. He could even see Brady down on the end of his dock, a small speck against the mass of blue-steel water.

"There used to be a Silverheels Silverheels," Roy said.

Patricia stepped up beside him but said nothing.

"Why do people need two names?" Roy wondered aloud. "Indians didn't have two names before white people came

here." He poured a second drink. "Now we've got stupid names like Robert Joe and Joe Simon. You'd think people would have enough imagination to give each person their own sound." He thought about that for a second. "The phone book wouldn't be any thicker."

"Why did you want to come here?" Patricia said, and held her styrofoam cup toward the bottle tucked under Roy's arm.

"My old man was telling me that this mine used to be an Indian secret. The guy who found it was the first Silverheels. Silverheels Silverheels."

"So you came up here to be bitter?"

Roy faced Patricia. "What was that?"

"The mine used to belong to the Indians, then the whites came along and took it. They mined it to exhaustion, then shut it down. That's the history of the mine."

"So?"

"So it sounds like you came here to moan about the injustice."

Roy shook his head. "Not especially. It's just that I know he stood here at one time and looked at pretty much the same thing I'm looking at now."

"It won't work," Patricia told him.

"What won't work?"

Since Roy had made no move to pour her another drink, Patricia took the bottle and poured her own. "You've come up here to think about something serious, right?"

"Maybe," Roy shrugged.

"Don't play games," Patricia warned. She set the bottle on the gravel at their feet. "Most people don't get into this stuff at ten o'clock in the morning unless they want to tune up for a serious think. I don't think you're far gone enough to need it out of habit."

"I just wondered what it would be like to stand in three-hundred-year-old footprints and look at things."

"You can't do it."

"You can try."

"Look," said Patricia. "My mother was a blue-eyed Similkameen Indian, and my father was a dark-skinned, flat-nosed logger. From all I can make out, I think I'm about half-and-half." She finished her drink, then twisted the cup into some loose gravel. "My father used to tell me Indian stories, and my mother used to sit me on her lap and thumb through European fashion magazines -- they gave things to me, but they never interpreted for me." She took Roy's hands in her own and caressed first the dark knuckles and the bones on the backs of his hands, then the lighter skin on the palms, and finally the callouses that had begun to build near the base of the fingers and the finger pads.

"You can't stand in someone else's footprints and find out anything useful about your own future." She touched the side of his face, pushing back the dark hair that hung forward from his temples. "It's not the same world anymore. And you don't have the same mind."

Roy shrugged. Patricia's wisdom was without answers; Roy's two biggest fears still loomed as the most distinct possibilities for his future: first, he could sink himself into a lost past that would paralyze him, in which case he'd wind up like his father; or second -- because, by definition, a good Indian is an Indian who acts like a whiteman -- he could abandon the past for success in a white future. Those were the only choices. Unlike the Indian fishermen on the coast, he couldn't pick up the old ways, make a living, and take pride in the preservation of his own history. Nomadic hunting was out of fashion.

The problem remained: Eugene Silverheels sat in his house at the end of the lake, rioting his body and his brain with cheap rye and beer; thirty miles south, in Kelowna, Ian the Terrible and that officious little prick of a civil servant were probably sitting at a table in the Willow Inn, waiting for another sucker chug to come their way; and right below him now, sitting on the end of his old wooden dock, staring at the water, sipping spiked coffee and eating cold pork and beans, was Brady Stuart.

In just a few short weeks, Roy had grown to love Brady. The crooked walk. The spike-grey hair. The way he grumbled out his words, no matter how tender his meaning. Roy admired Brady's determination, and he loved the gentleness and patience that informed every gruff command, no matter how hard Brady tried to hide it. But the mine that Silverheels Silverheels discovered now belonged to Brady Stuart. Brady controlled it. And the great lake creature that the Indians had either invented or discovered, Brady now claimed as his. Period. So despite his affection for the old man, Roy wasn't sure that Brady had anything over Ian the Terrible.

"Where are your parents now?" Roy asked.

"Both dead."

After a few seconds, Roy said, "Let's go in," and nodded toward the boarded-up mouth of the mine.

"Why?" Patricia's voice was filled with warnings.

"I just want to see."

"It's sealed."

Roy went to the truck and rummaged a rusted jack and tire iron out from behind the seat. In the glove compartment he found a heavy-duty flashlight.

But Patricia was right: attached to a square, two-by-four frame, extra-long two-by-twelves railed the mine's mouth shut. Tempered steel spikes had been driven

through the frame and into the rock.

Roy searched for a saw behind and under the truck seat, and through the debris of rope and plywood and orchard tools in the back of the truck box, but he came up empty-handed.

"There's nothing worth seeing in there," Patricia said impatiently. "Let's just go."

"If there's nothing to hide," Roy said as he marched back to the mouth and picked the tire iron out of the dust, "then why's it closed up so tight? It's not like you've got to worry about kids trekking up here."

"It's just a bunch of tunnels into the mountain. And it's spent now."

Roy shrugged. If it was just a bunch of tunnels, why did it need to be sealed so tight? What was Brady trying to hide?

Working his way around the frame, Roy searched the wood for knots. If he could break one side of the frame, he'd be able to pry one of the rails free.

"Just forget it," Patricia said.

But Roy had found a knot. It didn't occur to him that breaking the top piece of the frame would accomplish nothing, since the thick rails were fixed horizontally to the two-by-fours. And Patricia didn't tell him.

With one hand gripped around the flawed piece of wood

and the tire iron hooked through one of his belt loops, Roy wedged a foot between two of the rails and started up the face of boards. When his feet were about a third of the way up, he slipped the tire iron between the flawed section of the frame and the jagged rock behind.

"Be careful," Patricia warned.

Roy pulled -- dug the toes of his sneakers in between the rails and pulled down with all his might. With little effect. There was a high, thin screech as the steel spikes loosened in the rock, then nothing. So Roy released his feet and hung from the tire iron.

Still nothing.

He bounced, lifting himself into a chin-up, then falling to the length of his arms, until he'd established a rhythm and he could maintain by swinging his legs and hips.

His skin pinched between the metal and the bones in his fingers; his armpits ached; the muscles in his abdomen stretched.

The two-by-four snapped.

At first, Roy heard the screeching but felt no movement. Then he felt the wood begin to bend. He tried to make himself heavier; he bounced harder. And then he heard the splintering and looked up to see the tire iron breaking through the wood, scraping its rust onto the shredding fibres like blood. He wanted to let go, to drop

and try to land on his feet, but since the iron was the only thing holding him up in the first place, he tried instead to pull himself toward it.

The next thing Roy knew he was in the air, turning sideways. Then he slammed into the ground, the sharp end of the tire iron digging into his right arm, the left side of his face damp against the dust and gravel. And Patricia Lang's hands were on his back, running swift and gentle over his aching muscles.

Out of his good eye, Roy stared across the rutted clearing at the bottle of rye. In the old days, if he remembered correctly, they'd used liquor to clean wounds.

FOURTEEN

Brady was furious. He'd let Roy traipse off to Kelowna -- he'd even lent his goddamned truck for fear that the beaten-up Volkswagen would pack it in somewhere along Westside Road -- and the ungrateful sonofabitch had come back with one eye swollen shut, his bottom lip split and his right arm crooked against his stomach like a broken wing.

Now Roy waited on the back porch while Brady stormed around the kitchen, banging cupboards and slamming the taps on and off and working himself up for a second offensive.

Brady knew Roy wouldn't budge. Roy would stay where he was, leaning against the unpainted porch rail, staring across the matted grass to the rows of trees, and when Brady walked out and let off some more steam, Roy'd stand there and take it. This wasn't the case of a party that had gone on too long; this wasn't a matter of working out the trivial personality conflicts that surfaced in any work-based relationship. This was serious. Roy had signed on, he'd made a commitment to help Brady with the biggest fight of his life, and then he'd wandered into the city to have his face pounded black and blue. His eyes were puffed into slits, the blood vessels in the whites exploded and

firing crimson around the ebony irises. His speech was heavy and slack, the tongue struggling to form syllables against the inflated lip.

What Roy did was wrong.

Brady threw open the back door. "You're not fit to pick your own nose. How can we do anything with you beat to hell?"

Roy clenched his fingers tight around the rail and turned his face away from Brady. Strands of his black hair had been soaked with blood and dirt and clung together. "This'll surprise you, I know, but I didn't go in there with the idea that it might be nice to have my face pulverized."

"But you got yourself into a fight?"

"Evidently."

"You know," Brady said, "that's the problem with you people -- it's not that you're drunkards, that's just a symptom. You're irresponsible. You just don't care that you've made commitments -- if something better comes along, off you go." Brady waved a hand to show how easily an Indian's attention could flit off into the breeze. "You need a haircut."

"I just had a haircut."

"You need another haircut."

Roy faced Brady. He leaned against the porch-rail and

lifted a hand to his face, half rubbing the facts and problems into focus, half shielding his bruises from Brady. "So I screwed up," he said. "That much is settled. Now what?" He pushed off the rail, standing straight now, his arms dangling at his sides. "What says that has to change any plans?"

"You can't dive like that."

"They're not even on the water yet."

"The point is, I can't trust you," said Brady. "If you want to know the truth, that's it. You can't be trusted to settle your own affairs and come back with your face in the same shape as when you left." Brady jabbed an index finger into the air between them. "You can't help yourself through a simple day -- how am I supposed to believe you can help me?"

"I just told you, I didn't lift a finger, I didn't mouth off. I just happened to be too near someone who wanted a fight."

"For pete's sake, probably everyone on this earth walks by a madman once a day. It doesn't mean you've got to stop and ask him to lunch." Brady couldn't help it. Staring at Roy -- he stood tall now, his chest a little fuller, hints of his cocky grin pulling at the left side of his mouth -- Brady couldn't trust. He saw Roy, the kid who'd wandered up his step with bruises similar to the ones

he sported today, and he saw the kid he felt anxious to stumble in on and talk to in the mornings. But those images did not stand alone, because he also saw Roy half-naked, the white scar bright as a warning against his copper skin. And Brady heard the back-talk and saw the flashing brown eyes. He knew one simple fact about Roy Silverheels: push down and Roy squirmed -- not so much against the pressure of responsibility, but toward his need for freedom. If Brady wanted to stick to his plan -- and the plan was a good one -- then he needed Roy. He could go it alone, but he'd need to revise his plan; it was absurd to imagine another recruit.

Roy fidgeted in the silence, hands tracing his bruises and cuts. "You want me to go, just say the word. I told you what happened. That's my story."

Brady did not speak. He opened the back door and slipped inside. The aluminum rattled.

Roy stepped after him. He pushed his face close to the open screen mesh. Inside, Brady stood at the sink. His hands rested on the arborite, his fingers curled down against the stainless steel. "Yeah," Roy said. "Just put up another sign. Wanted: Willing Accomplice For Old Man's Fantasy."

"Get out," Brady said without turning.

"Or how about, Do You Believe In The Ogopogo? Then

Join Me In A Great Adventure!"

Brady concentrated on the sink. Coffee grounds had dried on the black rubber gasket of the garbarator. He ran the tap and drank off a glass of cold water, he counted to himself -- one, two, three, four -- but he did not turn. He wanted Roy to go, but he did not want to watch him leave. He could hear the rattle and shake of the screen door in Roy's grip -- he had closed it after the last insult, but now it was drawn open again, the bottom hinge creaking under the pressure.

"Truck keys are in the ashtray," said Roy.

"You can get your things now or later," said Brady.

FIFTEEN

Roy didn't see Brady for three days. He stayed at the Reserve, hauling empty bottles and reeking bags of garbage away from Eugene's house. In between trips to the dumpsite, he listened to the old man's lunacies. "Goddamn women aren't happy 'less they're scratchin' at yer hemorrhoids." By which he meant he wished Roy's mother would come back to him, instead of phoning once a week to worry over his drinking. "Fuhgen white men told us we couldn't live by the same rules as they did. My grandfather was...not...allowed to own land in town and work at what he had a mind for!"

"That was fifty years ago," Roy reminded him.

"So after they've bought every inch of this valley and pinned down everything that moves, I'm supposed to tote out my family fortune and go to it?"

The old man hadn't washed in weeks; his grey hair was long and matted; he smelled of liquor and sweat and urine. When Roy was in his early teens, he'd wanted to cage his father and wait out the disease, but now he knew the shame and the vomiting and the delirious visions would do more damage than a cure.

On Tuesday afternoon, three days after Brady had

thrown him out, Roy approached his father in the book shed.

Eugene had reconstructed the fallen bookshelf and had angle-driven four-inch spikes through the cedar shelving and into the walls of the shed. He was busy sorting through the books and magazines when Roy came in. On the bottom shelf, level with Eugene's left knee, sat a dirty mason jar half-filled with rye.

"I've got to go," Roy said from the door.

"So go," Eugene told him, and used his shirt sleeve to wipe a stream of sweat from his forehead. The sun beating against the shed's aluminum roof raised the temperature close to ninety degrees. Eugene picked up a Rising Sun newspaper. The front page was stained and brittle from the dampness that came up through the earth floor in winter, then evaporated in the severe summer heat. "Couldn't expect you to stay here for long."

Roy shrugged. "What's to stay for?"

"What's to go for?" Eugene looked up; liquor-sweat soaked his clothes and ran dark as blood along the dirty folds in his skin. "Thought you lost your job?"

"Maybe I can get it back."

"While yer at it," Eugene said, sorting through a pile of Native Art magazines with his right shoe, "see if you can scrape some of the colour outa yer skin, eh?"

"Will do," Roy said quietly. He slipped out the door

and walked past the litter of papers and book-shelf wood, past the piles of weed-thick dirt and then through the burned-black grass to his car. Brady Stuart was a long way from perfect, but at least he had some fight left. Maybe the fight in Brady Stuart's blood and bones was what made him both so interesting and so enraging. Brady fought eagerly. You had to be alive to fight. You had to believe in something to fight for it. And maybe that was the difference between Eugene Silverheels and Brady Stuart: Eugene owned his Indian past, but he'd dedicated his life to proving his own helplessness; Brady did not own Naitaka, but he had fought to protect it just the same. If you were willing to fight, you had to believe there was something worth fighting for.

"I thought you'd left the place," Patricia said once she'd opened the door. "I walked over last night." She nodded across town, past the open field on the other side of the road and the houses beyond. She'd been to the shack hidden in the trees of Brady's orchard. "It looked like you'd cleaned the place out." She was braless beneath her white cotton sundress.

"Could I come in?" For the last two and a half weeks, since the night they met at Ransom's blow-out party, Roy had come to see her each evening. Sometimes they drank

wine and talked; twice they'd walked a mile down Westside Road and up the mountain to a dried-up gold creek. Patricia had never asked him to stay, and he'd never pushed it. Each night they kissed at the door -- passionately and long on the nights when their talk had been excited and free -- and Roy left.

"What for?"

"I've been thinking about what you said at the mine."

"And?"

"And I've decided something. I think."

"You must be exhausted."

Roy smiled mechanically. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you."

"I don't own you," Patricia told him.

"Well, maybe it was inconsiderate."

"That's a good word."

"I had a fight with Brady. I wanted to come here, but at that point I didn't want to be turned away from anywhere else. I just went to the old man's."

"And now you want to stay here?"

Roy hadn't thought about it. Once he had decided to come and take back his job with Brady, he'd seen himself in the picker's shack. "No."

After a long silence, Patricia opened the door.

She brewed strong coffee in a percolator, then brought

it out steaming in clear-glass mugs, which she set on the plastic coffee table in front of the couch. The chair by the front window was on casters, and Roy rolled it close to the table. "Okay, sit down," he told Patricia.

She sat on the couch, her legs crossed at the knees, and held her coffee on the saucer in her lap. Roy leaned forward in his chair. After he'd told her about the fight he'd had with Brady, he said, "I think I'm going to help him. I'm not sure how hard it'll be to convince Brady it's a good idea, but I think I can do it."

Patricia smiled. "What changed your mind?"

"The fight," said Roy. "Brady's always fighting to try to get the things he believes in to go right." Roy laughed. "I'm not sure he knows his ass from a hole in the ground half the time, but he's got guts enough to think he can tell the difference." Roy wrapped the fingers of both hands around his mug and took a drink. Quietly, he said, "My father's afraid to believe anymore, so he's decided that the safest thing to do is to prove that there's nothing left to believe in." He looked into Patricia's eyes. "If that creature is out there, and if Brady and I can get it, it might be something even Eugene couldn't turn away from."

"You've got a wonderful voice, Silverheels."

"I tape record all my resumes," Roy grinned.

"Why don't you bring that voice over here," Patricia said softly. "Right here." She turned her head and lifted a hand to her left ear.

When Roy stood up, Patricia moved to the end of the couch. "Put your feet up."

Roy stretched out on the couch, resting his head in Patricia's lap. Through the white cotton of her dress, he could see the shape of her dark aureoles. She bent her head toward him and lifted his toward her ear. "C'mon, Silverheels," she teased, "say something."

Roy slid her hair over her ears with his fingertips, then moved his lips close. Patricia did not wear perfume; her skin smelled of salt and bathwater. In a husky whisper fierce with urgency, he said, "The new moon is dim over Moscow."

Patricia jerked him away, laughing. His head rested on her thighs now. She moved her fingernails over his scalp. Then she lowered her face and kissed his scars -- first his bruised eyelid, then the cut cheekbone, and finally his lips. She kissed him gently, again and again and again, until Roy used his fingers to guide her face away.

Roy propped himself up on one elbow. He stared into her blue eyes; he traced the fingers of his free hand along her face, then down her neck. Then, without speaking or

for one second taking his eyes from hers, he slid the thin straps of her dress off her shoulders. Patricia kissed him, and freed her arms from the straps.

Roy moved so Patricia could lie beside him. When she was comfortable, he drew close to her again. He kissed her forehead, her nose, her lips, and he felt terribly sentimental. "Why are you here?" he said. "Everyone else around here is sixty or better. There isn't a single child in the place, but there's you." He smiled. "How come?"

"Maybe for the same reasons you've decided to come back." Patricia pulled away. She lifted a hand to clear the hair that had fallen across her face, then she rested her head against the armrest. Suddenly, she was years away from him. "Brady's fight has kept this place alive for the people who've chosen to stay. When the mine was open, they saw his fight against searchers as a fight to preserve things -- a fight against any attempt to change this place. Because Naitaka has everything to do with Stuart's Landing. It killed Brady's father, it tried to kill Therese. And they say Brady touched it. There isn't a person around here who doesn't believe it's going to come back."

Roy kissed her neck, her shoulders. He tried to listen but failed. When he asked her why she'd stayed, he had not expected the truth. He had wanted to hear her say she'd stayed for him. Because she was waiting for him.

When she went on about the Landing and the people, he drifted. He felt her drifting, slipping away from him as she sank into her story about the Landing, and he tried to bring her back. He slid down the couch and kissed her breasts, tracing them with his tongue, sucking gently on the nipples. He slid the dress down to her waist. He rolled her onto her stomach, cupping her breasts in his hands, and kissed her back. He saw the scars and felt Patricia go rigid at the same moment. He tried to keep kissing, to pretend nothing had happened, but the scars were like ice beneath his lips.

Roy stopped. On Patricia Lang's back and along the ribs on her left side, there were two long rows of scars, running in a sideways V, like teeth-marks from a massive jaw.

Roy came up cold. He could not speak, but he could not lift the tips of his fingers away from the pink ridges of scar tissue. He wanted to comfort her, to tell her it didn't matter -- as if the scars indicated rape and she needed his reassurance -- but Roy could not stop thinking about Brady and the creature, about the creature and the town, about the way everyone in Stuart's Landing seemed to be guarding a secret connection to Naitaka. Patricia's scars didn't mean rape: they meant incest.

"It was a long time ago," Patricia said.

Roy was no more than sixty feet from the workshed when he heard Brady yell "Shit!" and heard the sound of something crashing down inside the shed. He sprinted to the open door.

Brady lay motionless on the floor, his arms and head and shoulders trapped inside a life-sized decoy of Naitaka's head and neck and shoulders, his legs stretched out behind.

Weeks earlier, when Brady showed him a glossy drawing of a plesiosaur and swore they could build a look alike from aluminum tubing, lightweight fiberglass and paint, Roy had been skeptical. Brady had explained how he'd build it from the shoulders up, so that Roy could fit in from beneath and propel the decoy forward underwater, and, like a crazy tailor, he'd measured Roy's chest and shoulders and arms. But even after Brady completed the frame -- the small, snake-like head, the slender neck that flared steadily until the open chest was big enough for Roy -- Roy had been unable to imagine it looking real. Now the decoy was complete, and it did look real. "You need some help?" Roy said.

Brady spoke but the words came out garbled.

Roy shouted, "What?"

"I...am...fine," Brady said slowly.

"You've never looked better," said Roy.

Brady did not speak or move.

"You know, if you need some help...."

"I'm fine."

Roy shook his head. "Jesus, you're stubborn." He pulled one of the saw-horses close to the decoy, then sat down. "You're not fine, you're stuck."

Brady said nothing.

"Say you're stuck," Roy said. "If you say you're stuck, I'll help you. Say, 'Roy, I'm stuck.'"

Brady said, "Are you enjoying your little game?"

"So you are stuck!" Roy said gleefully.

"Yes," Brady said.

"Okay," Roy said. "Now, did you mean to get stuck?"

Even through the paint and the fiberglass, Roy heard Brady's long, impatient sigh. "No."

"Okay," Roy said, and walked around to the other side of the decoy. He gripped Brady's ankles in his hands, braced a foot against the edge of the decoy, and pulled. Once Brady was free, Roy lowered the old man's legs gently to the floor. Brady sat up, red-faced and breathing heavily, and rubbed his shoulder muscles.

Roy said, "The day you lent me your truck -- do you think I meant to come back beat up?"

"That's not the point."

"It is the point," Roy said.

Brady looked up but he did not speak.

"Stopping Voyageur is a two-man job," Roy said.

Brady shrugged. "I don't know. This Cranston character isn't like the others. I'm not sure a prank will stop him."

Roy said, "If we do it right, it'll be a hell of a lot more serious than a prank."

"Let's just drop it," Brady said. "No hard feelings."

The next morning -- an hour before Voyageur Expedition's official launch onto the lake -- Roy stole Brady's boat. Roy took the telescopic aluminum pole from under the gunwale, extended it and twisted the joints tight, then loosened the mooring ropes, letting them slip quietly into the water. Then he pushed off the dock. The whaler drifted back, the double hull sliding level over the calm water. Roy stepped to the bow and gave another push against the algaed stones. The boat slid into deeper water. Roy started the engine and headed north.

Brady might have believed he could give up, abandon the fight, but Roy knew he'd be sorry for it later. Everyone in Stuart's Landing was in some way connected to that goddamned creature. Brady's father. Brady. Therese. Patricia. (There were goddamned teeth marks on Patricia's

body!) And Roy refused to abandon this fight before he saw Naitaka for himself and had a chance to figure out why the people the creature tried to kill were so goddamned anxious to protect it. If Brady wanted to quit, that was his business, but Roy wanted to see him quit in the middle of the battle, not before it even began. That was too easy.

There was a giant TV screen in the middle of the beach. Right behind the half-circle of three-piece suits and tailored business-dresses, right behind the fringe of lounging tourists and locals who'd squeezed in behind the dignitaries to satisfy their curiosity, erected up behind the still figure of Bar Cranston, there was a big screen.

Roy set down the binoculars. He didn't know why it surprised him. Voyageur had somehow paid for or got hold of an expensive sub, so there was no reason to imagine the technology would stop there. But when he considered that all he and Brady had was their wits and plans for a fiber-glass monster, it didn't seem right. If Naitaka was anything, it was primal. And these people were choreographing their hunt like a Barbara Walters' special. If Brady saw this he'd throw a fit. Roy snatched up the binoculars.

Twenty yards off the beach, the mini-sub bobbed in the water. From Roy's vantage point, the craft looked

harmless, almost comic -- a miniature Good Year Blimp carted out to advertise bicycle tires. With the sun and the distance, Roy could not make out the images on the big screen. Now and again, he could see flashes of green, then brown, but as the boat drifted, Roy fell out of line with the images on the concave.

Maybe this was what his father meant.

Here I am watching a bunch of money-grubbing whites after an invention that belongs to my people. Two hundred years ago, we were the ones to carve his image on the prow of a dugout. We were the ones to find out it lived in the caves at Squally Point. We were the ones who made sacrifices and told them to do the same. And what did they do? Even then they armed themselves. There is nothing more sinister than a hostile hunter.

Roy jammed the whaler into gear. The bow lifted, the stern sank low, and the prop spun white foam. There were two hundred yards between Roy and the festivities on the beach, and he rode the distance full bore. The wind snapped at the bruises around his eyes and on his mouth, and for a moment Roy was sure the cuts would tear at the corners and rip their seams of scar. He clenched his fingers tight around the chrome steering wheel. Whipping across the surface of the water, his hair caught and shaped by the wind, his white cotton summer shirt blown tight

against his thin chest, Roy knew they could win. He knew that some men let things outside themselves stand in for their imaginations. His father was doing it with the white man's head start. Brady was doing it with his fear. And Roy had just seen it in Bar Cranston's eyes: the way Cranston fixed his gaze on the mini-sub, the way he stood, leaning back as if the big screen both cushioned and held his shoulders, on the beach. Roy could hear the words in Bar Cranston's head. These tools can search like no man. With these I can find the Ogopogo. Bar Cranston had equipment and a plan. Roy couldn't touch the equipment, but he could sabotage the plan.

When he reached the wide bay, Roy cut the throttle and spun the wheel left. The boat leaned, the double-hull digging like a skater's blades into ice.

Roy fell to his knees and slumped against the gunwale. "Help!" he called, and dragged the fingers of both hands hard across his cheeks, opening the cuts, reddening the bruises. "It's out there!" He had to change the rules. If Bar Cranston imagined a straight-forward search -- the lake calm and blue, spectators lining the beaches, the mini-sub and divers sliding through the depths with their gauges set and their cameras reeling -- then his machines could not be beaten. They'd do their thing no matter what. The way to stop Cranston was to go after the notions in his

head and hope he looked to the machines for his answers.

"Help!" Roy shouted again. Cranston had to respond to Roy's game: if he'd come here to say he believed in Ogopogo enough to search for it, then he could not dismiss a single sighting, no matter how sudden, no matter how badly timed.

The crowd stirred, puzzled faces turning to one another. "Bring him in," came across the water. Bar Cranston's voice. And Roy saw a young man with curly blonde hair wade quickly through the shallow water to where the search boat was secured to a floating orange oil can. When the boat approached, Roy reached for the throttle. "This way," he called, and made a fuss of dragging himself into the captain's chair. He feigned weakness, resting his chest against the steering wheel, as if this was the only way he could conserve enough energy to push the throttle down. But he did push, and Brady's boat shot toward the center of the lake.

Roy turned in his seat. The other boat stayed close behind, and Roy lifted his left arm high above his head, then threw it forward and to the right, indicating a small cove, steeped on three sides by the dusty hills, as the place he'd been mauled. He pushed the throttle to full, holding it down with a hand so the spring couldn't relax from the steady bounce of the hulls against the crested

waves.

Finally, he eased off, drifting straight till the whaler stopped. The other boat came up behind.

Roy held the wheel tight. He mustered up all the trembling fear he could. He bent his knees and spread his legs wide, anchoring himself against another attack.

"Here," he said, and swung his head left and right, scanning the surface of water. "It was here."

"When?" the blonde kid demanded. He was tanned and solidly built, the muscles showing through the thick blue wet-suit. "Where?"

"Here!" Roy shouted. Lowering his face into his folded arms, he mumbled incoherently.

"What...happened?" the other man asked. The boats had drifted side-to-side, and Curly sat on the port-side gunwale of the Expedition boat, holding the side of the whaler with both hands. "What did it look like?"

Roy lifted his head. He tried, without success, to manufacture tears. Failing at that he'd rubbed his wounds against his cotton shirt. When he lifted his head, his face was swollen and pitiful, his eyes cast down. But the fear in Curly's eyes made the pain pleasurable. "I came out fishin'," Roy confided quietly. "There's sometimes ling cod on the rocks close in." He stopped. Curly's eyes were wide and glued fast to Roy. "I got something but I

couldn't get the line in, so I figured I'd caught bottom, since I was jiggging just off the rocks. I'm pullin' and pullin', and up it comes..." He pressed his hands against his cheeks, then withdrew them, turning the bloodied palms toward Curly. "Jesus, it was the ugliest thing I ever seen. It had this huge, snaking head and it was all slime covered scales on the body, and these long fucken yellow teeth and these curved brown claws.... Jesus!"

"Okay, okay," blurted Curly, his eyes sweeping the water. "We better get you to a hospital." He looked earnestly at Roy. "We'll get it, don't you worry. Come on," he said, lifting a thick nylon rope from the deck, "I'll drag you in."

Roy shook his head. He pointed down the shoreline to a row of dilapidated cabins on the treed beach of the Reserve. "My old man lives just over there."

"Okay, okay." Curly glanced over the water the way they'd come. "You just don't worry. We'll bag it for sure." He looked back to Roy. "You sure?"

Roy nodded. He turned the key in the ignition and waited.

"Okay."

When the search boat had disappeared into the distance, Roy steered the whaler toward the shore of the Reserve. He'd wait there for a few minutes, wash his face

in the water, then head back and tell Brady.

The more he thought about what happened, the better he felt. Even if what he'd done failed to get Bar Cranston searching in the wrong place, Roy had at least managed to take the attention away from the launching ceremony. If he'd been standing on the beach, waiting for things to get underway, and someone had screamed in to say they'd been mauled by the Ogopogo, the ribbon-cutting and the applause would seem pretty dull. If he'd been there, then right about now he'd be wondering why Voyageur Expeditions wanted to come to the valley and stir up so much trouble. If he'd been there, then right about now he'd be wondering what happened to that poor, beaten-up Indian. And maybe the people who were there were changing their minds about the Voyageur Expedition.

SIXTEEN

When Brady strolled down to the dock in the late afternoon and found his boat gone, he did not panic. He walked across the old boards -- even now there were places where chips of white paint still clung -- and sat cross-legged at the end. Sweat broke through the skin on his forehead; his shirt stuck to his back and grew moist beneath the arms. This kind of valley-heat made him impatient.

Brady had not forgiven Roy. He could not deny the relief he'd felt -- part of it because he'd been discovered, most of it because he'd been discovered by Roy -- when Roy had found him trapped in the decoy; but neither could he deny that Roy was a liability. Roy was a hazard even to himself; he was the kind of person you could expect to be struck by lightning -- twice. As long as Roy was involved, nothing could be planned.

Across the lake, a white boat broke into view. The water was nervous today, jumping under the breeze, the tips of the waves capped, the sliding water at the bottom of the swells glistening starlight against the dark blue water. Brady climbed to his feet and watched the craft approach. After a few seconds, though, he lowered his hands from his eyes. It was a much bigger boat than the whaler.

Brady turned and walked down the dock to the house. For a moment he considered hopping in the truck and driving along Westside Road. From there he'd be able to see up and down the lake for several miles. But with the white caps and the bright sun, eye-scanning wouldn't do much good. And his binoculars were in the boat.

Instead of going after Roy, Brady decided to play another angle. Roy likely expected him to pop a spring over this -- since direct defiance was the method he preferred for proving his point -- Brady decided to act as if this were the kindest thing anyone had ever done for him.

Problem was, in all his planning and smiling to himself, Brady hadn't planned on seeing Roy and the whaler on the six o'clock news.

*

When Roy steered the boat close to the dock, Brady stood waiting. When Roy reached out to take Brady's extended hand, Brady let him climb halfway up, so that Roy's left foot rested on the dock and the other bobbed up and down on the gunwale, and he held him there. The grip was tight. Depending on which way he chose to throw his weight, Brady could heave Roy into the water on the other side of the

dock, or he could push him back into the boat, the angle just right for Roy's head to split open against the blue metal tackle box on the deck.

"The first guy I ever stopped from catching that creature," Brady explained, "I snugged a rifle so close to his asshole, he thought I was a suppository salesman."

"You don't know where I've been," Roy said aggressively.

Brady released his grip and shook his wrist free from Roy's hold. Turning away, he said, "Tell me."

"Just hang on a second." Roy climbed onto the dock. "You know how we were trying to figure out ways of screwing up his sub and his divers?"

Brady did not answer.

"Well, that was the wrong approach. He's got what he's got, and if we try to tamper with it, chances are we'll wind up in jail." Roy stepped to Brady's side. The old man's face was tired and bored. The skin below his eyes was red and dry; his glazed eyes gave no indication of interest. "What we've got to do is get the public behind us."

"The public doesn't care," Brady said flatly.

"Maybe they don't care because the problem is all talk. But maybe if you give them some action they'll have something to sink their teeth into."

"They pour piss and shit and chemical weed killers into the lake," Brady explained, directing a hand casually toward the water. "They've been doing that action longer than we've been blessed with your presence on this earth, and all that's ever come of it is a few letters to the mayor and somebody making a buck on '2-4-D NOT FOR ME' bumper stickers." Brady moved to the end of the dock. Digging his hands deep into the front pockets of his jeans, he said, "If they don't think it's hurting them directly, they couldn't care less."

"Exactly," said Roy.

"Then what's your point?"

"Listen," said Roy, and Brady could hear him pacing from side to side on the boards behind him. For a moment he considered telling Roy what he'd seen on the tube, but he decided against it. He'd let the kid rope his own neck.

Roy said, "Do you care what happens in Russia?"

Brady let out an impatient sigh.

Roy raised his voice. "Just answer the question."

"I don't get worked up about it on a daily basis, no."

"Well, I do," Roy told him.

"Great."

"And the reason I do," Roy went on, ignoring Brady's sarcasm, "is because I have relatives there."

Go on, thought Brady. Go on.

"They're not real relatives -- not in the sense that you people keep them. We savages don't tend to get so worked up about people who've been dead for more than a year or about the ones who aren't born yet. But I met him in a bar in Vancouver one time, and it turned out he was an Indian from Vladavastok. We got drunk and figured that maybe when all the Indians walked across the Bering Strait, maybe his family didn't want to go or were out visiting or something." Roy paused. "Good dancers in that bar."

"I'm going," said Brady. But when he tried to leave, Roy blocked his path. They danced from side to side for a few seconds, then Roy said, "So when I hear about something ugly happening there, I think of him. He had these perfectly round eyes. And it hurts right here to think he might be in trouble." He pushed a finger into the dip at the base of his neck.

Brady moved to the left, his eyes looking past Roy to the house. Roy stepped in front of him. "And if I wasn't so far away, I'd try to help." Roy took a deep breath. "You know how you feel when someone you know gets shafted? It's like you own a part of them, so it's not right for someone else to jerk them around."

"What's your point?" Brady said. He didn't want to care about Roy's little speech. He tried to ignore the jittering breaks in Roy's voice. But for once, the kid

seemed to be serious.

"All you've got to do," Roy said, stepping aside so Brady could pass if he chose to. "All you have to do is get people in the cities to think of Naitaka as theirs."

Brady walked away. He knew Roy was right. Ideally, public support was precisely what he wanted. And it occurred to him now that perhaps Roy's caulk-up this afternoon had been the product of an honest attempt to get the public interested. But it was a caulk-up. Even if Brady decided to rejoin the fight, Roy had set them back farther than they'd ever been.

When he'd stepped off the dock, Brady turned. He felt safe on the stones of the beach. These days there was something about the water he didn't trust. Even in his late night ramblings, he found himself maneuvering the whaler more carefully. His legs ached, and he wanted to get to the house, to rub some liniment into the skin and hope it sank to the bones. Staring at Roy, Brady said, "Is that why you did it?"

"Did what?"

"When you got your face plastered all across the goddamned TV -- was that for public support?"

"Shit!" Roy turned and looked down the lake, toward where the narrow arm broke east to Vernon. Lifting a hand to his face, he mumbled quietly. His eyes narrowed, as if

he was trying desperately to focus on a distant shape. Finally, he faced Brady. "That's all right. If people take it seriously, maybe they'll pressure Cranston to stop before someone gets killed."

"You're not a good enough actor for that."

"I couldn't have been there for more than twenty or thirty seconds."

Brady shook his head and walked toward the house. Roy followed.

Inside, Brady ushered Roy into the parlour. There was an old black-and-white television set standing in the corner. The finish on the cabinet had worn thin; there were nicks of light-coloured wood exposed along the edges. A sleek Panasonic VCR rested on the top of the set. A thick tangle of wires ran from the back of the machine to a series of adaptors screwed onto the wooden lid on the back of the TV.

"Have a seat," said Brady. There was a row of tapes on one of the bookcase shelves -- True Grit, Buck and the Preacher, Tom Horn. Brady took down an unlabelled tape and pushed it into the machine.

"Imagine my surprise," Brady said as he pressed the PLAY button, "when I figured my Boat for stolen, only to settle down to the news before dinner and find you'd seen fit to borrow it." Brady ran the tape.

"It can't hurt us," Roy reassured him, shaking his head.

Because Brady had slapped a tape into the machine and set in recording only after he'd seen Roy collapsed against the whaler's gunwale, the cameras picked up Curly wading through the water toward his boat. The tape stopped and the announcer came on. Roy turned to Brady. He was smiling.

"No question about it," Brady said. "The Poor Little Indian routine is great." He pointed to the set. "But there's more."

Roy turned back to the screen. "Christ Almighty," he breathed. The screen showed Roy in the whaler and Curly in the Expedition's search boat. The audio sounded distant; patches of static scratched the voices. The final image, however, could not be mistaken. When the white search boat spun away, growing smaller as it distanced the cove, Roy smiled. But it was not simply a nervous gesture; it was the mischievous, half-laughing grin of a man who'd duped his foe.

"How?" Roy asked without looking up.

"They've got what they've got," Brady said. "They just used it."

SEVENTEEN

If, as Roy suspected, Bar Cranston's camera-armed submarine had followed him a few minutes longer, it would have filmed him pulling up to the sloped shore behind his father's house. If the news people had the film, and followed the lead, they'd look for Roy at the house; but they'd find Eugene. And Roy didn't want to see the old man blasting off about his turn-coat son on the next installment of the six o'clock news.

He found his pissed-to-the-gills father out on the low, unfinished sundeck behind the house. He lay face up on the aluminum frame of a sun cot, the thin, flexible bands digging into his loose skin. He was singing "Love Me Tender," off-key and tuneless.

Roy was so relieved that he stood in the open patio door for several minutes. Although it was ridiculous to think that anyone could trace his bruised face, Roy had fully expected to find News vans blocking the road, searching for the Indian on the News. Instead, he found only his drunk and melodious father.

"If you're gonna like a white singer," the old man was saying, "it might as well be Elvis Presley. You watch some of those movies and tell me he didn't have some Indian in

him." He tilted his head back, his up-side-down eyes looking to Roy.

"I guess," Roy said.

"And I guess I'm prouda you, you goddamned Indian-lover, you."

"Come again?" said Roy.

Eugene sat up. He lifted a mason jar full of beer to his lips, then wiped foam from his upper lip and brushed some dribble from his chin. "I didn't know you cared about anything Indian." He slapped his knee to show the pleasure he took in his new discovery. "An' here I am since yesterday gettin' phone calls an' visits from the papers an' pretty news ladies, an' they're tellin' me my boy's out there tanglin' with Na-ha-ha-itkh i'self." He raised his glass to Roy.

"What did you tell them?" Roy wanted to know.

"The ladies?"

Roy nodded.

"I told 'em their microphones looked like dillies and asked if they liked talkin' at 'em all day."

"No you didn't," Roy told him. But the old man nodded proudly.

"On the news," said Eugene. "You just watch tonight."

"What else did you say?"

By this time, the old man had emptied the jar of beer.

Now he got to his feet. Placing a hand on Roy's shoulder, he said, "I told 'em I raised you to know you used to be free and proud in this valley, an' I told them I taught you nobody could take away the water god Na-ha-ha-itka." He pronounced the ancient word quickly and with absolute clarity, and even though the old man was reinventing the past to suit the occasion, Roy couldn't help smiling. Eugene weaved his way past Roy and into the house. Roy went after him.

"What did they want to know?" Roy pressed.

His father rattled half-empty dishes and bottles in the fridge. When he'd found and opened a fresh can of Black Label, he looked solemnly to Roy. "They said did I think this search for Na-ha-ha-itka would turn up with anything."

"And you said?"

"An' I said I thought maybe Jesus was on his way back." Before Roy could ask another question, Eugene held up a palm to stop him.

"An' they said did I think my son had really been fighting with their Ogopogo, or did I think he was up to something." He held his beer up to one side and nodded toward it. "And I said I figured hundreds had seen it, only maybe they didn't need to be believed to know they seen it." Nodding to his other hand, he said, "An' they

asked where you were." He paused there, and he focused his eyes on his son's face. Roy could almost feel him sober. He felt the pride coming through, and he felt the love. And for the first time in his living memory, Roy saw hope in the eyes of Eugene Silverheels. "An' I said," whispered the old man, "I said I hoped you were with Na-ha-ha-itka in the dance-water. Even if you were dead, I told them."

EIGHTEEN

Therese had been wakened by a muffler-blast from Roy Silverheels' rumbling, rusted Volkswagen.

Now she could hear Brady and Roy downstairs, hunched over the kitchen table, whispering. But the rhythms of their words whipped up the staircase like wind, and Therese went rigid. When she heard the wooden chairs scrape back over the linoleum, followed by the sound of Brady's heavy boots on the stairs, she turned into the covers.

"Therese," Brady told her when he came into the room, thinking to nudge her awake, no doubt -- thinking she'd be able to sleep through the insanity he'd brought back into this house. He sat on the edge of the bed, caressing her shoulders and brushing the hair away from her eyes. "Therese, you've got to listen to me carefully," he said. (Listen: that was the word that made her angry, that made her want to slap his face hard enough for his eyes to fly open and actually see something. Listen. How many years had he been refusing to listen to her? How many times had she said listen and tried to explain that all she had been able to see was green-black skin as thick as leather and those terrifying eyes. And how many times had she seen him shut down in the face of it, the lines around his wandering

eyes and the muscles in his jaw as much as saying, "When you've done, I'll try again." Listen.)

"Therese, you've got to listen to me carefully."

She did not catch on to him right away. She could not possibly deny that he'd been acting strangely in recent weeks -- now ecstatic, now angry and brooding, not sleeping, wandering up and down the lake in his boat, secretive and protective of the Indian fruit-picker he'd moved into the house -- and she should have known from the other times that his obsession with Naitaka had gripped him around the throat again. But it had been fifteen years since the last time he'd worked himself up like this, and Therese wanted to believe that it was something else this time. Calmly, she murmured, "Hmmm?" and reached out for his hand.

"I've seen it again," Brady told her. "Not a week ago."

Therese withdrew her hand. "Leave things alone," she said.

"It came up to the boat and took food." Shifting his weight more fully onto the bed, he reached for her hand, then turned her head to face his. "Therese," he said earnestly, "I touched it and my warts are gone." He raised his hands, turning them in the air to show the worn but unblemished skin. She knew what he was saying. He

believed she was sick again. He believed she was dying and he wanted her to submit to his magical monster. But if Brady's infested hands had been wiped clean, it was only because he had believed so strongly at that moment that his body had been altered by the power of his own brain. Therese, on the other hand, did not believe that Naitaka had any power other than the power to create and sustain pain; her life bore witness to the fact. Whatever chances Therese had for health were not to be found lurking in the black waters beneath the black surface of the lake. "Leave things alone," she repeated.

Mr. Listen, however, did not hear her. The frown line between his eyebrows deepened and he reached over her and placed a hand on each of her shoulders so that she had to face him as he spoke. "Therese," he said, "I know things aren't right. I know you're sick again."

Looking directly into his eyes, Therese said, "I'm fine."

"I found a pill bottle under the sink," Brady told her.

"I had another treatment," Therese lied. "The doctor said it was just precautionary. The pills are for the nausea." In fact, she had had no such treatment, but she hoped the threat of serious illness, of life and death, would shield his voodoo.

Therese had been to a doctor. She'd gone to a GP in Vernon to complain of insomnia, crying fits and extreme tension headaches. He'd prescribed valium. What she'd told the doctor was true, in part: the thought of death filled Therese with terror. She had no children, and now, during her darkest time, her husband had got it into his mind to go searching for Naitaka. And even though it was possible that Brady's half-baked vision of the lake-creature-as-healer sprang from his fear for her life, or his own fear of death and his fear of being alone in this world after she was gone, his attempts to decide that this held hope and this did not infuriated her. "If it's such a healer," she snapped impatiently, "Why don't you let these expedition people catch it and cure us all?"

Brady shook his head angrily. He opened his mouth to speak, then stopped.

Glancing past him to the bedroom window and the darkening sky outside, Therese let her eyes go slack. For a moment she imagined Naitaka caught and held in a tank on the other side of the Landing -- she had seen, two days ago, a scratched yellow bulldozer cutting deep lanes into the soil near the beach, and she had seen, stacked in piles beside the old food hatch, the massive, dusty bags of concrete -- and she could imagine herself approaching the creature under the cover of night. It was eerie to think

of herself as a killer, but in her mind she could see the creature as she'd seen it fifty years ago. She could see her white hands against its heavy skin; she was clutching it around the neck with neither the desire in her mind nor the ability in her limbs to tear herself away. She was going down into the water with it when someone grabbed her ankles and ripped her free. The terror she had been pushing away for fifty years was the fear that shook through her body like rusted fingers hollowing her limbs and her stomach, her breasts and the place between her legs, her eyes and her skull, when she broke the surface, saw for the first time what she'd only been looking at seconds before, watched Halverson Stuart's white-shirted body descending into the water, and screamed both for the joy of being alive and at the loss she'd just suffered. She could now imagine one of Brady's rifles in her hands precisely because the creature's death would mean that the question -- why did I feel relief and loss when he saved me? -- would no longer be real. It would never have to be faced again. But the more Brady tried to bring her closer to Naitaka, the more frightened and angry she became.

Refocusing on Brady, she said, "Please, leave it alone," in a hard-edged, unanswerable voice. But the moment she saw his eyes, she knew he'd seen her remembering. A vacant smile -- an expression filled

utterly with resentment because she had never spoken a word about what, exactly, had happened, not to him, not to anyone -- crossed his lips. He stood up, then paused at the side of the bed for several seconds. Therese did not dare move or speak; she stared blankly at the dresser at the foot of the bed and waited for him to leave. She was just as angry as he was, but she was a brooder whereas Brady was fire-tempered and could not be trusted. Though she came close to snapping, to picking up the clock-radio or the porcelain vase on her bedside table and hurling it when he said, "In this matter, you will do as I say," and marched out of the room.

Therese could not stop shaking; even when she held her arms tight to her chest, pressing the elbows into her ribs, the trembling persisted. She could not recall a time in her forty-eight years of marriage to Brady when she had been so overwhelmed by anger and resentment; she could not think of another instance in which he had displayed such a complete lack of sense or such a committed sense of selfishness. But when Brady left the bedroom, she saw in the set of his untanned shoulders and in the brisk strides of his legs a determination to dismiss any and all of her concerns. Come hell or high water, Brady Stuart was going to do just as Brady Stuart damn well pleased. He was going to march out into the world clothed in some ridiculous

cowboy image he'd created in his own mind, and he was going to change everything. He was going to dredge up the history Therese had spent fifty years trying to forget. If he failed, he'd be dead -- of course tall-walkin', straight-shootin' Brady would never imagine failure, could never believe for a moment that things were anything other than just the way he said they were -- and where would that leave Therese? Well, in six months or a year it would leave her alone in some cold, white hospital bed without a caring soul to tell her the pain would let up any minute, that everything would soon be right, that maybe there was somewhere you went after this -- that maybe this was just a dream you had to have if you were going to wake up in your real world and appreciate its beauty and its painlessness. And if Brady succeeded? Well, then Brady would hold up Naitaka like a trophy, and he would not care or remember that his father was dead or that Therese had almost died or that his prize creature had given her nothing less than fifty years of fear and nightmares or that she would not touch it to save her soul!

NINETEEN

Two days after Bar Cranston and Voyageur Expeditions launched their search at the north end of the lake, Brady and Roy were down-valley, off Hot Sands beach in Kelowna, ready to set their plan in motion.

FATAL ATTACK -- LAKE MONSTER'S WARNING, was the kind of headline Brady hoped to see in tomorrow's newspapers. Bar Cranston may have been right about the public; maybe people these days wanted the facts and nothing but the facts. But Cranston's argument was based on the theory of a lake creature; today, Roy and Brady would show the creature publically, and they'd show the creature's violence. People understood death. If all went well, there'd be a public out-cry. If all went well, people in the valley's cities would demand that Voyageur Expeditions pack up and go before someone else was killed.

But even though they'd gone over the plan again and again -- how they'd fake an attack by Naitaka to draw Voyageur Expeditions off-course and set the public raging -- and even though they'd run through it all as best they could -- splashing around beside Brady's dock after midnight, struggling to control the fiberglass-and-wire decoy -- Brady felt like a child trying to hold off a

drug-starved burglar with a toy gun.

Today was the kind of day that launched tourists and locals like invading troops onto the beach. By noon, Hot Sands, Rotary and Gyro beaches were packed with teenagers, housewives, hordes of children. On the tree-lined asphalt path that formed a natural border between the sand and the expansive City Park, lovers strolled, ice cream vendors rolled, ringing their bells; old men and adolescents stood or sat on park benches, staring at the backs of the young women who'd unhooked their bikini tops. Blankets and beach towels were notched into the sand like tokens from a board game. Closer to the water, construction had begun on several sandcastles. Near the water, a small Indian girl had buried herself in sand; her small, blonde companion soaked the grave with buckets of water from her sand pail, then refused to release the native girl until she'd sworn eternal friendship.

Brady stood waist-deep in the cold water. On his way to the beach half-an-hour ago, he'd stopped at a souvenir stand to purchase a red, yellow and orange beach ball. If he needed to jockey for position -- if he found himself crowded into the water and needed an excuse to swim out beyond the bouys -- then he wanted a prop. Now he toyed with the ball, letting it slip from his grasp every few seconds to draw him away from the cluster of splashing,

jubilant children to his right. Every five minutes or so, he raised an arm and waved toward the beach. If all went his way, curious observers would imagine a wife or grandson for him. The whole game made him feel stupid. On any other day, he could wade through the water, pissing or talking to himself or taking good long looks at the way the wet material clung to the buttocks of the women and he would not have felt as if everyone else on the beach was watching him. But not today. Today he was doing it; today he was standing up and swinging. Of course that didn't make it any easier: he'd fought small battles for years, but as one season bled into the next, as one summer hunter left the valley and was replaced by another, Brady's belief in Naitaka waned. He knew it had been there; he'd seen it, Therese had seen it, and the beast had stolen or murdered his father. He'd simply wondered, as summer after summer he defended the creature, is it still there? Now that he'd seen it again, his belief was unqualified. It was his resources that troubled him these days. Without question, Bar Cranston had more guts and, worse, more brains, than anyone Brady'd locked horns with before. And Brady no longer had his youth. He was old, and even though his legs felt strong today, even though the absence of pain might have let him believe that the bones were not as brittle and as knotted as old sticks, he was still frightened.

He waved at the beach, then tossed the beach ball into the air, making sure it angled backward and landed behind him. Then he turned to retrieve it. Scanning the lake, he thought he could see the whaler -- though the sight was no longer familiar, since Roy had spray-painted over the stripes and from a distance the boat would look like any other small craft -- approaching from the north, creeping through the water toward the bridge. Brady's heart beat faster and he was growing impatient. He knew that Roy had to move carefully so the skin of the fake Naitaka wouldn't tear, and he knew Roy had to get to the other side of the bridge, so that the whaler would be hidden from any cameras, before he could sink into the water and come for Brady, but he was tired and his feet had started to go numb and he felt old. He wanted to get it over with.

Brady had chosen Hot Sands because it was the largest and most crowded beach in the city. The others were spread down the shoreline from the Industrial Park on Poplar Point south toward the steep cliffs where the city stopped. But Hot Sands was in City Park, which bordered the city-centre. If something note-worthy happened here, the bars and shops and business offices would know about it soon enough. An ambulance or police car jolting over the concrete curb at the entrance wouldn't go unnoticed.

Brady tapped the front of his shorts. The plastic bag

of blood was still there, insulated by the styrofoam cloth Roy had packed round it. The inside of Brady's elbow hurt a bit, the muscle felt dry in the chill water; but Brady knew that the blood had been their one stroke of true genius. Who could dispute a man's death when spectators vowed they'd seen blood and the lab tests backed them up?

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Roy's nerves were frazzled. Every time a speed boat tore past the whaler, he cursed. He watched them sliding nearer and he willed them to go, afraid that one of the swells would lift Naitaka out of the water and rip the fiberglass skin. If the head or the neck got damaged, they'd be sunk, literally.

He thought of letting out some fishing lines, setting them with floats so the others would steer clear, but he was close to the bridge now and he'd only have to bring them in. And with the luck he and Brady had been having lately, a fish and game officer would float over for a license check the minute Roy dropped the line.

Puttering parallel to the bridge toward the lift-span, Roy watched for Brady. The water was like gleaming foil under the early-afternoon sun. Groups of children crinkled the surface now and again, ripping shards of silver into

the air. When the metal fell to the surface of the sheet and once more fused, Roy continued his search for Brady. He realized, as he looked up and down the beach, that they'd made at least one serious error: Roy did not know the colour of Brady's bathing trunks. He saw one old man as thin and as pale as Brady, but he was hurling a beach ball into the air again and again. Perhaps Brady had stepped up the beach to the public washrooms.

Turning under the Bridge -- the whaa-zing, whaa-zing, whaa-zing of the cars thundering above him -- Roy told himself there was no cause for alarm. Before they parted this morning, they had agreed that Brady would be standing just outside the orange barrel-buoys and the thick, yellow nylon cord that connected them. He'd be there at one-thirty, the busiest time of day. Through the crude periscope they'd fashioned from two discs of mirror and a black plastic rod-case, Roy would have little trouble making him out.

He turned the whaler sharply, easing close to the massive concrete float. Grabbing hold of the lowest of the rusted iron rungs that ran up the side, Roy steadied the boat. There were some boats in the distance, some swimmers in the water two hundred yards down the east shore, but he could not see anyone heading directly for him.

Naitaka was weighted under the boat with some five-

and ten-pound fishing weights Brady had taken from a would-be searcher several years before. There were also some huge iron washers from a junkyard. A nylon ski-rope secured Naitaka's muzzle to the trailer-eyelet on the hull, and another rope ran from the tow-rings on the stern to the decoy's torso. Because he couldn't see past the concrete pillar, Roy cut the idling motor and listened for the other boats. It was quiet, only the gleeful screams of children drifting through the summer air.

After untying the ropes at the stern and securing the muzzle-rope to the iron rung, Roy drove the whaler along the south side of the bridge and anchored the boat close to the shore on the west side of the lake. There was a small marina nearby and a Chamber of Commerce information booth, but the area was quiet and far enough from Hot Sands that associations with the coming disaster were unlikely.

He picked up his wet-suit, then changed his mind. Quietly, Roy slipped into the water.

*

Brady had been in the water for over an hour. He was cold; anger and frustration shook down his spine and lodged, shivering into a knot, in his lower back. He squeezed the beach ball in his hands, his nails digging in against the

plastic until, suddenly, he realized the ball was close to popping, and he eased his grip. He scanned the beach, he scanned the water and was irritated by the splashing children, he looked out into the middle of the lake and saw nothing. Half dazed, and without remembering that it was part of the plan, he walked toward the orange-metal buoys until the water slapped against his lower lip. He made a few cautious strokes through the water, then lunged at the faded yellow rope that strung the barrels one to another. Temporarily safe, he thought about the blood they'd drained from his arms over the last two days. He thought about going under, hanging perilously to Roy's ankles -- for how long? a mile? an hour? He thought about his talk with Therese, and he laughed bitterly because what had seemed like a mock ceremony at the time was now taking on terrifying dimensions.

But when Brady spotted Roy -- spotted their trumped-up decoy -- he felt a deep appreciation, and warmth burst into his stiff and whitened fingers: The head moved slowly along the surface of the lake, now sinking, now rising, back-tilting proudly. It did not look like a model at all. The hinged jaw closed when Roy lowered the head, and from Brady's position, the red paint inside the mouth looked moist and pliant. Brady looked over his shoulder to the beach. At first, he didn't see anyone looking; the clutter

of children, lazy swimmers and people lounging on air-mattresses reduced the bobbing head to the mediocrity of a floating board. Then Brady saw two figures frozen in their tracks, their eyes riveted to Naitaka. One was an old man, at least ten years Brady's senior, who was ankle deep in the water. He wore a powder-blue bathing suit; his hands rested on his hips. He leaned back slightly, looking for all the world as if he'd just stepped down the beach to cool his feet. But his eyes were wide and clear and filled with terror, and the colour drained steadily from his face. Every few seconds, his left hand dropped from his hip and he ripped his gaze from Naitaka and looked helplessly around. His jaw worked furiously, but he did not make a sound. The other witness was a life guard, a young woman wearing a red-and-white one-piece bathing suit with a maple leaf over her stomach. She was standing in her life-guard's chair, shielding her eyes against the sun, and she was shaking. She was going to scream.

Brady spun back toward Roy. Naitaka was a little more than ten yards away. "Come on," he whispered fiercely to himself, then "Now!" and he pushed away from the barrel, shouting, "Nnnn-aaaaa!" at the top of his lungs and slapping pathetically at the water while he reached into his crotch for the sack of blood. He could feel the creature's head brush his back, he could hear the air

breaking the surface of the water behind him, he could feel and hear his own pounding heart, and then he knew it was time. He submerged himself, broke open the styrofoam casing, crotched it, then tore open the blood-bag and let it stream over his head and shoulders while he again broke the surface of the water, driving his hands down as he did so, stuffing the bag into his trunks, screaming, "Jeeeee-sssuusssss!" as he descended once more amid the chorus horror that rose from the beach.

And then he was under the water. He was cold; his heart pounded hard against his lungs. He had forgotten to take a last deep breath before he went under, and now the muscles in his throat constricted and pulsed, sucking at the tiny pockets of air in his mouth and at his lips, at the water now seeping between his lips and teeth. His eyes were open but everything had gone red; his hands against the hard skin of Naitaka were stained with blood, and the colour was spreading over the creature. Down! down! down! came a voice, but it was not a familiar pitch or rhythm; it hadn't come through the water because the only sound in his ears was a high and constant ringing. "Go down, you stupid old son of a bitch!" Brady jammed his eyes shut and did as he was told. He tried to feel his way along the cold, rigid skin to where Roy waited with an air tank. But his arms shook violently, and there was so much cold and so

much pain it was as though his body had been rubbed raw with ice. Even when he felt Roy's hands clamp down on his ankles and drag him down through the icewater, he was thinking, All I have to do is take one breath -- one breath and this would all be gone. Something sharp ripped at his skin -- his skin was being torn from his face, a fist jammed his mouth open -- and then the water flooded clear and sweet into his lungs, and Brady breathed it enthusiastically.

*

Roy almost panicked. Still inside Naitaka's torso, he'd grabbed Brady's ankles and dragged him down and held him, scissor-gripped, between his legs. Then he'd worked the mouth-piece between Brady's lips and waited for the old man's hungry breathing to slow. Gradually, Brady calmed, but he did not come to; his breathing was steady and hard, though not as laboured as it had been, but he was out cold and the muscles in his jaw failed to clamp down on the rubber mouth-piece. Roy held the regulator to Brady's lips with one hand and with the other pressed the old man's lips tightly around it. Using Brady for leverage, he threw the weight of his own body as hard as he could away from the buoyant force of the creature. His stomach muscles ached,

his legs filled with pain, and his left foot, braced against his right ankle, grew numb. Finally, he pressed the mouth-piece into the palm of one hand, spreading his fingers over one of Brady's cheeks and the heel of his hand over the other, and used the leverage to squeeze Brady's lips and cheeks tightly around the rubber mouthpiece. With the other hand, Roy grabbed hold of the crude periscope, rotating the tube until it broke free from small rivets that held it in place, then thrust his arm up. The plastic cylinder tore the seals in the fiberglass skin at an angle, opening a hole the size of a baseball in the fabric of the decoy. Water poured in, deadening the frame, forcing it down. Roy pulled his body and the tanks free. Wrapping an arm around Brady's limp frame, he watched Naitaka descend.

TWENTY

Roy didn't know what he'd expected when he embarked upon this adventure with Brady. Maybe it had seemed like a joke. Maybe it had seemed like a good excuse to wave his fists in the air without the risk of breaking someone's nose or cracking the bones in his own fingers. Whatever the initial reason, the fun ended when Roy had to drag Brady through the cold water beneath the lift-span.

Roy had not been able to see. He knew only that when Brady started to inch his way down the frame to the air-tanks, they had both been headed in the right direction. With the subsequent confusion, however, it was impossible to say whether they had turned or stayed on course. And there was no way to check, since the slightest glimmer of man or beast on the surface of the lake would send boats and divers in their direction.

So Roy kept swimming. He kept his arm circled protectively around Brady's white chest -- beneath his fingers, the old man's ribs felt thin and frail -- and he kicked steadily against the water with his legs and flippers, driving them slowly forward. This is the right direction, he told himself. We are going the right way. But he did not know how fast they were moving. How many

inches or feet or yards did they move with each kick? And how far away was the bridge? He cursed himself for not counting the number of strokes his feet had taken on his way to the rendezvous with Brady.

How far beneath the surface were they? Except for the gurgle of dead air escaping from their regulators, there was no sound. There was no smell; even the sharp scent of rubber from the new diving mask had dissipated. And the water ahead was dark and shapeless.

The hand that held the regulator in Brady's mouth started to cramp. Roy's first reaction was to stretch the muscles against the seizure, but when he lifted his fingers, the rubber hose moved, and he had to fold his knuckles back into the pain.

Finally, he gave up. No matter how stupid it was, no matter how severe the risk, Roy had to find out where they were. It seemed as though he had been swimming for hours, kicking against the dark blue water without moving forward so much as an inch, and if he was going to slow Brady's pounding heart, he was going to have to surface. If he waited, it could be too late; for all Roy knew, they were heading toward the centre of the lake or north toward Poplar Point, away from the boat and the bridge and any hope of anonymity.

For the first time since Brady had descended into the

water, streaming blood, Roy looked up. From the weak, blue-tinged light above, he made their depth at twenty feet. He pinched his fingers tighter on Brady's nostrils and hoped that the old man's breathing would throw enough pressure against his septum to maintain the proper pressure. They rose slowly. When they had almost reached the surface, Roy worked their bodies vertical so the tanks would not break the surface. Then he folded his head down against his shoulder and rubbed the bottom edge of the mask against his skin until the pressure-seal broke and water flooded in between his eyes and the glass. With the pressure broken and the cavity weighted, the mask came off easily, and when the strap slipped off the back of his head, it sank quickly to Roy's open hand. Because one hand was wrapped around Brady -- the fingers now holding the rubber strap of the mask -- and the other was holding the breath to his lips and clamping down on his nostrils, Roy could not loosen the rubber band that gathered his long black hair into a pony tail. He could not remember how tight he'd pulled it this morning, and he could not tell how tight it was now, since the mask-strap held it back and the tail floated above. But Roy needed the cover: He did not want his face captured by a news camera. He loosened the straps on the air tank and took up the slack at the shoulders by pulling down until he could feel the canisters

knock against his buttocks. Then he bent his head forward and with small wrist-strokes propelled his head to the surface. Warm air flowered over his skull, but Roy did not succumb to the urge to throw his face up to the sun. Instead, he shook his head briskly, loosening some of the water, and draped the hair against his cheeks. Hopefully, he looked like nothing more harmful than a piece of bark floating in the water.

"Jesus," he muttered to himself when he turned his head first one way and then the other, gauging their position through his black net of hair. They had moved in the wrong direction, no question about it; they should have gone due south. But I buggered it, Roy thought, sinking gently back into the water, his lungs full, the pain freeing itself from the muscles in his back and his arms and his fingers, the afternoon warmth that had soaked his head now slipping over his limbs. Because he had not swum south. In all the commotion, he'd shifted off-course a half-turn, so that they'd headed south-west, away from the lift-span but toward the small underpass on the west side of the bridge. Toward the whaler. Toward safety.

Sixty seconds later they were in the dark shadows under the bridge. Roy broke the surface of the water with a shameless splash, dragging Brady up at the same moment and pinning him against the floating concrete pontoon,

holding him there with the force of his flippered, treading feet while he released the grip on his nostrils and cheeks and ripped the mouth-piece from his lips, whispering "Brady!" fiercely, then fingering the old man's eyes. There was no answer, no response -- there was only the raging of Brady's heart against his ribs. But there was breath.

Cars thundered above.

Slowly, Roy dragged Brady to the boat. He braced himself against the outboard motor and the silver ladder that hung over the stern, and he pushed Brady up and into the boat. He landed with a thud and a crash: his body falling to the floor, one leg smashing against the tackle box. Next, Roy moved to the port side of the boat, in the shadows between the fiberglass and the concrete bridge, and pushed the yellow air canisters over the gunwale. Once he'd unhooked the nylon ropes from the hull and the stern he dragged the boat into the shadows of the underpass and climbed aboard.

Brady lay prone on the floor, one heel split and resting on top of the tackle box. Roy shifted the old man's arms and legs, checked his pulse -- still violent but still there -- then started the motor and headed south. Originally, they had intended to head straight back to the Landing -- to wait for Bar Cranston to come thundering

through the trees to accuse them of staging the attack -- and hear the news with as much surprise and horror as everyone else. But with Brady hurt, Roy could not go back to Stuart's Landing. If Cranston intercepted them, Brady's involvement would be obvious. So Roy decided to take Brady to a place where Bar Cranston would not look; he decided to take Brady to the caves at Squally Point. A missing Brady would serve the plan better than a Brady delirious and weak. And when things settled down, Roy would come back.

TWENTY-ONE

Brady couldn't think. When he came to, he was lying on his back. The surface beneath him was hard and warm. Light came from somewhere beyond his feet, but it did not reach his eyes. His neck ached and his back ached. If he stayed perfectly still, the pain sank and he could float on top of it. The needle-sores -- the knifing in the muscles from his ears down to the soles of his feet -- remained close to him, but when he lay motionless, it receded, as if it might sink into his bed.

Only it wasn't a bed. Looking up, struggling to focus on the ceiling above him, he thought, Rock. He did not question the substance or make any associations. Rock. When he let his eyes relax, he felt the light on his calves and thighs, the longer blades on his stomach and lower ribs, and he thought, Morninglight. A soft, rhythmic sound reached his ears; sometimes it swished, then gave way to a gentle slapping, and in the background he heard a steady whisper, long and drawn out as a sigh. Water, he thought before he closed his eyes. And then he thought, Sleep.

The next time he woke, night had fallen, and this time Brady's first reaction was fear. The surface beneath him

was cold, and although the pain had subsided, he could not move. Slowly, he tried to unfold his hands and lift them away from his stomach; he tried to bend his knees; but his limbs wouldn't budge. In fact, there was nothing wrong with his muscles. He had simply been lying still on the rock for more than twenty-four hours; the temperature had combined with his fatigue to produce an absolutely motionless sleep. After what Brady had put them through, his muscles and his brain did not take well to the idea of being jarred from such a satisfying rest.

He could hear the breeze, so why was it that the water beneath him was unrippled? And if it wasn't the wind that was disturbing the water every few minutes, what was it? For a long time, he sat quietly, staring from the water to the lights in the distance. But it was not until he felt something wet and slime-covered touch his calf that he figured it out. He rolled backward, knocking his foot against the intruder, and cowered inside the cave. From this angle, some of the lights across the lake were obstructed by something other than the borders of the cave-mouth. The thing blocking them, he soon realized, was a land-mass. He could see its shape perfectly, silhouetted by the lights. Small and in the shape of a half-circle, an island protected the seventy-foot channel between its base

and the rise of the lava-stone mountain behind it.

Brady did not know how long he'd been without food and sleep. Two days, at least. Long enough, at any rate, to fill his stomach with an acid hunger and long enough to make his temples pound and his eyes glaze black every time he stood up.

Since he'd come into the cave, the sun had gone down twice, and once, in between the long darknesses, it had come up. At first, Brady had been so tired he'd dozed off several times. But by now the hard cave walls cut into the muscles in his back too fiercely for sleep.

He wanted someone to reassure him. He had a vague suspicion that someone else was supposed to be there with him. Or had he always been there, alone? He was naked in the warm cave, his body unscarred, as if he'd been here for years and had only recently lost his ability to hunt and sleep and remember. For example: there must at one time have been a way to fend off, or trick or avoid, the massive green-skinned creature that reared its head to the mouth of the cave every now and again: six times in the last light-span, if he measured the space between the second and third appearances by the movement of the sun, then set that distance against the next appearance and the next and the

next. Satisfied with the pattern, he had crawled, as quickly as his aching muscles and spinning head allowed, to the cave-mouth after the last time and he watched the creature slip back into the water. The skin looked slick and diseased -- dark and pitted and coated with a milky gel. The head had dipped back into the water by the time Brady got there, but he saw the long neck bend into a half-circle, graceful and lean and still strong enough to pull the torso along after it, the body unmuscled and sack-like. Despite the animal's obvious weakness, the entire movement was slow and controlled, a gesture like the water itself, and when the tail slipped below the surface, it was not so much like one shape disappearing into another as it was like an element divorced from itself now rejoining. The water above the creature did not darken at the descent; it simply flickered a richer shade of green: It was the colour of earth and drenched plant-life pressed close to the eyes. It was beautiful in its way, but he was glad to see it go because the small eyes, when it rose to peer in on him, were hard and extreme. (Earlier, on the creature's third visit, its long neck slipped over the bottom lip of the cave, following the contours of the rock. Its eyes were polished-black, like like marble, crisp and violent, and Brady threw himself into the darkness at the rear of the cavern. From there, the silhouetted head was

dark, but he could see teeth the size of rifle shells, long and pointed and capable of effortless destruction.)

He did not know if the animal had been checking on him in the dark; if it had, he did not know how often, since he had nothing he could use to measure intervals. A little while before, he'd heard flowing water followed by a weak, fluid splash, but when he moved to the cave-mouth and looked down, he saw only the darkness.

If Brady had not yet regained his memory or understood the connections between his presence here and the events that had gone on before, he did understand that he had to get free of the cave. What he'd do then, he did not know; but he knew from the pain that pounded inside his head, from the dizziness and the blackness and the toxic emptiness in his stomach, that he had only two choices: move or die.

And so, the last time the darkness filtered into the light, Brady had devised a plan: when the light came back and the creature sank into the water after its first visit, Brady was going to get to the island. He'd seen three snakes and four or five mice moving in and about the rocks over there, and if he could get to them, he could live. There were fish in the lake, of course, and he'd figure out how to catch them later -- perhaps he could build a trap with rocks and branches he gathered from the island.

His chances for success were probably slight, but he could think of no other reasonable course of action: the rock face above the cave rose straight up and was without footholds; the face below was also sheer. If he dove in and swam north or south until he found some rocks or bushes he could use to pull himself to land, he would have to risk more time in the water, and once solidly back on land, he would be no further ahead. There would be food and plenty of it, likely, but where? The search might kill him.

He estimated the fall from the cave-mouth to the water at twice the length of his own body. If his angle when he hit the water was not too severe, he would rise quickly to the top and make the island in six or seven strokes.

As daylight approached, Brady grew more and more excited. The rain had wet the surface of stone outside the cave-mouth, and the scent of the shrubs and grasses on the island made the air heavy and sweet. The surface of the water had calmed since the previous night, as if the rain had driven the waves flat, and in spite of his hunger Brady felt confident of his plan. He shook his arms at his sides and squatted to loosen his knee joints and stretch the muscles in his legs.

Before the shade bled out of the morning air, the

creature made its first appearance, its head rising, open-jawed and tilted right, one polished eye fixed on Brady. It hovered there for several moments, then sank away.

Brady's heart pounded as he approached the mouth of the cave. He knew his plan was a good one, and yet he feared the look he'd seen in the creature's eye; the retina took light and revealed something like intelligence or intuition or understanding. Or hunger. But as the light grew stronger, Brady saw that the water this morning was a lighter shade -- the colour of willow-leaves instead of pines -- and as he stared he did not once detect the dark flash of the creature's leathered skin beneath the surface.

Later, he would not be able to decide whether his confidence or his fear had caused the fall. Whatever the case, when he stepped forward to check the water before ducking four steps into the cave for his run-up, his right foot slipped on the wet stone. His heel slid down the rock-face, the skin shredding off in layers, until finally the flesh was raw and a wet and spreading streak of blood marked its path. At first, he did not think he'd fall. His crotch came down heavily on the lip of the cave-mouth and he thought he could steady himself there; but when the jolt of pain rose through his testicles and clamped down on his stomach, releasing a wave of nausea, he buckled

forward. Lightness and resignation overtook him as he fell. And relief: the air cradled his naked body, his skin and muscles and bones were released from the stone cave. His mind felt clear and able; and when the back of his skull opened against a jut of rock, he thought, Now I can sleep, now food doesn't matter. His body entered the lake in a V, and he watched the displaced water spiral upward around him, warbling and full of sunlight. The wetness, as it enclosed him, felt good. Out of air, he inhaled massively, the water filling his lungs with a painless grace. Then, just when he thought it was finally over, he got hit. He did not know where it came from because he never saw it coming; he simply felt the creature's head drive into his stomach, hurling his body back and upward through the water, so that when his shoulder blades impacted with stone and his head rose into darkness and into air, he spewed water and vomited blood.

TWENTY-TWO

Two days had passed since Roy had hoisted Brady into the cave at Squally Point. The day of the stunt, Roy had returned to assess the affects of their completed mission. The beach had been cordoned off, quarantine signs had been pegged into the sand on the beach and wooden placards that read "ABSOLUTELY NO TRESPASSING" had been fixed to the orange barrel-buoys. The blue-and-yellow RCMP boat was anchored outside the bouys to make sure no one entered the vicinity.

So Roy waited on the other side of the lake.

When night fell and the crowd of spectators and newspeople filed off the bridge's bike-path, Roy was ready. He dove for the decoy, then dragged it beneath the liftspan, releasing it between two of the massive concrete pillars. The lake was said to be four hundred feet deep at this point. And who knew how much debris -- metal forms, tossed rocks, hurled bottles, concrete drippings -- rested on the bottom? On Bar Cranston's screen, the decoy would look like so much discarded junk.

Now, after yet another run down the lake to check on

Voyageur Expeditions -- Brady had been right; Bar Cranston had been forced to move the search south to service the uproar in Kelowna, and his attempt to coincide with the Regatta had been foiled -- Roy returned to the Landing.

The dock was vacant. The two-by-ten planks and the heavy pilons were bleached ash-grey by the sun. When he drifted up and reached over the gunwale to ease the impact, the tire-bumpers and the iron rings almost burned his fingers. And for a long time after disembarking, Roy stood in the middle of the dock, hands on hips, looking anxiously up and down the lake, as if some heavily-armed armada might burst violently into view at any moment.

He had abandoned Brady for two reasons. First, because the old man's heart-beats had slowed to a steady, regular rhythm and the danger seemed to be past. Second, because Roy felt sure that Bar Cranston would be looking for the whaler and for Brady and himself, and Roy did not want to be anywhere near the hideout.

But Roy felt a deep and urgent need to see and speak with his father. An eerie nausea had been swashing back and forth in his stomach ever since he entered the water with the decoy. But it was not the kind of sickness he associated with rolling water or twisting roads; it swayed his guts then poured up his chest and turned his brain to soup. He could not translate it into words or find a

logical progression of emotions for it: some foreign strain of excitement deepened his pulse; his heart beat harder -- he could feel the muscle making a stronger, more determined effort -- and he wanted to be rid of it. He felt certain that seeing Eugene would release this anxiety.

Strangely, he was afraid to see Patricia. What had happened to him this afternoon allowed him, for the first time in his life, to feel like an honest to goddamned Indian. He wanted to share that with her. But he kept thinking about the scars. When he tried to picture her face, the deep V of scarred skin pushed at him. He was afraid that Patricia would tell him that Naitaka meant death.

Twenty minutes later, Roy was still standing alone on the dock. For the first time since he'd met Brady, he felt a responsibility to himself. Up to this point, he had seen Brady as a half-crazed old man whose obsession might lead to adventure. It was a game. But when he'd seen the look on his father's face after the reporters had made their visit, the game had become important. This, he'd told himself, is the kind of thing I should be doing. Even then, Naitaka held no real meaning for him; the creature was an old story, a myth. But even though there had been no contact with the real Naitaka, Roy's underwater journey

with Brady had changed him. That he had risked his life told him that he must have believed something after all.

Staring at the water now, Roy felt moved. He could feel a damp chill on his skin and he could feel a damp silver wave pressing against the back of his eyes. The breeze had died and the surface of the lake was as unrippled as glass. He closed his eyes and whispered, "Is there something under there?" His words came to his own ears so frailly they barely scratched against the sunlight and the silence. What is it like for that creature to swim in so much darkness?

A surge of adrenaline fluttered up Roy's chest to his throat. Trying to picture himself moving slowly against the bottom of the lake, on and on and afraid or unable to enter the peopled world above, Roy's mind brushed against his deepest fear. It was a feeling, an imagining, that sometimes came upon him late at night; it was the dream of a conscious, spinning eternity. It was the world going on and on -- a globe and its people spinning forward in space along a cord that lead to a vital and ever-expanding future while Roy hung in an infinite, black universe at the moment of his death; it was a dream of impotent limbs and a mind fully aware that it would never touch or taste or feel or smell or see again. A mind fully aware: that was the problem. Because Roy knew with absolute certainty that

there was something in the brain and something in the chest that was utterly independent of blood and muscle and electric impulses. There was a reason why a falling child's eyes and mouth flew open and spawned tears and cries long before the child could think fear, think pain, think death.

For the first time since the adventure had started, Roy felt deeply afraid for Brady and Therese, and felt, also for the first time, that Voyageur Expeditions threatened something important. In the water off the beach, he had been frightened by Brady's sputtering for air, but his fear was part the fear of losing Brady; now he was afraid of Brady living in the world of death, and now the fear for Naitaka and his anger at Voyageur sprang from his empathy with the massive grace of an old and noble creature exiled into darkness. Something Brady had said pushed its way to the front of his mind: "They won't let it exist as a mystery -- they won't acknowledge it as a mystery until they can see it, but they don't understand that they'll kill it with their gawking eyes."

Roy smiled as he thought of the morning. He felt proud of what they'd done now because he understood the reason, the necessity, behind it. How could Voyageur keep going when the public knew that they'd caused a killing? People were bound to shout, "THESE THINGS ONLY HAPPEN WHEN

IT'S HUNTED -- FOR GOD'S SAKE LEAVE IT AND US IN PEACE!" and wonder at the surface of the lake. But so far the people had been silent.

*

Therese spotted Roy from the bedroom window. At first, she intended to rush down and ask him about Brady. She'd caught the tail-end of a news report from Kelowna -- something about an accident, an elderly man dragged into the waters beyond the beach -- and she knew it was Brady. Yet she knew absolutely that he was safe.

Something made her stop and watch Roy for a few minutes before going down. By turns, he paced the beach between the foot-path and the split-log bench, and he paced the sun-greyled boards of the dock. Every few minutes he stopped and dipped his feet into the water off the end of the dock. Twice he trudged through the trees to the picker's shack, and even from the house, Therese could hear him make noise enough to wake the dead. When Roy was on his way back to the beach the second time, Therese hurried down the stairs and out onto the porch.

"Where's Brady?" she said eagerly. She held an empty pill bottle in her right hand; as she waited for Roy's answer she twisted the cap-end against her left palm,

reddening the skin.

Roy stood only a few yards away, and yet he started when she spoke, as if Therese had pounced on him suddenly. "Why?" he said, too quickly.

"There was something on the radio about an accident down in the city, on the water."

"Never heard about it," Roy shrugged. A few seconds later, he added: "I think he's just out fishing."

"I saw you dock the boat."

"No," Roy corrected himself, "I mean I think he might've thrown a line in behind the motel or something."

"Don't lie to me in my own yard," Therese warned him. "You may think you know Brady well enough to want to protect him, but I'd ask you to remember that he's been my husband for forty-eight years."

Roy said, "Has there been anyone here to see you -- asking questions?"

Therese shook her head. "Is he all right? Where is he?" she twisted the bottle harder now, biting her lips against the pain but needing the pain as a diversion from her racing thoughts.

"Sort of," Roy said to answer the first question, and he stepped closer.

Therese stared at Roy in amazement. It seemed incredible that she could be kept away from her husband by

someone she'd known for less than a month. But the look on Roy's face was defiant. For good reasons or bad, he'd made up his mind to keep his own counsel. So it came as a surprise to Therese that Roy took one more step toward her and whispered -- as if their might be a band of high-tech guerrillas lurking in the trees around them -- "We staged the thing you heard about. Brady took a bit of water but he's okay now. I've hidden him."

"Where?" Therese demanded.

"It doesn't matter," Roy assured her.

"If it doesn't matter," Therese said tightly, "Then why is he there instead of here?" She did not wait for an answer. Turning her back on Roy, Therese walked to the edge of the porch and stared out to the lake. Because a row of pine trees and shrubs enclosed the back yard, she could not see the shore, but even though the middle of the lake looked calm despite the wind that had been gathering force since morning, she could hear the heavy slap of the waves against the pilons and the bumpers on the dock, and she could feel the water throwing itself across the stones on the beach, toward the house. She felt chilled and folded her arms across her chest. As she scanned the hills -- they were bleached almost to beige in places, spotted here and there by clumps of pine trees and mounds of rock that had risen through the dirt like blood-sacks -- she was

close to tears. Brady was somewhere out there; he was hiding in the hills, perhaps in one of those old shacks you saw above the gravel logging roads, or maybe in the natural shelter of a stand of pine or fir trees -- she could see him lying on his back in a bed of dirt and needles, his chest barely rising and falling -- or he was on or somewhere near the water, kneeling on the stone beach of some cove. Or drowned by now, if he'd lost his strength and even more of his good sense.

"Has anybody been looking for him?" Roy said from behind. "Anyone at all?" His voice was anxious, almost pleading.

Therese shook her head. A few minutes ago, as she watched Roy from the window, she'd felt sure of Brady's safety. Now, however, the sounds and smells overtook her and it all seemed so damn big: a hundred and fifty square miles of black water. Millions, perhaps billions of gallons of water, and so deep -- some said bottomless -- any human who tried to make bottom would be crushed by the pressure, squeezed into a fist-sized glob of jelly. And Brady was out there. "Why didn't you 'hide out' and let him come back?" Therese said angrily. "What can the body of a sixty-five-year-old man stand that yours can't stand five times over?" She kneaded the flesh of her upper arms.

Roy let out a long breath. "It's not that simple," he

said. "Him being hidden is part of the plan. Once I set a couple more things in motion, he'll be able to come back."

Therese turned in rage toward Roy. Not knowing Brady's whereabouts or condition was bad enough, but being willfully denied that information by a house-guest who understood nothing of what fifty years of marriage or fear or life meant to a person was the biggest insult she'd ever suffered. "Where is my husband?" she demanded furiously.

Roy's face showed no expression. His eyes met hers and held them for what seemed like minutes: "Squally Point," Roy finally muttered, and he turned his back on her, and walked away.

TWENTY-THREE

In the face of Therese's anger, Roy felt too uncomfortable to stick around the house and wait for Bar Cranston any longer. Hanging around the dock or sitting in the corner of the parlour would only mean having to be embarrassed every time Therese passed by. And Roy wanted to see his father; he wanted to tell the old man what they'd been doing, how they were going to make fools out of those crazy white men's search for Na-ha-ha-itkh. He wouldn't tell his father that Brady was white; he'd get around it by referring to him indefinitely. "My buddy and I did it -- we staged the whole thing, and now these guys are running around half-crazed because they don't know what's hit them. They never planned on this." He could almost see the wide smile spread across his father's face, the teeth, yellow and streaked with brown in the cracks, splitting his face open in a look of crooked mischief. And Roy knew his father would approve of what they planned to do next, because the next stage in the plan would both corroborate Eugene's belief that Indian culture was dying and confirm that it had been, at one time, unique and magical. As soon as possible, Roy and Brady planned to show the public a dying Naitaka.

Although he couldn't be sure it would keep running long enough to get him to the Reserve, Roy pulled the soiled canvas tarp off his Volkswagon Beetle and fired it up. The broken muffler belched, the chassis rattled, and the windshield wipers beat steadily back and forth across the glass.

Seconds later, Roy pulled up onto the asphalt pad at the Expedition base. There were several other vehicles in the lot. A silver and burgundy crew-cab was angle-parked in front of the door to the large, unpainted shack on the corner of the pad; there were three or four small cars parked along the north side of the building. But there was no sign of life; there wasn't the usual fringe of locals on the beach, watching the crew prep their boats and equipment. The windows of the shack were dark.

Roy climbed out of the car and walked down to the beach. The white-and-blue nylon ropes hung off the dock into the water. For as far as Roy could see toward the city, there was no sign of activity on the water. It was ten past six. By this time of day, the lake was usually thick with fishermen, water skiers, big cruising boats and swimmers; but today it was vacant. "Where are they?" Roy whispered, and tried weakly to push the thought out of his head. "What are they saying on the news? Who saw what when I dragged him away?"

Roy sprinted to the car, fumbled with the broken door-handle until it finally released the latch, jammed the key into the lock and turned the engine over. But instead of doing the only thing he could logically expect himself to do -- instead of throwing the car into gear and speeding down to the south end of the lake and doubling back on the east side until he was as close to Squally Point as he could get, and instead of then traversing the rocky terrain to the caves where he'd left Brady -- a boat was out of the question, no matter what direction he took, since by now Voyageur and the cops would be scouring the water like vultures -- instead of doing any of the things essential if he hoped to save Brady and their plan and Naitaka, Roy just sat quietly in the car and after a few seconds reached down and adjusted his socks.

Being out on the water and out of his normal territory around the north end of the lake, especially with the story of the "killing" at Hot Sands likely plastered all over the news, would be an admission of guilt. It was possible that either Voyageur or the cops would find Brady, but it was also possible that Roy and Brady could continue to milk their plan despite that. Although he looked like a tall, lanky, beer-drinking red-neck, Brady could think on his feet. And it might just occur to him to admit he had no idea how he got to that cave; he might not know how he got

to the cave: the fear and the unconsciousness might have wiped the whole episode from his brain. It was even possible that he had not yet wakened. If any of these scenarios proved true, Brady and Roy wouldn't lose ground at all; they'd just be where they wanted to be: in the eyes of the people who made this valley their home, something would have worked Ogopogo up enough to kill, or prepare to kill, one of their own. In light of that, they'd want Bar Cranston and Voyageur Expeditions right the hell out of their lives.

As soon as Roy pulled into his father's driveway and stepped out of the car, he knew something was wrong. The door had been left wide open, something his father never allowed, even in the most blistering heat, because he feared the entrance of all manner of beings -- bears, humans, snakes, the embittered souls of his enemies. Second, music blared from inside the house, but it wasn't anything his father would listen to; it wasn't country or the traditional Indian chants he had on cassette or the late-night drunken ramblings he sometimes recorded -- his own, largely fictional account of the history and cultural traditions of the Okanagan people. It was Rock 'n' roll, a special documentary, Roy learned as he listened from the

drive, on country stars who started out as long-hairs.

Since Eugene Silverheels never entertained and only left his house for necessities -- beer, rye and groceries -- the only explanation Roy could think of as he cautiously approached the door was that his father had embarked upon a bender to end all benders. A few minutes later he found out that he had not been far off.

"Chief," Roy called as he stepped into the house. Across the kitchen, the patio door stood open. There was a pile of budweiser tins on the kitchen table, and dozens of books were scattered around them, as well as on one of the chairs and on the floor.

Roy stepped left into the living room and flicked off the old Heathkit stereo. "Chief?" he called into the silence. No one answered.

"Chief?" Roy called nervously. "Chief!"

Glancing out the window, he saw the empty back yard and saw the extraordinary calmness of the lake. Because the Reserve lay on an unprotected strip of land along the northwest side of the lake, near the tip, the water usually developed a chop under the slightest breeze. Today the wind blew hard, but the lake was dead calm. "CHIEF!" Roy shouted, and ran upstairs.

From his father's bedroom window at the top of the house, Roy saw the face-down body of Eugene Silverheels

soaking in the lake, just beyond the old, unvarnished picnic table.

It did not seem real. Roy saw the body from the window, and he thought, Move! and he stumbled and fell on his face because the brain-waves had relayed down his body in descending order, so that his head tilted forward, his chest and hips went forward and his feet simply kicked the floor out from under him. He scrambled upright and ran as fast as he could, zipping down the short flight of stairs in two steps, then through the kitchen and out into the yard. Somewhere inside, he must have known it was his father; the body had his father's shape and wore his father's clothes; but the father-image that filled his mind so completely he could see it, even as he ran blindly toward the water, was the image of a small, compact man with angry brown eyes who did not want to die! When Roy closed his hands around the corpse's ankles and heaved the soaking body to shore, he thought only, It's not too late, it is not too late. The face, when he turned the body prone, was visible but smoothed by water and sleep. Roy began to cry. He lowered his lips to the wide, crescent-shaped slice across the throat, he tasted the diluted salt-taste of blood and water, and then he lifted his head and stared for a long time at the wet-marbled

flesh and the plastic-textured air-passage and muscles. His tears dropped onto the rocks and the face and neck of the body, and it suddenly enraged Roy that they did not have the dignity to mix with his father's blood or cleanse the wound. It was such a stupid and selfish thought that Roy laughed. His chest emptied under the pressure of the laughter and the sobs, and Roy tried with shaking fingers to force the wound shut, to hold it closed just long enough to let the skin and flesh and muscle heal itself and allow the blood to start flowing again. His fingers trembled violently and skidded across the cold skin whenever he applied pressure, and the muscles and tendons and veins around the wound had stiffened, so that even when Roy bore down with his full weight and closed the wound, it slowly reopened under its own power. Before long, Roy realized that the body would not respond as long as he left it out in the chill air, and he decided to carry it to the house.

Roy dragged the kitchen table into the living room and laid his father's body, face up, upon it. He stripped off the tattered, soaking clothes, dried the old man's chilled skin, and redressed him in the navy blue suit he'd worn to divorce court. Across the wide, smile-shaped cut on his father's throat, Roy rested a folded white face cloth. Before long, the cotton was coloured around the edges with the last uncongealed drops of blood. Working as best he

could, Roy gently wiped the wound as clean as he could get it without ripping the scars. He knew enough about butchering to know he'd die slow doing it like that. Why didn't he hit the jugular?

Roy lowered himself into the burgundy recliner his father called the TV Chair. Eyes fixed on his father's face, he couldn't help thinking, once again, how content the features were. "What was in your mind when you did it?" he said aloud. "Were you getting away from all of this or trying to go somewhere else?" For a long time, Roy sat perfectly still and quiet, as if he expected the body to answer. Finally, he leaned forward and said, "You make about as much sense as a politician," because it was the kind of remark that used to make Eugene Silverheels smile and release a river of venom at the ghosts of statesmen past, present and future: "I'll tell you about politicians...."

"What the hell were you doing?" Roy demanded, and stood up. He paced around the body several times, stopping once to straighten the blue-and-red-striped tie and centre the silver rodeo buckle against the pearl-coloured buttons on the dress-shirt. Then Roy retrieved the stacks of books from the kitchen and spread them out on the carpet in front of the chair. He took a can of beer from the fridge, snapped it open, and sat staring from the books to his

father to the books; he stood up and glanced through the smoke-filmed window to the unmown, paper-littered lawn and the hazed stretch of asphalt that ran in front of the house. Sitting in the chair again, he examined the books, picking them up then discarding one after another. If you'd get off your selfish ass and explain some things, I might be able to make sense out of these! But the books did not make sense; they held hundreds of facts and figures that Eugene Silverheels did not have to see in print to understand and believe. He had courted the knowledge of his own heritage from his childhood onward, and he'd raised Roy to know it. If you had to do this, why couldn't you at least explain?

Roy grew more and more angry. His chest tightened, and he found it impossible to breathe normally. The air inside the house was heavy and close with the smell of his father's blood, and to keep from screaming or shaking his father's body for answers, Roy left the house.

At first, he walked down the drive and out onto the road that twisted through the reserve, but there was nowhere to go and he soon turned back for fear of finding himself in the village, face-to-face with someone who asked after Roy or his father. He walked back to the house, thinking, He was too bold a man to do this without letting people know exactly why, over and over again.

In the back yard, Roy found a partial answer. He sat at the picnic table, staring at the place where he'd found the body, and then at the lake, and then it hit him: He died two ways -- he cut his throat and he drowned. He didn't hit the jugular, and he wasn't dead when he hit the water. I pumped water out of his lungs. He did that on purpose.

Roy ran to the house. Now the books made sense: somewhere, inside one of them, he'd find a ceremony. Back in the living room, he ran his finger down each table of contents, then skimmed, as fast as he could, through every chapter that seemed likely to hold some clue. But the only reference that came as close was a bit he'd read about the sacrifice of sheep and dogs. Finally, disgusted, Roy hurled down the last of the books and went to the kitchen for another beer. Landing against the sink, he saw a piece of paper beneath the kitchen table. It must have fallen out when he gathered up the books. Roy snatched it up. Scribbled in the unsteady, cramped hand that Eugene Silverheels had learned from the lead hand on a farm he worked at as a young man, Roy read:

Dancewater blood in my veins
Dancewater beat in my brain
My Dancewater spirit is true
Dancewater Dancewater blue

And beneath the words, pencilled in thick, steady lines, Eugene Silverheels had drawn a plesiosaur.

Roy stuffed the paper in his pocket and ran out of the house. He had no clearer understanding of his father's motivations than he'd had when he found the body face down in the water. He did know, however, that the old man had sought some sort of union with the lake, with Naitaka. And if the union with the lake was what he'd wanted, Roy could help him. But first he needed Brady's boat.

TWENTY-FOUR

Somehow, Naitaka had given Eugene a kind of paradoxical hope -- enough hope to kill himself as a part of some strange ritual. Enough hope to believe in his actions. Roy's plan was simple: He'd collect Brady from the cave at Squally Point, and together they'd give Eugene a proper water-burial.

"Brady!" Roy shouted. "Brady!"

Roy hooked a braided nylon rope to the end of the whaler's anchor-chain and hurled the anchor up into the cave. Eugene's body was stretched out in the bow of the boat. "I'll just be a minute," Roy told the old man.

Once he'd scaled the ten feet of stone, Roy searched through the cave. He had thought to bring a flashlight, so he could make his way to the back of each fork in the cavern. But he did not find Brady. There was a small pile of dried feces at the mouth of the left fork, but no other signs of life.

Back at the cave mouth, Roy scanned the water. He'd searched high and low -- over the island, through the caves and the surrounding rocks, over the surface of the lake -- but he could not find Brady. In this landscape of nowhere-to-go, Brady had disappeared.

"Brady?" Roy called, then called again, louder and longer this time, "Brraaay-deeee?"

*

Brady woke up to the pressure of his own breathing against his bruised stomach muscles, to a skull-ache where his head had smacked against rock, and to the sound of his own name.

"Brady? Brady?"

"What?" Brady said softly. He was curled up on his side and lying on a narrow ledge of rock. His eyes had begun to adjust to the dim light, which funnelled in through a fist-sized hole above his head. On the other side of the cavern, across the small pond of black water that was both the bottom of the cave and its mouth, Brady saw another wide, flat ledge of stone. There was something long and pale stretched out on the rock. Another person?

"Hey," Brady said, and stretched out an arm to show he was friendly. "Who's there?" He squinted, but the light was too dim.

When Naitaka slid up through the water and stared at him, Brady was neither frightened nor surprised. Although he did not know precisely where he was, the facts of his life had come back to him. He'd lost his breath when he went under water with Roy at the beach. He'd come to in a

cave above the water, and he'd set his mind on crossing the small strait to the island. Since there were only two islands in the entire lake, and since there were no caves around Whiskey Island, he had to be at Squally Point.

"So this is it?" Brady said to Naitaka. For years Brady had believed that Naitaka had a secret chamber somewhere, a hideout he used to slip pursuers, store food, sleep. "So this is it?" Brady repeated, as if he expected the creature to confirm the accuracy of the find. But Naitaka did not move. His jaw hung open like a sweating dog's, his bony head dipped toward Brady, and his left eye -- as hard and impenetrable as stone, as black and as surface-slick as oil -- trained in on Brady. The gentleness, the helplessness Brady had detected when he spooned the cans of beans into Naitaka's mouth, was gone. But the sick-gel lay thick on the creature's exposed neck.

Again Brady heard the voice fall weakly through the hole overhead. "Brady?" The tone was more frantic, the volume louder. Roy?

"Here!" Brady called. From the way the sound rolled around the cave, he knew that only a thread of the reply had escaped through the airhole.

Brady sat up. He rubbed the back of his aching head; his fingers came away flecked with dried bits of blood. His stomach muscles were tender, but he had not broken any

ribs. His thighs pounded, needling the dull pain in his groin, but he had not damaged any bones in the fall.

Naitaka inched closer, and for the first time, Brady took in his smell -- the heavy, sickly-sweet odour of algaed breath coming in snorts through the bony nostrils, the hot-waste scent of the sick-gel. Brady gagged.

"Brady?"

Naitaka moved closer, nudging Brady's knee with his jaw, the skin and teeth cold against Brady's pale skin. The touch was not gentle.

"What?" Brady said. He felt absolutely calm; even though his circumstances were ludicrous, he could not remember feeling so certain that the pieces of the world were locked firmly into their proper places. He was in an underwater cave with a million-year-old dinosaur. And his best friend -- yes, Roy was his best friend, or how could Brady have shared this adventure? -- was outside, searching through the rocks and caves for him. It made perfect sense and made Brady feel perfectly at home. Which bothered him. If you'd spent your life in search of something that wasn't supposed to exist, and later found yourself face-to-face with the object of your search, why should you feel comfort? When you hadn't eaten for three days, why should you feel full? If your best friend was searching frantically for you, why should you feel that he could

wait, that all would right itself in time?

"Do something." Brady raised his voice for the command.

Naitaka nudged his leg again, harder this time, so that the back of Brady's right calf scraped against the rocks. Naitaka drifted toward the ledge on the other side of the cave, then stopped and plunged his head violently into the water. The splash hit Brady and set him shivering.

"What?" Brady said. Why didn't he feel excited? He breathed evenly; he thought slowly and calmly; he did not feel rushed or anxious, even though part of him believed he would never escape this cave. Why?

"Brady?"

"Just hang on!" Brady shouted at the ceiling of the cave, and stared at Naitaka, and thought, What? uneasily, because he was frightened.

*

Roy slid the telescopic boat-pole out from the gunwale and extended it to full length. He had no choice but to believe that Brady was dead. There was right -- physically, Roy could handle five-times the strain. Brady may have been amnesiac or delirious when he woke up. In an

attempt to escape the cave, he probably fell against the rocks.

The whaler bobbed close to the rocks. Roy worked the pole through the water, testing the solidity and size of every underwater surface he could reach.

Eugene Silverheels was dead, Brady was dead, and Roy now felt numb to the whole process: if this was the season for old men to die, what could he do about it?

*

When Naitaka once again nudged his nose into Brady's leg, and for the third time drifted toward the ledge on the other side of the cave to push against whatever it was that was laid out on the rock -- weeds or fish or old circular buoys -- Brady signalled the creature back. "Here," he said. "Here." And Naitaka came close.

Brady slipped into the water. He laid his hands on Naitaka's back and pressed down. The sick-gel was thick and cold on his fingers and palms, the smell bitter and over-powering. Brady breathed through his mouth. Naitaka sank deeper into the water, and Brady struggled onto his back. With one quick stab of Naitaka's front fins, they reached the ledge on the other side of the dim cave.

When Brady saw the grey-brown skeleton and the dirty

remnants of cotton hanging over the ribs, he went numb. Around the skeleton's neck, lying against the spine at the bottom of the empty chest, Brady made out a leather thong. Fastened to the rotting leather was a filthy piece of metal.

Halverson Stuart.

From the moment he first heard the story of how his father had disappeared after freeing Therese from Naitaka, Brady had imagined his father drowned and lying somewhere on the bottom of the lake. He had never believed that his father had been killed by the creature; nor had he believed that Naitaka had intended to kill Therese. And yet here was his father's carcass alongside two others.

Brady dug his fingers into the sick-gel on Naitaka's neck; he pressed his nails into the soaked-wood texture green skin until his fingertips went numb. "Roy!" he shouted. "Royyy!"

*

Brady's voice rang up the airpipe. Roy froze. When the sound came again, entering weakly into the dusk, Roy hauled in the boat-pole and called back. "Brady?"

"Here."

Roy glanced around, dumbfounded. "Where? Talk

louder."

"I'm shouting," said Brady.

"Shout louder. I can't tell where you are."

"Wherever my voice is," Brady snapped.

"Don't you know where it is?"

"I'm underground somewhere," Brady said. "In a cave. There's a hole in the roof."

"Hum!" Roy said.

"What?"

"Hum something so I can track your voice."

Roy tracked over the rocks toward the sound of Brady's frail, humming voice. Just past a wide, black-deep crack in one level of stone, Roy found the small hole. "How'd you get in there?" he wanted to know. He tried peering down the opening.

"It's a long story," said Brady. "I think it's just a hollow in the rock. The bottom's all water. Are all the ropes in the boat?"

"Yeah."

"Get 'em and hitch 'em together."

Roy backed carefully down the rocks to the water. When he returned with the ropes, he said, "Now what?"

"Knots strong?"

"Check," said Roy.

"Okay -- feed one end down the hole."

Roy threaded one end of the long rope down the hole; when he felt Brady pulling, he let the rope slip through his fingers.

"Okay," Brady called after a few seconds. "Now pull."

"You'll never squeeze through the hole," said Roy.

"Just pull," said Brady, but Roy could hear the laughter in his voice.

"How hard?"

"Firm and steady. And when I say 'Stop,' get to the boat." There was a short pause. "Go."

Roy pulled on the rope with both hands.

"Harder," said Brady.

Whatever Brady'd hooked the rope to wasn't budging. Roy leaned back on the rope but nothing moved. Then the pressure from Brady's end exploded, pulling Roy toward the hole. "Braaay-deee."

"Pull, pull, pull -- stop!"

Roy released the rope and charged down the rocks to the boat just in time to see Brady rise out of the water on the biggest, ugliest, meanest-looking creature Roy had ever seen. And Brady was swinging his arm like a goddamn rodeo king.

It worked. When Naitaka felt the pressure of the rope around his neck, he strained against it, then dove down through a twenty-foot tunnel of rock and resurfaced in the narrow channel between Rattlesnake Island and Squally Point.

Brady watched as Roy jumped from the slope of mountainside rock into the stern of the whaler. Naitaka was excited and jerked left and right between the island and the rocks, stabbing through the water with his short, thick fins. His great, tapered lizard's-tail clubbed the water. Water-spray darkened the rocks. Then he bucked forward, as if trying to thrust up an imaginary shoulder blade. "Over here!" Brady ordered. If the creature really wanted to lose him, all he had to do was roll; the force of the water would shuck Brady off like blown dust. That Naitaka did not roll told Brady something.

"What?" Roy stood at the back of the boat, his eyes wide, his mouth hanging open.

"What did you think it was gonna look like -- the Pillsbury doughboy?"

"What now?"

"Bring the boat over this way." Since Naitaka had come right up to the stern of the boat once before, Brady hoped he wouldn't be startled by it today. "Slowly."

Roy eased the whaler along the rocks in reverse.

When the boat was twenty feet away, Brady said, "All right -- shut'er down."

Roy cut the engine.

Holding the rope in his left hand, Brady let himself slide off Naitaka's back into the water. When he reached the boat, he looped the rope through the steel hook to the left of the motor and tied it off a dozen feet from the end.

Roy reached down and helped Brady into the boat. Then Roy stripped off his jeans and handed them to Brady. With the pants on, Brady glanced at Naitaka, who had discovered his predicament and was straining against the rope, and tied another knot around the base of the steering column.

Roy stared at the rope-burns on his hands. "He'll rip the boat apart."

Brady shook his head. "Slip knot." He pointed to Naitaka's throat. "I worked it so that when he pulled down, the pressure was on the bottom of his jaw. Now it's on his neck." He was silent for a moment. "Fucker'll choke if he pulls now," he said finally.

TWENTY-FIVE

Therese had been glad to see Roy go. Even though she knew that Brady usually did as he pleased and that it was his will and no one else's that filled his head with crazy plans or gave him the strength to resist tomfoolery, she could not help but blame Roy. Having a like-minded cohort pushed Brady into territory even his warped sense of adventure and obligation might have resisted otherwise.

By the next morning, however, Therese regretted the harshness of her words to Roy. Sitting quietly by the parlour window, she kept her eyes trained on the long gravel driveway. She'd spent the night listening to the sound of the water rippling against the beach-rocks and the rain sheeting into the lake and the wind funneling down the valley like a ghost; they were taunting sounds, inexorable and stubborn. The rain fed the lake; the wind stirred the water to waves; the waves beat against the shore. Now she wished for company in her vigil -- someone to talk at and to speculate with while she waited. As it was, she did not know where Roy had gone after he'd left the house; nor did she know how to get hold of him; worst of all, she did not know what he planned to do next. Did he mean to rescue Brady today? (Was Brady still alive? The sleepless night

had robbed her of the ability to think rationally for more than a few seconds: Yes, she could tell herself, he's alive. But when she tried to concentrate and figure out why he should be alive, her thoughts jumbled and spun and she could think only, Because he has no right to die and leave me here alone.)

When morning came and there was still no sight or sound of Roy, Therese dressed and left the house.

She would not allow Brady to get away with any of this. He had no right to endanger his life. He had no right to decide to cure her with Naitaka. (The idea was ludicrous. Therese had nearly been killed; half the town had watched Halverson Stuart sink to his death.) Even if the creature did have some kind of power, Brady had no right to decide that she'd accept it. He had no right to assume force.

It felt like years since she'd ventured along the streets of the village on foot, but as she walked she felt somehow cleansed by the process. If I walk in there it might do something to end this foolish division. But when she stopped at the edge of the expedition lot and stared across the drainage ditch to the shack at the centre of what used to be Ransom's patio -- there was a tall, thickly-built man standing in the doorway, his back to Therese -- she had to take several deep breaths to dilute

the nervous tingling in her chest. Brady, she told herself, had cast this man as an enemy when in fact he was anything but. Bar Cranston wanted to find the creature, and he had as much right to do so as Brady did. No more, no less. But it was typical of Brady, she decided, and nodded silently to herself as she stepped across the ditch, to paint the world black and white. There was Brady's way and there was the wrong way. Take, for example, Naitaka: For fifty years, despite all evidence to the contrary, Brady had believed that the creature had some kind of power. Mercy save you if you thought differently. Brady swore he'd had some kind of experience with it -- whatever that meant -- when he was fifteen, and that automatically meant that everyone else had to have, or at least believe in, the same experience. It didn't make sense. Bar Cranston was no enemy of Brady's; like Therese, he simply had his own way of looking at things.

"Mr. Cranston." Therese stepped over the unfinished ledge and onto the pale plywood floor. She angled between the big man and the door jamb and stood squinting into the room for several seconds, letting her eyes adjust to the dim interior.

Inside was one large, high-ceilinged room. The walls and the floor consisted of bare plywood. One small window opened out of each wall, and the only furnishings were a

series of tattered couches and easy chairs, deck-cots and stools. Piled in one corner were a dozen or more sleeping bags and pale green foamies. A stack of empty Labatt's Blue beer cases stood in another corner.

"Mrs. Stuart," Bar Cranston nodded, and stood up. Some of the other men smirked, eyeing Therese, then looked to their cronies for approval. Bar Cranston, on the other hand, looked Therese straight in the eye; he neither patronized nor acted uninterested.

"The first thing I'd like you to understand, Mr. Cranston," Therese said evenly, "is that I am in no way involved in the differences between my husband and yourself."

"Would you prefer to talk in private?" Cranston asked.

"This is fine," Therese assured him. She glanced at the men seated around the room. "I'm sure what I have to say will involve these men, as well." After a moment's pause, she said, "I'd like you to find my husband. I know where he is and I have reason to believe that there will also be something of interest to you there."

"I'm listening."

"The second thing I would like understood is that I do not want my husband humiliated." She eyed the men who had been snickering a minute earlier. Therese thought she saw Bar Cranston's eyes flash, but she was not sure how to

interpret the gesture. "I'm concerned only with his safety, Mr. Cranston. I have reason to believe he may be in danger."

"Where is he, Mrs. Stuart?"

"If he's hurt, I would ask that you take him directly to the hospital; if he's safe, I would like you to bring him back here immediately." Therese paused thoughtfully. "If he resists, leave him be," she said, "only capture your creature. I'm sure you'll find him nearby."

"Where is he, Mrs. Stuart?" Bar Cranston repeated.

Therese walked to the door. Before she turned around, she said, "Do you understand my request, Mr. Cranston, or are you simply the hunter my husband says you are?" She faced the room again and looked slowly from one face to another: Do you understand that this is more important than your silly game of hide and seek? When she came to Bar Cranston, she raised her eyebrows and waited.

Without blinking, without shifting a muscle or letting his gaze fix for even a second on anything other than Therese's face, Cranston said, "First thing we'll do is find him and make sure he's safe. There'll be time for the rest of it later." In his leather jacket and jeans -- with his bright eyes and the smartass half-grin that played at the right side of his mouth -- Bar Cranston did not look unlike the Brady Stuart of thirty years ago.

"Thank you," said Therese. "He's at Squally Point."
She walked away then, taking the tack across the asphalt pad. Even amid the sounds of scraping chairs and cheering, she did not look back. Walking steadily back to the house, she told herself she'd done the right thing.

TWENTY-SIX

It was dark by the time Brady and Roy reached the lift-span with Naitaka in tow. The creature was not coming willingly -- they could feel every ounce of his weight dragging on the whaler's stern, they could see thin shreds of skin and spots of blood worn onto the bright yellow rope, and they could see the pale ring-wound opening under the abrasive pressure of the nylon -- but neither had he attempted to tear himself free or charge the boat.

Brady was cold and tired and hungry; he ate slowly from the dented tin of beans he'd dug out of the gunwale, and every few minutes he dug a finger-wad of granules out of an unlabelled jar of hot rum mix and dissolved it on his tongue.

It was Wednesday night; bridge-traffic was sparse, and the beaches were deserted. Brady saw several wooden signs posted on the water's-edge of Hot Sands.

"What day is it?" Brady asked Roy.

Roy turned in the captain's chair. "Wednesday."

Six days. Voyageur Expeditions had been out on the water for six days. "Where's Cranston searching?" Brady asked.

"Somewhere around here," Roy said. "He's been here

since Monday. He's combed every inch around here, but he's trying to drag it out. Regatta starts tomorrow." He nodded out behind the boat. Naitaka had given up his feeble attempt to free himself from the rope.

Brady pointed to the winding terrain on the west shore of the lake. "Let's get over there. There's cover."

Roy turned the boat. After a few minutes, he said, "There's nowhere to hide him at the Landing," but said it quietly enough that Brady could decide whether or not he wanted to listen.

"You've been all day roaring up and down the lake with a dead body -- don't tell me what makes sense." Brady dropped his half-empty can of beans to the floor, then screwed the white, metal lid back onto the jar of rum mix. "Besides, I'm not sure I want to hide him anymore."

Roy gave a slight nod but said nothing. It was the gesture of someone who did not understand your motives but was willing, for the moment, to let them stand.

They had reached the shore of the Westbank Indian Reserve. The narrow Westside Highway was only fifty yards from the water in some places, but the whaler was protected by darkness and clusters of pine trees. Roy sat half-turned in his chair, shifting his gaze between Brady and the water out in front of the boat.

Back across the water, near the lift-span, a small

fleet of boats roared toward the south end of the lake. One of the boats was big enough to be Voyageur's lead boat, but it was impossible to see clearly in the deepening dusk.

"Cranston?" Brady said.

"Naw. Not at this time of day." Roy smiled. He doesn't move much unless people can see him."

Brady unclenched his right fist and held out his open palm.

"What's that?" said Roy.

"Take it."

Roy lifted the object away from Brady's fingers. It was a twisted metal charm fastened to a leather strap.

"That's the first piece of silver that ever came out of the mine," Brady said quietly. "My father used to wear it." He was silent for a moment. "I found it in the cave, along with his bones."

Roy checked their course along the shore, then examined the charm. He brought it close to his face and tried to push the tarnish and dirt away with his thumbs. He was smiling.

Brady didn't understand. "What?" he said.

"It seems to be a day for dying."

"My father's been dead for fifty years," Brady said.

Roy shook his head. "Maybe so," he said. "But I get the feeling it's only just started to be real -- otherwise

you wouldn't be ready for revenge on Naitaka."

"I don't want revenge."

"No?"

Without looking at Roy, Brady shook his head.

"Then why do you want to expose it? You've spent most of a lifetime looking for it, trying to keep it safe from profiteers and curators, and now you're all of a sudden ready to turn it over."

"Maybe I want it understood," said Brady. "Maybe I want to understand it."

"How so?"

Brady shook his head. "I don't know. I guess I've always figured it was just me -- that Naitaka was just for me." He pressed the tips of his fingers together, forming a cage, and stared through the bars to the vinyl floor of the whaler. "The first time I saw Naitaka, I thought it was a dream. I thought I was seeing things. But it didn't take long to figure out that it was real -- I'd seen it, my father had disappeared with it." Brady looked up at Roy, his eyes wet and full of wonder. "That was the thing: My father had disappeared with it. I was fifteen years old when I came here, and I hadn't seen my father in almost ten years. I didn't know him well enough to feel much loss. I was choked, but it wasn't real." He paused again. "The thing I latched onto was that my father had disappeared

with Naitaka -- no blood, no body, he was just gone. I'd seen Naitaka, I'd touched him, and so had my father. There was a connection." Brady shook his head; his eyes were narrow. "When I saw his bones in that cave today, I lost the connection."

They had been working their way slowly along the shore for more than an hour. In the distance, they could see lights on the south shore of the Landing.

Roy opened his mouth to speak, then changed his mind. Brady went on with his story.

"And Therese was connected, too. Naitaka was going after her when my father got in the way. And I fell in love with her. I knew she'd seen it, but that had nothing to do with the way I felt about her. Or if it did, it doesn't now. Or maybe it does -- maybe it did. I don't know. Maybe by that time I was just looking to connect myself to Naitaka. Like it was mine."

Roy steered around a long, smooth rock that angled into the water from the tip of the cove they were leaving. Then he turned to Brady. "Can I say something?" he asked quietly.

"Since when did you need permission?"

"Well," said Roy, "usually I just offend your stubbornness. Now I think I might offend something a little more important."

Brady gave a sideways nod.

"It's not yours at all," Roy told him.

Brady chuckled. "Is that it? That's what's going to offend me?"

Roy shrugged.

"I'm sorry," said Brady. "It's just that that's what's got me feeling this way in the first place. It's not mine. I know that. That's the rub." He looked past Roy to the dim lights of the Landing. "These last couple of days I've been thinking about all the people I've chased away. I used to believe I chased them off because they wanted to harm Naitaka. Now I think I chased them off because they wanted to take him away from me. If Naitaka belonged to everyone, where did that leave me?"

"He doesn't belong to everyone," Roy said.

"Who, then?"

"Listen," Roy said. "The beauty in Naitaka isn't the belonging, it's the being. People are always trying to turn things toward themselves -- this affects us this way, that affects us that way. The real beauty in Naitaka is that he doesn't live for us. But that doesn't make his existence any less amazing." Roy stopped and pointed out behind the boat.

Naitaka had lowered himself into the water so that the rope and the rope-wound were submerged. Only the bony head

remained above water; his breath came as heavy as a harsh whisper through the tear-shaped nostrils. Once, while Roy and Brady watched, he bit listlessly at the rope, then stopped, lowering his head to let the water stream over his skull.

"Look at that," Roy said. "Just look." His eyes were wide. The dusk shaded his high cheekbones, his flat nose, his wide mouth. He looked good, healthy, thought Brady. His father, if he'd been alive to see it, would have been proud.

"He's not supposed to be here," Roy said. "He's not supposed to exist. You've read the scientific opinions -- according to the people who know about these things, he doesn't exist because he can't exist. It's impossible. But there he is. It's unusual for a person to see him more than once in a lifetime. Most don't see him at all. It's the believing that counts. My father had nothing to live for until he started believing in Naitaka again. Then he had something to die for."

Brady stood and slowly made his way to the front of the boat. He stood beside the captain's chair and looked down at the blanketed body of Eugene Silverheels. "I think that's my problem. Despite the things everyone's told me over the years, I've always believed Naitaka had to do with life, not death. I've believed that for fifty years -- and

now it's all come crashing down in one day."

They were only two hundred yards from the southern shore of the Landing, from where Ransom Steen had sold fruit and milk and cheese and his special brew for half a century, and from where, these days, Bar Cranston directed his search for Naitaka. The windows of Voyageur's small building were lit, and the outside lamp-standard washed the big asphalt pad with bright light. But the lot was vacant of cars and there was no sign of the Expedition's boats or their small submarine at the dock. Roy steered the whaler toward Brady's dock at the tip of the Landing. "What are you going to do now?"

Brady let out a long breath, then looked down at Roy. "Turn him over," he said.

TWENTY-SEVEN

Brady had meant it when he told Roy he intended to turn Naitaka over to Bar Cranston. He even untied the rope that held Naitaka to the steel hook at the stern of the whaler and asked Roy to fasten it to one of the pylons and wait for him to return with one of Bar Cranston's people.

But when he saw the receiving party, he changed his mind.

From the base of the dock he could see up past the edge of his house to the end of the driveway. In the darkness, it was difficult to tell just how many of the discontented had gathered there, much less make out individual faces. The pursuers had packed themselves as close as a huddle of sturdy, oblong stones. Under a sky gone blue-black, they ignored the beach-path and broke open the silver-metal gate at the head of the drive. They lumbered toward the beach like a huge stone bear.

"Mr. Stuart! Mr. Stuart!"

Brady recognized Benton Williams' voice, full of anger. The sound came a hundred yards down the driveway, twisting around Brady's truck and Therese's car and Roy Silverheel's orange Volkswagen Beetle, veering around the house -- loose shingles, sagging eaves troughs, cracked

paint -- to the thin strip of beach and the dock.

"Stuuuuuaart!"

Brady shifted from foot to foot. He opened his mouth but no words came. What is happening here? From behind him came the sound of water rising from water. Then came a mighty, sleeting rain, and the massive plunge of the creature falling back into the lake. Brady turned to see the pale pale belly turned upward as Naitaka plunged.

"Jesus!" someone shouted. Other voices rose, releasing a collective "Ahh!" that towered between the full-moon sky and the silvered surface of the lake.

"We're coming down there, Stuart."

At the far end of the dock, Roy had himself wedged against the algaed pylon, his arms wrapped around either side, the skin of his hands tearing against the pressure of the slipping rope. His chest was jammed against the wood, and his face was turned toward Brady, the cheek packed tight between the pylon and his bones. His eyes were clamped tight, and his face was contorted -- mouth open and twisted -- as if he'd engaged himself in some fervent and necessary prayer that could not be abandoned. Naitaka strained his roped neck against Roy's grip, but for now there was no release, only the sound of shredding skin.

"Stuart!" Earle Hyatt yelled. "I'm gonna break your goddamned neck, Brady!"

The mob was half-way down the drive.

"Roy!" Brady called, throwing his arm out to point at the boat tied to the other side of the dock. Slowly, Roy's eyes opened; he lifted his head an inch, then lowered it. Brady took a last fleeting glance at the cut-stone mass coming across his land -- they were in front of the house now, the yellow porch-light doubling their size with a black shadow -- then broke across the water-wet dock to the whaler. He threw the ropes off the gunwales, and in one motion pushed the boat away from the dock, regathered himself into a crouch, and jumped, landing shoulder-down on the aluminum fish tub in the back. He heard the muscles tear but thought only, I must not use that arm, and pushed himself up with his opposite hand. The corpse, stretched face-up along the port-side gunwale, was undamaged.

Seventy-five yards away, several figures at the front of the cluster had crumbled away and were now sprinting toward the dock.

Brady's fingers found the key in the ignition. He knocked the throttle into gear and then threw the wheel right. The boat leaned; the outboard prop threw a stream of water up and across the dock, splashing Roy and carrying across to fall over the slick, leathery skin of Naitaka before it thrummed back into the lake.

Seconds later, Brady had bumped the whaler hard into

the end of the dock. Roy stood three feet away, arms still around the pylon. His face was turned away from Brady.

"Roy," Brady called. "Give me the ropes."

Roy didn't move.

"Roy!" Brady boomed. He stared at the Indian's back, at the ice-ridges beneath Roy's skin. Shock. His muscles were taut, fixed by their command to hold the rope. I've been there, Brady thought. I've been there and now I can't remember how to get through. He hit the whaler's throttle again, swinging the boat in front of his friend. For a brief moment, as he stared into Roy's wide and staring eyes, it came back to him: he was lying face-up on the soaking orchard floor and staring dreamlessly into sky. The bones in his thighs were busted clean through, but the pain was important. The world floated by in 3/4 time, but if during those minutes someone had leaned over him to say, "Brady, your legs are still in the tree," he would simply have nodded.

"Stuart!"

Several figures stood at the beach-end of the dock. Brady made out Earl Hyatt, Ransom Steen, Walter Ghallager, and Patricia Lang. Standing one step in front of the others was Benton Williams, his eyes like slits, his face blood-drained. "Mr. Stuart," Benton said, and opened his arms in a benevolent gesture. "There's no need for all

this -- we're only interested in peaceful conversation."

They looked peaceful enough, but how come they wanted peace now that Brady had the treasure? When he had the thing they'd been denying? The thing they'd been trying to deny him?

Billy Ostipin stood behind the others, tanked-up and wavering slightly just up the slant of beach, near Brady's cedar fence-hedge. "Is that right, Billy?" he called. "They just wanna make peace, Billy? Eh, Billy?" Billy's eyes were as wide as Roy's and fixed with absolute terror on the water. "I guess I'll just have to decline your generous peace offer there, Williams."

"How can a little talk hurt?" Benton wanted to know. And in his darting eyes and his slack posture, Brady detected an uncharacteristic patience. Five people stood at the end of his dock, asking simply to chat, while Roy stood with a rope tight around the throat of a creature that could change their lives and open up their futures and the futures of their children like a leprachaun snapping the lid off a pot of gold.

If this lynching-party chose to attack, Roy and Brady couldn't possibly defend the rope against all those reaching hands, and yet those hands hung limply by sides or were shoved comfortably into pants pockets.

Brady glanced up into Roy's eyes. Then he looked back

to the crew at the end of his dock, and back again to Roy. He made as if to scratch thoughtfully at his scalp, but when his hand reached head-level, he threw it toward Roy's and snapped his fingers around the rope. He yanked with every ounce of muscle he could dredge up. He did not look up because the sound -- a wet "sliggig, sliggig" -- of the rope ripping against Roy's flesh made him nauseous.

When Brady had the rope, he wrapped it swiftly around the steering column, then pivoted -- the sound of leather-soled shoes slapping the wooden dock now like a gathering avalanche -- and screamed at Roy, "Go after it, man! There!" and pointed violently toward the centre of the lake, simultaneously jamming the whaler into gear, swinging around to the end of the dock.

Suddenly, Roy moved, peeled away from the pylon, his chest bleeding and slimed with algae, his knees bent for the dive. And Brady knew then that the effort would come up short. He tried to veer the boat out of the way, but he was too late. Roy heaved himself through the air, and his face slammed against the gunwale. Brady reached over the edge of the whaler and closed his hands on Roy's shoulders, and did it so quickly that Roy's torn cheek did not have time to spill blood into the water. He pulled the Indian to the floor and pushed him prone, so that the vomit spilled onto the vinyl instead of catching in Roy's throat.

The boat moved slowly, circling back toward land as the water pushed the outboard leg to the left; Naitaka had stopped fighting. Brady stepped to the wheel and steered for the center of the lake.

"Cranston is on his way, Stuart," Benton Williams called from the end of the dock.

"I'd never have guessed," Brady shouted back, and felt a smile on his lips.

"You know you don't have a chance out there against him, don't you, Mr. Stuart?"

"We'll see-ee," Brady sang back. But he had begun to worry. Amid the events of the past month, Brady had had more than one opportunity to see Bar Cranston's equipment, and he knew that except for a few ripples on the surface of the water, you couldn't see his little water-shuttle till it banged a hole in the side of your boat.

A hundred yards off-shore, Brady cut the Merc back to an idle. Taking the rope in his hands, he tried to pull Naitaka to the stern, but the creature wouldn't budge. He struggled against the loop of rope -- the nylon now black with blood and skin, the ring-wound raw and glistening -- only his slender neck, his open jaw and snake's head above the surface, the massive torso and powerful legs and tail working against Brady beneath the water. His eyes were misted. Look, Brady stared back, I have only wanted to

save what is mine, and what is more than that I have tried to save Therese. You are the one who made me believe I could do it this way.

On his knees, his pant legs soaked with the blood from Roy's face, Brady's hands moved swiftly between the small emergency kit he'd taken from under the seat and Roy's torn cheek. He poured disinfectant over the wound, then packed it with gauze. His fingers felt clumsy and heavy. "Come on," his whispered at his hands and at the blood. "Come on."

How fast can Cranston move in that thing?

With the bleeding stopped, Brady searched the water. Squinting toward the dock, he shouted, "Where's your boy wonder there, Williams?"

"Roy," Brady said quietly. "Roy?" He knelt and touched his fingers to the wound. The blood had begun to congeal into hard ridges. Placing his hand to his friend's throat, he felt a strong, rapid, pulse. "Come on, kid." He wanted Roy to waken, to come to and tell him how to solve his other problem. Because Brady had realized, sitting in his captain's chair in the temporary lull, that Therese was still in the house.

TWENTY-EIGHT

When Therese saw Brady step out of his boat and onto the dock, bare-chested and wearing a pair of loose, ragged blue jeans, she started crying. Brady looked ten pounds lighter; even from this distance she could see the bags under his eyes and the paleness of his skin.

Below and to her right, Therese saw a small crowd push aside the aluminum driveway gate and begin a march toward the beach. Another confrontation -- only this one didn't matter. Therese's stomach did not tighten, her finger's didn't clench at the thought of the shouting, her legs and arms didn't stiffen. During the days of waiting, she had given something up; she'd allowed something to come loose inside her. She'd learned something: strange things happened and strange forces had their place and their way, and you weren't always perceptive enough or fortunate enough to understand your place among them. Maybe.

The crowd had passed beneath the window. At the head of the tight-gathered throng, Benton Williams was yelling at Brady. "Mr. Stuart! Mr. Stuart!" An angry sound as far as Benton was concerned, but it came to Therese's ears like music. Brady was alive.

Therese pushed away from the window sill and rushed

down the stairs. If she hurried, she could stop an unnecessary showdown.

She heard the commotion as soon as she stepped off the back porch and onto the lawn -- heard the whaler roar away from the dock, heard Brady shouting at Roy and Benton and Earle Hyatt shouting at Brady. And when she broke through the cedar fence-hedge, she saw why. Brady was out in the whaler, sixty yards or so off the end of the dock. And he had Naitaka roped to the boat. The creature was low in the water, its bony snake's head and long, thick neck black and gleaming in the moonlight. The braided nylon ropes lay slack across the water between the creature and the whaler.

Was this for her benefit?

Therese stepped back into the house. In its case in the cutlery drawer, she found the long, bone-handled knife she used to cut bread on special occasions. She slipped it into the pocket of her jeans.

Benton stood on the end of the dock with Earle Hyatt, Walter Striper, Ransom and Billy Ostipin. At the beach end of the dock, Patricia Lang stood with her hands folded over her mouth. Behind Therese, approaching from the cedar-chip beach-path, another, smaller crowd approached.

Therese put an arm around Patricia's shoulders.

Patricia pointed out to the boat. Brady's head was

visible above the gunwale. "Roy's with him," she said. "He's hurt."

"He'll be all right," Therese told her.

At the end of the dock, Benton Williams was yelling across the water at Brady. "If you'll come in here, we can settle this."

And Brady shouted back, "But you want a fight, Benton. That's why you're here -- you're not interested in letting things run a natural course."

As Therese headed down the dock toward Benton and the others, a shout went up from the crowd gathered on the beach. Therese turned to see the big orange Voyageur Expedition boat come out from behind the trees. A tall young man with curly blonde hair sat behind the wheel. Behind him, Bar Cranston, dressed in a black diving suit, stood at a long panel of electronic controls. His top lip was curled. Suddenly, he banged a fist down on the panel.

"I came back to hand Naitaka over," Brady shouted.

"And?" said Cranston. He leaned toward the blonde man at the wheel and whispered. A moment later the motor in the Expedition boat went quiet. Long shards of silver flashed on the black water between the boats. Naitaka sank into the lake, then tread upward, sending thick circles of water toward the Brady and Bar Cranston and the dock. The neck wound glistened; some of the sick gel wore

into the water.

"But Benton here as much as said I didn't have the right to give it over -- apparently you've come to take it." Brady leaned over the edge of the boat and scanned the water. "Where's your little spaceship?"

Bar Cranston shook his head. "It's here."

Patricia Lang stepped onto the dock. "He's lying," she called. "They can't get it going -- it's hidden in the water by Steen's."

"Is that true, Cranston?" Brady was smiling.

Bar Cranston didn't answer the question. "You came to hand it over."

"That's right," Brady nodded.

"Why?"

"Well, I figure that's my business. But I won't do it unless you do me a favour."

"Which is?"

"Get my wife from the house."

Standing on the dock, Therese shook her head. (Just like Brady. He had to rescue the school marm before the end of the picture.)

Therese stepped out from behind Benton and Earle Hyatt. "Brady."

Bar Cranston looked at Therese, then back to Brady. "You want me to bring her over there?"

Brady nodded.

"No!" Therese shouted. She looked back down the dock to Patricia Lang. "You don't know what he'll try, Brady."

"I can't come in there," Brady told her.

Therese said, "I know," and then stopped. "I'll swim."

The beach crowd muttered. Earle Hyatt whispered something to Walter Striper.

The group on the end of the dock stepped back to give Therese room. The knife was covered from view by the pocket of Therese's jeans and by the bottom of her white sweatshirt, so she could not remove either to make the swim easier. She slipped down to a sitting position on the boards and removed her stockings and shoes. Then she lowered herself into the water.

Therese had not been in the lake for fifty years; for fifty years she had refused to confront her biggest fear. But now she was ready, and she knew Brady was ready. She had known him long enough, and she knew him well enough, to know that his stated intention to release the creature to Cranston was sincere. She did not know why he wanted to do it, nor did she believe he was right to do it, but she did know that he meant what he said. And that told her something else about Brady: it told her that he was willing, in some way, to release his obsessions and to

abandon his need for control.

She had forgotten the sensation of water on the face and in the mouth. She had forgotten the heaviness that filled the limbs when you swam in clothes. It came back to her now. Water held every curve and crease of your body. Water cells pressed against skin cells. Water made the load lighter. This water was like a returning.

Safely away from the dock, Therese peeled the sweatshirt from her body and let it sink into the water. Lighter now, her muscles remembered the sense of strength and agility the water gave. She moved smoothly and easily toward the boat. Behind her, the crowd was silent.

Twenty yards from the boat, Therese reached the rope that held Naitaka. But instead of passing beneath it or using it as a guide to the boat, she turned toward the creature. "Therese!" shouted Walter Striper. (That's right, you were there, you saw what happened.) From the dock, the creature had looked black and slick, but each of its colours came into focus as Therese swam nearer. Two shades of green -- one olive, one the black-green shade of algae between the lake-stones. An off-white gel coated the skin. The eyes were as black and as a burned candle-wick.

Therese could feel her skin crawling where the creature had touched her fifty years ago -- her back, just above the buttock, her gutted breast, her fingers and

wrists. She could hear the shuffle of feet on the dock as the crowd moved from the beach for a closer look. And she heard Brady behind her. He was whispering, "Just touch it, Therese. Just touch it."

Only Naitaka's head was above the water. But Therese didn't need to see the body to know its shape.

The rope lay slack and twisted on top of the water. With her left and, Therese submerged it and made the kind of fold you'd use to stop the flow of water in a garden hose. Without taking her eyes from the creature, she treaded briskly with her legs and pulled the knife from its case with her right hand. Then she cut the rope and let it go. For several moments, neither Naitaka nor Therese moved. Finally, slowly, Therese worked the knife beneath the water until the tip nudged Naitaka's thick skin. She made a long, scarring cut in the creature's heavy skin. She had touched that skin; she knew its hardness, and she knew the wound would be only cosmetic. Therese dropped the knife and swam cautiously back to the boat.

When Brady reached down to help her in, Naitaka still had not moved.

"I cut it loose," Therese whispered.

Brady nodded. He stepped to the captain's chair and started the engine, then drove them -- Therese and himself and Roy and Eugene Silverheels -- to the middle of the

lake. Naitaka followed for a few minutes, the severed rope trailing in the water behind its neck, the rope-wound bright in the flesh of its neck, but disappeared when Bar Cranston's boat approached from behind.

Brady turned to Therese, who sat in the rear chair, staring at the dark water. "Let them wait," he said.

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