

Chapter 5

On their way to downstream to Quechec, Ray and Bacon plunged paddles in fast synchrony. Moss-bearded old-growth forests passed in a blur, and then selectively logged forest where sapling pines, maples and oaks vied for light with taller trees and broader branch tiers. Not much sun filtered through the gray afternoon. The rain was mere mist, whose fingers reached into and around the trees suggesting a Tennysonian primeval world.

The first sign of civilization appeared after a few hours. Ray had churned the one lane bridge in his truck a few days earlier. They beached the canoe and jogged the road into Quechec, or rather, tried to keep up with the puppy jerking Ray around on the leash that Ray had improvised from tent line. Ray changed from one side of the road to another, as the puppy manically sniffed plants, pebbles, and animal tracks.

Bacon panted, "Straighten that dog out and make her run right. She runs like she's cross-eyed. Give her a name. That's how you train them." They passed the wood-carved sign **Indian Reserve Incorporated in 1683 Historic Trading Post** that the dog naturally had to piss by to leave her mark.

"Molly, come," Ray shouted. It was the first name that came to his mind. He had an Aunt Molly who was cross-eyed.

Canadians who logged the opposite side of the river, the Alwyn side the International Paper side, the Great Northern side, crossed the river into Quechec at the end of the day to buy groceries, ammo, guns, furs and Rosie's Truck Stop famous Muskrat Stew. In season, Rosie served bear, moose and deer stew and steaks. She would boil up the occasional squirrel soup, if you really begged her, but nobody did.

In the police station, the officer leaned on his elbows on an uncluttered desk, reading a paperback book entitled *Love in the Tropics*. He was so engrossed that Bacon had to clear his throat several times before he closed the book and looked up. Ray and Bacon had known Officer Eugene Wiley practically all their lives. Before the County built the integrated high school for Cascade Country, they went to the Nunotuck elementary and junior high school. They knew each other the way only life long friends do. Ray didn't just see the badge and the paunch Eugene cultivated, he saw the kid who played a sly game of poker, who could never be found in hide and seek, who pulled all-nighters to get his straight A's, after days of not cracking a book. After high school, Eugene had gone on to Police Academy. He had always planned to come back to the Res as a cop. He wanted justice done. He had seen enough of it not done, of cases lost by the Nunotucks, self-defeatist Nunotuck attitudes, and racial tensions. He had been a cop for ten years now, and people on both sides of the river trusted him – no small feat, considering all the conflicts of interest that continually arose. Relations between the two sides of the River had become easier. Wiley was fair to Nunotuck, and non-Nunotuck alike. He was not corruptible. He followed the law, explaining his decisions so everyone could understand. He was that unusual type – good cop, popular even.

Now, he took in their panting, slightly glazed, damp looks, and said, "Hey guys. Have a sit. Got something for me?"

Bacon, too worn out for civilities, gasped, "Gene, there's a body stuck in the whirlpool at the Falls."

"No shit." Wiley's heavy-set body, even his long ponytail slumped, while one eyebrow skidded up, the other down. In high school, Ray had often tried to mimic this sign of distress, without success. Wiley pondered in silence, then his eyebrows evened out, as he concluded an internal dialogue. "I'll round up volunteers. You coming?" Ray and Bacon both

nodded. "Last time it took a dozen men." Wiley shoved his book in a drawer. "This is a part of my job I don't like." He grabbed the phone, and punched a number. "Dale," he said into the receiver. "We have a problem." He sounded suddenly tired. "Somebody's stuck in the whirlpool." He listened, wiping his forehead, then continued, "Yep, my truck's all loaded. Call your people. I'll meet you there." He hung up and dialed another number. "Honey, I can't make dinner....Tell them I have an emergency....I'm sorry you feel that way." With a groan, he hauled himself up from his seat and retrieved a file from the cabinet in the corner of the office. "Start from the beginning," he sighed and began filling out a form, confiding, "My partner's at the gun convention in Portland. I'll have to call Majestic Bay. The River is half their jurisdiction, half ours. They're probably all at the gun convention, but they'll dig up some fuck to send. Just to say they helped out." He scratched his head, another tic he had when considering a situation. "We'll pick Bernard up on the way. What's with the dog?"

Molly had been sitting in Ray's lap, but feeling dampness start to spread, Ray had spilled her onto the floor and she had dripped over to a scraggly potted plant by the window and pissed by the pot.

Bacon said. "Can we leave her here?"

"Felony?" Wiley asked.

"Make it a misdemeanor. She's just a puppy. Make it something like trespassing," Bacon said, trying unsuccessfully to twitch his own eyebrows. Bacon considered teasing a social grace. It lightened a situation and put people at ease.

"They like a bed," Wiley said. He let Molly into a cell. She hopped on the cot, turned a couple of times, and flopped down contentedly, falling into such an instant sleep that she did not see them leave. Ray thought she would be OK alone

for a while. She might be used to it. After all, she was alone at the meadow where they had found her.

Wiley punched open the outside door, held it for them as they walked out, and stared aggressively at Bacon. He used to be easy-going and they all used to be able to joke around, but the job had changed Wiley, not essentially, but to the point where sometimes he felt he had to act the cop. People would not respect him if he did not act the part. Truth be told, the job had put a certain distance between him and other people. He was not just one of the guys. It was an honor, a responsibility, and sometimes a drag.

His vehicle was a battered small bed truck. The detachable red beacon on the dash seemed to be as far as official went on the exterior. Wiley stuck it in on the roof as he drove. The dashboard had what looked like pretty up-to-date communications equipment. Radio, walkie-talkie, radar, mike, other bells and whistles Ray couldn't identify. But the rest of the interior was as dismal as the exterior. The seat upholstery looked like skin flaking. They were three big men crammed into the front seat. Springs poked through. One rested on Ray's tailbone. Ray peered through the back window. In the truck bed was an assortment of tools piled together like a garage sale: lengths of chain, rope, chain saw, winch, different size metal hooks, a scythe, leaf blower, shovels, pick axes. As they drove down Quechec's main street, rutted like corrugated cardboard, Ray felt a little sick to his stomach. It was not the bouncing, but the thought of the job that lay ahead.

Chapter 6

The quickest way by truck to the Falls was to cross the river over the bridge where Ray and Bacon had beached their canoe, leave the one lane road into Canada and take a maze of lumber roads up to where a path jutted off to the River. Clear-cut tracts, miles on end, juxtaposed new growth, and older growth that the timber companies were saving for clear cutting. They passed some old growth forest the lumber companies were saving for the next cut. Clear-cut tracts stretched like wastelands for miles. The new growth ones, where nature struggled to regain a balance, were the worst, with their straggly poplars and birch, their weedy goldenrod and alder bogs. Katahdin and International Paper divided most of Cascade County. They coated the lumber road surfaces with calcium to keep the dust from the dirt roads from swirling for miles around when logging trucks careened from the cutting areas. Ray watched the hood of Wiley's truck cloy with the sticky, milky powder. "Damn logger," Wiley swore, as a truck roared toward them without slowing down, forcing Wiley into the woods. There were no road banks.

"He'd just as soon mow you down," Ray said. "Can't you book him for driving to endanger?"

"Yeah, well, first you're the windshield, then you're the fly." Wiley shrugged it off. "Technically we're on a private road. This tract I recall is Katahdin. Alwyn Mills has a stake in Katahdin. All these companies are a mish mash. Toilet paper, newspaper, magazines, wallpaper. The lawyers have you coming and going. You could have a tree owned by Great Northern going to a Wausau paper mill to be processed. Land ownership, paper production, it's all mixed up. The buck doesn't stop anywhere."

"Not in my pocket." Bacon said.

"Say that truck killed us," Ray persisted.

"It didn't," Wiley said, gunning the truck engine to get the undercarriage over rocks and trees and back onto the road.

"Don't go looking for trouble, you mean," Bacon said.

"You don't have to." Eugene ran the wipers to clear the mixture of sludge and calcium off the windshield. "If it wants you, it will find you."

"That's for goddamn sure," Ray said. "Look at Oedipus."

"Look at that fucked canoeist we're on our way to rescue."

"You don't rescue a dead man. You retrieve the remains."

Eugene maneuvered left onto another logging road, narrowly missing being smashed by another smoke spitting, dust churning monster rig with half an acre of trees chained to it.

"Must be rush hour," Ray said.

"Remember how we used to swim beneath the Falls?" Bacon's voice was suddenly wistful.

"Yeah," Wiley responded enthusiastically, "Dive from the rock spur up top!"

"Even some girls dove," Bacon reminisced. "Thirty foot free fall. We'd have some brew, some weed maybe, the day would be hot. We'd pick blueberries, bring sandwiches, chips, somebody's mom would send a pie. We had fir switches to brush away the bugs. We would lie on the cedar needles at the edge of the falls until we got so hot and itchy we had to go in. We knew the water would fuckin freeze our balls. That period of anticipation had to build up. A little fear, a little bravado, showing off, wanting the thrill, the danger, freedom...god those were the days."

Wiley said. "Hell, seems like since I'd been in diapers, I'd been bugging my mom, to let me dive. She kept saying, 'When you're twelve.'"

"That was the general rule." Bacon shifted in his seat, trying to get comfortable.

"Before the whirlpool," Ray finished for him. "We had it good for a long time. As I got older, I still had the urge to dive. Hell, old guys were doing it. One day about fifteen years ago, I was there. There was a bunch of people, all ages, girls, guys. Bobby did a perfect jackknife, straight in without a splash. He didn't come up. We couldn't figure it. We raced down the footpath and waded out. It was a tiny pinwheel whirlpool. About a foot in diameter. You could see the edges. Believe you me; we kept away from the edges. We saw Bobby. He was spinning round and round, on the bottom. Looked like he was reaching up to us, waving. Must have been twenty feet down."

"Good kid, Bobby. "

"Bad luck."

A moose appeared ahead of them, ambling down the middle of the road. It did not change course as they closed in on it. Wiley clocked it at thirty miles per hour. "Not a bad speed for a jog," he said.

"A moose has a brain the size of a peanut." Ray shifted in his seat, relieving only slightly the irritation of a seat coil grating his spine.

"He's got what he needs," Bacon said. "Moose are not endangered."

Wiley pounded the steering wheel with a fist. The horn accidentally went off. "Every year the river changes, the

whirlpool changes and people hope it's gone. Now it's mostly teen-age guys. They think they're immortal. They think, *if I aim just right, hit the depths right, I'll come up*. Well, guess what, buddy, aim to one side, hit the rocks, break your neck, and paralyze yourself for life. We had one of those last year. Paraplegic now. Another miscalculation, you're in the whirlpool. Like a black hole. Your scream will go on forever. Two summers ago, we lost that seventeen-year-old in the whirlpool. Some say it was suicide, some say murder, jealousy over a girl. Maybe we'll never know." His eyebrows twitched. Ray judged Eugene was alternating sadness and resignation. "Anyhoo." Wiley scratched his head. He wore a heavy wool cap and thick orange gloves.

They turned onto a road chewed by lumber equipment into such ruts that Wiley had to get out and put the truck in 4-wheel drive. His truck was so old he had to do it manually. They continued to a cabin built right on the road, with no front yard. A man with a face like a stitched moccasin emerged from the house and climbed in the truck bed. "French Canadian," Eugene said. "Works for International."

Suddenly conifers rose proud and mysterious. They had crossed the boundary between logging and National Forest land. They jerked to a stop in a clearing by the road where people parked when they visited the Falls. Three pick-up trucks were parked ahead of them.

Following the path parallel to the Falls down, Wiley started to pant with the exertion of hauling his share of chain and hook. "Majestic Bay cops said they were here this morning. Chased away some bikers target shooting. This is Conservation land... pant... public land ... protected. Technically it's National Park Ranger ...pant...territory, but Rangers don't get out here often. No reason too. They stick to Bar Harbor where the tourists are. So Majestic Bay and me, we just ...pant... do what I think is right here. Course ...pant... the Park Rangers would shit all over us for stepping on their toes... pant... that's if something went wrong. If

there's ...pant... no problem, they'll take the credit. Human nature."

They had reached a meadow picnic ground. Pink, purple and white asters were trampled, as if there had recently been a crowd. You couldn't see the river from here, but you could hear the roar of the Falls. Bacon took the chain and hook from Gene, to Gene's great relief, and they started walking downhill again, Eugene still talking. He liked to chew the fat. Unofficially. "Anyhoo, this must be where the bikers were. The MB cops said they were real cooperative. The bikers said they would leave so the cops took off. No use sticking around and checking on them. I like to trust people. Most MB cops are the same. So they probably never went further down toward the river than here. Just drove off. For all I know, this canoe fellow could have been in the whirlpool the whole time, and nobody saw him. Or maybe he was just going over the edge. Who know what happened? I've got a funny feeling about this case. We need to know more."

They had reached the river. Wiley greeted the men standing by the river's edge.

"Hey," the men said. Ray knew most of them by sight. A mixed group of Nunotucks, Cascade County and Majestic Bay volunteers. There was Russ Alwyn, the reporter for the Cascade County News, known for getting into everyone's business, being obnoxious if he had to be. Reputed to be a fair and accurate reporter who never missed a story. A man who gave each side a chance. He wore rumpled checked trousers, creased white shirt and a vest. He took a picture of the group of men standing by the river saying, "I was here -- last summer -- to get that kid off the rocks and the summer before that -- I'm getting too experienced at this." He was thin and looked older than his late thirties. His sister, Stacy Alwyn, was around forty three, a high school class behind Ray. Russ was at least four or five years younger than Stacy.

Bernard spoke in his French accent, "I wonder whoo'z in zat

canoe. I haven't heard of anyone misseen."

The canoe in the whirlpool hadn't changed much since Ray had seen it last. It was still revolving in the molten lead stream. "OK guys," said Wiley. They cast a line of hooks out and tried to maneuver it into place, but it didn't catch.

"What if the body slides out?" someone said.

"Oh it's jammed in there good. If it ain't out by now, it ain't going to slide. That body will still be in the canoe when we beach it. Who's got the magnet hook? Chain please."

The water was greedy. The hook caught four times, then let go at the lip of the whirlpool. During the operation, the tossing torso slapped back and forth. It seemed caught under the prow, so they could only see the brown jacket bubbling out. The operation took about an hour, and then they had to extract the rubbery body whose feet tangled in ropes and poked through a life preserver secured to the prow. The body was huge, bloated, and layered in thick clothing. They ended up cutting the rope where it tangled with hooks and holes in the boat and pulling the body out, ropes and all. Russ recorded it all on film. Everybody agreed the body must belong to one of the old time trappers, the hard-core loaners. There was a small group of them. Terence liked to visit them and learn what he could from their ways of surviving in the wilderness.

When they got the body out, and took off the hat and wiped the heavy beard and the hair away from the face, Ray thought for sure he would have puked if he had had any lunch. The skin rippled like soggy potato chips. His hands without the gloves looked like puffed up rubber glove appendages.

"Christ," Russ said. The men started to remove the bulky clothing -- animal skins, sewed with pockets and buttons. "Christ," Russ whispered. "Stop."

It was as if everyone realized at once that the body was Michael Alwyn's. Russ sank to his knees, put his camera on the ground beside him, and laid himself gently crossways across the torso in an awkward embrace. Ray, who had just laid Michael's head on the ground, heard Russ whisper, "Pray for us now in the hour of our death. Pray for us. Michael. Nobis. Vobiscum." He stroked the cold face, tidied the hair. He touched the body carefully, as if it could feel pain.

"Watch out for zee ropes, son," Bernard said. "Ee's tangled in knots. Look at zat rope. Don't trip." Bernard made the sign of the cross. Belief in life after death was a comfort to some, but Ray considered life on Earth the final judgment, all the Heaven and Hell there need be. Michael's life would have to speak for itself now. Michael could not change things. That was what death meant.

Wiley took Russ' camera. "Canoe's dented to hell. Almost looks like a gunshot hole here." Snapping pictures at various angles, he said, "Coroner's at the gun convention. He'll do the autopsy Monday, maybe Tuesday."

Russ stood up. Tears streamed from his eyes. His glasses misted. He walked straight into Bacon, who recognized signs of shock. Bacon grasped Russ's arm and walked him around the perimeter of the scene while Wiley checked Michael's body.

Four men carried the body, the feet still tied in ropes, through the woods. They cleared out a space in the back of Wiley's truck. Russ wanted to sit with the body, so someone else drove Russ' truck back to Quechec.

As they started downhill, Ray looked out the window into the rear of the truck. He did not know why he picked that moment to do it, precisely when Russ had reached inside Michael's fur coat, fiddled with a pocket, and taken out a

folded piece of paper enclosed in a waterproof bag. Wiley must have missed that pocket, and he didn't notice anything happening in back now. His eyes were on the road. Russ put the paper into his own pocket. Ray looked at Bacon, who gestured with his thumb toward the back window. Ray was glad Bacon had seen it also. It was a guide's job not to miss a thing.

Wiley reflected, "I better contact the bikers. They might have seen something they didn't tell the cops because it didn't seem important at the time."

By the time they were back in town, the afternoon had darkened and rain was coming in cold and fast. The trucks drove to police station like a funeral procession. Wiley called for an ambulance to take the body to the morgue in Majestic Bay. One by one, the men in the rescue team gave statements, and left. Russ sat at Wiley's desk and called his family. Someone had to make the phone call everyone dreads.

Chapter 7

Wiley released the puppy from her cell. She dashed excited circles, sniffing Ray madly. "She remembers me," Ray said, reaching down to pick her up.

"She remembers your fitness bar," Bacon said, as Molly escaped from Ray and pawed at Bacon, scratching the caked mud from Bacon's jeans. "She's begging for real food."

Eugene pulled off his boots and soaked socks. "Thanks for your help, buddies." He put on dry socks and boots, punched Ray, then Bacon lightly on the arm. "You're the best. Seeing you guys is one bright light in this day."

Russ, on the phone with his family, muttered "God rest Michael's soul. God rest all our souls."

"Take it easy now," Wiley said, as Ray and Bacon started out the door. "Stay dry."

"You're a good man, Eugene," Bacon said. "Weather's supposed to clear tonight."

They started back down Quechec's only street to their canoe. Setting up a dry camp at the ginseng festival would be a challenge, and Ray liked that. As he got older, Ray wanted to guard against getting soft. He wanted to push the edges. He didn't want to take too much risk. Just enough to keep him on his toes.

Footsteps hurried to catch up with them. "Hey," Russ Alwyn called. "My family asked me -- is it -- we were hoping it's not -- too much to ask -- to invite you -- we want to hear everything from you first hand. You spotted him first." The rain slicked his brown hair flat. His eyes were red-rimmed and unfocused. He held useless misty glasses in one hand and blinked nervously.

Ray shook his head to refuse Russ' invitation. "We've told you everything we know. You're grasping at straws, Russ. Call your minister or your priest. Bacon and I would just be in the way." He slapped Russ on the back to reassure him. "We're all in shock. Go to your family Russ. They need you." Ray was not religious. He was on a spiritual path, but it was a narrow, precarious path.

Bacon said, "Michael was a brilliant guide. I enjoyed his friendship. His death is a terrible loss to me. Please tell your family how much we – as Nunotucks – will remember and honor Michael.

Russ put his glasses on, took them off again, dried them, put them on, and stumbled to his truck parked outside the police station.

"He'll be able to drive once his glasses dry," Bacon said.

It was their good luck that the clouds dissipated. The bold full moon lit their course downstream until they reached the path that led up Nunotuck Mountain. It was good luck that Molly could keep up with their fast pace uphill. It was their good fortune that they arrived at the festival before the food was all gone.

Festivities were in full swing. A couple hundred people swarmed the bald dome of Mount Nunotuck where a bonfire blazed. The flames reached up into the gathering darkness, and threw light on terrain below. In a flat field below, a spirited volley ball game was in progress. People lounged on blankets. Toddlers explored the peripheries of the meadow campground. Groups of teenagers huddled at the far reaches of the clearing. Some people played instruments, some radios, some sang. People talked. Molly took off to romp with a pack of dogs.

Ray recognized many faces. There were Terence, the elected

chief of the Nunotuck Reservation, and his wife Monique. Terence had rimless glasses that magnified inquisitive eyes. He had salt and pepper hair, and a straggly goatee. He wore a hunter green corduroy suit -- pants and a jacket with leather elbow patches and a brilliant red shirt. He dressed like a hippie Sigmund Freud. When he saw Ray, a smile lit his face and he called, "How," then cracked up at his parody of Native American language. Terence was refreshingly politically incorrect in his behavior, and some found him a little offensively theatrical, but no one accused him of acting undignified at crucial moments.

Ray thought for a minute before returning the greeting. 'Hello' would be Anglo-Saxon. 'Hi' youthful. 'How do you do' would be too formal. 'Hey' too colloquial. What was left? 'Whas'up?' 'Bonjour?' 'Que passa?' "Ray extended his hand and said, "How-dy. What's happening, Chief?"

"Hey Ray," Monique, Terence's wife called. She held him at arm's length, then embraced him. "You are a sight to behold. How come you are so dirty wet and messed up? I still love you. Glad you came!" Ray could not feel her body through all her clothes. Over a long-sleeved tee shirt, she wore a vest, over the vest a sweater that hung over a knee-length skirt that reached over loose fitting pants and socks. And hiking boots. On anyone else, the outfit might have looked dumpy, but Monique, tall and erect, had flair. Like Terence, she enjoyed the freedom of saying what she wanted, entirely confident that people would take it the right way and not be offended.

Bacon was sitting with his wife Rose, with a group of people around the bonfire. He had his arm around her. They looked like newly-weds, when Rose would permit it. They had been married sixteen years, and sometimes she liked to remind Bacon that they ought to fight a little, so they could make up later. At least that's what Bacon told Ray. Ray didn't believe it and he didn't not believe it. It was a subject on which to hold no opinions.

Hold your horses. Something truly blew Ray away. Ray was not easily blown away. He thought he'd seen it all and nothing would surprise him. Not much did. But.... Stacy Alwyn sitting at the Nunotuck Hunter Moon festival, toasting a slice of bread on a stick! She was cross-legged in jeans, and looked perfectly at ease, having a great time talking to people around her. Ray stared until she looked up and waved at him casually. As if drawn by a huge, cosmic, fateful magnet, almost reluctantly dragging his feet, yet racing to get there, he walked the distance and sat on a rock beside her. She slid her toast off the stick and began to bite and chew. Her teeth were not movie star white. Ray was truly glad of that. "Hi," he said.

"Hi," she said.

"You're here."

"I'm here."

"Why?"

She bristled. "Did it ever occur to you that although my last name is Alwyn, I do not share the politics that Alwyn Mills follows? Are you aware that for the past twenty years I have worked for a watchdog group that scrutinizes mill policies and water quality? Do you have any idea I lobby in Washington and work actively throughout the state for mill safety standards?"

"No," Ray said. "Why don't I know that?"

"Did it occur to you that Carl might insist on a façade of family loyalty? Or are you implying the group I work for is a little low budget wussie group that doesn't do anything."

"I'm not implying anything."

"Am I not welcome because my name is Alwyn? Because I'm supposedly upper crust?"

"I asked you a question. You ever going get around to answering?"

"All right. I asked Terence if I could come. He said yes. I've been doing a yearlong study on Nunotuck River water quality. So far, I've focused on the Mills. Now I wanted to know more about the Nunotuck tribe."

"Thank you," Ray said. He didn't have the heart to ask her if she knew Michael had died and that her family was gathering at this very moment. How could he ask her that? How could he not? He concluded she must not know. If she did, she wouldn't be here. He was not the right person to tell her.

A man wearing jeans, black leather vest, and a heavy cross necklace raced by, followed by Molly and a pack of dogs. Stacy yelled, "Neat, stop for a second!"

He had an earring and the name "Nietzsche" tattooed on his wrist. Stacy said, "Ray this is Neat, my intern at HUG, the environmental group I run. Neat is so thrilled. He thought he lost his puppy earlier in the day, but she just turned up. See?"

All Ray could see was HIS puppy following Neat around.

"Miltona!" Neat shouted. She came. He patted her. "She ran away at the river while I target practiced with the bikers," Neat explained. "Now she's come back. The universe provides."

Ray set him straight on that. It was not divine intervention. She had been abandoned, and he, Ray, had rescued her.

"There are no accidents," Neat said, unfazed.

"Yes, there are accidents," Ray said.

Stacy shivered, and Ray had an urge, which he repressed, to put his arms around her to warm her, comfort her, to... What the hell was he thinking? She looked so sad, suddenly.

"I got Miltona at the pound," Neat was saying. "Ray, you can keep her if you want. This is my internship semester but when I go back to school in January, I live in a dorm. No dogs allowed. You want her?"

"Yes," Ray said before Neat finished asking.

"She's yours." They shook hands. Molly dashed by, chasing another dog, indifferent to the fact that her world had just changed. She wouldn't care as long as she was fed. Bacon was right. Ray would buy dog food. She might get tired of fitness bars. She certainly was taking advantage of every crumb of food dropped on the ground. Someone had put the garbage cans on a table so the dogs couldn't raid them.

Stacy had turned and was talking enthusiastically with a neighbor. She changed moods fast, and moved quickly through the crowd talking with people. Ray could feel her energy – a steady progression, like the bass player who repeats the steady, basic underlying pattern in a jazz group that holds everyone together. "So you work with Stacy," Ray said to Neat.

Neat shrugged. "My job at HUG forms, you know, a gestalt. I have a double major. English and Religion."

"Are you born again?" Ray asked.

Neat cracked up. "Once was enough. Since I started working with HUG, I've discovered that religion is consciousness. For example." he paused, to focus his thoughts. Ray sensed a lecture in the making. Neat undoubtedly would be a professor when he grew up. "Let's take the preservation of

ecosphere. The more the mountains are opened up to hikers, bikers and tourists, the more they erode. People destroy them. Not on purpose. What you might call little things like tracking dandelion seeds from the lower regions up to alpine heights. It's hard enough to educate people not to litter with beer cans and Styrofoam, let alone persuading them to wipe the soles of their boots as they cross from one ecosphere to another. People have tracked dandelions all the way up into the notches." He shuddered, and the cross around his neck clanked against its chain link. Molly ran by chasing another dog. "There goes your dog," said Neat, running after her, calling back. "You're doing a great job with her, Ray!"

The Hunter Moon was low in the sky, luminous and cratered. Neat ran after Molly. Monique had donned a tweed coat over her sweater, over her vest, over her rumpled pants and socks. She left the refreshment table to bring a tray of cups to people sitting around the fire. The tea was ginger, hibiscus and lemon tea, sweetened with honey. Ray took a cup. The liquid steamed down his throat, pungent and warming. "I hear you and Bacon were the ones who found Michael's body," she said, in a low voice. "Bacon just told me. Stacy doesn't know yet. What a shame. He was such a sweet man." She shook her head. She went to Stacy, tapped her shoulder and drew her away from the circle. Ray sighed with relief. He wasn't going to have to be the one to tell Stacy. He saw Stacy start to shake visibly. Monique held her. Gradually Stacy relaxed into a slumped, depressed, posture, and then she lay on the ground. Monique lay beside her at some distance, in meditation, silent communion with the earth.

Ray drank tea. Someone called, "A good appetite indicates good health."

"You mean you're hungry!" someone said.

"Have some stew," Terence said. "There's plenty."

"We cooked autumn!" A general round of laughter. People

milled about, opening picnic baskets or filling plates with food from the potluck offerings on the table. Ray heaped a plate for himself. He hadn't eaten all day. He was starving. When he finished, he noticed Stacy and Monique were walking toward Terence who stood by the food table, near the fire.

An owl hooted. Everyone quieted to listen. It hooted again, an unearthly howl, almost a coyote, coy dog or wolf. But definitely owl. Terence was the owl. He knew many bird and animal calls. This was his call to attention.

"Before the ginseng festival, I have an announcement. One of our own has passed over to the other side." The air had turned snapping cold. The crowd turned even quieter. Ray heard branches creak in the woods, night animals skitter.

"We Nunotucks do not view death as an ending. It is a process. Life goes on, and a person lives on in our memories. Because we are human, we are sad. Because we want to live life to the fullest, we need to celebrate that sadness. Most of you knew Michael Alwyn. He had his camp on our side of the river. He was a man of personal vision, knowledge and courage. I hunted with him, trapped with him, tracked with him, and learned from him. I loved him as a son. I will miss him. This poem is for him and for you."

*Michael, you gave us.
riches from your heart. They
live on and delight us.
Precious were our hours with you.*

*Michael, life is precious, anybody knows
who's struggled to plant to tend, let grow
trees or kids that don't understand
the work you put into them –*

*Michael, you knew we treasured you.
We never wanted you to go*

*away from us. We wanted you to grow.
The final mystery is life. We loved you, and so
I wrote this poem to let you know.*

He sat down. A cold wind whipped over the mountain, over the crowd.

Stacy stood up. "I'm grateful you and Michael knew each other, Terence." She stopped to wipe her eyes, and then continued. "I have just found out about my brother's drowning. I am not prepared to speak to you. I am not prepared to let him go. In many ways, he will never leave me. He deserves to be remembered here among you, where he spent so much time and gave so much of his attention and affection. I am Stacy Alwyn, his younger sister. I can see why he loved the Nunotuck ways and people. Michael kept journals. He wrote them to give away. He gave me many. He also gave many to Terence. His death has taken me by complete surprise. Terence and I agreed that Michael would be pleased if some segments of a journal he gave Terence were read here for you. When Michael was done with one journal, he'd give it to someone, or leave it somewhere to be found. He said it was like writing a note in a bottle, casting it into the sea and hoping it would find a good reader. Tonight, let him live in you a while."

She picked up a birch-bark-bound journal and read

Nature Journal by Michael Alwyn

Mink tracks on the riverbank, a Canadian goose waddling back and forth over the mink tracks. Muskrat going downstream, and further into the woods. A weasel dragging a mouse, which it stuffed under a bush to save for winter. Extensive gnawing on the willows near the falls makes me suspect moose, and indeed, I find hoof marks, and acorn-shaped dropping. No animals caught in my traps last night. I saw bear dropping by the coyote trap. The bear had taken my coyote bait. I moved that trap. No coyote's going to come to a

place or a trap with bear scent. I'll set a new trap for the coyote, and I'll go after the bear. I got a bear permit this year.

Stumbled into a partridge today. I walked by and it rose out of the bush like a fan unfurling. I didn't shoot it. Their numbers are going down, and it doesn't feel right. Same goes for ruffed grouse. I view myself as a gatekeeper. I monitor woods traffic. As for the river, I've also stopped fishing trout -- too many beavers. Their dams warm the water and the trout can't make it upstream, and then they won't spawn. So I go after the beavers. It balances things out. I have about 20 trap lines out right now, and check them everyday. There are usually two or three. The furs bring upwards of \$15. There's nothing as warm and comfortable as beaver. Last year I made myself a coat in two weeks with 12 spools of thread. I prefer it to mink because I'm doing nature a service in keeping the balance. I kill about 20 beaver for every mink.

Trapped a turtle yesterday, watched it writhe in the trap. Killed it almost immediately. I hate the thought of inflicting pain. I kill only to survive. Not for power. I only want to live in harmony with nature, and I observe that the order of the natural world is anarchistic, so that is my politics. I am completely devoid of desire to succeed at anything that would bring money or prestige to me in the human social arena.

Stacy closed the notebook. She looked at the ground and said, "I miss you Michael." She looked over the silent crowd. "Thank you members of the Nunotuck Community for welcoming Michael to your side of the river. and into your hearts. You don't know me, but I hope to know you better. I am Stacy Alwyn. I am not Carl Alwyn. I do not run Alwyn Mills. I do not represent his politics. Michael respected the Nunotuck path, and although I chose a different path than his, my path is in line with his and with yours. Michael thought so. Perhaps I can help him and help you if, for his sake, you give me a chance. Thank you for celebrating his life with this ceremony." She sat down.

A young man stood up. "Last week Michael showed me how he tagged wild ginseng. We walked all day. Michael insisted there was a plant in a certain grove, and we kept searching until after dark. Michael gave me a flint, and told me to build a fire. I tried, but I couldn't. Then Michael took the flint, and made a blaze. He had shot a squirrel, and we cooked it. The next day, we found the ginseng."

A man came up and played guitar. Somebody sang "Daniel my brother," changing the name to Michael. Someone sang "Michael row your boat ashore, hallelujah!" People lit candles, and set them near the fire to make an altar. One brought flowers, another a photograph. A child laid a drawing in blues and purples, with a pink heart in the middle on it.

After some time, Terence clanged a bell and stood up to speak again. "The food is delicious. Thanks to the cooks." After a chorus of agreeing murmurs he continued. "We had a long and bountiful summer and got a very good harvest of herbs for the Herbal factory. Last month we celebrated the Harvest Moon. Now it is October, and Hunter's Moon. In fall, we gather and hunt what the earth has produced so we can last through the winter. The land where we find our food belongs to those who care for it. Only by caring for it can we be healthy." He waited for the swell of assenting voices to subside.

"Tonight we hunt ginseng. It is a tradition that ginseng is most potent when gathered right before frost under a full moon. There may be people here who don't know what a ginseng looks like. I brought one to show you." He held up a root that looked like a small man – all the limbs were there, and a head and an erect penis -- he said, "Ginseng is shaped like a man, but in old age it doesn't lose strength like a man. It keeps on getting more powerful. This root is about sixty years old, hard, and vigorous as a young man, tangy, cagey as an old man. Ginseng grows deep, but has small foliage. It

takes its power from the soil and gives it back to those who farm it right. Tonight we harvest. For every plant we take we plant a dozen seeds, or several seedlings."

The moon was headed for the center of the sky. The night wind was defined sharp west. Terence said, "Humans are hunters and scavengers. Some people hunt for game in the wilderness, some hunt for money or fame, love, nourishment for the spirit. Some seek opportunities to do good. Everyone needs to be needed. You collect the energy of the world with your breath. You must give it back, or you will die. We live by growth and change. It's what we have and let go of that changes us, the moon on these rocks, the light of the fire, the birds that wake us in the morning, the wide blue of the sky, the things we cannot hold that never leave us. Everything we do changes us. Every thought plants a seed of another thought we will reap. Every full moon ceremony changes the ones that will come after it. After this ceremony, we will never be the same."

He raised a bowl over his head. His face was shadowed into craters by the moon and the dancing flames of the fire. "Here are the bowls. Our potters have made one for each of you. Take one with you when you leave. It is empty. Plenty of room to let in the new. They will not always be filled with joy. Maybe one will be a bowl of piss. Sometimes it's better to have an empty bowl. That's one of the ironies of life. But tonight let's celebrate the abundance in our lives. Let's accept the beauty of this night -- one of the first without rain! Let's take in the pleasure of being together. And I invite each of you to look within yourself and acknowledge the hunter, the seeker within. A moment of silence, please."

The flames of the fire flared toward the star-studded sky. Ray craned his neck to look up. He'd never been good at identifying the known constellations. He preferred to make his own patterns. Knife shapes. Tools. Tonight there was a hacksaw. A ball peen hammer. Slowly he brought his gaze down to the horizon, the luminous band of starless sky,

juncture of heaven and earth. Then to the people sitting around the fire. If patterns of nature repeated themselves, each person was a star, traveling a course. Maybe Michael had been a meteor, a rogue star. He had shot across time blazing his unique and unusual truth. Meteors left a lasting impression because their trajectories were brief.

Monique said, "Let's close with a circle. Hold hands and we'll pass a hand squeeze around."

It was done. Terence sat down beside Ray and Bacon. "We've lost most of the old rituals. Many of us here aren't full-blooded Nunotuck anyway. Maybe it's lucky, because this way we always have to recreate ourselves, and stay relevant."

"It was good," Monique said. She announced in a loud voice, "Refreshments are on the table. The yellow keg has ginseng, fo-ti, ma huang, ginger, feverfew, sarsaparilla and astragalus. The red keg has the same, with rum."

Neat came and sat on a rock beside Ray. "I've got to tell you something. I can't get it off my mind, I was right there where Michael died. I mean, I was with the motorcycle gang. The poor guy may have floated right by us. If I had gone down to the river, been observant, I maybe would have had a chance to save his life."

"You can't see the Falls from the meadow. You can't see the top of the falls unless you go through the woods, so you couldn't have persuaded him to stop."

"No, but I could have looked around. A couple of the guys did. I guess the timing wasn't right. I should stop thinking about it. Idle thoughts send you to Purgatory, and that would drive me crazy. You know the punishment for idleness Milton describes in *The Purgatorio*?"

"Not off hand," Ray said.

"I have a photographic memory," Neat said. "Dante describes the indolent chained to boulders because they delayed – even though they only delayed the good sighs till the last. Carpe diem, that's my motto. You never know when you're going to die. Look at Michael. I bet he didn't know he was going to die when he set off in his canoe." Neat toyed with a grilling stick someone had left.

Monique was talking about guns. "Political power grows from the barrel of a gun. There's a great misuse of guns in this country. Martin Luther King, the Kennedy's – these assassinations have changed history."

"Any death changes history," Stacy said in a low voice.

Terence said, "Only gangsters think power is worth killing for."

"Some people kill because they respect life," Neat said darkly. "Like what would you do if someone killed your child?"

"Surely you're not defending that, Neat?" Stacy peered into Neat's face, which was a little flushed from the punch. "Can you go get me some of that divine banana cream pie?" Stacy held her hands toward the fire. "He's young," she said to Ray as Neat headed toward the food table. "A little over the top, but a good fundraiser. People donate because he's so earnest."

Conga drumming started at the other side of the fire. Stacy leaned toward Ray to make herself heard. The noise around them made their conversation seem intimate. He listened to the insistent beat, primal and thrilling. "Fundraising is important at HUG," Stacy shouted. "I spend most of my time on the phone."

"Don't ask me for money," Ray said, leaning toward her. "I don't have a lot."

"Can I put you on our mailing list?" Stacy said, not missing a beat.

"Sure, why not." Ray smiled into Stacy's smile. "I mean, I'm interested," he said.

"Wonderful," she said. When she smiled, her eyes crinkled. Her profile in the firelight reminded Ray of the old family daguerreotypes his mother had on the wall by her bed. Stacy's eyelashes fluttered like moths when she blinked. Her eyebrows were a little bushy, unevenly arched, giving her face an unprepared look at odds with her competent personality. She seemed young, yet not childish. She had an uncompromising quality -- almost like an adolescence that most people lost as they grew up. Ray thought it gave her a vigor age would only enrich.

Ray wondered what she thought of him. She was from the premier family of the county and she probably thought he was just a blue-collar guy.

A woman came up to Stacy and said, "You're doing good work at HUG."

"Thank you. Are you on our mailing list?" Stacy handed her a card. They talked about the effect of industrial bleach on water. Stacy used chemical terms and numbers.

When the woman left, Stacy's eyes moved around the fireside circle of faces as if she was memorizing each one. "I understand why Michael felt at home here." Unexpectedly, her hand closed on his. Her touch felt cool, sophisticated, and somehow translucent as if their hands were dissolving. "You're going to laugh," she said. "I always had a thing for you in high school."

He was a little sorry she said it. Because it meant, ok, she thinks she has more class than me, so she has to give the opening. "I'm flattered," he said. The words of Sage's

prophecy came to him. *Trouble's brewing in this County. Make sure you're on the right side.* That probably meant he should stay away from the Alwyns.

"I heard you got married," she said.

"For seven years. It ended eight years ago. I have a fourteen year old daughter." What inspired him to ask, smoothly, using the line that usually came to him when he wanted to pick up a woman, "Are you seeing anybody?"

She laughed and said, "I'm married to my work."

"I don't know what makes personal relationships work," Ray admitted, horrified that he was confiding in her. He did his best to smile at her, as if this were a normal conversation for him. "So far, I think love is a combination of curiosity and lust," he finished, thinking, *that's bound to turn her off.*

"That sounds right. Add friendship." She smiled. She took her hand away and brushed her hair back from her face. The moon left hollows beneath her eyes and cheekbones. She looked pale, and classically beautiful, if a bit bony.

"I'm off to hunt ginseng." Ray stood up. He surprised himself by leaned down to kiss one of her sculpted cheekbones, and lingering there a little. "I'm really sorry about your brother."

"Thank you." She stood up and draped her arms around him. He put his around her and tightened the pressure a notch. Even through her winter coat, she felt thin, but vibrant, as if she didn't waste a calorie storing body fat. "Be safe tonight," she said. "Things happen in the dark. Be careful. Come back."

Chapter 8

Ten men followed a deer trail out of the clearing. Ten flashlights flashed like oversize fireflies. Molly sniffed along. It wasn't long before Terence signaled a gash in a tree trunk. "Michael's mark," he said.

He began to dig around the nondescript leaves and lever the root, as carefully as a midwife might coach a baby from the womb. When it was out, dirt clung to a root the shape of a long gnarled tooth. Terence wrapped it carefully in leaves, "to keep it moist. This root is ten years old. It's grown well this year. See the part between the stalk and the main root? That shows the growth span. Ginseng needs twenty to forty inches of rain in a growing season. Each winter leaves a scar on the neck of the age root. We found an eighteen-inch plant once. It was a hundred years old." He cradled the harvested root as proudly as if he were a new father. Gingerly he tucked it into his knapsack.

Removing small plants with roots a half an inch long from another pocket of the knapsack, he handed them one by one to people in the group. He gave each person a trowel. "Dig a twelve inch deep hole in a place that will be well shaded and drained, so it gets rain, but the extra water runs away. Get all the rocks out. Look under trees for rich, loamy soil. Watch me do one." He demonstrated, saying, "It takes twenty years for a ginseng to grow to the size of a man's hand. That's as long as it takes a child to become an adult. It's ironic. For years, we just puttered along doing what we loved to do, walk in the woods, and raise plants. We had a lot of wild ginseng, and we used it as a tonic and a medicine."

He covered the seedling with a light layer of mulch and stood up, brushing the dirt from his hands. While the others planted, he supervised and talked. He was telling a story from a long time ago. "We were going along following the traditions. Then we noticed how expensive ginseng was in

stores. We started thinking. The light bulbs went on. Every time we wild harvested, we planted seeds or we planted seedlings of new plants we had started from seed. We traveled around the world and researched and collected the finest ginseng cultivars. We went from planting uniquely in the wild, to starting the ginseng field. We built the herbal Factory and Greenhouses near Quechec. We ran social programs for our community. We sent kids to college. We needed an educated workforce so we could give back whatever the earth gave us.”

From somewhere down the slope came an owl call that sounded like half dog-bark, half rooster. Then a chorus of high lean coyote barks, followed by their screechy overtones. Terence led the way around the top of the mountain and down a gulch. Each ginseng plant was mapped. At the bottom of the gulch, Terence dug out a fifteen inch root while the rest of the men searched out propitious locations and planted seedlings. Carrying a clipboard, each time they stopped, Terence meticulously diagrammed where each man was planting.

Meanwhile, he continued his story as if he had not stopped. Terence was passing on history, an oral tradition. Ray paid close attention. This lore would be repeated as long as there were Nunotucks. “We began distributing ginseng root, ginseng tea, and ginseng tablets to area health food stores. We wanted to do things right, so we had chemical assays done, and knew how much active ingredient was in our product – unlike some of those fly by night herbal companies riding the new age wave. God knows what’s in their products. Some say they put too much lead. Because we do things in an orderly and scientific way, suddenly, we’re hip. I won’t say we’re rich. But, good lord, we’re a stock company, and our stocks have doubled and split. We’ve met the Avon Lady, and she’s one of us! Ha ha. Avon wouldn’t know us from a hole in the ground. Now we’re starting other herbs. Ginseng is our gold, but we have Echinacea, golden seal, valerian, feverfew, clover, dandelion, peppermint – and

ideas. We make creams and teas. We are busy from morning to midnight. Do you know our reservation has no unemployment? People come here for jobs, but we have to be careful who to let in. I meditate about how to do things right. Hey, dig in there. fellows, meditate on how to plant your plant so it feels at home."

They circled the mountain dome, and descended the south side of the mountain for three more sites. Terence proposed a rest. A pale halo around the moon extended to all of heaven and earth. The dew brought the scent of the underworld -- mold and rot, the rich equalizer of earthly qualities. Humus, mud, bog, peat moss, clay, dust. Ray cradled Molly. She snuggled into his chest as his daughter Cindy had, fourteen years ago. He had forgotten the joy of pure infant cuddling but rocking Molly brought it back. Ray experienced a yearning in his heart that he couldn't explain. Was it for connections missed? He had never cuddled with Sheila without the ulterior motive of sex -- the more steamy the better. He had never had sex with her without expecting to admire their combined ability to generate sweat and sublime orgasms. But had they ever loved each other? Was the ache in his heart as Molly nestled trustingly into him wistfulness for a future of a healthy love? He was almost forty-four. Was he striving toward love slowly, stubbornly and certainly blindly? Was he getting anywhere? He was approaching the age when it was time to take stock of his life.

Terence kicked a pebble and it skittered into the woods. Ray's hearing was so sharpened that he actually heard the pebble land, not on moss or in ferns, but a soft slide to stop on pine needles. Terence got up and walked over to sit on the rock next to Rays. The other men sat on a long flat boulder a little ways downhill.

Terence adjusted his hat -- some skins Monique had sewn together -- and wiped the soles of his shoes. "Guys," he called, "clean the soles of your shoes. We don't want to mix up ecospheres."

"God forbid," somebody joked

"Why are there so few men in heaven," Someone asked?

"They only get in by a close shave."

They bantered. "My computer's not working, he said disconsolately," one of the techies said.

"I'm afraid I can't get over my emotions about Michael," Terence said, in a low voice to Ray. "As I said, he was like a son to me. Eleanor sent him over to the Res from often when he was little. I taught him how to hunt, and survive in the woods. Eleanor. I was glad to have him. Monique and I never had children. We tried, but it didn't happen. We were surrogate parents to a lot of the young people on the Res."

Ray said, "You said he had survival skills. Why did he go over the Falls? That river was crazy. No one in his right mind would do the falls. I heard he did it in better weather, but believe me, if you'd been there that day, you'd know what I mean."

Terence didn't answer directly. "I've known Eleanor and Carl all my life," he said. "Here's something that'll surprise you. Eleanor and I dated for a while. When we were teenagers." He paused and fiddled with a zipper on his jacket, an uncharacteristically frivolous gesture. "She chose Carl over me. If she had chosen me, everything would be different."

"No use to think about it." Ray spoke from experience.

Terence closed the jacket zipper. You didn't hear what I said about Eleanor's choosing Carl," he said. "What did I just tell you?"

"I forget," Ray said. He didn't. But he would never tell anyone.

Terence stared at the ground and Ray stared up at the moon poised in the sky like the blank face of a clock. There was such a thing as time – but how to measure it in a moment of such surprise? Lucky he had his wristwatch. It was 3:00 am.

Terence said, “I worry about Eleanor. Michael used to give me news of her. When he was fourteen he wanted to work at the Herbal Factory. He swept floors, planted a little, watered. I never pried, but he’d come out with complaints about his family, his feelings of being different from every body else. I thought they were only, you know, the usual adolescent conflicts. I counseled Michael to be a source of strength for his family and people around him, not to be so critical.”

Terence straightened his shoulders. “I didn’t want to interfere. I knew there were things we wanted to tell me, but I held him at bay, for his family’s sake. Now I think I was better to the Alwyns than I was to Michael. I should have let him express his deepest feelings. I wonder if he ever expressed them to anyone. I wonder if the journals were his way of trying to communicate.

“I’m sure you helped him,” Ray said. “I’m not trying to make you feel better. You have a healing effect on people because you genuinely care about them. During and after my divorce, I sure bent your ear more than once.”

“No problem,” Terence said. “I’m the Chief. Who else you gonna call? I knew you were doing the right thing. I knew you’d be fine. Guess I shouldn’t worry about Eleanor. I’ve done the best I can for her with Michael.”

Molly sniffed in the bushes. Ray thought of all the animals that could be out there. The dog reappeared periodically, lowering her head and sniffing, pushing her snout into the ground. Then she came back with a deer mouse, the feet hanging like twigs from her mouth. She spit it out at Ray’s feet, a gift.

"Hey Chief," someone called. The people in the group were stirring. "We gonna move along or what?"

"Sure," Terence said. They stood up, stretched and started back up the mountain. During the walk, Terence talked business. He said he was glad this group of men had come along, because he wanted an open business community. The more people that got involved, the better. The Herbal Factory had faced some crises this year. A few competitor ginseng products had appeared. "Herbs aren't under FDA control. They slip through the cracks. No one has to divulge whether they're being made in a clean facility like ours, or somebody's rat cellar."

Although the night was slow and spacious, the talk about ginseng made Ray uneasy. The world of business was encroaching on the slow-growing world of the root. Nature was being invaded by people of obscure intent, and, sometimes just as bad, the do-gooders, who might say they loved nature but who did not participate in its vast processes.

Chapter 9

Stacy's back was stiff from the hard ground. Molly and some other dogs collapsed in a heap by the ashes of the fire pit. Ray, like the others, huddled in his sleeping bag. She had heard him come back late last night. He had spread out his bag next to her -- a coincidence surely. How could he have recognized her shape in the dark? She had been glad. His presence comforted her. She had had trouble sleeping until then. When Ray lay down and sank into deep rhythmic breathing, she felt as if they were on the ocean together, rocking.

She couldn't have slept more than a half hour before a small flashlight beam shone in her eyes. She woke with a jerk, terror in her throat ready to erupt into a scream. "Hush," Russ said, covering her mouth with his gloved hand. He put the other arm around her, pulling her sleeping bag over her shoulders. "You've got to come with me. It's urgent Stacy. It's fucking terrible."

"I know, Russ." They were whispering. Stacy climbed out of her sleeping bag. She and Russ tiptoed around the prone shapes near the fire pit until they came to the outer edge of the circle. They sat on rock well away from everyone. Stacy put her arms around Russ. They held each other for a long time without speaking. Finally, Stacy said, "Thank you for finding me. I found out earlier this evening about Michael's death. I couldn't come home because I didn't know the way, and everyone was busy with the full moon festival. The Nunotucks incorporated a funeral ceremony for Michael into their full moon festival. I didn't realize he was so appreciated -- beloved -- here. Tomorrow, or rather today, I'll get back to our family. How is everyone?"

Russ' eyes were glazed. He hardly seemed to be taking in what she said. "Every one is taking the news as you'd expect -- not well, but coping. I told them you were incommunicado

at a D.C. conference and would be back today.”

Thanks for sticking up for me.”

“Stacy. I found something. I hope I’m doing the right thing. Tell me what you think.”

Russ reached into his pocket and brought out a water-stained document folded into the size of a passport. “Michael had a secret pocket sewn into his coat. He told me that if anything ever happened to him, I should take what was in there. I found this, while I was on the back of Officer Wiley’s truck with Michael’s body. Here.” He handed the document and his flashlight to Stacy. Then he lay back on the rock and fell asleep.

It didn’t take Stacy long to read the document, a photocopy of a very old document handwritten in a crabbed hand. But she sat on the rock for a long time while Russ slept thinking about what the document meant, how it had been found, why Michael had it in his possession when he went downstream, and how these pieces of knowledge, if ever brought to light, would change their lives. As the faintest glimmer of light began to rise in the East over the dome of the mountain, she shook Russ awake.

He sat up immediately. “What do you think?

“First of all, I’m wondering why you brought the document to me. Have you shown it to Carl?”

Russ shook his head, no. “He has too much to deal with right now.”

“Are you sure that’s all, Russ?”

“It’s not the half of it. You know this document will stir things up in the county. We could keep it secret, like Michael did. I brought you the document because I thought between

the two of us, we have the right to keep it secret. I couldn't keep a secret like that alone. I need you in on it."

"Russ, someone else may know about the document. We know so little about Michael or his life, or whom he trusted. What if its contents become known and we're not prepared to deal with the consequences? I think we should make it public knowledge, and get groups and people involved, straighten things out in the open."

Russ sighed. "I knew you'd say that. How do we get other people involved?"

"Frankly, you made a wise decision to not involve Carl first. He'd run wild with this paper. It's all to his benefit. He'd pay here, pay there, and the deed would be executed. How about if I show it to Terence today? That gives the Nunotucks a chance to muster their forces."

Russ looked Stacy straight in the eye. "I have a feeling we're on the same side. It's not that we're against the Alwyn family," he added hastily.

Stacy looked back without blinking. "We're on Michael's side."

Russ stood up. "Keep the document and show it to Terence. I'll meet you at Carl and Eleanor's."

Stacy stood up too and put her arms around him. "You're my only brother, now. Power is passing to our generation. We're getting old."

"We have hard choices to make."

"We have to stick together, Russ."

"Knights of the Round Table. All for one and one for all."

Russ bowed, Stacy laughed, Russ laughed and started down

the path, jumping with a gaiety all for show, that he didn't feel in the least.

Stacy made her way back to her sleeping bag and couldn't help nestling in a little closer to Ray. She needed something, someone solid to help her through what she was going to have to face.

Some hours later, she awoke. She could hear water gushing from a spring downhill. She had to pee. She went into the woods, to the designated area, and followed the environmentally recommended procedures in *The Woodsman's Bible, How to Shit in the Woods*. When she came back into the clearing, Terence had made coffee. He poured her a cup from the old-fashioned percolator set on a flat stone by the fire. Well, she thought. It's now or never. She took a deep breath and took the document from her pocket. She knew she was chewing her lower lip and frowning, a nervous habit. She told herself to get a grip. Her voice was going to tremble, and before she spoke, she tried to steady it. "I hate doing this to you, Terence," she said.

He looked puzzled. "Spit it out fast. Best way."

"I have to show you a document. But first, let me explain it." She started talking fast, another thing she did when she was upset. "It's a bizarre document Russ found in Michael's pocket after he died. We can't imagine where Michael got it or why he had it with him. He never carried anything he didn't need. We can't show it to Carl when he's so upset about Michael. We were hoping you would be able to clear up the muddle. Don't get mad, Terence, Michael was gullible. Someone probably gave it to him, some cracked lunatic."

Terence held out his hand. She stopped herself and took a deep breath.

Terence began to study the document. Stacy drank her coffee and watched the fire.

As Terence read, Monique climbed out of her sleeping bag. "Good morning, Stacy." She took out a mirror and inspected her face. "Praise the lord," she said. "Every wrinkle is in place."

"With you, age is a gift," Stacy answered.

"It's easy for the young to say that," Monique said.

"I'm not that young," Stacy said. "I'm forty three."

"I like a woman who tells her age." Monique said. She put the mirror away and held up a small round jar. "Watch the difference when I put this on my face. This is one of my products. I'm in charge of the cosmetics line for the Nunotuck Herbal Factory. This one has jojoba oil, beeswax, cucumber to close the pores, rosemary to energize, chamomile to rejuvenate, sage to freshen, and aloe to soothe. Here." She handed the jar to Stacy. "Try some. Put it anywhere you like. Skin is skin. I don't hold with that body parts discrimination that says you can only use hand cream for hands, eye cream for eyes. That's separatism if you know what I mean. Like racism."

"Its consequences are probably not as bad," Stacy said, smoothing some on her hands, glad to have something to do, so that she didn't have to worry about Terence, who was studying the document she had given him, a frown on his face.

Monique said. "I come from Quebec. Mainers call us Frogs. We used to say all English-speaking people were the same, but they had different faces so you could tell them apart. Racism comes in all flavors."

Stacy handed back the jar. "This is very soothing."

Monique said, "I know since you work for HUG you're OK,

even if you are an Alwyn. Michael was OK too, of course. There's a lot of prejudice in this county. I don't hold with it. I judge each person on merit, not on class. I want you to know that."

Terence stood up and handed the document back to Stacy. He went to the woodpile, picked up an armful of logs and dumped them into the fire. The fire was shortly squelched.

"Oh oh. He's upset. Keep your blood pressure down, hon," Monique warned him.

Terence said in an even voice, "Read it out loud, Stacy."

Her voice sounded to her own ears like the voice of a stranger.

*The Nunotuck Nation in consideration of six leagues of wampum, assorted trinkets and three greatcoats, grant, to Samuel B. Alwyn land situated on both sides of the Nunotuck River, and including the entirety of Mount Nunotuck bounded and described as follows:
Beginning at the northeasterly corner of the origin of the Nunotuck River, thence more or less in a southwesterly direction along the easterly sideline of the deer trail, to a great pine standing alone in a meadow, thence southwesterly to the westerly top of Mount Nunotuck, thence to a stone bound, thence along a hickory stand to a flowering cherry tree, thence southeasterly along the mountain ridge, to the edge of the cliff, thence northeasterly along the cliff edge, thence north along a row of hemlocks, thence North to where the Nunotuck river plunges down a great waterfall, thence south, crossing the Nunotuck river, and continuing up the slope to what is known as, and including, Deer Canyon.*

*Signed Chief Nuntupaq for the Nunotuck Nation
Signed Samuel B. Alwyn*

I witness my hand and seal this second day of July 1789. The

above signed Samuel Alwyn personally appeared and acknowledged the foregoing instrument to be his free act and deed, before me, Fortunatus Fabricius

As soon as she finished, Stacy hastened to say, "I'm sure it doesn't mean anything. There must be a simple explanation. It must be bogus, a hoax. It's so old; it's probably not valid even if it is real. You must wonder why I'm arguing against a document that would benefit my family. I happen to like the status quo. It's fair. We all benefit. Why upset the apple cart? I like my Nunotuck neighbors. I am against legal battles."

Monique said, "I keep the records. I have every electricity bill, every county mandate, every boundary survey, and every census. I have never seen that deed. The only deed we are in possession of establishes present boundaries. There's nothing after that. I go to the Registry periodically to make sure they're doing things right. There is no deed dated 1789. We've paid our taxes every year, for goodness sakes. There are one hundred families, 450 pureblooded Nunotucks and 1500 give or take that have a legal right to live on the Reservation. That's about two thousand people. We may not all be full blood related Indians anymore, but we run this land according to our charter. That's never been questioned." Terence started to pace, then, without warning he doubled over, gasping.

"Sit down, Terence," Monique commanded. "Here's your inhaler." She had it ready in an instant. "That piece of paper caused your asthma attack. If you die, it's murder."

"Don't be melodramatic, Monique," Terence gasped, drawing on the inhaler. "I'm not dying."

"He's already had a heart attack," Monique told Stacy. She stood behind Terence, her hands on his shoulders. "He spent three months in the hospital. He had a triple by-pass. He's obstinate. Terence the vein that's making your heart tick right now used to be in your left leg. There's not that many spare

parts left."

Terence managed a smile. "We're not in the hardware business, Monique. And remember," he said, as the inhaler took effect, "The earth is our body. We have to care for the earth as we do for our own body."

"Don't pull that speech stuff on me," Monique said affectionately. "It doesn't impress me. My job is to take care of you Terence, and I'm going to do it in spite of yourself. Be still now."

Terence drew a deep breath. "Triple bypass, my ass. I'm like a new man. There's nothing wrong with my heart." He put his arm around Monique's shoulders and squeezed.

Watching them, Stacy felt envious. She forgot the deed for a moment. She remembered her own marriage, something she tried not to do too often because something as good as that could not happen again.

Other people were starting to roll out of their sleeping bags and approach the fire. She watched Ray stand up and stretch, watched him go into the woods, emerge, and head towards the fire. He poured a cup of coffee, and then started a fresh pot. He looked unaware of the others, unaware she was watching him. She thought; *He's used to living alone. He's following his usual routine. This is how he wakes up.*

Bacon was up also. She saw him start a batch of toast on a camping toaster, a narrow wire box whose two sides snapped together, holding six pieces of bread at a time inside.

Terence called, "Ray, Bacon, you've got to see this. Stacy, show them what you brought." His voice sounded menacing now.

Stacy thought, *Oh no. Here's where the shit hits the fan.*

She handed the deed to Ray and was about to explain where it had come from, but he took one look at it and held up his hand to stop her. "I recognize this. I was in Wiley's truck. I saw Russ take this from Michael's pocket on the way back from the Falls. I don't know how Wiley missed it."

He almost sounded suspicious of Russ. Or was it of Michael? Or Eugene. She said, "It was a secret pocket. Only Russ knew how to get at it. I'll tell you one more thing that should show you how much Russ cares. He climbed Mount Nunotuck in the dark last night after we were all asleep to bring that document to me so I could show it to Terence. That's how much he wanted the Nunotucks to see it. He doesn't think Carl should have to deal with the deed while he is grieving for Michael. Russ thinks this deed needs time and research to settle. Both sides should have equal advantage. This deed should be investigated in the cold light of day, apart from passions, fear and greed. You see, Russ and I aren't sure we will share Carl's point of view."

Stacy watched Ray read. He moved his lips like a first grader. Was he thinking about his land? As far as she could recall, his family had acquired land from the tribe about the same time the Alwyns had bought their much larger tract. 1788. Other Nunotuck Indians too had jumped on the bandwagon of private ownership. Indians thought selling land meant granting hunting rights. Their idea of land ownership was not Anglo-Saxon. It was territorial, involving stewardship and caring for the earth. She'd never been one to idealize the Indians, or anyone for that matter. However, she thought as far as land went, they had the right idea. When you sold land, you agreed to hunt on it together, and to manage it. Of course, Carl wouldn't agree.

Ray shot Stacy a sullen glance as he passed the document without comment to Bacon. Stacy couldn't look him in the eye. She knew what he was thinking. That the Alwyns had enough. They were the richest family in the County. This deed gave more. Gave them everything.

Bacon skimmed it and burst into laughter. "Bull crap. We can't disrupt the way things have been for the last couple of centuries. When we get back to town, we can check it out at the Registry. It's fake. I guarantee you that. HEY LET'S EAT. Here Miss Stacy," he said, handing her the document with just a shade of condescension. "Let's not waste time, with all due respect to your brother, who conveyed indirectly this document to us. He probably did not know what it meant. We got lawyers. Alwyn got lawyers. WE WANT EGGS! CEREAL! BREAD!" Comforting people with food was one of Bacon's better guide skills.

Terence, who had been watching them closely, relaxed. "We can't do anything about it now. When we get back home, I'll put the lawyers on the case, just in case."

Stacy was tougher skinned than she seemed. She didn't take Bacon's comments personally. He was smart, and she would look into every point he had brought up.

They prepared breakfast -- oatmeal, eggs, sausage, and toast. Stacy watched Ray eat. *He barely chews. I don't think he even tastes it. He just inhales his food, like Garfield.* She liked noticing little things about him. She tapped his shoulder and asked him, "Are you going to stop at Alwyn Mills on your way downstream?"

"We have to ask the time they're releasing water over the dam."

"If you see Carl, don't mention the deed we found on Michael's body. Russ and I want to talk with him about it first." He raised his eyebrows. She knew what he was wondering. She was wondering it herself. Why had Russ brought the deed to Terence before showing it to Carl? She had thought she was protecting Carl. Now she wasn't sure whose side was she on. "Oh, and by the way," she said, trying to sound casual, "Don't mention me. I wasn't up here,

understand?"

Ray said, "You're the second person who has sworn me to secrecy in twenty four hours. I promise you I will not say anything to Carl about you or the deed. I will offer my condolences on the death of his son. I am not loquacious or even particularly curious. I don't want to know your secrets, Stacy."

"Thank you, Ray," she said. She turned around to dry a dish. Her slim hands moved efficiently. He had lied. He was curious about Stacy. He wanted to know her secrets.

When they had finished eating and washing the dishes, and were sitting around the fire, Monique handed a green-tinted bottle to Ray. "Would you try one of the products I'm developing for the Nunotuck Herbal Factory? Put a little of this after-shave on your cheek. It's lily of the valley. We put in a little goldenseal, which smells, god-awful, just to ground it. We don't favor the sugary stuff, and I'm so tired of musk and lime on men I could scream."

Ray slapped some on. Stacy thought *I bet he never uses after-shave. He probably thinks it's wimpy.* She stepped close and sniffed his face. The earthy aroma surprised her.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"Umm," she said.

"It's OK," Ray said. He was blushing!

"There's a man who appreciates the good things in life." Monique laughed.

After they had packed, Ray, Molly and Bacon prepared to start down. "Does Bacon always go first?" Stacy asked.

Bacon said, "A guide has to go first, no matter where the path

leads.”

They stepped over sweet ferns and the pine needles. People waved good-bye. Stacy put the thought of the deed and Michael out of her mind. It was going to be, she decided, one of those mornings that took off like a bird in flight, surging forward.