

## *Wilderness House Literary Review 3/1*

*Anne Brudevold*

### **Hunter Moon**

#### *Chapter 24*

Eleanor lay on the sofa in the living room, pale as a sheet. "Oh Stacy," she breathed, "would you put a damp warm cloth on my forehead? My head is splitting in two."

Her eyes closed. She did not acknowledge Ray. "Hello, Eleanor, sorry to see you under the weather," he said. "Where did Carl go? He usually helps you through your, what do you call them..."

"Spells," Eleanor said. "Carl's upstairs somewhere, probably his office. He has so much to do. I know I'm a burden to him sometimes. But he is also a burden to me, although I hardly ever admit it. He's so busy, he's rarely around. Then it is one demand after another. Make a dinner. Go to a function. Come to Mexico. Support the Ladies Guild at the mill. It never ends." She waved her hand weakly, as if to brush away what she had said. "Don't mind me. I get depressed sometimes, but I snap out of it. I love Carl. I could not do without him. I do end up enjoying the things he wants me to do. I do, usually. I'm tired."

Stacy came back from the kitchen with the damp cloth and laid it over Eleanor's forehead and eyes. "There, Mother, just relax. Breathe deeply and focus on the good things."

Stacy said to Ray, "Sometimes she needs to escape. She's like me. She doesn't know anything until she verbalizes it. She can't decide if she wants to go to Mexico with Carl. It would mean leaving everything behind."

Ray acted surprised. "Is Carl going to Mexico?"

"Not right away," Eleanor said quickly. "He's making plans to go eventually. I can't decide if I want to leave this beautiful house where we have spent all our married life and go to a new unfamiliar place."

"Follow your instinct, Eleanor. People actually act and communicate by

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smell and instinct. We're all pretty much animals, under the surface."

"You sound like Michael. Is that all there is to it?" Stacy asked, standing up and coming over to him, sniffing the curve of his shoulder.

"At least at first," Ray answered, pulling her to him.

"Only at first? Is that what you think?" Without giving him time to ponder a response to that remark, she said, "Mother, would you like me to find Carl? Maybe talking with him would help you."

"No, dear. You are already helping me more than you know. Sit down beside me on the sofa. You sit too, Ray. Make yourself comfortable in one of the chairs, but why don't you make yourself, Stacy and me a drink first. I'll have white wine."

"Sparkling water for me," Stacy said.

Ray went to the bar and filled the orders, including a beer for himself. The house was so quiet it didn't seem that anyone else could be in it. Ray reminded himself that it was an old, solidly built house, and sound would not carry through the walls. He had not even heard Stacy turning on the water in the kitchen. The Oriental rugs absorbed sound, the walls stopped it.

"Carl can't be disturbed," Eleanor said. "He told me he has to prepare plans for Louise to help her run the mill. It upset me. He has put such a burden on her shoulders, and she is always so good, so obedient, and so loyal. I'm afraid this is a terrible strain to her. I asked Carl to help her out, to give her more information. She's not prepared to be a CEO quite yet. She doesn't know the ropes of the mill.

Eleanor began to get some color in her skin, and to sit up a little straighter. The tight plane of her face softened. As she drank her wine, she began to cry, long sobs that shook her whole body. The sobs gradually subsided.

"Do you want to talk about it, Mother?" Stacy asked.

Eleanor appeared to be talking to herself. "I'm not crying about Louise. Louise will be fine. I'm crying about Michael, and what I did to him. You

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see, Michael knew," she said, softly. "Somehow he sensed it. Just like Ray says, people communicate by smell and instinct. I didn't believe that so I lied to him and I thought he would believe me. I was stupid. He must have hated me."

"Did Carl know?" Ray asked, aware that Stacy was mystified by Eleanor's musing, whereas he was not, because Terence had confided in him during the ginseng hunt.

"I never told him, but just like Michael, he sensed it. I don't think he wanted me to tell him. He wanted to live the lie. So we would be a normal family. It would have been very bad politically if the truth had come out. But a few hours ago I told him. Everything is out in the open now." She looked Ray straight in the eye. "You're a Nunotuck," she said. "You understand. And of course you'll understand that Terence never pressed me. He respected Carl's and my need to have the perfect family. Of course, I knew I could always depend on Terence, if I needed to. It was unspoken."

"What are you talking about?" Stacy wondered.

Color rose to Eleanor's cheeks. "It's so long ago. Almost hard to recall."

"Try, Mother. Try to get it out. You'll feel better afterwards."

"I had to choose between your father and Terence," Eleanor said diffidently, as if picking her way between stepping-stones. Ray watched the faces. "I chose Carl. I didn't know I was already pregnant with Terence's child." She turned her back to them, and lay with her face pressed into the sofa. "I'm sorry." The words came out muffled.

Still watching the Stacy's face, Ray saw a gamut of emotion that ranged from astonishment to dismay.

Eleanor turned back. "I was terrified Carl would leave me if the family didn't present the perfect picture. I'm sorry I never told Michael. He always felt that I was withholding something from him, and he was right. I know women can change things, and have some influence on men, but I was too scared to try. I thought everyone would hate me for it. It would cause us trouble in the County."

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"Carl loved him anyway," Stacy said. "Michael was a loveable person."

Eleanor said, "Michael was a schizophrenic. Carl dealt with him the best he could."

"Not true," Stacy said. "I'm starting to think Michael was the healthiest one in the family."

"Stacy!" Eleanor said. "Stop it this minute." She fumbled through her pockets, then took out a pillbox and swallowed 2 yellow and green pills.

Ray remembered the pills from the last dinner he'd had with the Alwyns, the day Michael died. "I'm sure you're going to want to rest, Eleanor," Ray said. "Stacy, can I help you take your mother upstairs?"

"No," Eleanor said. "I'll just rest on the sofa. You two young people can go outside on the porch and enjoy this lovely night. You don't want to sit with an old lady."

"How can you say that?" For one thing you're not old, for another, I'd gladly sit with you and I'm sure Ray would too."

"No, children. I want to be alone a little. I'll come out and join you in a bit. I have to get

used to the idea that now you know. I have carried that secret in me so long. Now I have told you, and earlier this evening I told Carl. I couldn't stand holding it in any longer. He is disturbed. He needs time to think about it. But nothing will really change. We have lived together for so long. We have our ways. Go now. Go. I'll be out soon."

"If you're sure."

"Why do people say, 'are you sure?' Would I say it if I weren't sure?"

All right, Mother. Stacy gave her Mother a kiss. "I'm glad you told me. I'll have to get used to it, but somehow it makes everything fall into place. I understand now why Michael was the way he was. Who knows what it would have been like if everyone knew the truth? We can't go back in time. It's foolish to even wish it. But I wish it. Oh, how I wish it."

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"You'll get used to it. Things will be better now."

"I hope you're right. "It's a lot to absorb."

Eleanor lay back and put the cloth over her eyes. Stacy and Ray went outside to sit on a porch swing. Pale moonlight shone through the hemlock trees that surrounded the Alwyn house, their branches sweeping the ground like dark angels' wings. Looking at Stacy's profile, he wouldn't have imagined that she had any problems at all. She looked fine. Her hair glistened. They swayed gently back and forth. He wanted his feelings for her to stay simple, but that was impossible.

Looking straight ahead into the forest, she said, "I used to think how lucky our family was. We were wealthy, respected, and helped the community." She gave a little laugh that was more like a snuffle.

Ray said, "The fact that Terence is Michael's father wouldn't change too many people's opinions. People are more broad-minded than they used to be."

She turned to him. Her eyes looked sad. "Maybe. I hope they never find out. What good would it do? But what worries me is that you are going to hate our family and hate me because my father killed my brother. You'll always be suspicious of me. It's as if the Alwyns carry a curse."

The swing creaked at the end of each arc. A few moths batted at the porch light.

"There's no curse. It's just Carl. Stop being negative. What you don't know is that I heard Louise say it again the night of the Community Center Party. I had a gun in my back so I couldn't leave. The gun was held by a Federal Agent who taped everything. The Feds know it all. They were hiding in the bushes when your family came out. I was there accidentally, giving Molly the time to do her thing. You don't have any secrets now."

She turned pale. "I didn't know what was the right thing to do – to tell the police or protect my father. I didn't want to" she hesitated -- "betray him."

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"Now you know you don't have to make that decision."

She laid her head on his shoulder. "I was just wondering how much of a moral coward I was. And then I thought of how Eleanor's life has been afflicted by her not telling the truth. I didn't want to be like her. See, I'm admitting to you the Alwyns aren't so great. Still, I can't believe Carl is capable of murder.

They swung in silence. "Poor Michael," she said. "He really was cast adrift -- I meant to use those words -- in a stream of questions no one should ever have to ask."

She looked a little raw, new, as if a surface layer of knowledge had been sloughed off.

Ray said, "You're different from the rest of your family. You have values, you care, you have standards. Everyone respects you."

She sighed deeply. "They do? Do I?"

A shadow appeared from behind a tree, then another, then another. They were surrounded by police officers. Wiley was there. The Fed walked up the steps and stood in front of the porch swing. "Where is Carl?"

"I have no idea. What are you people all doing here?"

"We had all the exits covered, the driveway blocked. He must still be in the house."

Eleanor appeared at the door. "What on earth..."

"We have a warrant to search the house. We're looking for Carl."

"Go ahead," Eleanor said. "I don't want to see your foolish warrant. Carl has nothing to hide. I don't know where he is. Upstairs in his study probably."

The men trooped inside. An hour later, they came out. It took that long for them to go through the huge house. While they were searching, Eleanor, Ray and Stacy went back into the living room. "We might as

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well have a late night snack," Eleanor said. "I wish they'd go home. I'm exhausted. I wonder where on earth Carl is. I didn't hear him leave. Did you?"

Somewhere close by a plane roared by. It sounded low to the ground, then it climbed. Ray could see it in the sky, a small plane, white and shining.

The Fed entered the kitchen. "His car is still in the driveway. The BMW, anyway. I don't know how many cars he had. But no car left the driveway. And no one left the house except Stacy and Ray, who sat on the porch. My men can attest to that. We were at every door. He left by none of them. Is there some secret hiding place in this house?"

Eleanor laughed. "I have often wished there were, and that I could go into to it and disappear for a while."

"He disappeared right under our watch. Damn, excuse me, dang it all to heel."

The cops left. They piled into a truck that blocked the driveway some distance down from the house. Ray was mystified, but kept his mouth shut.

Eleanor yawned, and finished her ham sandwich. "That Carl," she said. "He's a sly one."

"Mother, will you be all right alone tonight? After all, I have a feeling Carl never left. He may appear to keep you company tonight."

"Yes, dear, certainly. You go along, go along the both of you."

Stacy said, "Mother, you're not the only Alwyn who has been attracted to a Nunotuck."

Ray's heart raced.

"I have eyes," Eleanor said.

Stacy drove Ray back to his truck at the Community Center, and then followed him to his cabin. Before they went to bed, she wanted tea. She

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said she wouldn't be able to sleep until her mind settled, and tea relaxed her. She needed everything to look nice. She went to the cupboard, searched, and found a tablecloth. It was lace. She laid it on the table and said, "I bet there's a story behind this tablecloth."

"Sure is. I bought it at Sears."

She looked disappointed. "I like stories with a beginning, middle and ending. This tablecloth looks so romantic, I thought..."

He wasn't going to tell her about Sheila's light-fingered habits. In their climate of honesty, he didn't want to hide anything from Stacy. But the sin of omission was easier than explaining your whole previous life to a new companion. And by the time you were almost forty four that was a whole lot of explaining. He'd been through that with a lot of girlfriends. Explaining hadn't worked. It brought the past into the present. That wasn't right. He wanted Stacy to be a new start, unburdened by the past. Maybe he was the one who wanted to keep some secrets. But they were just little ones. He hoped they wouldn't matter. Maybe in time he could divulge all those little secrets, and they would just seem like stories, But for now, he said, "I'm not a story teller. I'm the strong silent type."

"I like your point of view." She smiled at him.

As they fell asleep, Ray absorbed the texture of the night, which held a faint edge of leaf mold even inside. He listened to the wind and the forest sounds of dying crickets and a few animals scurrying. He felt Stacy stretching out, warm beside him.



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*Chapter 25*

Ray had begun to forget he was at the police station when he heard Wiley say, "Yeah," he was saying. He was on the phone. He said again, "Yeah....OK.... Whatever."

He hung up. "Those Majestic Bay cops have a problem. They need me but they don't know how to handle a Reservation cop."

"What else is new?"

Wiley stood up and stretched. "God I'm tired. How's about we go back to Miss Flo's and have coffee."

They strolled to Miss Florence's Restaurant. Miss Flo's was crowded. A French logging crew occupied the first half of the room. The French talked non-stop, Ray envied their animated conversation. Different culture. He wished he spoke French, or Quebecois. Maybe they knew something he didn't. Maybe he felt that way about everybody. He didn't have any answers, that was for sure.

They got a back booth, away from the noise. They both ordered coffee and a burger with everything on it. When they were served and chowing down, Ray said, "Humor me. Did you really trace the bullet you found at the river to Carl's gun?"

Wiley took a huge bite of burger. He wiped the ketchup off his face and said, "The Fed jerked you around. He told Carl they found the bullet. He told you they didn't, that they just said it to flush out the Alwaysns."

"Asshole" Ray said.

"Well, I found it. In the river bed. Incredible good luck. It lodged in the sand by the shore, probably right where the canoe is."

"That guy is a jerk. I didn't know what was going on."

"He just thought you might be of some use, I guess. He just uses people."

"I never saw Carl at the house. Maybe he was already gone by the

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time I got there."

"That Fed, those Majestic Bay cops none of them are swift. They had the house surrounded, they were hiding behind every tree, but they missed one exit. Eleanor didn't tell them about it either. What an actress. She kept you and Stacy busy listening to her, and gave Carl plenty of time to escape. There's a secret tunnel from the wine cellar to the old gate keeper's lodge at the end of the driveway. The cops had a barricade down there, but Carl wasn't going that way. There's a cut-off exit tunnel through the woods to his airplane on his landing strip. I heard the plane take off before we even crawled out of the woods."

Ray remembered the white plane low in the sky he saw when he was on the porch with Stacy. "I heard that plane. You didn't tell the Fed or the other cops?"

"Nope. I don't mind catching the criminals. But I don't like the way this case is going down."

"Maybe you think Carl was telling the truth. He didn't mean to shoot Michael."

Wiley said. He will probably be charged with reckless endangerment. Moreover, I can tell you that even some of his political friends are starting to fade into the woodwork. He has to come up with a lot of cash to keep his boat afloat. Especially now that we know the bullet did come from his gun, and the Feds have Louise's story on tape."

"Do you think he'll stand trial?" Ray asked.

"He's in Mexico. He'll come back in secret for Eleanor, and maybe a few business deals. He'll need bribe money. He'll get that Mexican thing going. But I'm not telling that to the Majestic Bay cops. When and if they find out, I doubt they'll bother to extradite. He'll live the good life down there, and he'll have his surrogates running the golf course and all those big Majestic Bay projects Russ found out he owns like the Mall in Majestic Bay. His family will run the mill. No matter what they say, those Alwyns stick together. And you know what?" He swallowed the last of his coffee. "That's the way it should be. I don't like Carl Alwyn. Never did. But I don't believe he shot Michael on purpose. It was one of those

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what do you call it, cosmic accidents. I bet God is looking on, just checking out how this one plays out, how the human race handles this one. Justice has its own way of working. I don't get in the way. But i'm watching this one very carefully."

"You're a funny mixture," Ray said, picking up the check and adding up the items carefully to make sure there were no mistakes. "This one's on me. Cynical, warm-hearted guy, and like a snake. I bet you snap at your prey when they don't expect it. I bet you always get your man. "

"Thanks," Wiley said, beaming.

Ray went home. He started to assemble knives he kept in stock. Soon he would make some deliveries, among others, to the outfitter's store and the tourist store in Quebec. The phone rang. It was Wiley. He told Ray that Carl had just returned from Mexico, and was cooperating with the police.

"That was fast."

"Man," Wiley said, "that shot with a .38 that hit Michael in the throat – you just have to say it was one of those unlucky lucky ones – improbable to say the least, but possible. Carl keeps saying he was desperate at the time, and he knows he used poor judgment. His story doesn't change, not even under police pressure. He keeps saying he was trying to save his son's life. It's a question as to whether he'll be charged with accidental death, murder, reckless endangerment, or whether the charges against him will be dismissed. Knowing Carl's connections to this community, my guess is that the charges will be dismissed. You never know what happens behind those closed doors. Anyway, it'll be all over the newspapers tomorrow. So, you want to meet for lunch tomorrow?"

Ray said. "I'm coming to town to stock the stores with knives. How about Miss Flo's again?"

"Do we have a choice in this one restaurant town?"

Ray said, "I don't think we can have lunch at the Mon Desir Lingerie."

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"If we went to see Sage, she would not serve anything earthly."

"She sure takes her share in. That woman must weigh two hundred pounds."

They rang off. Ray loaded up his truck with supplies he needed to deliver the next day. His mind kept wandering to the idea of lucky and unlucky shots. He was familiar with a .38. He knew what it could and could not do. Whether Carl had shot Michael's throat purposefully might never be discovered. It was doable. And it had been done. Maybe everyone had just been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Bad luck all around. Ray looked around for some wood to knock on. He thought about unlikely coincidences – the man who died when a flowerpot on a window sill on a second floor apartment slid off and hit him in the head as he walked by. The man hit by the errant ball of a crane momentarily out of control. The brand new Porsche squashed by a falling oak tree in a hurricane instead of the old truck beside it. The roof of a house torn off by a tornado, and then returned to its place by the same tornado an hour later. You never could tell.

The next day, Ray conducted his business in town, then met Wiley at Miss Flo's. Wiley

ordered two burgers, and soup. Ray asked, "Are you starving at home?"

"Oh, no. Terry keeps me busy exercising, you know, in bed. I've got to keep my strength up."

"Great," Ray said. "So you two are back together." He didn't want to talk about Wiley's sex life. "So," he said, in an attempt to change the subject, "what do you think Carl is going to do about his case?"

The food came, and Wiley dived into his soup like a piranha after a prey. Then he said, "There's news on that front. After I talked to you this morning, they charged him with reckless endangerment. He's free to go until the trial. He hired a bodyguard and a limo with bullet-proof tinted windows. That's going to stick out like a sore thumb in Cascade County. This is a county of pick-up trucks. Public opinion isn't too favorable to a man now formally charged with shooting at his son. A lot of people have

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old grudges against Alwyn Mills.”

When Ray got home, Stacy called. “Ray, I’m still disinherited. Did you talk with Carl about your involvement with the mill?”

“Oh yes. Russ and I met with him. I was actually feeling conciliatory but Carl was being obnoxious. I had been going to tell him I was ready to work together with Louise to try to improve conditions, but he was so hostile, Russ and I ended up telling him we would not be involved in the Mill, at least not the way it had been run. You know, Russ and I were ready to try. We called it infiltrating. However, that doesn’t seem likely now. He told us we were naïve, and he really did mean what he had said in the documents he gave us. I told him I was proud I wasn't a "poor little rich girl" any more. I said I would come out publicly with an environmental position condemning mill practices. Russ told Carl he was writing an editorial in the Cascade County Gazette that was critical of Louise's management of the Mill. So you see, Ray, the family is just falling apart. The great Alwyns.” She gave an ironic laugh.

“Are you all right?” Ray asked.

“Oh, never been better.” Again the laugh. But then she said, “Actually, it’s a relief to have everything out in the open. I can’t believe how many secrets there have been. We have such different goals and different ideas about the world that they’re hard to reconcile. Unfortunately, we are in the public sphere, so our problems are all over the news. I mean plastered. Every paper. Father kills son. It’ll be national by tonight. But you know what Carl’s doing?. Are you anywhere you can watch TV? Carl’s on the news right now. That man never stops.”

Ray turned on the small TV that was on a corner table in the police station. Unbelievably, Carl said only he was innocent. He was on the offensive. He announced that he had put together a consortium of bankers. They were making plans to build a mall on the city limits of Majestic Bay. Carl was helping fund an expansion of the public airport, to make the runway long enough to land his jet. He was building his own hangar. Carl wanted to be seen as a community leader to deflect attention from the legal charges he faced. Not a word about Mexico.

Chapter 26

Ray's attention turned to handles. For the custom-made knife, he considered animal products -- stag horn, ivory (from washed up whales, whales' teeth or water buffalo horn, but that didn't seem right. He didn't like to use plastic micarta. He went through his collection of wood -- partridge wood, rosewood, English walnut, ash, eucalyptus. Finally he chose a piece of black walnut burl whose grain resembled a star nebula. He liked patterns that repeated themselves in nature.

Last summer he had cut the burl into strips and dried them. He sawed the chosen one in half, then flattened the one slab with the grinder. He checked it on the lamp against the light to see if there were waves. He sanded them flat.

He marked and drilled pinholes on the knife tang. He made pins from brazing rod and clamped the slabs to the tang. He mixed epoxy cement, put in the pins, and clamped the handle. Now the knife was structurally complete. It just needed final touches – accessorizing. Sheila used to say. She maintained that finding the right sheath was the most important step. She always made suggestive comments like that.

A wistful yipping reminded Ray that Molly needed to go out. After a satisfying bout of stick chasing, she was ready to snooze again in her bed by the forge.

He started to work on finger grips for the handles. He ground out them out using the belt sander, which made round depressions but left the ridges well defined. When he inspected the handle for cracks and detected a small one, he filled it with Crazy Glue, which dried clear, completely absorbed into the wood.

The last stages of polishing and grinding always took more time than people realized. Ray had been surprised when he first started the business at how time-consuming these fine points were. The extra touches at the end were what people really appreciated. First, he used the belt sander with a coarse 40 grit to smooth the edges of handle of the Montana client's knife and to grind down the surface of the handle and

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rivets until they were even. Then he sanded the handle with 80 grit. Then he resanded with progressively finer grits until the handle was as smooth as a baby's cheek.

To polish the knife handle, Ray started with a coarse 40-grit belt, and worked progressively up to 240 grit, for which he changed to a flap sander. As he polished the handle, he also passed over the bolster and the back of the blade, and any other areas that looked dull. Lastly, he buffed and cleaned the handle, and coated it with two coats of oil to harden the wood, and make it moisture-resistant. Then he went back and refined the Montana customer's wife's knife. He would do the rest of the batch later.

The Montana customer was due to arrive. Ray did a final cleaning of the handle and bolster areas of the utility knives. He re-sanded and buffed, ground the final edge of the blade and buffed it razor sharp.

The customer was a large man. He looked just the way his voice sounded -- robust and outdoorsy, just the way the way Ray remembered him when he had come into the shop and ordered last year. He was mighty pleased with the knives. He knew his wife would love hers. "She doesn't hunt, or skin animals or anything. But she sure likes a sharp knife to cut what I kill."

It was easy for Ray to part with knives once they were completed. Above all, he enjoyed having been able to make a custom design that could get to the heart of what the wielder wanted. He also liked the less individual designs, for their broad generic appeal. Like children who had grown up and were making their own way in the world, his completed knives remained in Ray's consciousness. He never forgot a knife. He could recall each one, and when he did, he felt a sense of satisfaction and immediacy. He started to put the finishing touches on the remaining utility knives.

He was looking forward to starting a new knife design. That stage of creation gave him an exhilarating sense of opening a new chapter in his life, of positive change, of progress. He began sketches for the filet knife for fish he had envisioned in a dream.

That evening, Stacy, Ray and Russ sat in the library of the Alwyn mansion. Eleanor had been in and come back from Mexico. Carl seemed

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to be coming and going and Eleanor sometimes stayed in Maine when Carl went back. Now she was upstairs sleeping. Stacy curled in an oversized armchair. Although it was not cold in the room, she had wrapped a blanket around her. She needed comfort and reassurance. She had started a fire in the fireplace. The shadows from the flames leaped around the room like ghosts. She didn't want ghosts. She got up and turned on the lights.

Russ hunched in the bamboo chair Eleanor had brought back on one of her trips to Mexico in the Lear jet. Ray was reading a book he found on the coffee table called "Sacred Places in North America." He wanted to visit every single sacred place, although he wondered whether the trips would be worth more than traveling to the local quarry near Mount Nunotuck. He often went to the quarry on his days off and looked at the white quartz stones nestled in the earth like jagged eggs. It was like going to church, going back to the source, seeing what gorgeous crystals the earth churned up .

"It's up to us now," Stacy said to Russ.

"What is?"

Stacy said, "The documents Carl signed that cut us out of the family fortune were conditional on one thing: we could stay in the family if we worked with Louise at the Mill. So that means we can stay if we work at the Mill."

"I don't want to work at the Mill. We tried to talk with Carl and he was a jerk."

"OK," Stacy said. "That ends that."

"Not for you."

"I meant for you. Look Russ, he doesn't just want to cut us out. He wants us involved. He's a scoundrel, but he does have a sense of loyalty, and, well, he's not completely bad. Maybe no one is."

Russ said, "It's too soon to decide. I can't wake up one morning as a newspaper reporter and wake up the next as the worker at a paper mill."



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"You don't have to decide that fast, Russ. We can take our time. You can stay at the newspaper, but be more involved in the mill. You can be on the board of directors; you can help direct policy without actually doing any work."

"Well, that sounds good. The no work part. Just kidding. But what would you do at the Mill?"

Stacy huddled into her blanket. "Oh you know, I'd keep my job, and at the mill I'd do my usual environmental stuff. For the moment, I want to stay warm. It's the end of October. We had the first killing frost last night."

"OK, stay warm. Is there anything else you want to do?"

"I want to be with Ray."

Ray looked up from his reading about the Antelope Canyon, Rainbow of the Earth. "Hmm", he thought.

"Stacy, I'm not talking about your love life."

"Russ, people have different goals in life. Eleanor, per usual, wants to sleep. I want to do my environmental work in whatever capacity is the most effective. You want to be a news reporter."

"Everything has happened so fast. I don't know what I want." Russ settled back in the bamboo chair. "Let's think about this. Stacy, you and I could make a good team. You'd handle the environmental side. I'd write the press releases and monitor the correspondence, arrange conferences. I guess I have done enough research to know the outside effects of the paper industry. We have to hurry up and get Louise help with bringing in consultants. But in our own way, without sacrificing our ideals, we could help Louise run the Mill. From what I'm hearing, it's bad over there."

"Russ, she don't know a thing about running a paper mill. We have to help her find the right people."

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They heard footsteps on the stairs. Eleanor came into the room. She was wearing a white silk nightgown, a blue terrycloth bathrobe and fuzzy slippers, the kind you slip your toes into that leave your heels bare. She was carrying a notebook. She crossed the room and lay down on the sofa. "How nice it is in here with a fire," she said dreamily.

"N'est-ce pas?" Stacy said. She reverted to a foreign language. She didn't know what to say in her own language. Her mother seemed disembodied. She wasn't like herself. She wasn't like somebody else. She was a shadow, a ghost.

Eleanor said. "I was recalling the bicentennial of the Mill. Remember Michael's gift to Carl? A white stone. At the time I thought it embarrassing. I didn't understand it. Oh, there's no use going over and over things you can't change. I need to get away. Maybe I won't come back."

"Oh you have to," Russ said. "We need you."

Stacy said, "We love you."

"I know I can rely on you." Eleanor's sigh seemed to incorporate both satisfaction and hopelessness. "You are so young. And so stupid. And I am so ignorant. Don't think I didn't read his journals." She opened the notebook she was carrying and read out loud.

I felt sorry for Mother this evening when I watched her carrying kitchen scraps to the garbage bins. Her body is so thin, bird-like really, yet her movements are as heavy as an elephant's and make me uneasy. When she came back inside, she bent down stiff from the waist and poked and prodded the kitchen waste can back into the cabinet under the sink. She groaned and caught her breath during these simple movements, which she performed not with the natural grace which animals are not afraid to display, but with the wooden stifled stiffness of a marionette who was not really alive, but only pretending. How can she go on like this day after day?

Why didn't she marry Terence? She might have been happier. We all might have been. To make the scene even more incongruous

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she was wearing a ridiculous sweater with an embroidered poodle, who lifted a sequined paw in mute appeal. My poor mother who hates dogs, yet wears a poodle emblazoned on her chest. When did she become a shadow of herself?

Eleanor laid the notebook on the coffee table. "He should have been a scientist. He viewed everybody through a microscope. You couldn't get away with anything. He was a purist. He didn't let anyone get away with any weakness. He was a bad son."

Stacy said sadly. "He hurt your feelings."

Eleanor said, "You children are an extension of Carl and me. You are our projections, our ticket to the future, to immortality."

"That's pretty selfish," Stacy said.

Eleanor shrugged her shoulders. "I'm going upstairs now. Good night."

"Good night, mother," Russ said. When she was gone, he said with irritation "So I'm just her ticket to the future. That's great."

"Don't have an identity crisis now," Stacy said. "We're beyond that. Poor woman. I think we should hire someone to watch her. Go with her back and forth from Mexico. I don't trust her to take care of herself when Carl's not around. Do you know any one who needs a job?"

Russ said. "I'll ask around."

Stacy stretched her arms over her head. She said, "My shoulders are tense. They creak when I raise my arms."

Ray said, "If you're taking care of everybody else, you better remember to take care of yourself. Of course," he added, "I can help."

He was tired. He didn't see how Russ and Stacy kept going. He decided to take a snooze on the sofa. Russ and Stacy were talking about Gail Peterfreund. "Go ahead and call her," Russ was saying. "It's the right thing to do."

Stacy took a deep breath and dialed the number. It was eleven o'clock at

night.

"Yes?" The voice sound cranky. Ray imagined Gail Peterfreund disturbed from her sleep, wearing a button up to the neck Victorian nightgown.

"Sorry to call so late, It's Stacy Alwyn. Did I wake you up?"

"Yes," the voice said.

Stacy obviously had trouble calling the woman by her first name. But she said sounding purposefully friendly, "Gail, I'm sure you've heard about my father's involvement in Michael's death. I know you had premonitions about it, as you made clear at the funeral. But that's not why I'm calling. There is another fact that has not been made public, but I think you deserve to know. I'm sure you'll respect my feelings about the privacy of this information. The fact is that my brother's father was not Carl, but Terence, the Nunotuck. I hope," she added in her friendliest voice, "that you'll talk with me. I'm not your enemy. I was never Michael's enemy. And of course this information is confidential."

After just the slightest pause, Gail said, "I know you championed Michael. I don't have a problem with you." Another pause. "Ahh. I wish Michael had known who his real father was. It would have simplified things for him." A longer pause. "That's about all I can say. You know I hadn't seen Michael recently. Not in the past three or four years. But I can tell you this. What you've told me makes everything fall into place. I see it now. Michael was Indian by temperament. Any child whose temperament doesn't match the family that raises him is doomed to some degree of failure to thrive. The Alwyns didn't foster his natural instincts. I'm not getting into the cultural/genetic thing. Just that many children are born into hostile families. The phenomenon is more widespread than we recognize. Some children are used as scapegoats. Why? In this historical time, we call it psychology. In the Romantic period, the mis-match was attributed to a natural propensity of the child -- or the parent -- to melancholy, or malaise. The person who didn't fit in was identified as suffering nostalgia for wholeness. Romantics idealized the primitive state that prevailed in humans, before innocence was lost. The symbols of its loss were the caged bird, stormy weather, rain. Romantic poets made the sickness of maladjustment into an art form. I like to use this vocabulary. I

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like to remember Michael as the Natural, condemned to Civilization."

"Do you think he was schizophrenic?" Stacy asked.

"Of course not!" Gail Peterfreund scoffed. "Michael was a Romantic. Your family is Gothic. Gothic is the distortion, the twisting of Nature. When I said at Michael's funeral that your family killed him, I meant it in a psychological sense. I've been following the case in the newspapers. Of course, if Carl actually killed Michael that shows how deep the contortion, hatred in this case, ran between them. A Romantic would say that that's what happens when natural instincts are thwarted. Carl was a Gothic villain. Now if you don't mind, I'm going back to sleep. I have to teach a class at 8 a.m."

Stacy hung up. There was a knock at the back door. "Who the Hell?"

It was Neat, in trench coat, rumpled shirt and jeans. Ray decided to go back to dozing on the sofa, and let Stacy handle it. She could. She always did. But he was curious enough to remain peripherally aware. He could practically see her pull herself together. She said with aplomb. "Come in. It's only 11:30 at night. To what do I owe the felicity of this visit? Neat appreciated lofty dialogue.

"Hello," Neat said. "Hello Stacy, Russ. I know it's late, but I know you're night owls. I was at a bar in Majestic Bay. The bartender and I started talking about Carl and Michael. Then I decided to come here. I have just bought a motorcycle. The guy in the shop gave me a deal I couldn't refuse. I used next month's salary and more, but I trust in the providence of the universe. I'm going to ride with the club I was with on the day Michael died. I rode up here to tell you that. It's a bumpy ride. My ass is killing me. I sure could use some coffee. I'll make it. Just show me how. God, Stacy, what a great place your family has. Who's that on the sofa?"

"That's Ray. Don't bother him. He's had a long day. He's tired."

"I'm going to snooze a bit too," Russ said. He leaned back in his chair. Ray, decided he was thirsty and wanted a glass of water. He got up and went to the kitchen with Neat and Stacy. Stacy showed Neat how to operate a coffee machine. She couldn't believe he didn't know how.

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"Didn't you have a mother?" she asked.

"No," he said. "I'm an orphan."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't know, Neat, or I wouldn't have asked. You must think I'm awful."

"Don't be sorry," he said. "You showed me how to make coffee. New doors open all the time, if you're receptive." When the three of them were seated back in the living room and

sipping, Neat said, "This tastes awesome. Best coffee I ever had." When no remarks were forthcoming he added, "And believe me, I've had a lot of coffee!"

"You show great potential as an outstanding coffee maker, Neat," Stacy said. Neat refilled his coffee cup and asked if she had any crackers or cookies or something.

"In the kitchen," she said. "Open all the cabinets. Feel free. I honestly don't know what's in there. I seem to remember shortbread from Scotland, in a tin. Somebody gave it to me at a conference. I gave it to Eleanor."

Neat leaned over the coffee table and spoke in a confidential voice. "I heard Michael calling to me when I was riding up here. It was like I was hearing voices from the wild frontier. I can't go there, Stacy. I'm brave but I'm not a visionary. I can't go to extremes. I try to be an objective, balanced person."

"It's a good thing," Stacy said. Neat went into the kitchen and reappeared with the tin. "Oh yes," she said. "I got that at a conference from a visiting environmental scientist from the British Isles, also studying ground water. 'Ground water is a world-wide concern,' he said. Talk about stating the obvious."

Neat took a biscuit. Russ opened his eyes, took a biscuit and poured a cup of coffee. He said, "I had to write about the Mill again. It's getting harder and harder. Louise is firing the the old-timers. She is hiring new men to run machines the mill doesn't have yet. Morale is at an all-time low. Public opinion is turning more and more against the Mill. With

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what people have found out about Carl, and with what Louise is doing with the staff, the reputation of Alwyn Mills couldn't be worse. What are we going to do?"

Stacy said, "Hard as it may be – and it's going to be damn hard – we have to try and cooperate with Louise. Don't mind me if I repeat myself. We have to infiltrate from the inside..." She and Russ burst into laughter.

Neat engulfed more biscuits and said, "That's brilliant."

Russ said, in a more cheerful tone of voice, "On the environmental front, the issues have changed. I don't have to push the environmental hard-line in Cascade County. The facts have been established. Alwyn Mills could be a test case. It can hold up a mirror to the whole paper industry. As far as environmental issues go, I think Louise is amenable to persuasion. She was always into recycling. Progress will be slow but sure. Realistically, we have to zigzag a little to pursue our goals. Satisfy the industries. The environmentalists. The economists. The people. The readers."

He gulped his coffee. "I've learned from the sixties. We were all fired up then, and we thought we could change the world with our revolution. That failed. But the sixties never died. They went low profile but the ideals continued to permeate. Soon they'll be stronger than ever. They'll be mainstream! I feel pretty good about the way things are turning out. I even think that if Michael could see us now he'd be pleased. He had radical crazy goals, but some of them are being reached. He drew attention to the forged land deed so that it was invalidated. His death caused Carl to resign. Alwyn Mills will reform -- although Louise needs a little work done on her. Anyway, the Nunotuck River will be watched and protected. I don't think Michael died in vain."

Neat said, "Louise is Lady Macbeth. Carl is the Pontius Pilate of the Alwyn morality play. In his own mind, he means well. He searches for the right thing to do -- protect the family, protect the family business. Isn't it a cosmic irony that his seeking to do right results in so many wrongs? Is this the impulse that drives history forward? That the good of one generation becomes the evil of the next? You know how sometimes you're so close to understanding something it hurts? You want to know the truth, but you know it's not going to be easy. You'll call on anything.

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It's that moment like dawn -- full of potential and mystery. The moment will pass, and the truth, the sun of clarity will shine down. I bet it's like that for Carl. He's running out of places to hide."

"He's got Mexico," Stacy said. "And the rain forest to devastate."

"And," Neat added, "the political situation down there to navigate. It's pretty dangerous."

Stacy stared at him. She said, "That's right, Neat. I hadn't thought of that. He has all these people working for him. They're practically slaves. He pays them a pittance, and takes the profit. It can't be safe for him."

When Neat left. Stacy insisted that he take the tin of shortbread. "You need this more than I do," she said. "Don't you get enough to eat every day? I mean you have your assistantship stipend and tuition waiver. If you need help, let me know. Your work is great. Maybe I can get you extra money."

Neat said with great dignity, "Thank you, Stacy. I will seriously consider your offer. I can't share the circumstances of my personal life with you right now, but I will admit they are somewhat strained. I guess that's why I'm attracted to the seventeenth century. It seems far enough away to be safe."

Neat bowed ceremoniously, took Stacy's hand and kissed it in a courtly gesture of leave-taking.

Ray thought the evening was finished. He longed to go to bed and get some real sleep. But almost as soon as Neat left, the doorbell rang.

It was Evelyn Waites. "Oh," Stacy said, with no visible sign of surprise. "Come in."

Evelyn Waites' hair wasn't pulled tightly back from her face as usual, but hung to her shoulders smooth and flat. She was wearing a windbreaker and jeans. She looked flustered.

"Ms. Alwyn," she said, "you must think I'm rude bothering you at night like this. I'm really sorry."



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Stacy asked, "Are you all right?"

"I'm OK. I was desperate. I couldn't sleep. It's been like this for days. I thought I'd go out of my mind. I just had to talk to someone. You're the only one I thought would understand."

"Do you want me to leave?" Ray asked, longing to go to sleep.

"That's up to Ms. Alwyn," Evelyn said. "It's about Michael. I don't mind if Ray stays."

"Oh, call me Stacy," Stacy said. "We're not in the Mill!" She offered Evelyn a cup of coffee, which she declined. Ray declined one as well. Drinking coffee at midnight seemed a little insane. This was, after all, Maine, where people went to bed and got up with the sun. All these midnight meandering were collegiate.

Evelyn draped her parka over the back of a kitchen chair, pushed back the sleeves of a faded sweatshirt, pulled a used tissue from her pocket and blew her nose. She looked younger than at Alwyn Mills. When she took off her glasses and brushed her straight bangs to the side, at least twenty years dropped away. She was probably in her late thirties. "I'm sure what I'm going to say will astonish you."

Ray and Stacy looked at Evelyn expectantly.

"I have to give you the background first. I'm so nervous. I'm a wreck, for heaven's sake.

Okay." She took a deep breath, then said quickly, "Michael and I were" – her voice trembled – "in a relationship."

"A relationship," Ray repeated.

"We were in love," Evelyn said.

Stacy's mouth opened but no sound came out.

"Let me explain Ms. Alwyn," Evelyn said. "When Carl hired me eight years ago, I was a good typist but I didn't know anything about – well, life. I came from a poor family. You'd call us white trash."

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Stacy protested, "That's not an expression I use. I don't think like that."

Evelyn dismissed the disclaimer with a wave of her hand. "Everyone in the county knows there's Alwyns and there's white trash, which is a lot of us. Don't condescend to me by pretending to be democratic. I hate that. I met Michael soon after I started at the Mill when he came to visit his father. Michael didn't wear animal skins then. He had a blue shirt I remember – sky blue. It brought out the blue in his eyes. He looked Irish. He told me the Alwyns are of Irish descent. I told him, so are the Waites. When we knew each other better we talked about how we had that in common even though our social standing was completely different. Anyway, I'm getting ahead of myself. When he wore that shirt he looked so smooth. He had wonderful tanned skin. I almost swooned. He instantly attracted, almost hypnotized me." She blushed and looked away. Ray looked at her with a new respect. Evelyn Waites wasn't just the mechanical secretary. She had had a life.

"Why did you keep your relationship secret?" Stacy asked.

"We didn't mean to deceive anyone. What we had was private. Michael said we were an endangered species. If we exposed our relationship to others, it would die. I would sit at my desk at the Mill and be efficient. I'm a good secretary. I love a fresh sheaf of paper, a new folder, an organized desk. Order and detail inspire me. I like to take directions and be part of a plan. I like to be of service. It was easy for me to separate these two sides of my life. When I left the office, my private life began. Michael was kind to me. He was so wise. I was just awestruck." She paused. Her features took on a glow. "He encouraged me. We read books together and discussed them. We exchanged opinions. He made me feel smart, educated even though I barely finished high school. He opened the world for me. I knew he was eccentric but I accepted him on his own terms. In private, when he relaxed, he was really fun to be with."

Stacy nodded, as if she didn't trust herself to speak.

"But that's not what I came here to tell you," Evelyn said hurriedly. "I would have kept our secret. It's the way he died that torments my mind. You see, the newspaper accounts of his death weren't correct. I know something no one else knows."

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"No one else knows?" Ray prompted, when Evelyn stopped.

"I want you to realize how important this is," Evelyn said.

"Otherwise I'll just leave."

Stacy said, "Anything you have to say about Michael is important to me."

Evelyn said, "You see, I was there when he started downstream."

"You were there," Ray said.

Stacy shot him an irritated glance. He better go easy on repeating. On the other hand, it worked. Why stop?

Evelyn stared into the distance as if she was watching a movie. She set her elbows on her knees and leaned her head on her hands. After a minute, she wiped her eyes. "He left about 7:00 in the morning for Carl's house. It was dawn. I was getting ready to go to work. It was a weekend. I knew Carl would be working, but I didn't have to go in. It was raining. Michael paced. I asked him why. He said he had heard something about bamboo from one of the Nunotucks and he had to decide what to do. He had been up to a bamboo patch that Carl had planted on Nunotuck land. In two years, it had taken over native growth, and exploded to 4 times its original size. I tried to talk to him, to tell him that it was better to tell Terence and deal with the whole matter rationally, but he wasn't listening to me. I kept asking him to calm down. He stopped pacing and told me about the deed. He had come to a decision. He was going to take it downstream to show Terence. First he was going to stop at Carl's and confront him. He climbed in the canoe and then oh my god he put a long section of rope in the canoe and told me that he might have to go over the Falls, and if he did, he would tie himself in the canoe.

"I screamed at him, 'why would you do that? Why would you chance the Falls in weather like this? Why would you tie yourself in?'

"'The water's high,' was all he would say.

"I pleaded with him. 'You'll never make it over the Falls. You'll kill yourself.' The more I screamed, the calmer he got. He told me whether he lived or died was immaterial. Either way, he

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would accomplish his goal.

“What is that goal?” I screamed. “What is it worth if it costs your life?”

“I’ll never forget what he said. ‘If I survive, Terence will see the deed and be forewarned so he’ll be able to block it. My death will warn him how crucial, how immediate the problem is. It can’t wait for reasoned discussions. Mount Nunotuck is being destroyed, as we speak’

You see,” she said slowly, “Michael was ready to sacrifice himself to block that deed. That’s what I needed to tell you, Ms. Alwyn. His death wasn’t accidental. It wasn’t suicide. Dying was a risk worth taking. He died a noble death.” Again she paused, taking a deep breath, “Not that he would want me to make it sound grandiose or anything,” she added. “But his death did accomplish something. Carl didn’t pursue the deed. So it worked. It gives me comfort to admire his death, just as I did his life.”

Stacy stood up, went to the kitchen window and stared out. Ray looked down at the floor. He wasn’t going to take Evelyn Waites’ comfort away by telling her that Michael had died for a phony forged document. However the issue of bamboo was crucial – though Michael had reacted in a hysterical, theatrical way to dramatize it.

Evelyn said, “I had to tell you. I didn’t want the whole world to lose sight of him. I wanted you at least to know. He loved you.”

“Yes,” Stacy said, gently. “His death changed the course of history at Alwyn Mills. It will continue to resonate. His devotion to the Nunotucks and the natural world have inspired a lot of people. I could go on and on. His life was admirable. I wish he had had another way to make his point than by dying, but I have to accept that he thought his mission was crucial enough that he had to risk the Falls. Thank you, Evelyn. What you have told me is so valuable. I treasure the thought that Michael and you had each other. I treasure the thought that he had such strong feelings and values. I can’t thank you enough for coming. I am so glad.”

“I feel better now,” Evelyn said. “I’m still shakey. I should leave. It’s so late, and I don’t trust myself not to break down. I don’t want to do that in front of you.”

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"Please don't leave," Stacy said. "You can't drive in the state you're in. Don't be afraid of breaking down. My family does it all the time. We expect it

Evelyn said, "It's a luxury most people can't afford."

"I hadn't thought of it that way. You're right of course. I have a lot to learn. I have led a privileged, sheltered life. I felt guilty about it. I tried to expiate my guilt by working for HUG, for a greater cause. I almost envy people like you. You know more about the real world than I do. I want what you have, Evelyn. That may seem strange. I am not condescending to you. I admire your courage and your honesty. Those qualities are in short supply in my family."

"I don't envy you," Evelyn said. "I wish my mother and I had an easier time of it, but I wouldn't trade lives with you. Michael told me too much about the Alwyns for me to ever want what you have. You pay too great a price for what you have. People hate you, have misconceptions about you, distance themselves from you, gossip about you, and I believe right now your family is in some danger. I wouldn't want it known that I came to see you. This must be kept confidential at all costs. Louise – Ms. Alwyn – must not know. No one else in your family must know. I trust Ray because he's like me. He understands. Michael didn't know Ray well, but he respected him."

"We have a guest room," Stacy said. "It's so late. You're stressed out and exhausted."

"Believe me... Stacy... I'd feel worse if I slept in this house than I will driving home. I am glad I came though. I had to tell you about that morning. I have one more request."

Stacy nodded.

"I want to take you to Michael's campsite – his – sort of our home. He said you had never been. He would want you to see how he lived. I think you would find some peace there."

"I can see why Michael loved you," Stacy said. "Thank you again. For everything."

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### *Chapter 27*

One by one, Ray tested the hardness of the new batch of blades he had tempered. He trued each one up with a round hammer covered with leather. Then he reground the edges with a 40 belt and polished the blades with progressively finer grits, from 80, to the 600-grid belt. Slow, patient, make time disappear.

In the evening, he sat at the kitchen table and watched the lamplight sway over the irregular pages of Michael's journal. Some were neat; some blotched, jagged and crazy. There was no recognizable handwriting that could be called Michael's. Yet Ray had come to enjoy the reading, the communion with a wild soul.

Reported to Carl. Severe pollution, dead trout downstream from the mill. I think it's the mill, not the beaver dams. He said he was expecting test results, but the indications were that the numbers were good. I said, "You can't argue with a dead trout." He said no reason to pin it on the mill.

God I started falling apart. I'd like to shut out the yellow holding pond, the stench, the dead trees along the banks -- ignore them and spend the evening doing something constructive, mentally undressing my girlfriend Her Highness of the lacy bras, constructing a suspension bridge across the Bay of Finny, or climbing Annapurna, something more relaxing than facing Carl's stonewall of ignorance. It ought to be easy to come up with lots of things to while away the time and distract myself.

Russ is holed up in the newsroom starting a series of articles that should expose Carl, should show the result of Carl's shoddiness, the layers of foamy water kissing the shore in some vampirical way. Russ should be like a badger and get Carl holed up. Carl should not get out this time. And if he does, Russ should tear him apart limb from limb. This should be Greek in scope. The modern version of Oedipus killing his father in an age when things are out in the open, and information can damn someone from coast to coast. It seems sensational, but it's a common story, son rebels against father, just a little bit more dramatic and public than usual, with bigger stakes. We do have a villain here, and a good guy. We

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have a David and Goliath. We have ointment and we have a fly. But I have little confidence in Russ. He's always trying to be "objective." He hates me for my commitments -- I go too far.

At the mill I heard Carl talking on the phone to some people who grow some new product. I heard Carl say he can get the acreage to grow it himself. He kept saying bamboo, like an incantation. "Bamboo" I repeated, dancing around in his office. "Bamboo – he begged me to stop. I danced out to his reception room. People waiting and Evelyn staring at me. Guess I embarrassed him.

Ray remembered Dave the barber's reference to bamboo. He went to the dictionary for further information, but it was no help. Then he thought of calling his friend Wilson Piquette. He had met Wilson ice fishing in Majestic Bay. Wilson was a pleasant man, Professor of Plant Ecology in the Department of Biology at the University of Majestic Bay. When Wilson heard Ray's voice on the phone, he enthusiastically launched into an account of winter camping until Ray said the magic word, "bamboo."

"Bamboo?" Wilson repeated, taken by surprise. "It's a hot item. Little known in North America so far. It's a fast growing and fibrous. It could have a lot of applications. For example it could replace wood as a pulp source. Wouldn't that revolutionize the paper industry! In one lab, biologists created a variety of bamboo that can survive quite far North. I tell you, Ray, bio-genetics is just beginning. It's going to be big. It'll be the wave of the future."

Ray shuddered. The thought of bamboo growing in Northern Maine was hideous. What if it took over the oaks and pines? "If it's so great why aren't the paper companies jumping on it like a duck on a June bug?"

Wilson laughed. "You know the FDA. They want studies. No one knows the side-effects of bringing a highly invasive plant like this into the American landscape. We don't know if it could be controlled, or if it would destroy native species. Plus, one other little thing." He chuckled.

"What?"

"Just my gallows sense of humor. Bamboo harbors insects and molds that don't exist here. I've heard that under certain conditions a lethal mold

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grows on the stem. It's been used to murder people. Just last month a colleague was telling me about a Mexican wife who served her husband some bamboo mold mixed into a tortilla filling. The guy died in less than an hour."

Ray didn't say anything. He was sick of the idea of people killing family members.

Wilson said, "Haven't seen much of you lately. What have you been up to?"

"Same old same old," Ray said. That sure wasn't the truth. "To tell you the truth, I took on too many knife orders." That wasn't the truth either. The truth would be, "Mostly Alwyn business." But he couldn't tell Wilson that.

"How about some ice fishing this weekend?"

"Can't. Too busy." He liked Wilson. Normally, he would have jumped at the chance to go ice fishing. But he wanted to see what would happen in the Alwyn family with Carl's departure. "I'll take a rain-check," he said. "Snow check, whatever."

Wilson said. "You know what they say about all work and no play."

"I know. How about you? What have you been doing?"

"I stopped working when I got tenure," Wilson said. "Seriously, I do my work in the field. You know, ice fishing."

Wilson had the reputation of being a good biologist. Sometimes the best people down-played themselves.

After they hung up, Ray phoned Terence. "Don't bother to sit down, Terence. I've got good

news. Just thought you might like to know (and this is just between us), that deed is a forgery."

"Thank God for that. Monique," he called, "the deed is a forgery."



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Monique gave a victory war whoop. Ray heard her ask. "Who forged it?"

"That's the million dollar question," Ray said. "But the official version is that Carl has decided not to act on the deed. In case anyone asks."

"Right," Terence said. "The old turn your disadvantages into advantages. I heard about the page torn from the Registry. And Wiley told me that they found a bullet. Michael was shot. That's goddamn evil. I think I'm a good person, but if I ever met that killer, I don't know what I'd do."

"It's good Wiley is involved," Ray could hear Monique saying in the background.

"Not officially," Ray said.

Monique came to the phone. "Hi Ray. Wiley is still working on it because he cares. And I think the criminal will reveal himself – or herself -- to Wiley just because Wiley seems so kind of muddling. Wiley will set the trap, and that person will walk right in. Murder, forgery and theft. How can we have so much crime in this County?"

Ray heard Terence swallow and say "Good tea, Monique."

"It's chamomile, Saint Johnswort and kava-kava, your favorite. Calms you down." Monique turned back to Ray. "Ever since Terence heard about the bullet, he's been in a rage."

"It takes time," Ray said, speaking from personal experience, "to accept bad news."

"Yes," Monique said. "When you're grieving, at first you hate time. That's where he's at. But don't worry, Ray," she added quickly. "He's helped a lot of other people get through similar trials. He knows how it goes."

"Anything I can do?"

"We have a lot of support here on the Res. Just call him, Ray. Keep in touch. Well, you always do."

Terence came back on the line. "This bullet news is still new, It was a shock. We'll get through it. Everything in nature passes. How are you?"

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"Heard about a new kind of bamboo," Ray said, thinking to change the subject, to impart interesting information.

There was an explosion on the other end of the line as Terence roared, bamboo?"

"Yes," Ray said.

"We were foolish enough to lease an acre to Carl to plant it. That was three years ago. He said the plant was FDA approved and grew in the South. That was a goddamn lie. He wanted to see if it would survive up here. Said it had a high fiber content, could be commercially profitable. Said we could consider a partnership, if the crop grew well. Well, he misled us. That damn bamboo grew so well, it started to strangle the other vegetation, even trees. This Spring, we cancelled the lease and then we tried to get rid of the bamboo. You can't pull it up by the roots. The roots spread underground like a vine. We had to bring a bulldozer in there, and some plants are still coming up."

Ray asked, "How did Carl plant it?"

"He brought it in his Piper Cub. Carl's got two planes -- a private jet and a Piper Cub. Garages them at the Majestic Bay Airforce Base, civilian terminal. He's an excellent pilot. He can land on a dime. He cleared a little airstrip for himself on our land. He can also garage the planes there."

"Did you ask him why he couldn't grow bamboo on his own land?"

"We were stupid," Terence replied. "Considering how careful we are with the land, I can't believe we were that gullible. But Carl was so convincing. And then, I thought it might be good for community relations. Plus an acre is very little to us. He has a very efficient way of planting seedlings that are already sturdy and rooted in organic containers, so he just digs a hole and plunks them in. He hired people to plant. It brought a little money into the Res, so I fell for it, but

I knew I had to keep my eye on it."

"How did he take it when you cancelled the lease?"

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"He didn't seem upset. It surprised me. Just shrugged and said, 'Oh well.' It kind of worried me. I was asking myself, 'If his heart wasn't in that bamboo project, why did he spend a lot of time convincing us in the first place?' And then I started thinking, 'he must have something up his sleeve.'

"You're probably right," Ray said. "But we'd have to go to Mexico to find out." He paused. "By the way, Terence, sit down now. Take a deep breath. I don't want to tell you this and yet it's the best news I've heard in a long time. It's too much too late, that's all. But I guess it's all you'll get.

"Speak your piece," Terence said.

"Eleanor went into one of her funks. I think she was stalling for time and she couldn't think of what else to say, so out comes the story I think you already knew, because we talked about it on the ginseng hunt. But I have never heard it from Eleanor herself, and she told me she never told you. She regrets that she never told Carl or her family that you were Michael's father. She said she was afraid all the time that the truth would come out. It was a hard secret to hold. Hard on everyone. She said she knew now that it was best that the truth be known. She just told Carl. a few days ago. As I say, I think she was partly stalling for time to give Carl time to get away, because there were cops all around the house. But mostly, I think she wanted to give up her secret. It's been weighing on her for a long time."

Long silence. "You know something, Ray? She told me. But she made me promise to let Carl raise him. She said I could share him with Carl, but I'd have to keep it secret. She was so concerned about appearances. I would have given anything to have been able to treat Michael openly and lovingly the way he deserved to be treated. I did my best, but I couldn't be open with him, when his mother wasn't." Long sigh. "When you think about what might have been..."

"Don't," Ray said. "Don't torture yourself. It's fate."

"I loved my boy. I'll always have that."

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"See you, Chief."

They hung up. Ray opened two cans of beef stew, one for himself, one for Molly. She didn't come up for air until her bowl was empty. Then she curled down on a rug in the corner of the kitchen to snooze. Every so often, her legs raced, as she dreamed of chasing – what? Bamboo?

He called Stacy and said, "I've always wanted to see Mexico. I'm due a few days vacation. We could go together. The trip's on me. That's if Carl is there. We could visit."

Silence at the end of the line. "Why, Ray?" she asked.

Ray summarized what Wilson Piquette and Terence had told him about bamboo.

"Wait a minute," she said. She lowered her voice and whispered, "Louise is here visiting me. That's a first. Then louder, "Let me ask Louise if she knows where he is."

She must have left the phone receiver pointing toward the living room, because Ray could

hear the conversation.

"Carl went back to Mexico. You can't go to see him there. He'd kill you."

"He'll kill me, Louise? Really, you're exaggerating. I'm a big girl. I can take care of myself. Besides Ray's coming with me."

Louise sounded even more startled. "But why do you want to go?"

"Oh," Stacy sounded vague. "I felt bad about the way he left. I think he wanted to reconcile, but I was stubborn. I want to make sure there are no hard feelings. I thought he might like it if I made the effort."

"Absolutely not. He doesn't want anyone down there."

"Why not?"

Now Louise sounded vague. "He's feeling betrayed by you and Russ, and you know his tactics. The best defense is a strong offense. He would be

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very rude to you. You'd have a terrible time."

"I'm not doing anything to him, Louise, just trying to mend bridges. I didn't know he took my work at HUG so seriously. I'd like to tell him I'd like to get more involved in mill affairs. Not that I'd change my convictions, just that maybe I could help him make the mill less polluting."

"He's not running the mill any more. I am. Did you forget? He's involved in another business project. He doesn't want any outsiders."

"What's so secret? Is it about bamboo?"

"What are you talking about?" Louise asked sharply.

"I read it in Michael's journal," Stacy half lied. Ray had explained the whole thing to her.

"Michael was crazy."

Stacy prodded in her most diplomatic way. "I think bamboo is theoretically a great alternative to cutting down trees. It's fast-growing. It's a good renewable source of pulp. Much higher yield per acre than trees. And less polluting to break down into pulp than wood. I've come across some articles in environmental journals. So if that's what he's down there for, I say bravo. I don't want bamboo to take over Maine. If bamboo can't come to Carl, it's fine if Carl goes to bamboo."

"Anyway," Louise said, "you'd never find him. He's in a little town deep in the Yucatan. There are no roads. It's not on the map. He flies his own jet to San Cristobal. Then he has his little private plane down there to get to the village. There's no runway in the town, just a grass strip. It's not your Club Med. Give it up, Stacy."

Stacy sighed. "Louise, Club Med has never been my style. But maybe you're right. Maybe it's a wild goose chase, and good for nothing."

Ray heard Stacy's footsteps approaching the phone. She said in a low voice, almost a whisper, "Ray, I think you're on to something. We should definitely check it out. I'll get directions and arrange transportation

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somehow."

The next day they were in a three passenger Cessna, flying low over the Yucatan. The macho pilot banked sharply to show them the sights, a waterfall, a close-up of a river. He let the plane fall with heart-stopping speed, then rose up sharp. It was a roller coaster ride. Stacy wisely hadn't had lunch. Ray was having trouble keeping his down.

After an hour, the pilot began a dive that turned out to be a landing attempt on a short grass strip carved out of the middle of the jungle. He aborted the landing at the last minute, as a flock of chickens was grazing there. When the plane skimmed over the chickens, they scattered. The pilot turned sharply, and came back, coming to rest at the very end of the strip. He grinned at them. "Have to do that every time I land at one of these Mexican towns."

The touchdown was bumpy, but Ray barely noticed. His eyes were on the twenty or so grass huts nestled in a small clearing and on the incredibly lush jungle beyond. A few Indian children wearing red, green and black striped tunics ran to meet the plane. As Ray stepped onto the grass, the heat hit him like a damp wall. *You're not in Maine anymore.* A concrete bunker-type house stood at one side of the runway. Carl emerged from it.

"Nice to see you," he said. His smile was too wide and a little worried. "I've ordered a little lunch for you. I'll get someone to take your bags to your accommodations. I've arranged for you to have your own grass hut."

"How romantic," Stacy said.

Carl shrugged. "That's how we live here." He gestured toward the cement hut. "That building is the only one with electricity. We have a generator, so we can also pump water and run some electronic equipment. But you didn't come here to see the modern conveniences." He steered them toward a hut. Smoke seeped in a small stream from a hole in the roof. "This is an old village. I came here three years ago with Representative Fielding and some representatives of the Mexican government who wanted to develop Indian culture. These people had no

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schools. They didn't even know what money was. I offered to try and help them develop the economy. The officials wanted the Indians to have a cash crop. Their idea was to have the Indians start growing coffee. But I said I would sponsor bamboo. I said I would build a mill and paper products would be a cash crop. They agreed. I'll show you the fields later. It's siesta time. When it's cooler, when the field workers have returned to work, you can see the whole operation. But now, let's eat."

They entered a hut where two women were baking tortillas on a thin flat stone over fire. Ray watched the women spread a bean paste over the tortillas, then fold the tortillas over. In addition, the women served Stacy and Russ each a chicken wing, and gave Carl a leg. To drink, they had a milky liquid Carl said was extracted from corn. "This is a feast," he said. "The natives don't eat like this every day. But for you, they killed a chicken."

The women watched them eat. They smiled and gestured. They spoke no English or Spanish. "How do you communicate with them?" Stacy asked.

"I have a translator. He oversees the operations here. He's away for a few days, but he left directions, so everyone knows what to do."

When they had finished eating, Carl said, "I have a very special treat in store for you. It's an extraordinarily beautiful place," Carl said. "The Yucatan is famous for its swimming holes and waterfalls. But this is one waterfall you won't find in guide books. We're in a section of the Yucatan that hasn't been discovered by tourists -- yet. Just me. I don't need this waterfall for a mill -- yet."

Stacy said, "I'm sweaty and grimy. I'd love a swim. How about you, Ray?"

"I'm not a strong swimmer. But I'd like to see it."

"Ray, you're always up for an adventure. Let's change into bathing suits." She and Ray went into their hut where someone had placed their bags. When they got back, they started down a narrow path. A yellow, blue and red parrot screeched at them. A monkey leaped from its perch on a branch onto Stacy's head and tore at her hair. Stacy screamed. Ray sprinted forward. Carl shouted to the animal, which promptly retreated

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from him in fear. "God, I hate that filthy animal," Carl said. "He's the foreman's pet. Usually he's on a chain."

The path broadened and then disappeared as they came into a different terrain. The trees were so tall that the leaves overhead looked like a distant green sky. "Some of the trees don't have leaves," Carl said. "In fact they've been dead so long they're petrified." The forest changed again. They followed a narrow path through verdant jungle, with vines and low bushes, many of which looked like overgrown versions of houseplants found in Maine living rooms. At a turn in the path, they saw it. A pristine emerald pool. A shimmering ribbon of waterfall. Sunlight made glimmering jewels on the water. Lush vegetation surrounded the waterfall and pool. In the low bushes on the other side of the pool lay a giant python.

"Don't worry," Carl said. "The Indians say after it comes here to sleep after it's had a pig or a couple of chickens from the village. It probably wouldn't go for a human unless someone irritated it. We'll just stay on this side and swim. Don't go too close to the falls."

The water was crystal clear. Stacy waded in and splashed Ray, who sat on the bank dangling his feet. "Aren't you coming, Dad?" she asked. "You young people go in," Carl said. "I'll cool off by the mist of the Falls."

"What about whirlpools?" Ray asked. Once burned, twice shy.

"Oh no, the locals swim here all the time," Carl said.

The day was hot, and after the walk, Ray was sweating. He decided a swim might be refreshing. Cautiously, he waded into the water. The incline was steep. Soon he was up to his chest. Eddies and currents swirled around his legs. Stacy was swimming, heading to the Falls. She turned her head back. "Catch me," she called, laughing.

Ray arched his body and flailed his arms. Stacy was a strong swimmer, and now that she saw him pursuing her, she increased her speed, enjoying the age-old game of the chase. Ray reached her. He caught her by the waist. He treaded water with his legs and with one arm pulled her toward him. She felt warm and cold at the same time, tingling in his embrace. Was there no end to their kiss, the delicious cold water, the mist



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rising around them from the spray of the Falls? "This is paradise," she whispered, twining her legs around him.

"Complete with the snake," Ray said, glancing at the far bank where the python lay motionless. Ray checked out Carl, who also appeared to be sleeping, stretched out under the shade of some huge tree Ray could not begin to identify. Everything was new and exotic. Except Stacy's body, which seemed completely familiar, yet startling.

"Let's float and enjoy it," Ray said. They lay on their backs holding hands. The sky was azure, canopied with trees. The sound of the waterfall was timeless, rhythm less and comforting. The occasional bumping of Stacy's body into his made him feel that they were water creatures, not just earthly beings, but transported for a while that felt like an eternity into a different element, one where they both felt at home. He turned on his side and whispered "I love you." It was the first time he had said it to her.

She said, "I love you." That was also the first time he had heard it from her.

Maybe it was because they were in paradise. It was a perfect setting, like a movie. As if they were actors playing out a great part. Ray didn't want to analyze it.

No one talked on the way back except for Carl, who kept up a running chatter about the advantages of running a business in Mexico, where the labor costs were cheap. The heat was damp and oppressive. Ray wondered if he was getting heat stroke. He felt dizzy and sick to his stomach. As he trudged back up the path toward the tiny clearing of the village, his brain felt feverish. Maybe he was delirious.

When they got back to the sprinkling of grass huts, Carl led them down a well-worn path to the bamboo fields. "The men aren't back yet, but we might as well have a look. Twenty acres of bamboo. "That's all I need," he said. "This is just my start-up. Look." He picked up a hoe and pried at one plant. It slid easily out of the earth, already boxed. "I had the whole field set like a grid," he said. "One bamboo per box. They grow big enough to ship in a month. They can be planted directly in the ground.

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The box decomposes into earth. I staggered the starting dates so I have a steady transportable supply. I can fly the loads out in a small transport plane, or I can expand and keep the business down here. And Stacy," he turned to face her. His head seemed bigger than usual. Maybe he was the one with heat stroke. "You won't mention this to anyone. I'm at the start-up stage. Don't try to ruin this business, the way you compromised the mill."

"Dad, I never meant to. That's what I came down here to tell you. I wanted to tell you I'd be happy to be a consultant to the Mill. I can help make it less polluting."

"You'll have to speak with Louise about that. Bamboo in Mexico is my business now." Carl's voice had a sharp edge. "But I applaud your initiative, Stacy. I see you've learned a lesson from me. Never give up. Never admit defeat. Defeat is just a door opening. You can't keep an Alwyn down."

He turned to Ray. His eyes were bright, shooting little glints of light. "I'm sure you recognize the importance of the trust I place in you in showing you these fields. The Alwyns have always treated you well." Was there an implied, 'so far?' Carl's voice was smooth. "I'm an entrepreneur. I'd do anything to keep this business going. I have big ideas. When you come back in a few months, you won't recognize the place. We're going to transform the landscape. Over there," he pointed, "will be a bank. Right here will be a paved street. And I'm building Eleanor and myself a little hacienda – already have the landscaper working on the garden. You know how she loves gardens. We're going to tame this jungle." Carl's huge head turned on its axis until his gaze rested on Stacy. He said, "Your mother and I have always acted together on everything. She supports everything I do. She's the best woman in the world."

Stacy said, "I'm not feeling so good."

Carl said. "You better lie down. I was foolish to take you out in midday. Especially when you're used to Maine's temperate climate. I'm used to the heat by now, so I didn't think..."

Carl went into the hut first to check for scorpions. When they entered, he

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told them to lie on the hammocks. He said bugs crawled on you if you slept on the ground. He left, saying they'd feel refreshed after a nap.

"It won't be paradise here for long," Stacy said, when they were each swinging on a hammock. The slight breeze cooled Ray off.

"You can't stop progress," he said. Neither one of them had energy for much conversation. "If Carl wants a road, he'll build a road. It would be easier to drive here than take that dare devil airplane ride."

"Wasn't that chicken great?" Stacy asked, referring to lunch.

"It was the best chicken I ever had in my life. Wild running organic fowl. Nothing like Stouffers."

"I didn't like the tortilla, though. Only had a tiny bite." Ray told Stacy Wilson Piquette's story about bamboo mold, and the husband who had died eating it spread on a tortilla by his wife.

"I loved the tortilla," she said. "I'm glad I didn't know that story."

Ray said. "Maybe we have heat stroke."

Stacy said, "I'm not having any more tortillas. I want to go home."

"The plane's coming tomorrow."

Carl poked his head in the doorway. "Everything OK? Feeling better?"

They said simultaneously, "Yes, better."

Carl said, "If you're worried about the Indians stealing your money or passports, you can give those things to me. I can lock them up."

Stacy checked her backpack. "Everything is here. I'm sure we'll be fine. Thanks anyway, Carl."

"Well, I'm off to check on the field hands. When you're up to it, come on out and check out our operation. I know you'll be impressed."

After he had gone, Ray said, "There's something touching about your father. He's an asshole, but in his own way he believes he's doing the

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right thing.”

Stacy said, “You mean he has his own value system. That’s for sure. But I can’t support it. I’ve gotten to the point where I can barely stand my own father. How horrible does that sound? I mean,” there was a long pause. “Whether he means to or not, he’s ruining the rain forest. Bamboo will take over. He’s playing God. Biogenetics my foot. It’s scientific invention driven by the profit motive. But I’m not telling him that. I can’t do anything about it and it’s not my problem. I came here to talk about the mill because there I can make some changes. I have to persuade him that Russ and I want to help Louise. It’s not to get our inheritance back. We’ll lose money at first if we take the initiatives we want. Russ and I have decided that Louise needs our help. The pollution and mill situation will become even worse if we don’t step in. The mill might fold.”

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### *Chapter 28*

The next day, Stacy called to make an appointment to see her at the mill. Evelyn Waites, who, incredibly was still working at the mill, had put her right through to Louise. Louise had been curt on the phone. She said she could give Stacy fifteen minutes at the end of the day.

Ray agreed to go with her. He had been thinking a lot about their relationship. Right now he was a sort of bodyguard. But he had broached a new idea with Stacy and she had enthusiastically embraced it. After all the brouhaha with her family settled down, he had asked her if she would like to work for him, part time, on an as needed basis. The idea was that she would do PR. The advertising and the selling angles. She was such a networker, and could reach a market that would be interested in handmade quality knives. She thought it would be peaceful. The thought of the two of them working together by the heat of the forge gave Ray no end of delight. Stacy on the phone. Ray on the acetylene torch. This idea provided the incentive to him to continue to be her bodyguard. And well, there were other obvious rewards. Making love with Stacy was – well how could he describe it? – it was an enrichment, an investment. Not monetarily. In a life sense. He knew this sounded very unromantic, but it that's the way he felt.

Ray and Stacy got to Alwyn Mills at 5:00. Workers were streaming out the door. As they went in, Ray heard one grumbling about "that bitch who thinks she can run a mill." Another said, "You give your life to a company, then they kick you out the door." The reply, "Then they go and hire people who don't know what an on-off switch is. It's an accident waiting to happen."

They went up to Louise's office. The secretary's desk was unoccupied. Evelyn Waites must have left at the dot of 5:00.

Stacy opened her folder containing information on recycling, new technologies available to pulp and paper mills, and a list of mills that were implementing them. The list of new technologies was long, the list of mills implementing them short. Stacy had said to Louise, "Why don't we have dinner together afterward?"

Louise said that the end of the Mill workday was not the end of her

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workday. She was swamped with work. She did not have time for dinner.

"How are things going here?" Stacy asked, knowing the answer already.

"Any transition is difficult. I'm steering a straight course. I'm encountering some opposition. But that's normal. It will pass."

"What kind of opposition?" Stacy thought Louise would ignore the question, or say it was none of her business, but to her surprise, Louise started talking. Maybe Louise needed to talk to someone. Stacy suddenly realized that Louise had no friends, at least that Stacy knew of. The only person Louise had talked to was Carl. Maybe Eleanor. And now they were both in Mexico. Carl had picked her up and flown her back.

"I'll tell you what kind of opposition. This morning I was down at the pulp production part of the Mill. Some of the men were complaining about the makeshift way the new supervisor was dealing with the kiln problem. You know, or I guess you don't know, that the kiln is supposed to burn the vapors from the pulping process, but the system wasn't tight. The men said the supervisor was stuffing rags in the leaking pipes. I got down there. One of the men came right up to me and said I had fired a good supervisor and hired a dunce. Those were his words. I started to talk with the supervisor, but the men were getting upset and got a little rowdy. I said 'OK, I would make sure the problem was solved. I said I'd get an inspector from OSHA -- Occupational Safety and Health Act -- to come ASAP. And technical support, engineers, whatever we needed. I went upstairs and got on the phone with the OSHA inspector who promised to come tomorrow. Are you with me?"

"I am, Louise. Sounds like you did the right thing."

"I am trying, Stacy. I want the Mill to be safe. I want the employees to have confidence in me. It's the old employees who are causing the trouble. Maybe I'll have to fire more men. I have hired a new employment counselor who hires qualified replacements. These people owe their jobs to me, not Carl. It's going to take time to get things going smoothly."

"OK," Stacy said. "Carl put you in a tough spot. It was obviously too

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sudden to plunge you immediately into the intricacies of running a mill.

In the inner office, Louise was just hanging up the phone. Louise said, "Hi. I'm on my way downstairs to tell the men the OSHA inspector is coming tomorrow. I hope I can catch at least the new supervisor before he leaves. Wait here. I'll be right back."

They sat in what used to be Carl's office and was now Louise's. Nothing in the room had been changed. Same file cabinets, huge mahogany desk, three chairs for visitors on one side of the desk. Stacy walked to Louise's chair and sat down. It gave her an odd feeling. She told Ray she felt small. The desk was cluttered with papers, which Stacy didn't look at. Instead, she focused on three photographs by the desk lamp. A picture of Carl and Eleanor. Carl had his arm around her. She seemed to be trying to tie a scarf over her hair, which was blowing in the wind. The second picture was a formal family portrait. She remembered sitting for it. She had been eight years old. All the kids looked sullen, and Carl and Eleanor looked dignified. The third picture was an aerial view of the Mill.

Ray got up and went to the window. The Nunotuck river rushed over the dam below. The water was the color of rust. The holding pond looked scummy, On the other side of the river were the dense forests of the Reservation, and beyond that, Province Mountain.

Louise seemed to be taking a long time. Stacy hoped she wasn't running into any more labor disputes. She started reading the reports on Louise's desk. Nothing extraordinary. Then she heard the evacuation alarm ringing – one she had never heard before in her life at the mill, but it was a pretty universal sound. Without thinking, she and Ray bolted down the stairs towards where they knew Louise had gone. Later Ray wondered why neither of them had considered their own personal safety.

The account of what had happened came from a worker, a new man, who had stayed late because his boot shoelace had snapped, and he had to remove it and tie the ends together, and replace the boot. He was at the far end of the white liquor vat and saw Louise come down the stairs. She went to the supervisor's station and called the supervisor's name. It was quiet in the room. The machines were turned off. Louise looked annoyed when she came out with the man. They turned and abruptly headed back to the stairs. The worker said they were walking pretty fast.

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In their rush, the new supervisor knocked over a barrel.

Safety reviews were filed later. Even though the barrel was empty, it should have been tightly sealed. Apparently no one had bothered to observe the same precautions they might have for a full one.

Unfortunately even an empty barrel of sodium dioxide retains product residues and fumes.

The worker said he was just finishing lacing his boot. He saw the supervisor trip and fall over the barrel he knocked down. The lid rolled away. His head was next to the opening of the barrel. He began to gasp and choke. He reached his arms out, apparently to push away the barrel, but they went inside the barrel and touched the sides. He pushed against the sides to try and get up.

"Louise was already half way up the stairs. You know how she is. She never looks back. I don't think she realized what had happened until the supervisor started screaming," the worker reported. "It was like it was happening in slow motion. I had started toward him as soon as he fell into the barrel. I got to him. I knew he had been exposed to some chemical. I didn't know what it was. I'm new to the Mill. I work in another section. I looked around for help, but everyone was gone. Ms. Alwyn has cut staffing for the moment and there is no night shift. The mill is operating with two shifts instead of three. Louise was standing on the stairs, then she just collapsed, like she was paralyzed. I ran for the hose. I thought, 'I'll wash the man down.' I turned on the hose and all hell broke loose. Fire burst up all around him, and it kept flaring up. He started erupting like a volcano. His skin just melted away. He choked and gasped. He couldn't breathe. I was crying so hard. I was so confused. For God's sake, I'm a Quaker."

The safety review noted that sodium peroxide is corrosive and causes severe burns to every area of contact. It is harmful if inhaled. It may explode violently if exposed to contact with water.

That's when Ray and Stacy ran down the stairs looking for Louise. They saw Louise collapsed on the stairs. They saw a man in flames and another man dealing with it. Stacy dragged Louise up the stairs – afterwards she never knew how she got the strength. Ray raced downstairs, understood immediately what was happening and turned



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off the hose.

The safety review recommended that directions be posted as follows: to extinguish a fire, use dry chemical or pulverized dolomite. The directions were, of course already on the barrel. But neither Louise nor the worker had read those directions. And no dolomite was at hand.

“Call 911,” Stacy screamed, as she dragged Louise up step by step. The worker, who seemed in a daze ran into the supervisor’s office. As the flames on the supervisor’s body died down, Ray knelt down and started CPR. But his eyes started to burn and he had difficulty breathing. It was obviously too late to save the man. “Get away,” Stacy screamed. “Come on. We’ve all got to get out of here. Outside, Stacy knelt by Louise. Louise was still breathing. The new worker was pacing aimlessly, in shock, his bootlace still untied. Ray lay on his back in the grass, not daring to rinse out his eyes, hoping they wouldn’t explode out of his head. Downstairs a man was dead.