

*Anne Brudevold*

**Hunter Moon**

*Chapter 29*

Eileen told Ray and Steward she didn't want any fuss made over her birthday. "By the time you get to be 70, you stop counting the years. You just pay attention to every breath, and believe me, you're thankful to be drawing it!" But no matter what she said, they knew she loved to be noticed. It seemed like the perfect occasion for a get-together of people she hadn't seen for a long time. Ray and Steward called Terence, Monique, Bacon, Rose, Eileen's card-playing friends (including Sage), her friends from the Senior Center, and the regulars and bartender from the Starlight Grill and Bar. They hired the Swing Band that played on Thursday nights at the Starlight. Ray invited Stacy. Eileen would continue to scope Stacy out and decide whether or not she would make good wife material. Cindy couldn't come because she had the flu.

Hopefully, the weather would be good, as it would be hard to fit everybody in the house. And they were lucky. The day dawned warm and clear. By 2:00 in the afternoon, the Swing Band had plugged in their amps and set up microphones in the driveway. They were playing "April in Paris" as people began to arrive.

Eileen was in what she called eighth heaven – seventh heaven was too trite. Steward had taken her shopping, and told her to pick out a dancing dress and shoes. She wore a gauzy orange and black number that swirled as she twirled, and low heeled pumps perfect for navigating dips and turns on the gravel driveway. The hairdresser had parted her gray hair in the middle and bobby pin curls fell around her face. It was a hairdo out of the forties. As the band started on "I love those shiny stockings," Eileen was back in the forties. She was a flapper. She was young. This was her time and she was going to dance it.

Ray had arranged chairs in the driveway, but hardly anyone sat in them. Eileen's enthusiasm was infectious. The seniors from Eileen and Steward's era were as caught up in the moment as she was. Eileen would talk about this day for weeks and years. He hoped, decades.

Eileen and Steward knew Terence and Monique from the days when they used to visit the Res more often. Now Eileen only went when someone drove her to play cards with Sage. Steward referred to Terence

as “the youngster,” since Terence was only 56. Steward and Eileen had known Terence’s father better than they knew Terence.

When Eileen took a break from dancing, she went into the dining room to get something to eat. When she saw Terence, she went over to him and went on one of her memory rampages. She said to him, “You put your parents through the wringer when you were a teenager!”

Terence laughed. “I don’t remember it that way. Those were good years. My classmates and I – we were a posse. Got together after school, built camp fires in the woods, had these truth telling sessions at night.”

“Drank a lot of beer,” Eileen said. “Littered. Your mother made you pick up the cans. Then you went to California. Your dad was afraid you’d never come back. That was the sixties by then.”

“Well Eileen, I went to California for college. I went to Berkeley. I even graduated.”

“I thought you just disappeared for a while.” Eileen took a bite of a turkey sub. The Starlight Grill and Bar had donated subs and coleslaw. Of course that was money out of Steward’s pocket but so what? Who thought of money at a time like this? In the driveway, the band had started “Stella by Starlight.” Eileen could see Steward twirling Rose around, a big grin on his face. He was in his element. Although he had put on a few pounds, he still moved like a thin man.

“The sixties,” Eileen said. “All the kids disappeared. You young people were either in Vietnam like Ray or you were demonstrating, or you left the country. That was a terrible time for parents. We didn’t know what was happening to our children. Terence, your father thought you’d never come back from that commune you joined in California. He thought you were gone for good.”

Terence took a bite of coleslaw and chewed it for a long time.

“Your father was sick,” Eileen said. “He had three heart attacks. He couldn’t get in touch with you because you didn’t have a phone. You had renounced all material values, I recall. Like telephones.”

Terence swallowed. “It seemed like the right thing to do at the time.”

“Your father was sure you didn’t ever want to be chief. Your mother took over his duties when he got sick. She was a great chief. Then suddenly you came back. There you were.”

“There I was,” Terence said, “sitting in Berkeley, wondering was I ready to be chief? Did I want to do it? What good was it to be a chief’s

son? Indians were a dying breed. When I figured things out, I came back. My mother was the first person I saw. She said, 'Your father died last month.' I always felt bad I didn't say good bye to him. She didn't try and make me feel bad. But I did. But he and I had good times before that. I don't have too many regrets."

"That's right, you remember that right," Eileen said. "These days memory is important. A lot of people don't remember things right. Your mother was a good chief, but she got old. We all do. My goodness. How old was she? I'm 70 years old today. I don't feel old. Sometimes I look in the mirror. I see an old woman. 'Who is that?' I ask myself. That's not me. That's some old woman with wrinkles and she's squinting to see herself in the mirror. That's pathetic. That old creature. Who can that be?"

Terence said, "I remember you from when I was a kid. I went to your wedding. You and Steward were dancing like there was no tomorrow. I thought, that's the way I want to live."

"Let me give you a kiss on the cheek," Eileen said. "You're a sweet boy."

Ray heard the crunch of gravel. A car was pulling into the driveway. He ran out and stopped it before it drove right into the band and the people dancing. Sage emerged from the vehicle, a mountain emerging from a molehill. "Hello Sage."

"Hello, Ray."

"Glad you could make it. Come in."

"Thank you, Ray. I will."

Sage entered the house with dignity and went straight to the dining room and the buffet. Eileen embraced her and told her how glad she was that Sage had been able to come to her party. "You haven't come to my house in years," she marveled.

"I have hardly been out of my trailer. I can barely fit out the door. People bring me my groceries and everything I need. I am blessed to have so much love and support." Sage said. She winked at Terence, who was standing nearby. Terence bowed rather formally, then went outside to dance. Bacon, Rose, Ray and Stacy surrounded Sage. Eileen asked if Sage could give her a quick reading as a birthday present.

"Sure," Sage said. "I brought the cards so I don't have to go into a trance. Choose one. I'll make it short. Say what jumps out at me." She pulled the Tarot deck from her purse and Eileen chose a card.

Sage closed her hand on it without looking at it. She seemed to soak in its pulsations. "I think this card is trying to tell us something."

"Very funny, Sage," Ray said. Was that a tear dripping down her cheek?

She looked at the card. It showed a person hanging upside down, suspended by one foot. The figure's face was expressionless. It could be either a man or a woman. Sage murmured in a deep voice, almost a growl, "In the spirit world, to which the Tarot belongs, hanging is OK. It means a spiritual regard for things, rather than acceptance of material values. It means renunciation of the flesh and worldly desires. As you can see, the spiritual path ain't easy!" She threw the cards back into her purse. "Heave ho. Hanged person. All my life. I hate it. Who cared after all? Who gave a fuck?"

Tears ran down her face. Ray had never seen her so agitated.

"So it's a card that brings up memories," she sobbed. "So what? I'm human too. I have my own agenda!" She cried and cried. Eileen tried to comfort her. Ray sat helpless, turning over a button on his shirt, keeping his eyes fixed on the floor, anywhere but on her heaving bosom and the ringed hands that trembled and pressed against her fleshy face. "God in heaven, so help me, Eileen, that card," she cried. "I...no...I should not say any more. I am, after all, a vessel," she said, with strange calmness and a deep breath. She seemed to gather courage from the thought. Her stormy breathing settled down. "I can tell you one thing. Terence was a very attractive man in his day. More than one woman can attest to that. He was a little younger than me, but I myself... but I will say no more. This was not a card about you, Eileen. You picked a card about me. You gave me a present. I'll let you win at our next card game. Sometimes my trance mind just shows up and acts wrong. It floods my mind with memories. With some of those memories, I'm good for nothing." She stole a glance through the window at Terence, who was dancing with Monique, then shrugged and said, "Of course, food always helps."

Eileen hurried her to the buffet table, where Sage began to demolish a salami sub.

Terence had finished his dance with Monique and stepped inside. He stood by the dining room window and watched the party outside. He looked strange, gesturing, as if speaking to himself, or an imaginary audience. Ray approached him. Terence said, in a voice so low that Ray had to strain to hear him, "We cry to the air and go mad. We rock death.

Kiss the sun. We feel a vision kind of pain. Our souls receive what they can bear. Behind the rain is snow. Through all the phases of the moon, we rejoice and we ache. The only truth is loyalty to the earth. The versatile, rotating earth."

Ray wanted to say, "You heart-breaker, you," but he had the eerie feeling that what Terence was saying were his own deeper thoughts, only Terence was speaking them. He wouldn't be able to put them into words like that.

Somebody opened the kitchen door and Molly, who had been harassing the dancers outside, raced in and headed straight for her food bowl. After wolfing down her portion, she beaded in on Terence. Terence knelt down and embraced her. The mystical mood was broken. Terence laughed, returning Molly's exuberant greeting, holding his arm up, encouraging her to jump. When she tired of that, he patted her all over. He turned around, looked at Sage and asked, "Will you be coming to the Lodge Full Moon Festival this weekend?"

"I don't think so, Terence," Sage said with dignity. Terence went to her and embraced her. She stiffened at first, then softened, patted his back maternally and said, "The universe forgives you."

"I'm sorry, Sage," Terence said. "Sorry for everything."

In the awkward silence that ensued, Bacon said, "Sure, me and Rose, we'll be there."

Ray nodded.

"How about you, Stacy?" Terence asked.

"If that's an invitation, I'll be there," Stacy said.

Terence said. "You may not be a Nunotuck, but you have a protective attitude toward the land, and that's what counts. Even if you are an Alwyn, your heart's in the right place. Besides that, Monique says you and Ray look right together."

Stacy considered this. "Then I'll come if Ray wants me to," she said.

"Will you stop asking questions like that?" Ray said. "Hey, let's dance."

The band was playing "I left my heart in San Francisco." Stacy and Ray swayed. That was the limit of Ray's dancing. Holding Stacy in his arms, Ray didn't see how dancing could get any better. Who cared about foxtrots and waltzes?

After the song ended, Ray decided he wanted to show Stacy the path from his cabin to the Nunotuck River. The party was in full swing, and

would probably continue that way for a while. The almost full Lodge Moon lit the forest in theatrical light. The trail wound past yellowing oaks. It was a beaten path of gold. They passed a pond, gone from blue to russet in the night. And the sumacs, the fiery Virginia creepers, all the reds and yellows of Fall, the fall of leaves shining in a moonlit exaltation of color. Ray saw ripeness and achievement. The purpling wild grapes, bittersweet's acrid orange, the fruition of summer heat, visible in this clear, cold night. The earth had done its work. He thought of his own work – his responsibilities, his daughter Cindy, his parents, his knife business. He took Stacy's hand. He was beginning to suspect he didn't have to protect her from anything. Just care about her. Take care with her. Then there was the land – the butternut, hickory, the rusty birches. Looking at a leathery oak, he thought, the planet. Don't forget the planet.

He had a lot to care about. He was a lucky man.

They walked back. People were still dancing and eating, but the party was winding down and people sat in groups and talked. Ray and Stacy sat swinging on the old-fashioned double swing that Ray thought was the best feature of his cabin. The night was still warm. He took Stacy's hand and even though he knew it sounded stupid and sentimental he said, "I want to take care of you."

Stacy groaned. "That's a hinge on a one way swinging door. Men say it and it means they want you to take care of them. After the woman jumps into the trap thinking the caring will be equal, the woman always ends up taking more care than the man does."

"So far in our relationship, I've been your bodyguard."

She raised one eyebrow. He hadn't known she could do that. She said, "You're keeping tabs?"

"We've been through some pretty hellish circumstances. I helped you. Admit it."

"Good or bad, I need the stimulation. I get bored when things there's no challenge, no excitement."

"You're the first woman I've been with who is more like a partner than a wife – that's a compliment."

Three little wrinkles rayed out from the corner of each eye. Her lips widened as if she wanted to smile, but was holding the smile in. "So you're not going to ask me to marry you?"

"We could try living together. Not all the time. I'm too independent.

*Wilderness House Literary Review 3/2*

A little at a time."

She laughed. "This conversation is going backwards."

He shrugged. "That's as romantic as I get."

She looked him straight in the eye. No raised eyebrow. "I've had enough of romantic."

"Stacy, let's not drag in our past relationships."

"Ray, let's not hide our true selves. Let's not put on acts."

"I meant I want to care WITH you."

"I don't want to get fat, lazy, complacent or co-dependent."

"I've always worked for everything I got, and I want to keep on working until I die. I'll keep on making my knives." He started to laugh. He had been so overwrought during their conversation that relief engulfed him like a wave and he just couldn't stop laughing.

"What is wrong with you?" she asked.

They rocked together, slightly back and forth, feeling the wind blow around and through them. He was aware of the world outside, which had been absent from his consciousness for at least a few minutes. The dark conifers, also swaying, the shadows on the ground from the moonlight making a courtly minuet, and the clouds overhead, chasing each other, blurring into each other, coming apart, and turning into new shapes.

*Chapter 30*

“Surprising, but I like it here,” Eleanor said. She stretched out on a lounge chair under a palm tree, fanning herself with dried palm fronds. She was every inch the wife of a rich man. The Talbot’s tailored outfits—hounds tooth jackets and navy blue pleated skirts, the designer sweatshirts and tailored slacks (concessions to Maine) had been replaced by a white blouse and blouse embroidered with tropical flowers (handmade by Indian craftswomen and bought at a fraction of what they would fetch in the States, no doubt). She put down her fan, reached for the 30 SPF sunscreen, applied it carefully to all exposed areas of skin, and then lay back satisfied, as if her day’s work had been done. “You can’t be too careful about the sun in the tropics,” she said. “I get a sunless tan these days – those bronzers are terrific. I don’t want age spots and wrinkles. Ridiculous in our times, what with our scientific and health consciousness. Anyway, as I was saying,” she reached to a small table beside her to take a frosted glass and drink from it, “are you sure you won’t have a margarita?”

Stacy and Ray shook their heads. It was too hot, and too early in the day – right after breakfast.

Eleanor said, “These tropical drinks are spectacular. Anyway, yes,” she leaned back, closed her eyes and said, “Maine is a cold and bony state. I never liked it. I had too many social responsibilities. I felt the resentment of all the mill workers, of everybody in the county poorer than we were. Jealousy, bitterness. It’s harder when it’s your own country. You’re more aware of the undercurrents. Here – well I suppose there are some, but,” she sipped from her drink then laughed a surprisingly long and open chortle Ray didn’t know she was capable of, “here if there are undercurrents, I don’t feel them. I don’t speak the language, thank god. As far as I know, the servants and field workers are thankful for the jobs we provide – period. As they should be. The dollar goes a long way here. It’s amazing how cheap labor is. Apparently, we pay these people well. We are not taking advantage of them. Everything is cheap. We are living for half the price we did in Maine, even with all this building going on, and with house and garden help.” She closed her eyes and sun-bathed purposefully.

Since the last time he and Stacy had visited, the hacienda had been completed. A lawn had been planted. A lawn must take a lot of



insecticide in the middle of the rain forest. Ray saw a short man – average by Mexican standards – sweeping the stone paths from the hacienda to the patio by the lawn where they sat. The man sprayed the flowering decorative bushes by the path with insecticide or bug-killer – Ray smelled it. The man’s rhythm was unhurried, careful without seeming particularly focused. He swept as if his mind was elsewhere. His pace certainly did not match the frenzied purposeful pace of the workers at the Alwyn paper mill. Ray felt an odd sense of dislocation. What was wrong with this picture? It wasn’t the difference in pace. It was something that Ray couldn’t place, beneath the idyllic surface.

At least fifty men worked the fields, weeding, digging, planting, cutting back the jungle with machetes. The machetes had caught Ray’s attention instantly. He had bought a few different ones, one with a finger guard, one without, one convex, one flat with a primary bevel formed from a secondary bevel. They were light-weight and flexible. Ray guessed they were made from medium carbon spring steel 1095 or so. They were made to be elastic so they didn’t lose form with repeated hard blows to tough objects. Since they were tempered to maximum hardness, they were almost impossible to sharpen. He had bought several of different styles. He had bought decorated scabbards. He taken to wearing a scabbard complete with machete everywhere --whenever they went into the jungle to swim in the pool by the waterfall, or down to the river to wade and watch the women wash clothes, or wash their own clothes. All the men wore machetes. The women rubbed the clothes against the stones in the river to clean them. They added soap they made themselves. They scrubbed and scrubbed. Factories and cities far away polluted the river where the women washed their clothes. The water didn’t smell. It was clean enough to bathe and wash clothes in, Strong currents prevented swimming. Contamination was enough so that the natives had to boil the water before drinking it. This was a new practice for them. They had always drunk straight from the river. It was not until they began to get sick, and a chance visit by a fly-in doctor diagnosed the problem that they were taught to boil drinking water. The concept of germs was foreign to them. They did not understand why they had to boil the water, but they did it because it stopped them from getting sick.

Ray had done some research before this second trip to Mexico. He had read about jungle animals, insects and snakes. He had read about the

political situation. The Zapatistas, a revolutionary group of significant size and influence was infiltrating villages and turning people against the government. The political situation was volatile. Carl was living in a battle zone. Large landowners were at risk. The wealthy were at risk. Zapatistas spread resentment among the poor and blamed the privileged people in power for the poverty. Sometimes the poor rose up and kidnapped or killed a rich person, and took the land. The natives must put Carl in the same class as they did the cattle owners, who expanded their own grazing ranges every year and pushed the natives further into the Lacondon jungle where the soil was poor and it was hard to grow corn, beans, chiles and a few vegetables. The cattle owners and the rich appropriated land that had belonged to the Mayans since the beginning of recorded history in South America. Ray guessed that there were some revolutionaries in the village, but from the way they had co-operated with Carl, he guessed that the majority of Mayans in this village were not revolutionaries. They wanted to be left alone and farm. Carl let them do that, he did not take much of their land. He paid them for it, and he paid them to raise the bamboo.

Occasionally, government officials arrived and handed out decrees, demanding that they also grow coffee as a cash crop, which left them little land to grow healthy food. They treated the Mayans like second-class ignorant servants. They did not value the age-old customs of these people. Ray imagined the rage or bewilderment of the Mayans. They had a communal life style that the government called communist. They lived in grass and mud huts, six to eight people a hut, with three to four beds. Ray thought of the original American Indians, and of the Nunotucks, who had fought Congress and the Supreme Court to have the right to land they had owned since before the coming of the White men. The Mayans could not do that, without learning to read and write. One government official had flown in with a team. He said the Mexican government was considering maintaining this area as a museum. The residents were so resistant to change and modernization that the government could make it a showcase people would pay to visit to see how the original tribes had lived. Ray had mixed feelings about that. He would not want to be an exhibit in a museum.

This village still lived in a kind of iron age. They had no way of writing their language, which was not Spanish, but an old Mayan dialect

understandable only in this village. Children worked. School was unknown. People walked barefoot. The soles of their feet had calluses two inches thick. They delighted in seeing Stacy and Ray barefoot on the stony river beach, hopping and yelling "Ouch!"

Their primary diet was corn. Corn milk. Corn tortillas. Corn tacos, chips, tostados, burritos, a gruel of corn maize for breakfast, and tamales. They stuffed burritos with black beans, made corn and egg custard, ate the occasional chicken, goat and pig. They hunted boar, deer, and iguana. They were able to raise some tomatoes, chiles, green beans and squash. They were not averse to worms and grubs.

Ray, curious about the bamboo poison that Wilson Piquette had warned him about, watched the women cook bamboo shoots. He had done a little reading on the subject himself and found that the poison was only in some kinds of bamboo. It was cyanide, and at high doses produced coma and cardiac arrest in the human or animal system. Ray made sure that any bamboo he ate was boiled at least two hours. That killed the toxin.

The people in the next village, a three-day walk away, spoke another dialect. That village, far more primitive than the one Carl had chosen, had a population of twenty three. They had not adopted Western clothes, but wore grass skirts or loincloths. They practiced polygamy. The women were bare-breasted. Men prostituted their women in other villages in exchange for favors or food.

As Ray and Stacy sat with Eleanor, he put his hand at the nape of Stacy's neck, but quickly took it away. The weather was too hot. His hand and her neck got sweaty. Stacy stood up. "Mother, I have to be in meetings for the next couple of hours with Louise and Carl. I am slowly learning how to run a mill. When I get back to Maine, I'll combine that with what I know about running a Clean Mill."

Ray had come on this trip, frankly, for the machetes. It was a disappointment that he had not been able to find anyone local who made them. The men bought factory made machetes. When they needed those or other supplies, they walked six days to the largest village in the region that had a big open air market. There they sold what they could, bought Western clothes, factory-made machetes and whatever else they needed. They were leaving that morning and Ray was going with them, hoping he could find out the location of a machete factory or a machete maker.

They were gathering now. This time they were going to a smaller

market, only a six hour walk away, as opposed to the largest one six days away. One of them offered Ray a sheath of arrows. In sign language, Ray agreed to buy the arrows. They had bamboo shafts and hand-carved stone arrow points. There were points for large animals, for fish, for birds. Parrot feathers decorated the ends of the arrows and balanced them for flight. The native indicated to Ray that the arrows cost five dollars. Ray parted with that instantly without bargaining. The man looked disappointed. Bargaining was an essential part of buying and selling. He took an airmail envelope from a bag he carried to show it to Ray. He said he had bought it for five dollars from an Americano at the market. He shook two aspirin out of it. He had bought this miracle medicine for five dollars. Ten dollars was probably half the money the man earned in a year.

The open market was a mecca. Eggplant. Huge tomatoes that made the village tomatoes look pathetic. Live chickens, goats, cattle and pigs. Bananas, papayas, coconuts. Slices of meat and fish lay in vendors booths, but they were covered with flies. There was no ice. But you could buy ice from a machine. A cockfight in one corner of the market had half the men betting and yelling. Women sold hand-made Indian costumes, lovely wool capes, hats, shoes, embroidered blouses and skirts. People milled about in the square of the village, buying, comparing, socializing. They were all dressed in Indian garb -- colorful handmade linen shirts and vests, hats, linen pants, lightweight black shoes with upturned toes.

Ray bought clothes for Eleanor, Stacy, and Louise. He filled his backpack with whatever food was not available in Carl's village. He took pictures. He had brought the camera from home that he used to photograph his knives to advertise them. He hoped the heat -- it must have been about 100 degrees -- wouldn't melt the film.

Back at the ranch, Stacy and Louise were getting advice. Carl's Political tips on dealing with legislators and lawyers confirmed Stacy's opinions about corruption and payback in Cascade County. Louise took the advice at face value. Stacy wondered how far Louise would wade into the murky politics. "Look, dad," Stacy said. "We really don't need to hear this because we're not going to operate the way you did. We have scientists and counsel from out of state to make this mill a model for the others. The old ways won't work in the new climate we're setting up."

Louise said nothing. Stacy wondered if Louise had the temperament

to be CEO. So far, Stacy and Russ had made most of the decisions. The mill was beginning – a shaky start at best – to acquire the machinery and manpower need to reduce its pollution level. Production had fallen way off. Had Louise been financial officer, she would have complained. Evelyn Waites just did the figures and said nothing. So far, Louise, to her credit, had focused on safety measures for the workers. She had increased salaries and benefits and – lord almighty – given permission to the workers to start a union. It turned out that about half the workers didn't want a union. They didn't want to pay the dues or be bound by the rules. That matter was pending. Louise instituted weekly meetings with staff and management to get and give feedback.

Carl said, "All I can do is transmit my experience." He gave them useful information about each machine, the energy it consumed, how it worked and what it produced. He told them about the industry alliances in Cascade County – the way wood was rerouted, borrowed, shared, and bartered. He told them how companies worked together, how favors were done, logging trucks shared, drivers transferred. He told them forestry policies and practices in different areas of all of Northern Maine owned by different lumber companies. He gave them the names of his loggers and forestry advisors. "I wish you had told me all this before," Louise said. "My back was against the wall. I have made some mistakes and created bad feelings that I would not have done had I known then what I know now." She said it without rancor.

"My back was also against the wall, if you remember" Carl said. "I know how capable you are. I didn't have time to help you. You'll be all right, Louise. You can phone me anytime for advice. I'll phone you if I think of something you should know. The lines of communication are open. I want you to use another phone when you call me. Not the factory line. I don't want the calls traced. We'll arrange a new way. Email if we can. We'll get new computers and phone numbers and locations Telegrams that cannot be traced. "

Carl was very concerned about his legal status in Maine. He had been indicted *In Absentia*, convicted of endangerment, and sentenced to jail time. He was working through secret channels to have the conviction appealed and overthrown. He did not think he would be extradited. just the same, he was careful about communications with the outside world.

At the same time, it was the old grandiose Carl. First thing he had said, when Louise, Ray and Stacy arrived at the village was, "Just look

around you. Hey, I'll take you to the mill and the bamboo fields.

In the bamboo fields and at the mill was a buzz of activity. Carl said the mill was about halfway done, and by the next year, the bamboo crop would supply enough pulp to make the mill run at a profit.

Stacy asked about energy sources and pollution practices. "We are building a state of the art mill," Carl said.

Stacy pressed for more details, but Carl seemed suddenly tired. "I need to rest," he said. "I'm getting to be an old man. "I've gotten used to taking a siesta. We can talk more later."

"You're not an old man," Stacy said. "You are only in your sixties. Are you getting good medical care down here?"

"Yes, yes," Carl blew the question away. They walked back to the hacienda. Eleanor had cooked a sumptuous meal using local ingredients in her own way. "I thought you might like a break from native cooking," she said. "Delicious as it is, it is a little monotonous. Ray brought eggplant, plantain, papaya and bananas from the market."

They said down. "How long did you boil the bamboo shoots?" Ray asked. He remembered how both he and Stacy had felt a little sick after one Mexican meal. That had been on their last trip, when Mexican women had prepared the meal, and Carl and Stacy had not been on good terms.

"Gosh, the casserole has been in the oven two and a half hours."

"Good," Ray said.

"Why do you ask that at every meal?"

"I like bamboo well done," Ray said. He did not want to explain Wilson Piquette's story. He was still suspicious of Carl, and he did not want to give him any information that could lead to another death.

Ray had come home from the market in the evening. It was still light, and still hot. Stacy asked if anybody wanted to go to the pool to swim. Everyone but Eleanor agreed. Carl didn't like to swim himself, but he loved the spot. He liked to sit and contemplate the tall mahogany trees, the lush vegetation and the shining splash of blue-green water, dimpling in sun and shade.

Eleanor said she'd say home and wash up. It was the least she could do. Everyone else had worked all day, and she had been lazy. It was the maid's day off. Then Eleanor wanted to read.

On the way to the pool, in the section of the jungle where the trees were petrified and stood like stone statues, of different heights, all gray,

as if they were in a museum, they were surprised by three men striding into the clearing. The men had their machetes out – that was natural. They carried them by lanyards because they didn't have scabbards. The men didn't stop for greetings. Because no greeting was given, the encounter felt menacing. The men moved by, toward the village.

Carl's group continued toward the pool. When they reached it, they stopped, as usual to admire in the beauty of the place. The evening light gave the trees and pond a golden glow. Carl observed, "The python's gone."

Maybe he changed location to find food."

Stacy plunged in headfirst, aiming for the deeper waters beyond the walk-in shore. She cavorted, doing somersaults, stretching, dancing in the water, as if water were her natural element. Ray walked down the slope of the pond and immersed himself, crouching like a frog, only his head above water. Louise sat in the shallows for a while before she inched down. It took her quite a while to get her whole body wet. When she did, she rubbed her scalp, splashed water in her armpits, and bent over to wash between her toes, as if she were taking a bath, not luxuriating in a tropical pool of exhilarating beauty.

Carl sat on the bank. Then he stood up and started walking around the pool toward where the python had been. Ray watched warily. Carl swatted underbrush aside on his way. Ray got out of the water, put on shoes, grabbed his machete and ran to catch up with him. Carl was risking his life leaving a well-traveled path. There might be spiders or snakes.

"Carl, stop," Ray yelled. "There's no path. Turn back."

Carl ignored Ray, as he usually did. He had gone through the clumps of bushes and was nearing the cleared spot where the python usually lay. Ray caught up to him. He could see the outlines of the giant body imprinted in the earth. They stood for a moment, looking at it. "It lay there so long, it pressed itself into the ground," Carl said. "The patience of that creature fascinated me. I never saw it eat anything. That must be a magnificent sight."

"A sight I hope not to see right now," Ray said, pulling on Carl's sleeve. "Come on back. The snake may still be near."

As he said it, the huge snake head rose from the bushes near where they stood. It waved back and forth. Then it lashed out so fast that

Ray had no time to react. It knocked Carl sideways, about six feet. Carl literally flew by Ray, diagonally to the shore's edge. Ray drew his machete out of its scabbard. The snake's head disappeared into the bushes. Ray ran toward Carl. Carl was stunned. He lay where he fell. Ray looked back. Behind them, the head was emerging from the bushes and the body began a casual, sinuous advance toward them. It could easily grab Ray or Carl. They were no match for its speed. In what Ray later thought was the bravest act of his life, although he was not thinking at the time, Ray raised his machete and ran toward the creature. Not directly in front of him, but diagonally, hoping he was out of eyesight of the python, but not knowing what their eyesight encompassed. It all happened so fast. When he was within striking distance, Ray raised his machete over his head, holding it with both hands and struck down with all his strength on the snake's neck. Blood spurted up and blinded him for a moment, and he couldn't see if he had completely severed the head. He struck again. The huge body writhed. Its tail coiled so close to Ray that Ray thought it would coil around him. Without waiting, Ray ran to Carl, grabbed an arm and dragged him back the way they had come. He didn't know if either the python or Carl could swim, so he didn't dare go into the water. Ray picked Carl up, swung him over his shoulder and ran back the way they had come. He screamed at the top of his lungs to Stacy and Louise, "Get out of the water, and run back on the path we came on" Ray did not look back as they crashed through the clump of bushes, reached the trail, and headed down it. Stacy and Louise had not gone far. "Go on, keep on going," Ray yelled.

"Ray, we don't need to. You killed it. You cut its head off on the first blow."

Then Ray looked back. The python head was severed twice.

"Pretty good machete," Ray said.

He laid Carl on the ground. Carl was unconscious, but breathing. His heartbeat was strong.

"I can't believe you did that," Louise said. "You must be incredibly strong. Snakes are pure muscle. It must be really hard to cut through one. And the way you tossed Carl on your shoulder as if he were a sack of potatoes...."

Stacy said. "He's works with a hammer. He has superior upper body strength. But what I find incredible is how brave you were, Ray. The python could have snapped at you faster"



than you could even raise your machete.”

“I didn’t think. I just reacted.” Ray shrugged. “That’s my usual M.O.”

“You’re lucky to be alive,” Louise said.

“Probably not,” Ray said. “I think the snake was focused on Carl.”

Carl opened his eyes. Soon he was able to walk, but he limped. He said he may have sprained an ankle. Slowly they headed for the hacienda.

“Maybe you got a concussion.”

Carl put his hands on his chest. “I feel a pain in my ribs,” I’m having trouble breathing.”

“I hope you can fly the plane, Dad. We have to get you to a hospital in the states.”

“I m sure I can fly but I can’t fly to Maine. We’ll find a hospital in New Hampshire. I know that area. We can land in Wolfeboro.”

“Fine,” Stacy said.

“I’ll get my foreman to look after business here. It worries me, though.”

I can’t believe you’re worrying about your business when you should be taking care of your health. You might have had a small heart attack or stroke. You might have cracked your ribs. Carl, put things in priority.”

They were walking as fast as they could. The distance to the village was more noticeable when they walked so slowly and had to stop frequently so Carl could catch his breath.

As they approached the village, they smelled a burnt smell. Smoke drifted their way. The village was deserted. The hacienda had been burned and was still smoldering Eleanor was nowhere to be seen.

Carl gave a huge sigh. “Well, that’s that. I was afraid this would happen.”

Louise assessed the ruins. “Thank god, the Zapatistas left the plane. They’re not killers. They want us out. I think we should give them what they want.”

“We have to find Eleanor,” Carl said.” Eleanor” he yelled. They all yelled her name. Their voices sank into the jungle. “Look through the burnt hacienda,” Carl said in a trembling voice.

The house was leveled. The charcoal was still hot. There were no bones, no sign of human remains. Carl plunged through the burnt side

buildings, ignoring the hot embers. He looked into the cement house that contained the telephone, the electrical fuses and the generator. The equipment had been hacked and toppled. Eleanor was not there.

Stacy examined the gardens. The flowers and bushes had been hacked by machetes. The garden that Eleanor loved was in ruins. Eleanor was not there.

Ray looked around the patio, where Eleanor had lain so luxuriously, applying sun tan lotion to her skin.

Louise went to the pool. She screamed. She screamed again. She did not stop screaming. She crumpled to the ground, moaning and crying.

Eleanor had sunk to the bottom of the pool. She was naked. Carl ran over, ignoring his injuries. Ray ran to help. Carl dove in and Ray dove in after him. They hauled Eleanor to the surface and everyone helped pull her from the water and lay her on the tiles. Carl kissed her, and started CPR. It was obviously hopeless. She was beginning to turn blue. She had been in the water a long time. Ray could not help but compare the rippled water-logged skin to Michael's skin.

"You're breaking my heart, dad," Stacy said. "She's dead. Stop. Just kiss her." She knelt down and caressed her mother's wet stringy hair, caressing the skull. She put her hand on her mother's heart and closed her eyes. Tears rolled down her cheeks.

Stacy took her in her arms. They carried her to the small plane and laid her in the back, folding her body to fit. She had not yet begun to stiffen. Carl, silent and in shock, started the engine and cruised the landing strip once to warm up the engine. He revved up, turned around, seared the grass on take off, and they were aloft, heading toward San Cristobal and the Lear jet that would fly them home. Louise sat next to him as navigator. Carl flew like an automatic pilot, without saying a word.

Nobody noticed them in the small airport at San Cristobal. They put Eleanor on a bed in the back of the Lear jet. Carl took them aloft again. He did not say a word. Louise also navigated tonelessly. Once they were over American soil, flying low, dodging the control towers, Louise gave the directions to Wolfeboro. Carl responded, in a voice like a robot, "I am taking my wife home. We are going to Maine."

"What about your injuries, dad? You need to go to the hospital. Think of yourself. Eleanor would want that."

"I will go in time. I can't go through the police investigation that will surround us if we go to a public airport and they find a dead body. We will take her home quietly, as she would want, and we will bury her privately. Then I will go to some hospital, any hospital. Oh my poor darling. You will not have a grand funeral. You will be buried in secrecy. I don't know how I can stand it. It is so unworthy of you. You deserve so much more. You should have had so many more good years. You were not meant to die, and you were not meant to be buried in haste and secrecy."

"Where will you bury her?"

"There is a spot in the woods where Eleanor and I used to sit, and watch the stream flow by, watch the wild bushes and flowers. Eleanor planted myrtle there as a ground cover. We will bury her there."

They worked in haste. Carl could not dig because of his injuries, so Ray, Stacy and Louise dug a deep hole in the myrtle bed, and they lowered Eleanor into it. Then they covered her with dirt, and replaced the myrtle. It was a rough job. Stacy could barely see. She was crying the whole time. Louise said, "It doesn't matter about the coffin."

Carl covered obvious spots of dirt and torn plants with logs. He didn't say a word. When they were finished, he sank to his knees beside the grave, then crumpled to lie beside it. "Oh my Eleanor." He pressed his face to the ground.

"Dad, we have to hurry. Someone might have seen us land. We have to get away."

Ray thought of the smell of his cabin the smoked forge, the smell of his dog. He wanted to get back to work. Knife making was not just Ray's business. It was his creative expression. If he didn't do it, he missed it. It was his purpose on earth.

But he went with Stacy, Louise and Carl who flew the Lear jet to New Hampshire. Hospital tests showed Carl had suffered a minor heart attack, probably a concussion, two cracked ribs, one broken rib, and a sprained ankle. He had bruises all over his body, but the greatest bruise – presumably where the snake struck him, was on his side, by his ribs. The doctor said, "Mr. Alwyn must have been in a lot of pain."

"He didn't say a word about it."

"You have a stoic father," the doctor said. "He's lucky to be alive. After striking their victims to make them helpless, pythons usually coil around them so tightly that the victim dies instantly -- a crushed skull,

crushed heart, all systems suddenly stopped. Pythons usually don't go after humans because human shoulders are too wide. But given the size of the snake you describe, it would have been possible. Your father has a large head and narrow shoulders. The python was probably not hungry. Just angry. It was irritated in some way."

Ray said, "Carl went into its territory within striking range. He thought the snake had gone away. With its coloration, the snake camouflaged into the jungle. We didn't see it behind the bushes."

"Mr. Alwyn will be fine," the doctor said. "We'll keep him in the hospital a few days to monitor his heart, and scan his brain."

In the hospital cafeteria, Louise said, "He's going to be a terrible patient. He's going to want to be discharged instantly. I'd be surprised if he didn't escape."

"Where can he escape to?" Russ asked.

Louise sighed. "Carl is always two steps ahead of everyone. He has a back up plan is Australia. In the mean time, we have to watch for the Feds, in case word travels from New Hampshire to Maine that Carl is within reach. He'll escape in the jet. He shouldn't go back to the house in Maine. I'm sure by now the Feds know about the landing strip, the plane and the secret tunnel. They may have heard the plane fly away the last time he escaped. If the Feds are involved, he can't go anywhere in the US safely.

Stacy said, "He could put on a doctor coat, the way they do on TV. I have the feeling he needs to leave right away. I'll go snatch one somewhere. If he's still sick, he can always rest somewhere safe. He was capable enough to fly a Lear jet, so I'm not worried."

"Carl's on the run. Is that the way he wants it?"

"Of course not. But Carl will survive. Carl will make it. Carl always has a plan. As I said, he has friends in Australia."

Stacy said, "Louise, you have to get back to the mill and make sure things are on an even keel there."

"Of course. I planned to be back by today anyway. The consultants you and Russ recommended are meeting me at the Mill this afternoon, if you remember. You both are supposed to be there too."

"We can charter a flight. We're with you, Louise, but we kept our day jobs," Russ said.

Stacy left to find a doctor's white coat, or scrubs.

*Chapter 31*

The morning was cold and bright as Evelyn Waites led Bacon, Ray, Russ, Stacy and Neat to Michael's home. She was dressed for the woods in jeans, a hunter orange sweatshirt and hiking boots. Around her neck she wore a talisman she said Michael had made for her – a bear tooth dangling from a sinew cord. At her waist was a pouch Michael had made of rabbit skin, fastened with a bone button. She carried an old Winchester Model 74 .22. This was not Ms. Perfect Secretary.

Evelyn had had come to say good bye. She had detailed the various routes to the campsite. Over the years of her relationship with Michael, she had taken them all. They could walk from Alwyn Mills – at least twenty miles, or from a point on the river below the Alwyn mansion – about ten miles. They decided to drive upstream and take three canoes down to a landing that she pointed out. From there they would take an almost undetectable path, an animal trail. Evelyn said, "Michael usually made his own path. He tried to not leave tracks." The police had used another approach when they examined the site, arriving from the land side, from the Nunotuck Reservation. That was how Terence was coming.

The sun shone thinly as they stepped from the canoe and followed a path Ray could barely detect. Evelyn was a good guide. At an almost invisible indentation in a wall of young pine, she pushed aside the feathery branches and they stepped into a clearing. Once inside, Ray could see it was surrounded by brush, completely concealed from the outside. A wall tent, size 12x10. A smaller tent. Two sheds built from hand-hewn boards. Tarp covered woodpile. Outdoor solar-heated shower. Bucket to collect rainwater. Fire pit. Bare clothesline strung between two trees. The clearing was as still as a cemetery. The month that had passed since Michael's death had left its traces on the orderly campsite. Fallen leaves and pollen on the table by the fire pit. Mold on the clothesline. The overflowed rain bucket, its surface water scummy.

Evelyn had not said much during the trip. She sat on a stone by the fire pit. "I can't believe he's not going to walk out of the shed and kiss me." Tears collected in her eyes. "Just look around," she said, as if she needed to grant permission.

Entering the larger tent was like entering a small cabin. A stack of kindling beside the wood stove. Canned and store-bought goods.

Michael didn't live entirely off the land. Next to the stove were a card table and 2 folding canvas chairs. A kerosene lantern hung over the table, and on the table were a bottle of kerosene, a gas canister, a Bunsen burner, and an open journal.

Ray could picture Michael. Here was where he sat to drink coffee. Here's where he boiled the water, turned the switch on the Bunsen burner, lit the flame – the matches were still there in their waterproof container. Here's the powdered coffee – running low – it would occur to him to buy coffee next time in town. Here's the journal open, one page written. The blank pages would entice him. They were waiting to be filled. Observations to be made, meanings to be culled, thoughts caught like fish, pulled shining from the stream.

Ray read what was written on the first page:

I have discovered one thing. I do not have to be clever. I do not have to be wise. All I have to do is keep the boundaries of the forest intact within me against the ill spirits and intruders of this world. This is my promise and my energy. I see with soft eyes that I can create something that will live beyond me.

It is very beautiful as I write these words. I've just come back from Carl. It's mid morning. Rain. There's a fog, as shimmering as the most delicate veil. There's a magic and mystery beyond. The water is high, but I am ready to journey down the river.

Will God give the world a sign through me? I carry the deed – the sign of God's mysterious ways.

Ray put the journal down. Soon the campsite would be dismantled, the belongings disbursed.

Stacy came into the tent. He left. At this time and place, they were all alone.

He went to the smaller tent and peered inside. Here was the sleeping bag Michael tucked in at night. The mat under it, the tarp covering the tent floor, flashlight, a 12" blade knife beside the sleeping bag – not one of Ray's --. In the corner, long underwear, leather moccasins lined with

cattail down.

The first shed contained trapping equipment. Oil. Screwdrivers, wrenches, jaws, serrated edges, leather straps, hinges, slings, nets, hooks, lines, poles, reels, and lures -- garish hand-tied flies, fantastic creatures of thread and wire, webbed lace-wings, bug-eyed wasps, water skaters like seductive ballet dancers. The allure of death for fish.

The second shed was for food storage and drying. Skins hung in a slight breeze coming through the spaces between the slats. Leaves, fruits and vegetables hung in what looked like abundant disarray from the rafters, but each bundle was labeled. Also labeled and spread on screens were blueberries, blackberries, elderberries, currants, gooseberries, serviceberries, wild grapes and plums. Birchbark, plantain, purslane, chicory, lamb's quarters, clover, dandelions, mullein, St. John's Wort, ginseng, Jerusalem Artichoke tubers. Dried meat was labeled, wrapped in plastic with punched holes and hung from the rafters. In all corners, bunches of Southernwood hung to drive away moths, and dried marigolds to repel maggots. Ray's mother did the same thing in her attic at home. Dried and drying, a winter's supply of food was in this shed. There was a small wood stove to drive away the dampness. Under it, Ray disturbed a half-hibernating milk snake, resident rat catcher.

Ray emerged from the shed and looked at autumn asters springing up between rocks, tufts of golden rod and sweet fern lining the clearing. Evelyn sat on a stump by the drying shed, braiding lengths of grapevine into a wreath. Stacy came out of the wall tent hollow-eyed. Russ had begun emptying the small tent. He was rolling up Michael's sleeping bag and cramming it into the stuff sack. Neat put Michael's cooking utensils into a bag, saying, 'But age, with his stealing steps,/Hath claw'd me in his clutch,/And hath shipp'd me intil the land/As if I had never been such.' "

Bacon and Terence emptied the wall tent, pulled up the pegs, retrieved the structural rods, and folded the canvas. It took the rest of the morning to empty the sheds, pack things in bundles and tote the bundles to the river.

They filled the canoes with the first of the loads they would take to the public landing above

the Falls. They would fill a truckload and drive up to the Alwyns.

The canoes loaded, they returned to Michael's empty clearing.

Evelyn said, "Michael, here is your gravestone." In the center of the

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clearing, she laid a palm-sized smooth white stone, like the one Michael had given Carl at the Alwyn Mills Bicentennial. She said, "Sometimes the things you give are the things you want. Michael, this is for me and from me. This is what you would want."



*Chapter 32*

The gathering at the Alwyn mansion to receive Michael's possessions was a small one. Carl had not been apprehended in New Hampshire. He was very wary about coming to Maine, even for an hour, but he decided he had to pay homage to his son, and visit Eleanor's grave one last time before flying to Australia. He came with his lawyers. Terence and Monique arrived with, surprisingly enough, Dave, the barber. Michael's things were laid out on the porch. Nobody was in the mood to take anything, but every so often, someone would go out and look at what was left on earth of Michael's world. Each person wanted something as a memento, but didn't know what. It took time to feel comfortable in the situation. No one wanted to get emotional. Molly was distressed at having been relegated to staying in Ray's truck on a cold day. She would have been much happier in the mansion, eating hors d'oeuvres. Carl's lawyers constantly watched the windows, in case the police arrived. Eugene Wiley, was there, he said, as a family friend, but his position was ambiguous, since he was a cop. Ray figured he would talk his way out of any potential trouble if the law arrived. Louise was surprised to see Evelyn Waites. She still didn't have a clue that Evelyn had been Michael's girlfriend.

Ray cornered Stacy for a second in the front hall. She was nervous for Carl, and embarrassed that the dividing of Michael's things had no dignity. Everyone was awkward. The party relaxed somewhat as the punch took effect. was, Stacy had taken it upon herself to add a portion of vodka, but she had warned Carl not to drink it, because he would be piloting soon. It worked on everyone else. Monique felt fine examining the contents of Eleanor Alwyn's cupboards – canned cuisine, she noted with a little puff of self-satisfaction, nothing fresh or dried.

Carl quietly and quickly, without a word, passed out legal documents. The documents were self-explanatory. They reinstated Stacy and Russ into the family fortune. Stacy was appointed environmental consultant in the Mill, and Russ was on the board of directors. Louise was officially CEO, and in a surprise move, Carl promoted Evelyn Waites to Louise's former job, financial manager. Perhaps he knew about Michael and Evelyn, and was doing her a favor. More likely, he recognized her ability. He did not explain any of the documents.

He took Terence's arm and led him outside to the porch. Terence lit a

cigar. Carl said, "Hey give me one of those."

They didn't see Ray, who had also gone outside for a breath of fresh air, and to let Molly out for a little run in the woods. Ray was in no way spying or being secretive, but he heard everything they said. He had been in that spy-like situation before. He wasn't fond of it, but he wasn't about to jump out, wave his arms and say, "Hey, over here, guys."

"We lost a son," Terence said.

Carl inhaled his cigar smoke. "Where did you get these?"

"Havana. Via the new shop in Quechec."

"Oh," Carl said. There was a pause, then he said, "I shot my boy. It was an accident. I was trying to shoot the canoe so Michael wouldn't go."

"I believe you."

"I never loved him like you did."

"I know."

"You know everything."

"I don't know why Eleanor is not here. I don't know why she is such a wreck. She drinks too much. She takes pills. She doesn't pull her weight in this county. People think she's lazy."

Carl puffed fiercely on his cigar. "I'm appealing my conviction. I'll be able to come back to Maine soon. I have influential connections here."

"You didn't answer my question."

"Eleanor needs to be away right now."

"She was in bad shape even when things were going well with the mill. When I saw her, she could barely stand up. She's a shell of the woman I used to know."

"Watch what you say." Carl's eyes glittered. "She was troubled". He took fast puffs of cigar. "I'll be frank with you. She worried about Michael. For all the children's sake, we decided to keep things simple. We didn't tell them about you."

"You should have given Michael to me. Or at least told him that I was a father. You could have given me more access. It would have made things easier for him."

"I should tell you to butt out, but I don't know."

"You ruined that boy."

"I should punch you. We did our best."

Ray heard vehicles coming up the driveway. Carl heard them too. He said, "Excuse me," and went inside. Terence puffed a few times on his cigar, then ground it out and went inside.

Ray watched Molly rustling in the bushes. Two Majestic Bay police cruisers, no lights flashing, pulled up. Since there were already cars parked by the portico, the officers parked right where Ray was, and got out.

"How's it going?" Ray asked.

"Not bad," they answered. "Is Carl Alwyn home?"

Ray shrugged. "I don't know. I'm minding my dog. I haven't gone inside yet."

"Whew," one of them whistled, looking at the house. "Some house. Big as a mall." They strode up the driveway. Ray didn't follow them. As Molly nosed through the bushes by the driveway, Ray looked through the window and saw Carl open the door to the basement, as the Majestic Bay Cops rang the bell and were let in. There was sudden silence inside as the cops came in. Ray heard a click as a door downstairs shut. Carl was escaping. Déjà vu again. Fifteen minutes later, the cops left. Ray went into the house. Stacy told him that the police had left a warrant for Carl's arrest." she sighed. "The cops did Carl a favor and left the warrant with his lawyers. Legally they have to serve it to Carl in person, and no one could find him. I honestly don't think the cops looked very hard. The lawyers gave me the warrant to read. Look. It's the same as the court verdict. I think they brought it up just to have an excuse to enter the house. But what do I know about the legal system."

"Ray took the document from her and read". He was listening for the sound of the Lear jet taking off, but didn't hear it.

**Now comes the plaintiff the State of Maine and moves this Honorable Court to issue a Writ Ne Exeat for the arrest of the Defendant, Carl Alwyn, in accordance with Maine laws. Plaintiff further moves that the Defendant be ordered to post a bond in the amount of \$500,000.00 with sufficient sureties as security that he will not leave the Commonwealth of Maine without leave of Court.**

"That's just Maine," Stacy said. "Nothing wrong with him being in New Hampshire."

"This is what the Majestic Bay cops can do. The Feds will find a way."

Once the cops left, people started getting loud, slightly inebriated.

Only Evelyn sat in the room, quietly eyeing the evidence of Michael. She said in a loud voice, quite unlike her, "This is a gathering to distribute Michael's worldly possessions. I think respect is called for."

People instantly silenced.

Stacy said she would put the things that no one chose in Michael's childhood bedroom. She said she wanted the dried Southernwood and marigolds. They would keep away moths and insects. She asked for the small table on which Michael had written his journals. And she wanted the journals.

Russ took a compass. Louise didn't want anything. She eyed Evelyn askance as Evelyn said she wanted, oh, wanted everything. Evelyn took a good portion of the dried food for her and her mother to eat over the winter. She was glad for the money it would save them. Neat claimed what food Evelyn did not choose. Evelyn wanted Michael's leather slippers lined with cattail down. She wanted the warm bear coat, the bunson burner, the tent—oh all the rest. Russ and Stacy defended Evelyn's right to take things, saying that Evelyn and her mother were hard-strapped for cash since Evelyn's mother had a medical condition that was expensive to treat.

Louise, not understanding the situation, said, "Evelyn gets an excellent salary from the mill, and health insurance too."

Stacy pulled Louise aside and told her that Michael and Evelyn had been in love for a long time. Louise was quiet for a moment, and then shrugged her shoulders. "Now I've heard everything. I thought I knew everything and you guys were the ones in the dark. But I was the one in the dark. And so was Carl. Michael really got his way in the end."

The gathering ended. No one else made a claim for anything, except. Terence, who knew about Evelyn and Michael, deferred to her, but asked for some of the tools. He wanted to keep the traps he had already collected. Monique requested a selection of dried herbs to make teas.

Ray helped Evelyn load things in the truck to take home. She said she didn't know how she would fit it all in. Their house was so small. But somehow she would. Ray offered to go with her to help unload the heavy things, but she said some folks in her neighborhood would help.

She came back in to say good bye. Terence said, "Young lady, you be sure and keep coming to the Res, and especially I expect to see you at the Lodge full moon ceremony. Don't let me down now. I'm depending

on you to carry the flag, or however you say it. We Nunotucks believe that when a man dies, the spirit of that person enters into the hearts of those who loved him best. You carry Michael with you, and you will speak for him, I am sure of that."

Monique said, "You come on over the house anytime. Just call first, just like you and Michael used to do. Nothing has changed. Michael is still with us, and we have to find a way to keep things going to keep him happy. He wants you to be happy, just like you were. Who knows? You may meet another man. It's early to talk about that. But hold that thought. You're young. We all, including Michael, want the best for you."

"I'm not that young," Evelyn said. "I'll be visiting you. Don't you fret. I'll see you on the Res. Stacy and Russ -- will wonders never cease. Now we are working together, although I haven't seen you much at the mill. I'm going to make sure you keep within budget!"

Evelyn drove off. She did not say good bye to Louise. In Louise's eyes, Evelyn might always be an upstart secretary. It was outrageous that Evelyn had Louise's former position, but there you have it. Carl knew how to run a mill, and Louise wasn't about to question his decisions.

Ray was still waiting to hear the roar of the Lear jet take off. It didn't happen. After some time had passed, he approached Wiley. "You told the Feds, didn't you." It wasn't an accusation. It was an intuition he wanted confirmed. He didn't blame Eugene. Had he been in Eugene's place, he would have told the Feds. It was because of Stacy that he couldn't. But Eugene had a job and a reputation to protect. Eugene practiced justice on his own terms. Maybe he finally thought the time was right.

"I can't say I didn't," Eugene said.

"You want to walk over and take a look at the Lear?"

"I'd say that would be a good idea."

As they approached the site, they heard voices – lots of voices. It looked as if the whole police force of Cascade County were there – and a bunch of Feds. Some were milling around the perimeters of the clearing, but most crowded around the Lear jet. They were heavily armed. Some had M16's.

"This does not look good," Ray said.

The police officers recognized Wiley and let him through the crowd without saying a word.

There was blood on the ground. Bullet holes in the Lear. Carl lay on the ground. His body was riddled with wounds. Ray took a brief look. He didn't want to see too much. He never wanted to be able to tell Stacy exactly how bad her father looked in death.

Somebody said, "We told him to stop and put his arms up. He did. A couple of officers approached. He pulled a pistol from a holster under his arm and started shooting. He got one of our guys in the arm. Our guys opened fire. Back up poured in, just to make sure."

"They sure did," Wiley said. "Overkill."

"We couldn't see what kind of weapon he had. We thought he might have a semi automatic."

"You sure got him good."

"He fired first, Wiley."

"Whatever you say."

"We couldn't let him get away again."

"I guess it took the whole force and the Feds to take one man down."

"This was Carl Alwyn, Wiley. You know how slippery he was."

Wiley shook his head. "This is not going to look good to the press, the public, or his family."

"He died instantly."

"He sure did."

"He didn't suffer."

Ray turned and started to walk away. Wiley followed.

"I bet this satisfies your sense of justice."

"Yes, Ray, it does. A little too much justice, but the outcome would be the same one bullet or 200."

"You are one maverick cop."

Wiley sighed. "I guess."

"Come to think," Ray said, "the two cops showed up at the house to force Carl into the trap at the jet."

"That sounds right. I wasn't in on the details."

"I guess we didn't hear the bullets because people were getting noisy in the house."

"I guess that was a coincidence."

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Wiley stayed with the cops. Ray had to go back and break the news to the family. It was a lousy job. Stacy, Russ and Louise raced to the Lear to see for themselves, but the police had quickly cleared out. Ray guessed Wiley had hurried things along. Only the airplane and the blood on the ground were in the clearing. And the Alwyns, the new generation, absorbing another loss.

The Press, except for the *Cascade Times*, lauded the cops for getting a dangerous criminal. The cops hurried to get the body cleaned up. The Alwyn family never knew the extent of the assault made on Carl. Police dogs sniffed out Eleanor's body. The police dug her up. Despite the fact that Carl was officially a criminal, for his past contributions, Carl was given an elaborate State funeral, attended by all the lumber company heads, representatives of the government, the Alwyn family, and employees of the mill not yet fired by Louise. Carl and Eleanor's ashes were mixed and buried in an urn under a massive stone monument in the family plot. Carl had pre-ordered the monument and burial spot. The plot of the cemetery in Alwyn Mills looked over the Nunotuck River and Mount Nunotuck, both of which were in better condition after Carl left than while he lived.

*Chapter 33*

Ray had started on a series of fish knives. Fillet. Delicate. He had a line of thin flat fish knives, but this time he wanted to try a blade that swooped upward just a tad, so it would more easily pierce skin, and pick for meat between fish bones. To compensate for the upward line, the handle would sink a bit, to give balance. He was in the cardboard drawing stage. They looked elegant, more elegant than the flat ones. He would see how they would sell. Each new design was an adventure.

He hired a leather worker to engrave knife sheathes. His previous sheathes were plain, even for the engraved knives. The new designs for both the knives and sheathes were Yucatan or American Indian. Ray added on to the garage to make a larger workshop where he and the etchers could work together. He hired an apprentice to keep up with the orders that poured in. He hated to give up the meditative silence that working alone gave him, but the companionship and sense of communal business were good.

Stacy, true to her promise, dropped by when he needed PR or outreach work. Whether it was due to his work or hers, his business had expanded ten percent in one month. There was a steady upward curve in the number of orders.

Mid November. So far only light snow. Chickadees on the bushes. Twittering in the twigs. When Ray looked out the window, he could see them in groups, hopping from branch to branch. Hip. Hop. He wanted to make a knife as quick as a chickadee, as strong and delicate. A fillet knife that would slice through the soft flesh of a fish with sensitivity, power and grace, a tribute to the spirit of the living fish.

He kept looking out the window. All the leaves had fallen from the trees. A pheasant picked at some red berries on a naked bush outside the window. Everything outside was naked now. The forge warmed the workshop. It was cozy. Ray worked at the drawing table, and looked out the window. He wanted to celebrate the brown meadow beside his driveway, the early snow, the bare stretches of cattails, the racing gray and hairy squirrels, the skeleton outlines of the hills where he liked to get out and walk in every season.

The knife would have a seven-inch blade and five inch handle with full tang and thumb guard. The handle had to be triple riveted to the knife for strength. The blade would be high carbon steel, flexible,



razor sharp, and rust resistant. Ray began to trace the design from cardboard onto steel. He worked at an unhurried pace. If you hurried, you got less done. He had learned that a long time ago from the old Mainer who taught him how to make knives

He would give one to Bacon on their next fishing trip and compare it with the flat design he had given Bacon last year. Bacon's opinion counted.

In the corner, Molly gave a contented groan and stretched out a little longer along her rug to get more heat from the forge. In other parts of the workshop, the workers worked steadily.

Ray thought with anticipation about the next Full Moon festival, the Lodge Moon. That would be held in the Nunotuck Community Center.

By the end of November, there would be a foot of snow on the ground. He and Bacon would take their annual winter hunting trip. Bacon had a permit for a bear this year, and Ray would get his one allotted deer. They had tracked these animals since last winter, and knew each one's general habitats. To prepare himself, one night Ray tried out a one person winter hutch he had just bought. It was supposed to fit snugly over a person sleeping on the ground in a sleeping bag. He could carry it with him when he was tracking and sleep in it if he got too far from home camp to make it back for the night. Somehow, he trapped himself inside. Could not undo the zipper. Bacon said, "You might be the first person I know suffocated in a hutch in his own living room."

Across the driveway, the senior van stopped to drop off Eileen from her weekly trip to the market. Ray went out to help her bring the groceries into the house.

"I can't believe I fell for the bargain. I bought five pounds of cheddar cheese. That's a lotta cheese. It'll last longer than I will."

"Pshaw," Steward said, from the rocking chair, where he was reading *The Cascade Times*.

"Now Steward, where would I be without my sense of humor?"

"Beats me," Ray said.

Steward said, "Ray, you should slow down a little. You're on fast forward. Look at all the changes in the past month. You're working too hard."

"Don't be too hard on him, Steward." Eileen put the cheese inn the

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fridge. "He relaxes." Ray thought, thank goodness Eileen wasn't talking about his future wife. That meant she was satisfied -- for the moment at least.

Steward pointed at a picture in the newspaper. "There's a picture of Louise Alwyn and the assistant CEO she hired. He has a mill background. She's dividing responsibilities. That's good. She doesn't know squat about running a mill."

Ray put the ice cream in the freezer. "She can learn."

Nobody should have all the power." Eileen said. "Look at Carl Alwyn. He built a throne and it killed him."

The End